

The Future of Bundal Island

Introduction and Context

The current Government of Pakistan, under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan, has addressed on both the national and global stage, the two challenges of the climate crisis and biodiversity loss through the Green Stimulus programme, the Restoration Fund, the Billion Tree Tsunami programme and the Recharge Pakistan programme. They have initiated the notification of National Parks and Protected Areas and wildlife conservation. All these varied initiatives have been done within a human development and livelihoods context.

This was most recently reflected in the Prime Minister's speech at the UN Biodiversity Summit. Pakistan currently stands tall on the world's stage, but it must also reflect in action what it aspires to achieve and that means ensuring sustainable development of our biodiversity hot spots and key biodiversity areas (KBAs).

Such an area is Bundal Island that comes under the recently constituted Pakistan Islands Development Authority. It is important that while the economic objectives of development are met, they are done in a way that protects biodiversity, retains their role as buffers to the impact of rising seas, ensures coastal resilience and sets aside certain core zones for conservation as national parks and protected areas. This will simultaneously maintain biological and climate integrity and enhance greatly any prime property value while marketing a genuinely green healthy environment.

Bundal Island - Ecological and Economic Significance

Bundal Island is a small island located in the Arabian Sea off the coast of Karachi, Sindh. It is located in a highly fragile eco-system of Indus Delta, which is recognized among the resource-rich ecosystems facing numerous threats, mostly man-made. Given below are some of the ecological and economic details of the island:

- The total area under mangrove cover on these islands is 10,000 ha, which represents the habitat for juvenile fish and shrimp in the area. The mangroves stabilize the island from erosion and serve as nurseries for shrimp and fish. Large expanses of blank areas/mudflats are available for further mangrove plantation.
- Bundal Island is the breeding ground of the Green Turtles. The sandy beaches of these islands are key areas where the endangered Green Turtles visit the east coast of Karachi for breeding purposes. Ecotourism friendly turtle conservation programmes may be developed along these beaches with egg-hatching enclosures for Green Turtles.
- The area has great potential for eco-tourism since it has a higher elevation and offers extensive sandy beaches.
- Since the island constitutes the breeding ground of Green Turtles and several bird species, research on related issues may also be undertaken here.

- The ancient Rattoo Kot Fort on Muchaka Island (located closer to the two islands) can form a tourist attraction. It is part of the ancient history of Sindh and if rehabilitated could serve as an interesting historical landmark and attractive place for tourists.
- Maximum subsistence fishing, the main source of livelihood of the local population, is conducted in these areas. Out of a population of 25,000 of the coastal villages, 80% fish in these waters, and any development that negatively impacts the mangrove nursery beds of the fisheries will damage the economic well-being of the local population and the fish catch to Karachi.
- The island is also home to a wide variety of fauna. A large population of jackals lives on this island in the groves of the mangroves. The island also provides a habitat to several snake species such as boas, vipers and sea snakes, making the islands a biodiversity hot spot.
- The surrounding waters serve as feeding grounds for two varieties of dolphins (humpback and bottlenose).
- The area lies along the Indus Flyway and as such serves as an important breeding, roosting and feeding ground for migratory and resident bird species. The migratory birds include pelicans, flamingoes, cormorants, cranes and resident species comprise of herons, waders, terns, egrets, kites etc. This can be developed into an ecotourism attraction.

Background

There has been a dispute between the Sindh Government and Port Qasim Authority on the ownership rights of 12,000 acres (49 km²) of land on these Islands. It is also said that in the past Bahria Town had planned a Bahria Island City on Bundal and Buddo Islands back in April 2013, for which a \$20 billion deal was reportedly signed between Bahria Town and Thomas Kramer, a US-based developer known worldwide for his South Beach project in Miami, Florida (*source www.zameen.com*). Covering 12,000 acres of land, this project was meant to be developed in a span of 5–10 years and land was meant to be handed over to people in 2016.

Bundal Island is experiencing constant wave erosion due to frontage of sea. The frequency of waves approaching the island is 10 to 14 per minute and hit the coast at approximate angles of 20° to 35°. Due to this phenomenon, the fine sand and mud roll along the beach is causing erosion. The eroded material is probably being deposited at Kunni swamp, north of Bundal Island. It is reported that the Port Qasim Authority does dredging on a regular basis throughout the year. The dredged material is dumped locally but some of it is also dumped around the islands. The average quantity of this material amounts to 3 – 5 million cubic meters per annum. Also, around 10 – 15 million gallons of municipal waste along with sludge and solid waste from Karachi is washed down to this area daily. Hence pollution forms a major threat to the Islands.

IUCN has declared the area among High Priority Areas of conservation interest. Indus Delta is also enlisted on Global 200 Eco-regions of WWF. Therefore its environmental significance is well established.

Imran affirms support to efforts for biodiversity conservation

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that his government is committed to the global efforts for biodiversity conservation and protection and has, therefore, undertaken many initiatives to protect green areas in the country.

According to a press statement issued here on Monday by the Ministry of Climate Change, the prime minister said: "In fact today the global biodiversity is faced with myriad challenges caused due to unsustainable human activities, including habitat destruction, habitat fragmentation, habitat degradation, overexploitation of species for human use, introduction of exotic species and increased spread of diseases.

However, halting biodiversity loss is possible only through a global biodiversity action."

The prime minister released this message in

the context of the United Nations' Summit on Biodiversity beginning from Sept 30 in New York.

The summit is being convened by the president of the UN General Assembly, at the level of heads of state and government under the theme "Urgent action on biodiversity for sustainable development".

More than 45 heads of state and government from across the world will take part in the event.

