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June 21, 2021

**Water, water everywhere?**

News channels have been consistently reporting that Karachi’s monsoon season – which typically occurs in July – is starting prematurely this year.

The Met Department issued thunderstorm warnings for Karachi as early as June 18. Several other sources are predicting that Karachi will receive more than the usual amount of rains this year as well. If 2020 was to be used as a benchmark, we should collectively be deeply concerned.

The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) has issued instructions to the district administrations to ensure that all protective measures are taken ahead of the monsoon season to prevent the loss of life and property. Acting on these instructions and backed by the orders of the Supreme Court, the desilting of Karachi’s major drains is underway coupled with aggressive anti-encroachment drives (which is also raising a larger question of the displacement of residents, and urban planning in the city). Whether these measures will be sufficient remains to be tested, but the hopes of Karachi are pinned on their success.

Monsoons disrupt the services of every utility, but also bring one particular organization to the forefront – the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board. Responsible for providing over 20 million citizens with potable water and maintaining the city’s sanitation systems, we have yet to see any action announced let alone taken to keep our streets from turning into rivers. Incidentally, recent news reports showed that a 66-inch water pipeline had burst inside Karachi University which affected supply of water to District East and Central and flooded major portions of University Road causing extended traffic jams. According to officials, this was not the first time this had happened either.

Every year, torrential rains choke our systems and standing water affects movement and even the supply of electricity, as the power utility’s staff is unable to access submerged or waterlogged locations to restore power. People from affluent areas including PECHS and Defence are seen sharing videos of their submerged houses with no respite in sight. The year 2020 was especially bad for the city; will 2021 be different?

The safety and smooth functioning of a city like Karachi requires all stakeholders to come together and work towards a common vision. The resilience of the city is only as strong as its weakest link, and unfortunately it seems like the problem of water is currently our biggest challenge. Friends and colleagues in different parts of the city have reported seeing KE teams working to elevate the substations in areas that were most affected by rains. It is saddening to see that instead of relying on the water and sewerage authorities to fulfill their duty and create channels to evacuate water, a utility is being pushed to elevate its own infrastructure by several feet to steer clear.

We often see news reports flashing an outage at the Dhabeji Pumping Station or other major water supply points in the city. As a citizen, the frequency makes me wonder: what is preventing them from installing surge protectors or bolstering their infrastructure at these key points so that we can continue to receive a smooth supply of water?

Adding insult to injury, the prevalence of illegal hydrants is preventing people from access to the water as well. It is a common practice across the city for people to pay thousands of rupees for tankers of clean water to be delivered, despite having a dedicated supply line for their house. Shouldn’t we be demanding action against this theft the way we do for gas or electricity? By the looks of it, the authorities are neither providing us with sufficient water supply, nor utilizing resources towards effectively draining the water.

There is a great amount of focus on removing encroachments and widening the nullahs that are the main conduits of channeling water away from the city, with the apex court demanding action and accountability for all those involved. Where other stakeholders are being expected to pull up their socks and work proactively to ensure smooth services for Karachi, one hopes that the organization responsible for managing the root of the problem – adequate sewerage and sanitation – is also pushed to fulfill its obligation. Meanwhile, I’ll look up the cost of buying a small boat to navigate the city ahead of the monsoon.

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