

Scenario 155

WATER MAFIA IN KARACHI

TANKER MAFIAS OF THE CITY:

But it was not a new phenomenon; see daily '*Dawn*' of 1st April 2008.

A research was undertaken in March 2008 revealed that Karachi's water tanker mafia, which then used to generate an estimated Rs:49.6 billion annually, siphoned off over 41% of its water from the city's bulk distribution system every day and then used to sell the commodity at exorbitant rates to the residents and industries suffering from the water scarcity that was largely caused by the activities of the water tanker mafia itself.

WATER NEEDED: a report authored by one Perween Rahman of the Orangi Pilot Project [OPP] had shown that the city was supplied with 695 million gallons per day [mgd] of water - 645mgd from the River Indus and an average of 50mgd from the rain-fed Hub dam supply. Of this, 30mgd were supplied to the steel mills and Port Qasim before the water reaches the main *Dhabeji Pumping Station*, so the actual supply of water to the main city was 665mgd every day.

However, then [in 2008] the city required a maximum of 601mgd — for Karachi's 16 million residents; lower and middle income areas required about 20 gallons per person per day while the needs of the higher income groups, about 20 percent of the population, were estimated at 35 gallons per person per day; meanwhile, industries required an average of 123mgd and there was an additional requirement of 110mgd for other uses.

This indicated that sufficient water was supplied to the city every day to meet its needs – *but it was only on papers*. The on ground reality as per OPP's report was that:

'.....bulk supply to towns was 293mgd and thus there was a shortfall of between 260 to 308mgd. This shortfall was met through tanker supplies. Karachi's bulk supply was 665mgd. With 15%

wasted due to technical leakages, the available supply comes to 565.25mgd.

The gap between the actual supply and the availability was 272.25mgd, which was siphoned off from the bulk distribution system and [illegally] sold through tanker supplies. This operation generated an estimated Rs:49.6 billion annually (if at all sold at the average cost of Rs:0.5 per gallon).'

WATER SUPPLY: Karachi city receives water from the River Indus via canals from Kinjhar, Haleji and Gharo, and through conduits to the main *Dhabaji Pumping Station*. Thereafter, the water is distributed across the city through conduits and distribution mains of 66-inch and below diameters. There are two routes:

- *the Northern Rout: via Pipri to parts of the Malir cantonment area, the Gulshan COD reservoir, Gulshan Town and parts of Gadap, North Karachi, NEK, North Nazimabad, Gulberg, Liaquatabad and parts of Lyari; and*
- *the Southern Rout: Bin Qasim Town, Landhi, Korangi, along the National Highway to Shah Faisal and Jamshed towns, Saddar town including Defence and Clifton, Lyari and Keamari.*

The Hub water supply, meanwhile, services mainly Orangi, Site and Baldia towns. Since the Hub and River Indus supplies are interconnected at the distribution mains, the supply is meant to be shared as needed.

Till 2008; the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board [KWSB]'s quota for supply to the various towns, the cantonment and DHA amounted to 417.65mgd of the available water. However, the actual supply reaching the towns was only about 293mgd. Seven towns – Orangi, Gadap, Baldia, Jamshed, Site, North Karachi and Gulshan used to get 30-57 per cent of their quota while others get about 60-100 per cent - Cantonment used to get 100% while DHA used to avail 133%.

WATER's OFFICIAL PRICE: Till March 2008, there was an official system in place for water supplies via tankers. The KWSB maintained nine official hydrants which were managed by the Rangers. The officially sanctioned quantum of water was 13.75mgd, of which 3.42mgd was the quota for gratis supply to water-deficient areas while the rest was meant to be sold at official rates. This water was to be distributed through 13,750 trips made by 1,000 gallon capacity tankers of contracted tanker suppliers.

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The Rangers were authorised to charge the contractor a fixed amount of Rs:44 [4.4 paisa / gallon] only per 1,000 gallons of water for residential use and Rs:73 [7.3 paisa / gallon] per 1,000 gallons of water for industrial purposes, which was then to be sold at the official rates.

In reality, however, 25mgd of water was taken from these hydrants and supplied to the city through tankers with capacities ranging from 1,000 to 5,000 gallons and some of 10,000 gallons.

