**KCR victims**

BY A R I F H A S A N | 8/25/2019

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| ON May 9, the Supreme Court ordered the Pakistan Railways to remove `encroachments` from the Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) right of way within 15 days, after which the Sindh government would take over the project and make the KCR operative in one month.  The Supreme Court further ordered that the Sindh chief minister, Karachi mayor, Sindh chief secretary, Karachi commissioner and the Railways shall ensure that the schedule is followed and that they will seek whatever assistance is required from the federal government`s planning division.  The railway`s representative, who had proposed the schedule, assured the court that this would be done. In addition, the court ordered that the evicted households should be provided with appropriate housing within one year of their eviction.  However, it was simply not possible for the railway to meet its promises. They did not have the capacity to demolish 4,653 homes from the 50 feet (15 metres) right of way on either side of the railway track in two weeks.  It could not make the railway operative either, simply because the Green Line BRT corridor had cut across the railway track, and for the railway to be operative required an underpass or bridge across the BRT corridor.  This would take at least a year to build.  But, the demolition of the houses began as per schedule on 14th of Ramazan at the height of a heatwave in Karachi; 1,119 homes out of 4,653 were pulled down but the people have continued to live for the last two and a half months under the open sl(y on the rubble of their homes. The reason for this is that if they leave their homes, they will seize to exist for the railway authorities and as such they will lose their right to seek any form of compensation that the state may subsequently negotiate with them.  Living conditions on the rubble are terrible. Water, electricity, and gas connections have been disconnected by the railway police. Consequently, water has to be purchased, cooking has to be done on wood fuel, children cannot go to school, and women cannot go to work. There are no toilets and no manner of removing excreta. Attempts at creating some sort of parda for toilets are thwarted by the railway police, and there are complaints from women that the railway police misbehave with them. Men also cannot attend work regularly. As a result, incomes have declined and because of heat, dehydration and disease are rampant.  These are people who once had a roof over their head, legal gas and electricity meters, proper postal addresses, and had been registered as voters. Meanwhile, no plan for the rehabilitation of the evictees along the KCR right of way has been initiated as ordered bythe Supreme Court, and the demolition process has prematurely come to a halt. On the hearing of Aug 9, the railways informed the court that the KCR project was not feasible and that the railways could not possibly implement it. As such, the demolition of the homes makes no sense whatsoever.  To ease the situation for the affectees, each household head should be given a paper stating his/her name and the address of the demolished house and also stating that the person is entitled to compensation or relocation. The household will then be able to make arrangements to move out from the rubble of their home to their relatives or to rental accommodation. In addition, it is essential that a rehabilitation plan for the evicted households be developed immediately so that people have a place to live.  But there are other issues as well. The railway right of way is also encroached upon by the Railway Colony, factories, warehouses, and commercial buildings. Will they also be demolished? So far, no plan forthat exists. Then 3,534 houses still need to be demolished if the railway right of way is to be cleared. Their demolition should take place only after they have been rehabilitated so as to avoid the present situation. And what about the 20,000 to 30,000 other homes that liebeyond the KCR right of way? These settlements also need to be notified as katchi abadis and regularised.  For rehabilitating the 1,119 households that have been demolished, 24 acres of land is required. They should be settled within two kilometres from their original homes so that their social relations, workplaces and children`s schools can be easily accessed. Such a relocation project could be a model for the prime minister`s housing programme.  But then the question is, who is going to undertake this rehabilitation? So far no interest has been shown by the local, provincial, or federal governments and the shameful conditions in the demolished areas persist.  This whole episode demonstrates that government departments are not aware of the situation underground and that their decisions are made on false assumptions, as a result of which the people of this city undergo immense misery.  The writer is an architect.  arifhasan@gmail.com www.arifhasan.org |  |