**Social realities**

**BY A R I F H A S A N | 1/5/2020**

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| DUE to the implementation of the Oct 22, 2019, Sindh High Court judgement ordering the removal of all `encroachments` on public space, major changes in human relations have taken place in my neighbourhood in Karachi. As a result, we can no longer buy vegetables from a sabziwallah who had a khoka 50 metres from our house and nor can we buy fruit from the phalwallah as my family has done for more than 40 years. They have both been removed by the police and so we have to get fruit and vegetables from Imtiaz or another superstore in the neighbourhood.Two young Pakhtun boys had a cabin where I had my internet device recharged.Their cabin has also been removed. I now go to a proper shop dealing in all sorts of posh stationery and gadgets. Murad Khan, a Pakhtun from Quetta, has come to Karachi every winter to set up his dry fruit thela in the neighbourhood, ever since I can remember. He came this year as well, but has now vanished. Where can I get cheap dry fruit from now? Even the dry fruit market at Empress Market has been demolished as a result of a Supreme Court order.There was another khoka of a chaabiwallah who opened the locks of people who had lost their keys. His khoka is gone but he sits on the pavement with his tool kit next to him so now he is considered `legal`. The phoolwallah from whom we bought flowers for birthdays and other occasions for our friends is still there. However, the flowers he displays now have decreased both in volume and as such in value because he is afraid that they will be confiscated by the police if and when they remove him from his location.But I have other complaints also. For the last 30-plus years, I have taken my evening walk at Hill Park. After the walk, I would go and sit, like so many other walkers and visitors to the park,at a small `café` called The 3 Coins where we would have tea, cold drinks, samosas or chaat. The café was in one corner of the park and in no way disfigured or obstructed other park-related activities. It encouraged interaction between the people there and the creation of new multiclass relationships. That has been removed as a result of an earlier Supreme Court order.With these changes, we are creating a new city, new divisions in society, and removing the interdependence between the rich, not so rich and the poor. Do we really want a city like this? This is a question we must ponder on urgently and decide before socialanarchyforces a decision onus.The judgement of Oct 22, 2019, has impacted the whole city. Khokas have disappeared and so have most of the thelas. Thosethelas that survive play a game of hide-andseek with the police. Many now function from narrow lanes that the police normally don`t patrol but, in these lanes, customers are almost nonexistent.The Urban Resource Centre has identified over 6,500 khokas and thelas that have been removed and their owners have lost their sources of income. This is in addition to over 1,700 formally constructed shops that were demolished in the Empress Market and related demolitions which also removed 6,000 hawkers. It has to be appreciated that Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has halted the eviction of 40,000 families from the canal banks in Larkana district who had been served eviction notices as per the court judgement.The enactment of the Supreme Court and high court judgements is creating homelessness and joblessness and adding to the number of persons in search of places to `squat` where once again they will live in constant insecurity and with the fear of being evicted. It is important, one: thatinstead of ad hoc evictions, appropriately located places should be identified where people can live and work with security of tenure and where they can build their homes and worl(places incrementally with government advice; and two: that in the urban areas,the reorganisation of space and city functions should take place to guarantee that khokas and thelas be accommodated in street markets in an environmentally sustainable manner.This can be done easily if the political will is there to create the required institutions and human resources to make it possible. If we do not do these two things, we will be creating a province with a large and increasing population of rural and urban `squatters` living in insecurity and in environmentally degraded conditions. Also, it has to be understood that the PTI`s five million homes and 10m jobs will not cater to the populations that are being evicted. The homes are far too expensive and, for the foreseeable future, the jobs will not be available. `The writer is an architect.arifhasan37@gmail.com www.arifhasan.org  |