WATER SOLD ON HIGH PRICE: the water was then sold by tanker owners at over double the official rates. The approved price of water supplied through tankers ranged between 15 and 25 paisa per gallon depending on the distance, and whether it was intended for residential or commercial use. In actual situations:

".....the rates were more than doubled to 35-60 paisa / gallon depending on the distance, bargaining with clients and the season in which the water was supplied. These inflated rates were Rs:350 - 600 for 1,000 gallons; Rs:700 - 1,200 for 2,000 gallons; Rs:1,600 - 1,800 for 3,000 gallons and Rs:2,000 - 2,400 for 5,000 gallons.

Therefore, the [un-official] revenue generated per day from the sale of water was an average Rs:10 million - shared between the various sectors and up to the top most political heads.

UNOFFICIAL HYDRANTS: investigations revealed that in addition to the nine official hydrants, at least 161 unofficial hydrants and filling points existed all over Karachi, most of them located near bulk distribution mains. Additionally, many more filling points were reported from all the towns.

A sample *survey of nine unofficial hydrants* told that they were being used to siphon off 19.78mgd of water from the bulk supply. When extrapolated over 161 unauthorised hydrants, this means that some 358mgd of water, more than half of the total supply, was being removed from the regular supply channels and being sold to citizens at exorbitant rates.

Clusters of these unauthorised points were reported from six main areas: Hub reservoir to Banaras Chowk along Manghopir Road; Banaras Chowk to Gutter Baghicha; Mewashah graveyard to Shershah along Lyari nadi; near Saba Cinema of Ayub Goth-North Karachi and up into Gadap town; along the National Highway - Malir, and in Lalabad Landhi.

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With reference to the 272.25mgd of water that was siphoned off from the bulk distribution and sold through tanker supplies, the OPP report also identified the methods used. These included piped connections to the bulk distribution mains and perpetually unattended leakages in the bulk distribution mains which cause water seepage. At such sites, bores become filling points. Moreover:

"In some cases, like that of the Fauji Commander's hydrant near the Hub reservoir, the ponds were formed through which water was pumped out into tankers.

Lately, KWSB officials informed that 73 piped connections to the bulk distribution mains were disconnected in North Karachi and Gadap and that was done over media uproar."

CORRUPTION IN WATER: In Karachi, notorious for water shortages, it was often the KWSB that became the target of citizens' ire during dry days. And while the organisation certainly might have suffered from organisational and infrastructural problems, the tanker business was taking away a critical chunk of the revenue that ought by rights to go to the KWSB.

The KWSB's budget is always dependent on government subsidies and its annual budget for 2007-08 was Rs:5.3 billion. Of this, Rs:2.0-2.5 billion were recovered as water / sewerage taxes while the rest was government subsidy. Till March 2008, Rs:18.678 billion worth of dues were outstanding against the government and other state departments. However, water supply to everybody was not only possible but achievable at affordable and humane costs.

"A comparison of the KWSB's annual budget of Rs:5.3 billion with the Rs:49.6 billion generated through the sale of the 272mgd that was siphoned off and supplied through tankers had shown the irony of the situation.

If the KWSB could supply this water honestly, it could earn profits as well as provide water to all at affordable, humane costs – and without fail – and in abundance."

As per KWSB's own planning and paper work, the department could generate Rs:5.8 billion annually - more than the organisation's annual budget. For the citizens, meanwhile, the bill would amount to about Rs:200 a month per outlet, which was affordable and was incidentally the same as the average tax billed all over the city.

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Whereas, in water deficit areas, poor people were spending an average of Rs:500-600 a month buying sweet and salty water. People are willing to pay the same amount to the KWSB for the provision of sweet water. In addition, some of the poorest were buying sweet water supplied through *donkey carts*, the cost of which comes to Rs:100-120 for about 25 gallons - about eight times the cost of water supplied through water tankers.

Meanwhile, the KWSB could also annually generate Rs:44.7 billion by selling the rest of the water, about 245mgd, at the current average rate charged by tankers i.e. 50 paisa per gallon. This could be used to resolve organisational and infrastructural issues but the PPP's corrupt local leadership preferred to siphon out that amount for their own pockets – an open blatant corruption against huge hues & cries of the poor people.