Leaders of five of the world's largest economies will endorse the Leaders' Pledge for Nature at the summit, committing to decisive action on nature to protect human and planetary health.

"While Pakistan is no exception to the fallouts of the biodiversity loss at global and local levels, we have taken various initiatives to address this issue as a part of global efforts," the prime minister said.

He said: "My government has taken up the challenge of planting 10 billion

trees across the country with the support of local communities [and] aims to significantly reverse biodiversity loss by mainstreaming the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources across all sectors of the national economy, the society and the policy-making frameworks."

An ambitious green stimulus initiative had also been introduced, which led to creation of thousands of green job opportunities and was leading the people to protect forests and grow nurseries for livelihoods, he said.

Prime Minister Khan pledged strong support to the Leaders' Pledge for Nature, saying his government was committed to halting biodiversity loss.

He said that his government was already taking steps in the right direction — one of which included the launching of protected areas initiative under which 15 national parks would be protected over the next two years.

CS Scanned with CamScanner

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

Videos

The link to some of the recent footages capturing the magnificent biodiversity and ecosystem of the island is given below:

<https://we.tl/t-bWh9En1iIM>

Recent media coverage of the Bundal island issue

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1584335/twin-islands-along-karachis-coast-are-not-viable-for-development>

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/726486-nasir-shah-blames-government-for-making-island-issue-controversial>

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2267274/who-owns-the-islands>

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1583594>

<https://propakistani.pk/2020/10/09/bundal-island-karachi-project-will-attract-50-billion-in-investment/>

ANNEXURE

Natural Resources on Sale *(Brief Report on sale of two islands of Sindh)*

Authors

Naseer Memon and Zubaida Birwani



PAKISTAN MAHIGEER TAHREEK
The Movement of the Indigenous Coastal Fisherfolk Communities of Pakistan



Natural Resources on Sale

(Brief Report on sale of two islands of Sindh)



By: Naseer Memon and Zubaida Birwani

Background

Emaar Properties PJSC Emaar Properties PJSC, the Dubai-based real estate company, received Pakistan government's approval to develop two island projects near Karachi that will require investments worth Dh158 billion (\$43 billion). The approval for the project from Pakistan government was announced by Ashfaque Hasan Khan, Pakistan government's economic adviser at a Press conference on 27th Sept in Islamabad. He told that Emaar, with 85 per cent equity in the project, will build homes and apartments at Bundal and Buddo Islands over the next 13 years. Pakistan's Port Qasim Authority will hold 15 per cent stake and will provide land for the project

Under this scheme, the Federal Government has allotted 12,000 acres land on two islands of Sindh namely Bundal and Buddo (locally called *Bundaar* and *Dingi* respectively) to the UAE based construction giant to construct a model city near Karachi. The deal was kept so secret that initially the Chief Minister of Sindh Dr. Arbab Ghulam Rahim himself stated that the Federal Government has not taken Sindh Government in confidence on any such decision therefore his government will take up the matter with the federal government. However the Sindh Cabinet in its meeting held on 3rd October decided to support the mega project on the two islands and the Chief Minister taking u-turn said that “land” is not superior to “development” so the project will not be opposed. According to newspaper reports the project has been approved by the Economic Coordination Committee of Cabinet and the Prime Minister has formally approved the project.

The Project

Now Port Qasim Authority and Emaar Group are at advance stage of finalizing the modalities to initiate this mega joint venture to convert these islands into a modern city with 15,000 housing units along with a number of commercial plazas, leisure points, industrial parks, free trade zone and port terminals. The islands will be connected with Karachi Defense Phase-8 through 1.5 kms long bridge costing a hefty sum of US\$ 50 million (approx. 3 billion rupees). According to the plan the Emaar Group would invest about 43 billion dollars (about 2,600 billion rupees) over next 13 to 16 years. According to the Prime Minister’s adviser on finance, on completion it will be just like another Dubai. Although the official name of the new city is not yet announced however it is being named as Diamond City, Sky Land, Model City.

According to background of the project, the Port Qasim Authority had invited bids in April this year as a result four groups expressed their interest in joint venture out of which Emaar Group fulfilled the required criteria. The bidder of the project was required to have at least five billion dollars worth assets, one billion dollars annual income and technology to reclaim land from sea and Emaar Group was the only bidder that met these major requirements.

The Emaar Group

Emaar became a familiar name to people of Pakistan when over last few weeks leading national dailies carried a series of full page advertisements on its housing project in Islamabad. In May 2006 Emaar announced three real estate developments in the cities of Islamabad and Karachi in Pakistan. The projects, with a total investment of US\$2.4 billion will include a series of master planned communities and all three projects are expected to be completed in the next four to five years.

Two projects in Islamabad included The Highlands and Canyon Views with 1,500 acres between them, offering 9,000 luxury single-family town homes and villas. The Highlands development is located within the Defense Housing Authority Islamabad (DHAI) Phase 1 extension and Canyon Views within the DHAI Phase 2 extension. According to the official website of the Group, the proposed project for Karachi is named as Crescent Bay, Karachi. It is a 75 acre development featuring high and mid-rise towers for residential and commercial use, a shopping centre and a five star beachfront hotel. The towers will contain 4000 residential apartments. Crescent Bay is located within Karachi's DHA Phase 8 and in close proximity to the DHA golf course. In addition to that this new project is also in offing.

