

CAN LYARI EXPRESSWAY RESOLVE URBAN TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS?

by

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BACKGROUND

- Old quarters of Karachi have become exceedingly congested over the period of time. Expansion of vendor operations and whole scale market activities are the key reasons.
- Karachi Development Plan 1973-85 proposed a sequence of Northern and Southern Bypasses to facilitate easy movement of goods carrier vehicles, tankers and trailers without affecting city roads. The former is being implemented after three decades while the latter is held in abeyance.
- A group of expatriate professionals proposed Lyari Expressway as a solution to de-congest the inner city as an alternative to Northern Bypass.

- In 1989 CIDA was invited by KDA to participate in the process of design. An elevated option was proposed.
- Several objections were raised by concerned citizens, professionals and institutions such as URC. The URC's objection was that the expressway was not an alternative to the northern bypass. It would cause immense noise and air pollution in the most densely populated of Karachi's settlements, the elevated option would be aesthetically ugly, and the riverbank roads would displace poor communities.
- After passing through various stages, the project was begun in 2001. It has become a cause of great concern for the communities and city dwellers as a whole.

ISSUES

- **Evictions:** 25000 households (comprising 200,000 people; tens of thousands of school going children; women labour force and even normal workforce) have been directly affected.
- **Transparency:** Information and decision making kept confidential; work awarded without tendering; no public scrutiny or control.
- **Social justice:** Legal dwellers subjected to severe locational disadvantage and decline in living conditions.

- **Disregard of international covenants:** Fact finding mission from HIC and ACHR found serious irregularities in project design, implementation and human settlement issues.
- **Citizen rights:** No public consultation was carried out at any stage; communal and political voices were also ignored – one boy has since died during bull dozing, scores injured; many arrested.
- **Speculation:** Reclaimed land along LEW shall act as ideal grounds for real estate development

- **Technical merits:** Negligible – with KNBP in place few motorists will use LEW.
- **Corruption:** Military audit parties had pointed out serious irregularities in the management of the project in 2002-03; works pertinent to earth filling could have been controlled.
- **Cost benefit analysis:** Project shall cost over 23 billion rupees in the final analysis – Neither goods transporters nor public transport operators shall benefit from its existence – cost recovery extremely doubtful.

FINAL WORD

- It can be safely concluded that more such happenings shall remain in the offing till this quasi military government remains at the helm of affairs.
- Since it does not feel accountable to people, but to its own head quarters and outside peers, plight of the down trodden shall increase.
- It also confirms the fact that in the wake of the forthcoming World Trade Organization (WTO) regime, the poor will have virtually no tangible city space to claim.

- They shall be ruthlessly pushed aside in cases where their very existence may come in the way of any large scale development exercise.
- The only way for the poor is to organize themselves, obtain first hand information about developmental affairs, evolve options with the assistance of public spirited professionals and lobby for their rights.
- Experiences have shown that it is not easy to elbow out organized and well informed stakeholders groups, who fight for their legitimate rights.