TRAFFIC TROUBLES: In addition to swindling citizens and the KWSB, the dominance of the tanker mafia also contributes to traffic congestion, pollution and needless wear and tear on the city's already overburdened road network. According to the OPP study of 2008 and the Private Tankers Association's record, their members own 5,000 tankers of which 60% were of 5,000-gallon capacity, 30% of 2,000 gallon capacity and 10% of 1,000 gallon capacity. Each tanker makes 10 to 12 trips every day, which means that about 50,000 to 60,000 trips were made across the city every day to supply the water which otherwise was the citizens' right.

During its 2nd stint of rule, the Pakistan Peoples Party [PPP] had not opted to facilitate the *Karachiites* in respect of water supply. All political bosses continued to filter the huge bags of illegal money gifted to them by the tanker mafia.

The PPP government in power not only failed to solve the water supply issue but encouraged its political elite to make millions in collaboration with corrupt bureaucrat mafia sitting in KWSB. The media even commented that criminal gangsters' teams were deployed by the Sindh PPP to collect illegal booties and deliver the proportionate shares at the residences of concerned ministers and top stalwarts, allegedly including the Bilawal House [President Zardari's official residence in Karachi], on daily basis.

EVEN FOREIGN PRESS ROARED:

The issue not only went alarming in Pakistan but all over the world the civic NGOs and the press raised voices. See an essay published in '*LA Times*' dated 16th March 2010:

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- Karachi 'water mafia' leaves Pakistanis parched and broke.
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- Corrupt politicians allow businessmen to siphon off as much as 41% of the city's water supply and sell it at exorbitant rates to residents, generating an estimated \$43 million a year.

"Name a cash cow in this sprawling city and it's almost certain there's an organized crime syndicate behind it.

The illegal operations, routinely referred to as mafias, are everywhere. There's a land mafia that commandeers prime real estate, a sugar mafia that conspires to control sugar prices, and even a railway mafia that forges train tickets and pilfers locomotive parts.

....., however, the underworld entity they revile the most is the water tanker mafia, a network of trucking firms that teams up with corrupt bureaucrats to turn water into liquid gold worth tens of millions of dollars each year.

A family that makes \$100 a month can spend as much as a quarter of that on water, which, elsewhere in Pakistan, costs pennies.

Water scarcity isn't the cause. Karachi has a steady water supply, and it has the network of pipes to pump ample water into every neighbourhood, rich and poor.

But Karachi is also a city of opportunists forever on the prowl for under-the-table wealth. As municipal officials look the other way, businessmen illegally tap water mains, and use the makeshift hydrants to supply fleets of tankers that then sell water to businesses, factories and neighbourhoods at inflated prices. As many as 272 million gallons a day are siphoned off by the trucks.

The siphoning takes place around the clock, the fact known to all. It's done in the dead of night, but also in broad daylight.

On average, a tanker fills up six times a day, siphoning as much as 41% of the city's daily water supply, an amount that generates \$43 million annually for tanker owners.

'With this much money involved, it's clear these are very wealthy people. They're powerful mafias colluding with

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corrupt people in the government. So there's really nothing ordinary Pakistanis can do to stop it.'

At times, illegal hydrants are shut down by city officials, only to reopen a week later."

Referring to the '*Express Tribune*' dated 19th September 2013:

"Approximately 15 to 20 million gallons of water per day is stolen through these illegal water hydrants. The illegal hydrants are allegedly protected by law enforcers, political parties and certain officials of the KWSB.

The KWSB [purposefully] failed to chalk out an effective strategy to carry out a crackdown against the illegal water hydrants operational in the city."

The Board's MD, Qutubuddin Sheikh, admitted before the media teams that 'black sheep' of the department were involved in the business as it was a lucrative source of income. Mr Sheikh had started a crackdown against the illegal water hydrants operational in Baldia and SITE and sealed eight illegal water hydrants and a further 21 illegal connections. FIRs against the culprits were also registered so the tanker mafia would not be able to reconnect or reopen the illegal water hydrants – but even then no gain.