The business power that Emaar Group possesses is obvious from the fact that it is implementing huge scale projects in about 20 countries including Saudi Arabia, UAE, India, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Syria, Pakistan and Tunisia. The company recently announced record revenue and net profits of US\$1.383 billion and US\$0.831 billion respectively, for the half year ended 30 June 2006. The revenue and profit for the second quarter of 2006 (April to June) were US\$0.773 billion and US\$0.418 billion respectively. The company has witnessed tremendous growth since its inception in 1997.

Emaar has strengthened its international presence recently with the acquisition of John Laing Homes, the second largest privately held homebuilder in the US; and Hamptons International, a premier UK realtor. The company is also opening a full-fledged representative office in China.

Emaar is eyeing upon long term business interest in Pakistan. Mohammed Al Falasi, Managing Director, Emaar Pakistan, said in a recent Press statement that the challenge faced by Emaar in Pakistan was to create a new niche in the marketplace and revitalise interest on home-property in the minds of the upwardly mobile Pakistanis living in the country and abroad. Earlier this year, Mohamed Ali Alabbar, Chairman, Emaar Properties, said Pakistan represented a vital link in Emaar's global and regional plans. ***"These current projects are only a small and initial part of our commitment to providing world-class living and infrastructure in Pakistan."***

The Sold Islands

The two Islands on sale are actually the two ends of one long island, locally named as Dingi on west and Bundaar on east. According to the "COMPENDIUM REPORT OF HIGH PRIORITY AREAS – Pakistan Component" developed by IUCN, the Island is actually the part of Bundal/ Khipranwala/ Muchaka Islands Complex, which is included in High Priority Areas of Pakistan by IUCN. The island complex, spread over an area of 17,850 hectares is located at the western end of the Sindh Coastal Zone bordered by Korangi, Phitti and Jhari creeks. Bundal Island is one of the biggest and highest of all the islands along the Sindh Coast, with a length of about 8km. The width of the island varies - it is about 4km wide in the north and 1km in the south. There are shifting sand dunes on the island, some of which gain heights of up to 3m. A portion of the northern area of the island is covered at high water and has a thick growth of mangroves at the extreme northern point. The eastern coast, covered by sand dunes, is steep and easily approachable by boat. In the south of the island, the shallow patch of drying sand has developed into a new island namely Buddo (Dingi) Island, which is

the outermost island of this series. The sandy part of Bundal Island is under the influence of the monsoon winds.

Ownership of the Islands

The ownership of islands is still disputed as Sindh Government claims that the area was not leased to the Port Qasim Authority. Even the area leased to the PQA for port related operations does not include the islands. However the Prime Minister Mr. Shoukat Aziz during his visit to Karachi on 14th October 2006 decreed that the land belongs to Port Qasim Authority (PQA); enough message for Sindh Government.

City District Government of Karachi has also claim over the islands and according to report appeared in daily Dawn on October 8, 2002, the city district government and four entrepreneurs including a firm from Thailand signed a memorandum of understanding for establishing an IT infrastructural project. The "Karachi Technology Island City" proposed to be set up on a 300-acre piece of land, opposite the creek of Karachi, and seen a key technological infrastructure to help institutionalize and internationalize Karachi's IT industry with the help of international donor agencies and investors.

Those who signed the MoU at a ceremony included representatives of the city government, Army Welfare Trust, Pakistan Software Houses Association, EDP Services and Access Capital (Thailand). Briefing newsman about the project, City Nazim Naimatullah Khan said, the city government was ready to provide land and other infrastructural facilities for the project. Federal minister for science and technology Dr Atta-ur-Rehman was the chief guest on the occasion. Other who spoke on the occasion included the CEO of EDP Services; Syed Hamza Matin, The executive vice-president of the Access Capital; Marfred J. Pranada, Zain Syed of PASHA and the managing-director of AWT Lt-Gen Parwaiz Masood. Probably Dr. Atta-ur-Rehman sensed the ownership issues at that time and in his speech he urged all the stakeholders to be clear about their plan and give a legal shape to the project so that it could not be dropped half way.

Later all of them took a boat ride to see the proposed site. Though the initiators of the project did not give any exact name to the island, one of the crew told them that it was Bundal Island.

PQA has been a major player in the race for occupying the island. PQA also considered the Bundal island as one of the potential sites for setting up a terminal for Liquid Natural Gas (LNG). A consortium of leading Japanese and Korean companies expressed interest in setting up a LNG terminal at Bundal Island in response to an Expression of Interest (EOI) issued by PQA. Later a four-member delegation, comprising Mitsui (Japan) and Kogas and Vopak (Korea), visited the site along with PQA Chairman Vice-Admiral Asad Qureshi, and showed deep interest in the site which, they said, had great potential and could be developed into a leading LNG terminal in the world. Kogas from Korea is the largest LNG importer in the world and another Korean company Vopak are established chemical terminal operators. The LNG terminal would require an investment of one billion dollars. The EOI sparked strong reaction from the Sindh Government and the ownership of the area was challenged.

At one stage the Port Qasim Authority also allotted 2,700 acres of land to Pakistan Navy, without any authorization. Although Pakistan Navy later shifted the facility to Ormara for which the land was acquired yet it still has claim over that land. Defense Housing Authority also approached the President of Pakistan to get this land.

In 2001 another private company M/s Gulf Fze (A&P) approached the Federal Government for allocating Bundal and Khpiranwala islands to develop a Theme Park. The then Chief Executive Secretariat sent a letter to the government of Sindh, which said that “While approving the concept of developing Bundal and Khpiranwala Islands, Chief Executive directed that first the status of ownership of these islands be determined by DHA asking comments from Government of Sindh, Ministry of Communications, Port Qasim Authority and Pakistan Navy”. However the project with estimated investment of 69 million dollars could not take off since the Sindh government took strong views on the ownership of the island. The EDO (Revenue) of Karachi through a letter sent on 6th September 2001 reported that “The ownership of these Islands vests to the Provincial Government. In the past Government of Sindh, has made allotment to DHA and Port Qasim Authority but these Islands have not been allotted”.

