**[Bundal Island life](https://www.dawn.com/news/1597546/bundal-island-life)**

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THE excitement surrounding the proposed development of Bundal Island has the power brokers and real-estate developers in a tizzy. A world-class resort type of facility is going to be built off the coast of Karachi, far away from the mess that Karachi itself has become. An enclave for the super-rich of Pakistan to live in splendid isolation from the rest of Sindh. Governor Imran Ismail says that it will “surpass Dubai” and all stakeholders are enthralled by this prospect.

The reality of this project is a little different. Bundal Island is not physically connected to the mainland but located one mile away from DHA Phase VIII. So how does one get to and from the island? By boat? This takes two hours each way. So it rules out any residents that have to get to work off the island in the morning. Or any students that need to get to school or college during the day.

‘Oh we can build a bridge to Bundal Island,’ say the supporters. The cost of constructing a causeway over water runs $89-95 million per kilometre. This means that the 1.6 km bridge over to the island will cost $142m at the very least. There will be annual interest payments on the capital used for the bridge as well as the cost of upkeep. A failing bridge is not an attractive feature for super-rich investors.

The next issue is power. If Bundal Island is connected to the mainland power distribution system, then it will require submarine cables to conduct electricity and gas to the island, with substations located at both ends of the submarine cable. Then an entire underground distribution grid has to be developed for the island. Conservatively, this power infrastructure installation will cost over $100m. Interest costs on this investment at seven per cent will work out to Rs1.2 billion per year. Who will pay for these costs? The residents of Bundal Island or all of Karachi?

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Will the residents be paying for electricity at the current highly subsidised tariff being offered by K-Electric? Or will they pay the market rate for power? Singapore Power estimates that the monthly charge for power to a bungalow on the island nation is S$758 per month. This works out to about Rs91,000 per household on Bundal Island.

How about water supply? Clearly, the tanker system will not work on the island. So there is the obvious solution: a desalination plant. But wait! According to Dubai Electricity and Water Authority, it costs Dhr1 to process 37 gallons of water in the desalination plant. We estimate that providing desalinated water for Bundal Island residents will be Rs39,000 per month per household. Of course, we must not forget the cost of setting up a desalination plant. A plant that can serve the island will cost $300m. The interest costs on capital borrowing of that scale will be Rs3.5bn per year. Again, who pays for these development costs?

We then come to waste treatment. What is the Pakistan Islands Development Authority’s plan for that? Will all the trash and effluent be dumped into the sea? That will make for a very smelly place to live. And the trash will be swept back up to the land with the tide, as it does on Seaview Beach in Karachi. One cannot imagine any of the so-called elites tolerating such an environment.

‘So how about a waste-to-energy plant,’ say the supporters. The sum total of solid municipal waste that can be generated through this development is 16,650 tons per month. This level falls far below the tonnage required to operate a W2E plant successfully. So what is the solution? Is the trash going to be shipped back to the mainland by boat every day? After all, this kind of development cannot have kachra-kundis spread over the town. Where will the sewage lines lead to? The ocean? Or will the plans include a waste treatment plant as well? Consider the costs of constructing one of those.

Then, of course, there is the healthcare issue. Where will the residents go in the case of a medical emergency? Travel by boat for two hours to get to see a doctor or get admitted to a hospital?

Our estimates based on the size of the island of around 130 square kilometres indicates that the total number of residents that can reside on Bundal Island is 731,000. This means, given five persons per residence, the number of housing units will be 146,263. This is a very small base of residents for such a complex ecosystem to be developed.

The danger of this development is that if all of the infrastructure elements are not addressed, the project will fail. The people of Karachi will then once again be left with a half-built and abandoned project, huge investment losses and a ruined ecosystem.

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