The illegal hydrant business continued to thrive in the city, *aided by leaders of political parties, law enforcers and a few officials of the KWSB.* Landhi, Korangi, Shah Faisal, Bin Qasim, Liaqatabad, SITE, and Keamari were some of the areas where these illegal hydrants were found in abundance. Surprisingly these hydrants were legitimised illegally by the incumbent KWSB officials. Some facts:

- In Banaras and the adjoining Abdullah College vicinity, an influential leader of the Awami National Party [ANP] allegedly runs his business openly and provides the water to dye factories by installing illegal connections to the main line which runs through North Nazimabad from Banaras. The ANP leader has allegedly installed his own metres at the dye factories and charges up to Rs:1.5 million per month for the water supply.
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- An illegal water hydrant exists just behind the Paposh Nagar police post, where a large number of water tankers continue to fill their tanks under the cover of the Paposh Nagar Police.

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Unfortunately, the above two hydrants were only the tip of iceberg, in actual there were dozens being run with the connivance of the police and the areas' political parties who received their share from the Hydrant - owners to let their illegal businesses run smoothly. The police officials deployed in the respective areas had taken no action. The board's MD had asked the DG Rangers seeking assistance to initiate a crackdown against the perpetrators of the illegal business – but no positive response.

According to KWSB inner sources, at least 19 illegal hydrants were operational in Landhi and another six in Korangi [September 2013]. Though DHA's requirement was around 13 million gallons per day, it then used to receive no more than eight million gallons a day.

Water Crisis Continued In 2014-15: The water-crisis entered year 2014 with the same pomp & show and glamour.

During summer of 2014, the city administration announced the people must brace for a major water crisis over the next few months unless there would be ample rainfall to top-up the water reserves at Hub Dam – a reservoir of water supply for Karachi. Residents of several areas came out to the streets for protest and - KWSB were found scratching their heads.

In August 2014, the city was facing a shortage of 150mgd against the demand of 650mgd. The allegation of shortage was loaded over the shoulders of 'the drought at Hub Dam' ignoring the fact that [as per KWSB's own admissions] around 30% to 35% of the water was stolen or leaked through the cracked pipelines. The KWSB forgot to mention that Karachi was getting around 550mgd water through Keenjhar Lake and only 100mgd from the Hub Dam.

During 2014, the KWSB operated 16 water hydrants across the city – used to supply an average of around 30,000 gallons per day but who was responsible for 129 illegal water hydrants which were being run by influential. The official media note of KWSB said:

"The board has been carrying out its operation against illegal water hydrants since the last two years - we don't understand how they were still operating in the city."

During 2014, the 'tanker mafia' supplied water at a rate of Rs:3,000 per tanker – used to get their water from the illegal hydrants and supplied it to households at prime rates. Such was the demand for water that the business had become a lucrative source of income for the political tycoons. The water crisis was to subside only if the PPP government of

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Sindh could withdraw itself from that devastating business of patronizing the illegal tanker mafia.

Gulshan e Hadeed and Steel Town of Karachi had population of around 300,000 was deprived of water for over two months consecutively - a rift between the KWSB and Pakistan Steel Mill was blamed for the shortage. Due to an electricity crisis in the pumping stations of KWSB, the water supply was not smooth to the reservoir and the residents of the said areas were facing an acute shortage of water.

"We cannot stop water supply to the production workshops so we have to stop supply to the residential areas," the Steel Mill authorities held.

In a city as big as Karachi, it has been unfortunate that its residents had to suffer so much to obtain a basic necessity like water. This continued to happen even though people also made payments to the government for getting water through the main supply lines. During late January 2015, the Supreme Court gave strict directions to the local authorities to end the menace of illegal water hydrants.

Law enforcers and the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board were ordered to launch a crackdown against them but the illegal hydrants continued to function and residents of many areas were forced to buy water at exorbitant rates – salute to the PPP's political teams and corrupt bureaucracy.

In January 2015; the Rangers came on board the drive against illegal hydrants and vowed to rid the city of at least 15 large illegal hydrants operating in Karachi's District West – some were actually closed but then the Rangers retreated back because the PPP's provincial government started roaring terming it as *'undue interference by Rangers in civil administration'*; so the corruption in water supply touched its heights.