Sindh Government continued to claim the ownership of the islands. In a meeting held at Governor House, Sindh on 23rd February 2006 the Senior Member Board of Revenue told that the island is property of Government of Sindh. According to him, when PQA was established, its area of operation was defined, which does not include the Bundal Island. The Senior Minister (Excise and Taxation) also endorsed this point and said that Bundal Island has never been allotted to PQA.

In the same meeting, City Nazim of the City District Government Karachi suggested that Bundal Island can be developed as an Offshore Economic Hub of Pakistan. In support of this idea, EDO Master Plan Group of Offices (MPGO) offered to prepare a land use plan for Bundal Island. Governor Sindh appreciated the idea of the City Nazim and said that such development should be taken after looking into taxation matters and economically viable project for international bidders. He also said that Government of Sindh can assign this task to City District Government of Karachi. In the same meeting certain features of the land use plan were also agreed. It included, Diplomatic Enclave, Offshore Financial District, Hotels, Recreational Spots, Water Sports and Five Star Residential Area. The meeting does not bear even a passing reference on any impact on local fishermen or the environment of islands. This shows how city government and the Governor were insensitive about the local communities and eco-system of the area.

Legal Perspective

The provincial law department is also of the view that the land allotted by the federal government was the property of the provincial government. According to the Law secretary Syed Ghulam Nabi Shah, under Sindh Land Revenue Code (Repealed) all lands, the bed of the sea, harbours, creeks below the high-water mark etc. were the property of the provincial government. Similarly, Section 50 of the Sindh Revenue Act, 1967, also declares the same right as that which belongs to the provincial government. He cited that Sindh High Court had also given a judgment in favour of the provincial government in a dispute with the Defence Housing Authority about the latter’s claim to 250 acres of reclaimed land near the seashore of Clifton beach. According to Mr. Ghulam Nabi Shah any land reclaimed through natural

process or artificial process was the property of the provincial Government (Daily Times, 6th Oct 2006)

According to renowned legal expert Barrister Zamir Ghumro, the Federal Government does not possess any land in any province and all land within jurisdiction of any province belongs to the province only. However federal government can request provincial government for acquiring land for any purpose, which will not change the ownership status of the land. In this context Port Qasim Authority can not be the owner of the land, since it acquired area from Sindh province for port related activities only.

A letter of The Law Department, dated 9th September 2000 explains the legal position as “Under Article 172 of Constitution of Islamic Republic Pakistan, 1973 the land reclaimed through natural or artificial process located in the Province of Sindh vests in the Government of Sindh. This view gets support from the observations made by Mr. Justice Shabbir Ahmed Honorable Judge of High Court of Sindh while deciding the injunction application by Government of Sindh in suit No. 778 filed by the Government of Sindh”.

According to the Section 50 of the Land Revenue Act of 1967, provided that any Forest or quarry or any unclaimed, unoccupied, deserted or waste land or any spontaneous produce or other accessory interest in land belonging to the land owners, it shall be presumed to belong to Government.

The Constitution of Pakistan also supports the point of view of the Sindh Government. Article 172 (1) of the Constitution says “Any property which has no rightful owner shall, if located in a province, vest in the Government of that Province and in every other case, in the Federal Government.

It is strange that the Port Qasim Authority has now become claimant of the land and the Prime Minister is also publicly supporting the claim, without seeking legal position of the matter. No one from the local communities was ever consulted to understand historical rights of fishermen, who existed long before the country came on the world map.

Ecological Significance of the Islands

Although the Chief Minister of Sindh claims that only dogs roam on the islands and the Prime Minister says seventy percent of island was destroyed, the ground realities are entirely different. Recognizing immense ecological significance of the islands IUCN included them in the list of High Priority Areas. According to the “COMPENDIUM REPORT OF HIGH PRIORITY AREAS – Pakistan Component” developed by IUCN, The following are the significant ecological aspects of the Islands.

- The area has great potential for eco-tourism since it has a higher elevation and offers extensive sandy beaches.
- The total area under mangrove cover on these islands is 10,000 ha, which represents the habitat for juvenile fish and shrimp in the area. The mangroves stabilise the island and serve as nurseries for shrimp and fish. Large expanses of blank areas/ mudflats are available for further plantation.
- Bundal Island is the breeding ground of the Green Turtles. The sandy beaches of these islands are the only areas where the endangered Green Turtles visit the east

coast of Karachi for breeding purposes. Turtle conservation programmes may be developed along these beaches with egg-laying enclosures for Green Turtles.

- Since the islands constitute the breeding grounds of Green Turtles and several bird species, research on related issues may also be undertaken here
- The ancient Rattoo Kot Fort on Muchaka Island (located closer to the two islands) can form a tourist attraction. It is part of the ancient history of Sindh and if rehabilitated could serve as an interesting historical landmark and attractive place for tourists.
- Maximum subsistence fishing, the main source of livelihood of the local population, is conducted in these areas. Out of a population of 25,000 of the coastal villages, 80% fish in these waters.
- Bundal/ Khipranwala/ Muchaka Islands complex is also home to a wide variety of fauna. A large population of jackals lives on this island in the groves of the mangroves. The islands also provide a habitat to several snake species such as boas, vipers and sea snakes.
- The surrounding waters serve as feeding grounds for two varieties of dolphins (humpback and bottlenose).
- The area lies along the Indus Flyway and as such serves as an important breeding, roosting and feeding ground for migratory and resident bird species. The migratory birds include pelicans, flamingoes, cormorants, cranes and resident species comprise of herons, waders, terns, egrets, kites etc.

