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Karachi Expressway Project gets Go- Ahead

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KARACHI, June 6: While granting clearance for the 25-kilometre-long elevated expressway over MT Khan Road and Sharea Faisal, the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (Sepa) has required the project proponent, the City District Government of Karachi (CDGK), to plan traffic diversions and publicise them well in advance, minimise inconvenience to citizens and carefully monitor any potential environmental hazard.

The Sepa no-objection certificate (NOC) was issued to the CDGK on Monday for the construction of the Karachi Elevated Expressway (KEE) from Jinnah Bridge to the Quaidabad Intersection. The project's ground breaking ceremony was performed by President Gen Pervez Musharraf two months before an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) public hearing was conducted by Sepa on April 3. Concerns had been voiced that the project, which lies along Karachi's Sharea Faisal business strip, would cause significant environmental and other problems -- many of these are addressed in the conditions laid down by Sepa.

Under the requirements, the project is to be completed in the minimum time possible without being left abandoned or unattended at any time from the date of commencement of construction to completion. Therefore, the document stated, "work shall only be started when it is sure that it would neither stop nor slow down during the construction period."

Sepa directs the CDGK to advertise through the electronic and print media any diversions or detours that will become necessary during construction. It also requires these alternative routes to be properly constructed before the KEE construction is started, and that the diversionary plan is submitted to Sepa.

CDGK has been asked to ensure that traffic is not disrupted along the Rashid Minhas Intersection, and no existing structure is adversely affected in any way. If necessary, the bridge in the centre of the road for traffic turning right while approaching from the eastern (airport) side should to be relocated to avoid disruptions. Furthermore, space limitations on either end of the expressway, particularly at the Malir/Quaidabad Bridge, must be addressed in the entry and exit point designs.

Sepa has directed the CDGK to coordinate and consult the construction plan and schedule with all the relevant civic agencies, including the KW&SB, the KESC, PTCL, SSGCL, the Cantonment Board and the traffic police. In terms of the protection of the environment, Sepa requires the CDGK to adhere strictly to mitigation measures proposed in the EIA submitted earlier to the agency. Institutional arrangements for the implementation of the environment management plan must be finalised before construction is started so that no delay occurs. Furthermore, the proponent is required to restore the Sharea Faisal greenbelt as far as possible with plantation and landscaping after project completion.

The proponents have been asked to keep the height of the KEE at Level 2 on the Club Road section in order to reduce noise pollution and help maintain ambient air quality. "Wherever the height of the KEE is at Level-1," said the document, "some mechanical exhaust system must be supplemented to provide improved environment quality under the expressway."

The CDGK has also been directed to engage an independent environmental monitoring consultant to monitor any hazards such as dust emissions, road obstructions, traffic jams, or high levels of noise. Furthermore, states the Sepa document, "all the environmental conditions of this

approval shall be incorporated in the terms and conditions of tender document of the project for commitment and compliance. The tender document incorporating the conditions shall be provided to Sepa for record.”

Sepa stipulates that all social and conflicting issues must be settled before construction on the KEE is started, and the project proponent must adhere to clarifications made in response to the concerns of various stakeholders. It is further required that no puncturing of the deck slab should take place on existing bridges and suitable adjustments must be made to the KEE design. Construction techniques should be adopted with a view to reducing traffic disruptions as far as possible. Solid waste generated during the construction must be sent to designated landfill sites, and noise and vibration levels must be monitored and controlled.

The CDGK is asked to ensure that no unfortunate incident takes place in connection with the expressway construction, since the cost of damage to the environment, property or life of any person or worker will be borne by the proponents of the project. In addition, the Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) set-up must be established and supervised by an HSE officer with sufficient administrative and technical authority. Furthermore, the CDGK must not damage or restrict access to protected heritage sites, religious places, graveyards, hotels, museums or places of recreation.

The clearance issued by Sepa also requires the establishment of a complaint centre that is manned round the clock, the telephone numbers of which should be displayed on large signs on the extremities of each section. This is to ensure that any citizens' complaints are not only heard but also acted upon.

The document states that the approval has been granted only for the project activity described in the EIA reports, and the CDGK will be required to submit a separate EIA or other relevant report if any change in project design takes place.