It was also on record that *'the money the water tanker mafia has been generating through illegal hydrants has been traced back to militants in other parts of the country'*. The Chief Minister Qaim Ali Shah, however, never endorsed the idea – thus the people kept on crying for water on roads and the political elite continued to fill its coffers with ill-gotten money.

Till May 2015, almost 70 percent of Karachi was without water with Malir, Korangi, Orangi Town, SITE, Metroville, North Karachi, Landhi, Shireen Jinnah Colony, Baldia Town among the worst hit areas where even drinking water was not available.

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Moreover, the continuous load shedding at pumping stations including *Dhabeji* was making the situation worse. Even the posh areas of Karachi including Defence Housing Society and Clifton were no exception as they were buying bottled water for drinking purpose and arranging water tankers for other needs. Tanker operators across the city continued fleecing the buyers by charging exorbitant prices turning the shortage into a full blown crisis – but rocketing boom for certain rogues.

Commissioner Karachi Shoaib Siddqui took notice [*why so soon – as the problem has been creeping in Karachi since early 2008*] of the situation and directed KESC to immediately stop load shedding at pumping stations. Call it a mega corruption; citizens in various localities of Nazimabad, Liaquatabad and Old City area were without water despite paying KWSB bills for a long time.

Even till today, *Water shortage in Karachi had turned into a nightmare for the residents of Pakistan's largest metropolis with apparently no end in sight.* A city already facing energy crisis like the rest of Pakistan was countering another menace by the name of 'water crisis' with water tanker mafia sponsored by political and bureaucratic elite emerging as main beneficiaries.

SUPREME COURT GOT MOVED:

A survey report of Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR) published in 2012 claimed that in Karachi city water supply schemes were providing piped water for drinking and household needs to an enumerated population of 11.716 million persons on 1,247 surveyed water schemes. The subsequent facts appeared:

- *.....that 58 percent of the schemes were not functioning properly and, as a result, nearly 47 percent of the total population in Karachi remained NOT SERVED by the water supply schemes.*
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- *The PCRWR report, however, had truthfully told the people that more than 10,000 people die every year in Karachi because of renal infection caused by contaminated water.*
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- *During June 2015, the devastating heat-wave struck Sindh where it claimed 1,242 lives and 32 deaths were reported only in Karachi in one day – Saturday 27th June.*

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Various government-run hospitals in Karachi confirmed that at least 32 people died of heatstroke on that Saturday - 13 people died in Jinnah Post-graduate Medical Centre [JPMC], 11 in Abbasi Shaheed Hospital [ASH], two in Qatar Hospital, three in hospitals owned by Karachi Municipal Corporation [KMC] and three in other hospitals in the city.

The crisis centred in Karachi was worsened by interrupted power supply and shortage of potable water.

On 24th June 2015; the whole media roared that nearly 1000 people were dead in a severe four-day heat wave in Karachi; no arrangements were done by the Provincial or the Federal Government for the Water & Power shortages. The state officials were just passing statements instead of doing some productive deeds, which could save the lives of the poor Karachiites.

The majority of people died in government-run hospitals in metropolis Karachi as the temperature reached 45 degrees Celsius at a weekend, when the people who were out of power, acutely suffered due to persistent power shortage. Saeed Mangnejo, a senior health official in Sindh province, confirmed the media;

"The number of people who have died in the heat-wave has now reached 692 and the death toll may rise further.

Karachi's Post Graduate Medical College Hospital, has treated more than 3,000 patients, where they even could not even save the Lives of about 400 Patients.

Hospitals have been swamped with people suffering from heat-stroke and dehydration, while repeated power outages have left many without air conditioning or running water."

The deaths came as the overwhelmingly Muslim community was observing the Islamic month of Ramadan, during which eating and drinking is forbidden from sunrise to sunset. The Sindh Provincial Government, taking a serious note of more than 1000 Deaths in city, announced a public holiday to encourage residents to stay inside. Most of the victims of blistering heat were elderly and poor, many of them living in the streets and slums.