Threats to Islands

The IUCN document outlines the following threats to the islands

- Bundal Island is experiencing constant wave erosion due to frontage of sea. The frequency of waves approaching the island is 10 to 14 per minute and hit the coast at approximate angles of 20° to 35° . Due to this phenomenon, the fine sand and mud roll along the beach is causing erosion. The eroded material is probably being deposited at Kunni swamp, north of Bundal Island.
- The Port Qasim Authority does dredging on a regular basis throughout the year. The dredged material is dumped locally but some of it is also dumped around the islands. The average quantity of this material amounts to 3 – 5 million cubic meters per annum.
- About 10 – 15 million gallons of municipal waste along with sludge and solid waste from Karachi is washed down to this area daily. Hence pollution forms a major threat to the Islands
- Surveys are being conducted for oil exploration and in the event that off-shore drilling is conducted, the islands will be very appropriate for the establishment of base camps of oil companies. This will place even greater stress on the fragile ecosystems of the coastal zone.

The Issues

- Sell of the two islands was a clandestine deal done without doing any consultation with local communities, not even with the provincial government.
- Land of the two islands was leased to Port Qasim Authority by Sindh government for port related activities and not for commercial development

- With this development local small fishermen will lose their vital passages to open sea through Korangi and Phitti creeks. This will potentially restrict the movement of more than 4,000 fishing boats of Thatta and Karachi coast into deep sea. They are already prohibited from fishing on the western side of the coast after development of PAF Base and luxury clubs (Golf club, Marina club, Boat club etc) by DHA. With these developments they were deprived from rich fishing grounds in the area and with this new development they are bound to lose the remaining fishing grounds located near mangroves along the islands as well as access to open sea through Korangi and Phitti Creeks. It can ruin Ibrahim Hyder, the largest fishermen settlement of Karachi. Almost whole population of more than 120,000 people in Ibrahim Hyderi depends on fishing business, who will lose their market and many may abandon the area in the wake of blocked access to the open sea.
- Since greed knows no bounds among the decision makers of the country, this development-phobia is also likely to spread its tentacles on neighboring islands, depriving small fishermen from their fishing grounds near shallow water of other islands in the area.
- Karachi coast will be deprived of rich mangroves nurseries and cyclone barriers in the shape of sand dunes and mangrove forests. It may be recalled that the mangrove forest in Indus Delta reduced from 263,000 hectares in 1977 to only 80,000 hectares in 2002.
- Poor fishermen of the area would lose their sojourn places. They use these islands as their sojourn place when they return from long voyages of open sea. Numerous small huts are present on the Bundal Island, which are used to take rest.
- Local fishermen also use these islands as fish drying and net repairing yards since they don't find enough space on mainland areas. These are vital activities of their fishing related livelihood, which they will lose.
- Local fishermen will also lose a place of cultural importance i.e. shrine of Yousif Shah, located on Bundaar island where thousands of devotees throng during two-day annual mela. The event locally called "Bundaar waley Jo Melo" is celebrated with great fervor and fishing communities anxiously wait for this event every year.
- IUCN has declared the area among High Priority Areas of conservation interest. Indus Delta is also enlisted on Global 200 Eco-regions of WWF. Therefore its environmental significance is well established and no such development can be justified on the islands being part of Indus Delta. In spite of all these facts no Environmental and Social Impact assessment has been carried out before announcing this project. There is a possibility that the government may conduct a cosmetic environmental study to justify the scheme, however environmental sensitivity of the area is too obvious and does not need any studies.
- The country has a large homeless population, who deserve development more than any other. According to official statistics urban areas of Sindh need at least 135,000 new housing units each year and to meet the backlog, each year 200,000 residential units are required over next ten years. These mega projects will only add money in the pockets of rich people rather than providing roof to shelter less.
- Renowned expert of urban development Mr. Arif Hassan refers to four planning principles to gauge the overall effectiveness of urban development projects. (i) planning has to respect the ecology of the region in which the city is located (ii) land use has to be determined on the basis of social and environmental considerations and not on land value alone (iii) development must cater to the needs of the majority (iv) the tangible and intangible cultural assets and heritage of the city have to be

protected. Even a cursory look can prove that the proposed model city on islands does not comply with any of the four planning principles.

Fundamentals of Sustainable Development and the Island City

Ironically, every investment bringing revenue is considered here “development” though it often fails to bring real development. While the paradigm and concepts of term “development” have undergone phenomenal change throughout the world we are still stuck with its obsolete definitions.

The developed world experienced and realised the grim results of some major development initiatives when their negative effects started surfacing. In 1952 infamous Killer Fog resulted in 4,000 deaths and raised new questions about the industrial development in Europe. Similarly, much trumpeted Green Revolution caused irreparable damage to ecosystems on the earth. In 1962 Rachel Carson exposed the damages of DDT — a major source of the green revolution — in his book “Silent Spring”. The book laid foundation for environmental movements and challenged the development taking place in the name of Green Revolution. Hence, conventional concepts of development in industrial and agricultural sectors were challenged in developed world long before the present-day environmental movements began.

Gone are the days when feasibility of a development project was decided merely on its economic benefits such as profits and jobs. Now the key question to determine the fate of a project is whether or not it fits in the frame of sustainable development. There are dozens of definitions of ‘sustainable development.’ This concept drew significant attention of the international community at historical Rio Summit of 1992 and 179 nations finally adopted a ‘declaration on environment and development.’

The development practitioners by and large agree that the sustainable development is the one that does not (1) cause irreversible damage to natural resources; (2) take the toll of fragile eco-systems; (3) nurture social inequalities; (4) benefit a group of people/region at the cost of any other group of people/region; (5) jeopardise cultural diversity or cultural identity of any group of people specially indigenous people; and (6) which caters to the basic human needs of underdeveloped and marginalised groups.

Regrettably most of the mega projects in our country do not conform to these imperatives. How far the proposed project of building a modern city on the two islands Dingi and Bundaar (Bundal and Buddo) meets the criteria of sustainable development needs to be explored. Some relevant features of the project are as below:

Environmental Aspects: The two islands are located in a highly fragile eco-system of Indus Delta, which is recognised among the resource-rich ecosystems facing numerous threats, mostly man-made. The World Conservation Union, IUCN, has included Bundal Island in high priority areas of Pakistan in its document on this subject. Bundal/Khipranwala/Muchaka Island complex has been referred as home to remaining tracts of fast degrading mangrove eco-system in the delta.

The mangroves spread on these islands are approximately 10,000 hectares, which indicates the ecological significance of the islands. In addition, vast mudflats on these islands get exposed during low tide and offer fertile ground for planting new mangroves to reverse the

serious damage caused by reduced flow of fresh water in Indus, urban pollution of Karachi and unsustainable use by local communities.

Sandy shore of Bundaar provides nesting grounds for endangered marine turtles. The surrounding waters serve as feeding grounds for two varieties of dolphins (humpback and bottlenose). The area is located along the Indus Flyway and as such serves as an important breeding, roosting and feeding ground for migratory and resident bird species. The migratory birds include pelicans, flamingoes, cranes and resident species consist of herons, waders, terns, egrets, kites etc.

Protection of this treasure of nature is also an obligation by virtue of “Convention on Biological Diversity” (CBD). Pakistan is among the 189 signatories of the convention and the government has also prepared an action plan to implement the convention.

The World Bank has provided funding for the action plan and ICUN and WWF are to provide technical expertise. Their document identifies Indus Delta and Coastal Wetlands among the Critically Threatened Eco-systems of the country. Ironically constructing a modern city on the islands would only add to fragility of this critically threatened eco-system and the government will be essentially violating its own action plan on CBD by allowing this project.

Socio-Economic Aspect: Any development scheme which deprives marginalised people of their livelihood resources cannot be called a sustainable development. The two islands with mangrove eco-system provide rich fishing grounds for subsistence fishing in surrounding waters. A large population of Ibrahim Hyderi and other small villages of fishermen find their livelihood through shallow water fishing around these islands. Their earlier fishing grounds became inaccessible due to the “development” of DHA and various boat clubs. Now with this development hundreds of fishermen families are bound to lose the nearest source of their livelihood.

About 4,000 to 5,000 fishing boats navigate in the open sea through Korangi and Phitti Creeks, located on both ends of the twin islands. The Korangi creek access will be blocked once a 1.5 km bridge is constructed to connect the islands with mainland DHA-8. The other side will also be blocked in the wake of construction of the new city. Fishermen are being stopped from fishing near islands even when the project work is not yet under full swing.

The past history of development projects in the vicinity shows poor track record of providing employment opportunities for local poor. Hardly any locals are found working in 1,600 staff of Port Qasim Authority and 5,000 employees of Karachi Port Trust. Hence the proposed development on the two islands will snatch key sources of livelihood from marginalised fishing community without extending any benefit to them.

Whose Development: The widely quoted definition of sustainable development from “Our Common Future” famously known as “Brundtland Report” defines the term as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. International Institute for Sustainable Development explains the term “need” as “the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given”. Hence, in a country where a large segment of society is deprived of basic human needs, such projects which make the rich richer do not fit

in the concept of sustainable development.

Social development indicators particularly of health, education, drinking water and sewerage are shamefully poor in the country. In many social sector areas we lag behind Saarc countries and in some other even stand below the poor countries of Africa. Taking just an example of housing, the country needs 6.2 million new housing units to provide shelter to every citizen. Urban areas of Sindh require 135,000 new housing units to meet the present need and 200,000 units each year over a decade to clear the housing backlog. The proposed new city will provide 15,000 new housing units but surely not for the shelterless and poor. Hence, the proposed project will not make lives better for the poor echelon of the society even after investing hefty sum of 43 billion dollars. Hence the proposed project is negating all norms of sustainable development and there seems little justification of ignoring the concerns of local communities and the civil society.

Global Experience

The development wizards have also forgotten the recent lesson of Tsunami disaster, which unleashed hell over the coastal patches denuded of mangroves. They also don't bother to remember that the frequency of dangerous cyclones along Sindh coast is very high that is one per quarter of a century. Systematic elimination of mangrove barrier will not only deprive poor fishermen from their livelihood but also nurture greater danger of exposing coastal areas to deadly cyclones. Removing mangrove and sand dune shields is serves nothing but invites the wrath of nature in the shape of tidal and cyclonic disasters.

After the disastrous Tsunami which hit Asian coasts in 2004, The World Conservation Union (IUCN) compared the death toll from two villages in Sri Lanka that were hit by the devastating giant waves. Two people died in the settlement with dense mangrove and scrub forest, while up to 6,000 people died in the village without similar vegetation. In these areas many forests in the past were felled to build prawn farms and tourist resorts. Research has shown mangroves are able to absorb between 70-90% of the energy from a normal wave. Another study was conducted by Global Environment Centre in Malaysia. Five of the villages examined in the study include two on the coast and three behind mangroves. The villages on the coast were completely destroyed, whereas those behind the mangrove suffered no destruction even though other areas unshielded by vegetation at the same distance from the coast were damaged. The study concluded that the forested areas protected the villages from tsunami damage by reducing the energy of waves.

There are numerous stories to learn about the fact that how development projects on islands impact the human life and nature. A famous story of Mexican Cancún Island would be pertinent to cite here. Before its development, Cancún Island was a barrier island, 17 km long and 100-400 m wide. It faced the Caribbean Sea and enclosed a shallow lagoon and was an important nesting site for seabirds and sea turtles. There were several openings to the mangrove lined lagoon in which there was a variety of marine life.

In order to create a tax base for the newly created state of Quintana Roo (1973), it was decided to create an upscale resort for the wealthy. Quarries were developed and causeways constructed linking the island to the mainland and restricting the flow of fresh water into the lagoon. Sections of the lagoon were filled for golf courses and amusement parks. Sewage treatment and the disposal of other wastes became a major problem, eventually the exhausted quarries were used as rubbish dumps, polluting the groundwater supplies. The creation of

marinas in the lagoon added to the problems so that now the smell and appearance of the lagoon is unhealthy. Added to the ecological impacts is the demographic impact resulting from thousands of unskilled workers moving into the area and living in barrios with no running water or sewer services, where disease is a constant problem. Many of these workers, having few skills, turn to crime to survive, resulting in a frightening clash of cultures. After 15 years of development, Hurricane Gilbert hit Cancún in 1988, resulting in considerable destruction and hardship. It was a category 5 hurricane and a devastating blow. Many of the beaches disappeared, there was no water, no food, no electricity. Although Cancún Island is not the only case to refer, there are several others but who cares for the disasters till they unfold and have taken their toll.

What to do?

Here are few recommendations on the follow-up course

- Civil society should mobilize all resources to launch a campaign against this anti-people development.
- A network of civil society organizations need to be formed to take collective action on this issue.
- A comprehensive study may be conducted to cover various aspects of the project such as historical rights, legal position, environmental dimensions and socio-economic effects on local communities.
- International and national fora such as Friends of Earth, Green Peace, IUCN, WWF should be mobilized on urgent basis to halt this development, which will deprive thousands of poor fishermen from their livelihood and destroy remaining tracts of pristine eco-system in Indus Delta.
- Public interest litigation should be filed to seek historical rights of fishing community.
- Meetings should be held with Parliamentarians to sensitize them on the matter and motivate them to raise the matter in Parliament
- Leading non-parliamentarian political groups should be approached to voice against the ill conceived project
- Coastal communities should be mobilized to resist this project, which is likely to be extended to other islands of Pakistan coast, depriving fishing communities from their historical rights and sources of livelihood for their generations to come.
- Emaar Group and the government of UAE should be approached to share concerns of civil society of Pakistan



Community Fishing near Buddo (Dingi) Island



Sand dunes on Bundaar (Bundal) Island



Fish drying on islands



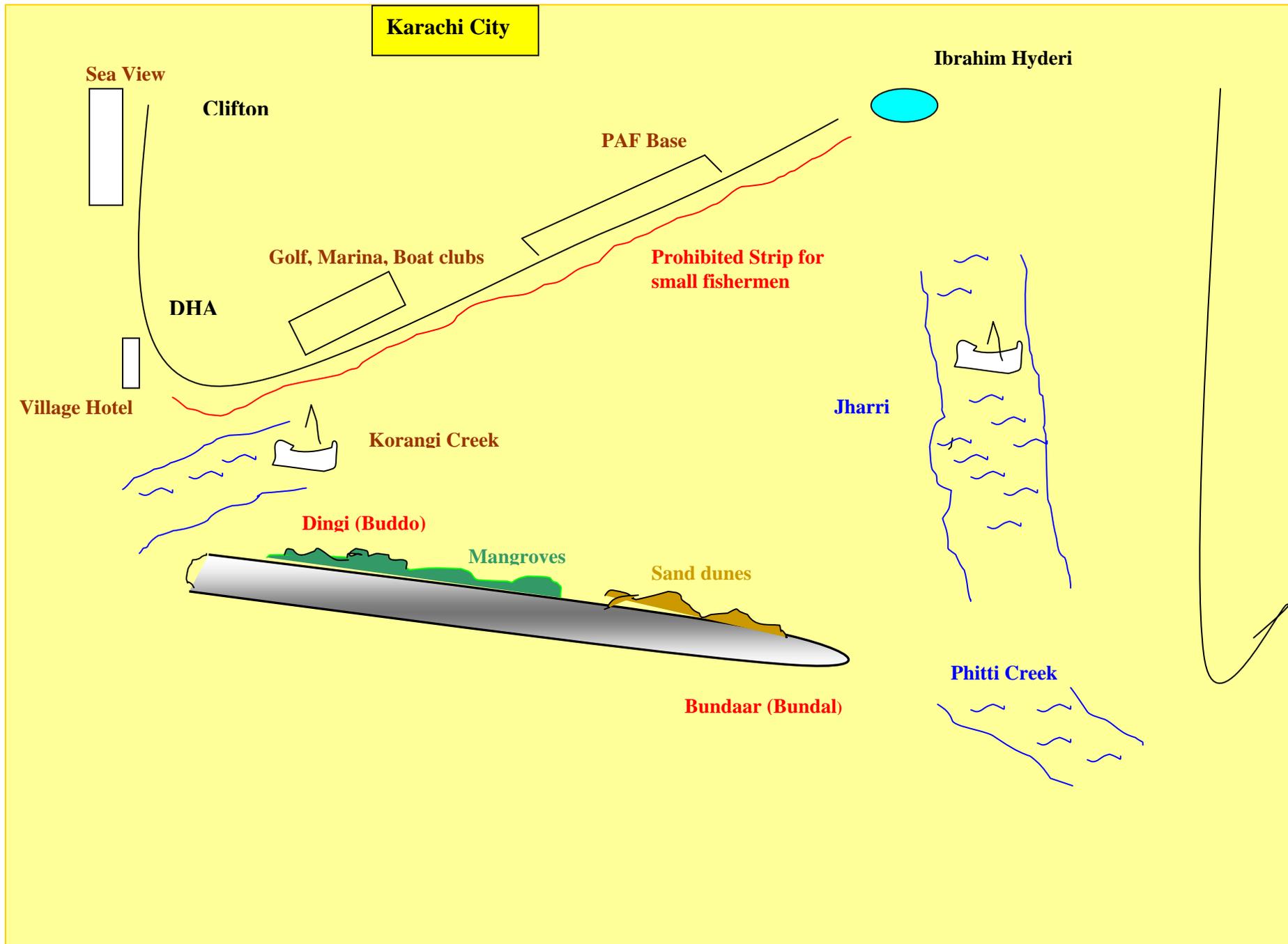
Birds flying over mangroves on Buddo (Dingi)



Sojourn place for voyagers on Bundal (Bundaar) Island

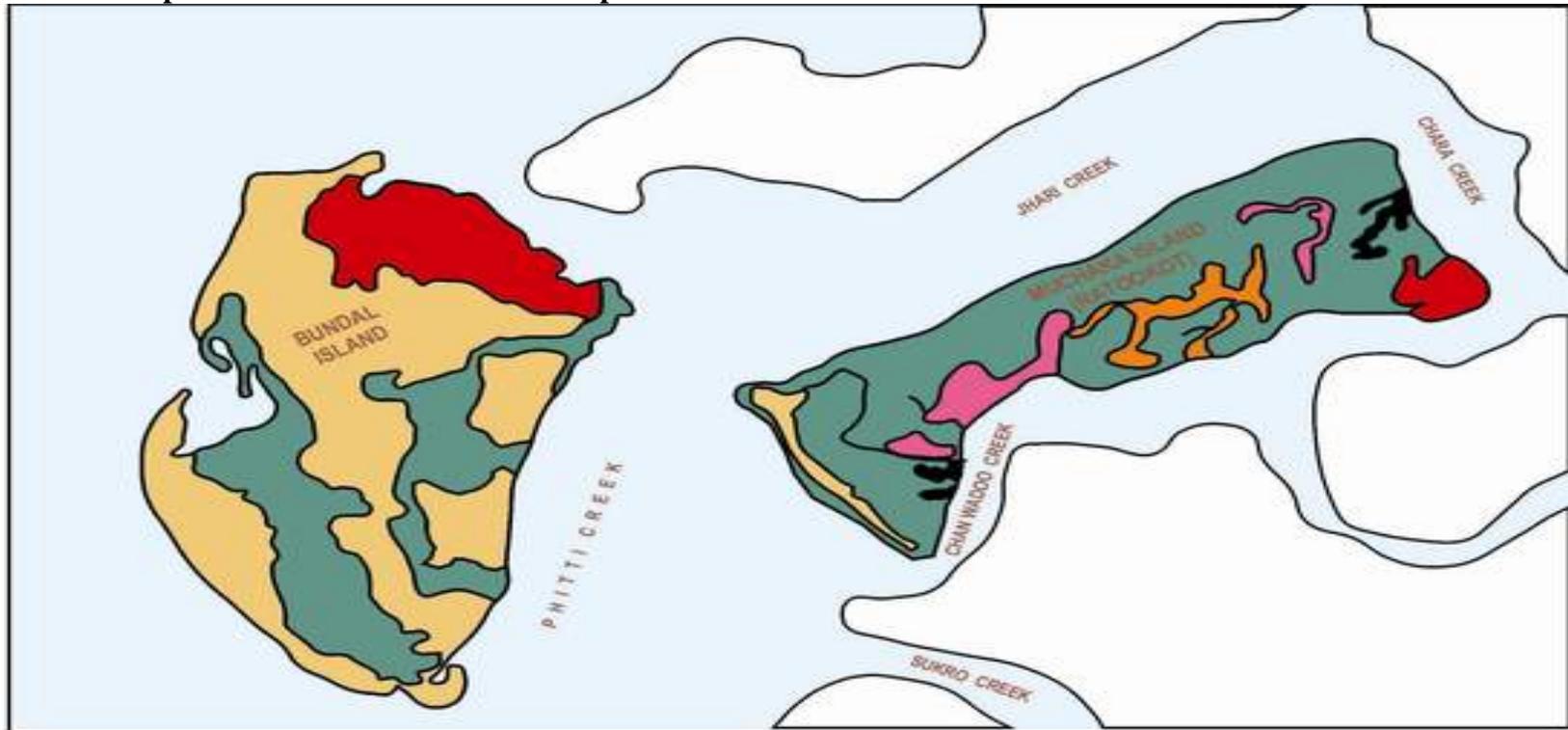


Passage to open sea on the east of Bundaar (Bundal) island



A rough sketch of the area

Bundal/ Khipranwala/ Muchaka Islands Complex



Scale:
1" = 3.3 km

Source: COMPENDIUM REPORT OF HIGH PRIORITY AREAS – Pakistan Component