Paramilitary Rangers had set up medical camps at several points in Karachi where they were providing water and anti-dehydration salts. More than 400

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dead bodies were received in two mortuaries of Edhi Foundation in three days of that heat wave.

The mortuaries soon reached beyond capacity across the city, as the relatives of the deceased could find no arrangements for even the dead bodies, *as there were no graves available in the grave yards*, which had already been officially closed since years. Chaotic scenes were reported that there were not even ambulances or coffin carriers available for the dead bodies to be shifted from the hospital, or to the grave yard.

Dozens of Dead Bodies were witnessed in the corridors of hospitals in the same blistering heat due to which they had died. High profile hospitals, which are famous among elites like Aga Khan Hospital, had closed their Emergency Departments, and refused to treat the Patients of heat stroke.

Despite the increasing number of deaths being reported in the provincial capital, neither government officials nor any NGO made any arrangements for collecting and collating the data of the death toll. The Sindh government had been criticised by all for poor management of the crisis; the blame game went on. Innocent Public had to face the evils created by the bad governance and corruption of the Pakistani politicians and bureaucrats.

On 30th July 2015; the Supreme Court [SC] of Pakistan, while hearing various human rights applications against the operation of illegal water hydrants in Karachi, ordered the Managing Director [MD] Karachi Water and Sewerage Board [KWSB] to personally appear with complete records relating to the regulation and monitoring of water hydrants and action initiated against those being operated illegally in the metropolis. A 3 member bench, headed by Justice Amir Hani Muslim, heard the said petitions. The MD avoided his presence before the apex court.

The judges ordered the officer to ensure that MD Zaidi appeared in the court within half an hour. Again the MD stayed away and sent the Deputy MD in his place but later appeared because the court was going to order his arrest to procure his appearance.

The bench members recorded their displeasure over the management of the water hydrants by the KWSB. The officer in-charge of hydrants of Karachi, Nisar Magsi, informed the court that there were 24 legal hydrants in the city, of which 21 were operational and the remaining three were dysfunctional. There was water board's policy in vogue under which these hydrants were regulated - there was a standard operating procedure [SOP] dated 25th August 2009 in that regard.

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Nisar Magsi told the court that the water from these hydrants was meant to be supplied to the slums where the infrastructure did not exist, adding that the commodity was also provided for funerals and weddings.

At this point, Justice Muslim remarked that the authorities had failed to even provide *Kafan* to bury about 1,300 bodies of the heatstroke victims during the heat wave in Karachi a month earlier. Magsi could not, however, offer any plausible explanation whether the tankers which filled water from the hydrants provided water on KWSB's instructions or was it the tanker owners who controlled the supply of water in Karachi.

A copy of the contract between KWSB and the contractors was placed before the said Supreme Court bench. The judges went through the terms of the contract and remarked;

"...prima facie the contract does not reflect that they were serving the residents of Karachi. In fact, the water board appears to have been selling the water through the contractors (tanker owners) and they do not have any scheme to serve the interests of the residents of Karachi.

The purpose for creating hydrants was different than the purpose for which the supply of water is being made in Karachi city."

Under the circumstances, the SC bench directed MD Magsi to provide the documentation on the basis of which he was regulating the supply of water through tankers. He was also directed to justify the increasing number of tankers in the recent past, when there was a hue and cry for the shortage of water in different areas of the city.

Referring to *Al-Jazeera* dated 10th September 2015;

"For years armed gangs have been controlling part of the water supply in Pakistan's largest city of Karachi. The so-called water mafia have stolen millions of dollars worth of water and sold it on the black market.

On the outskirts of the city, hidden in plain view, illegal water stations operate tapping into underground pipelines owned by the state, and in some cases sewage wells.

All day trucks fill up with stolen water, and sell it all over Karachi at an inflated price, denying poor residents much needed water. Wa-

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ter traders with 30 to 40 tankers reportedly earn as much as \$16,000 a day."

On 21st October 2015; the SC resumed the hearing of the said case at Karachi Registry and that time Chief Justice Anwar Zaheer Jamali himself presided the bench. The CJP expressed dissatisfaction over performance of government institutions. During the hearing, MD KWSB informed the court that the city was facing a shortage of 600 million gallons of water per day, adding that IRSA should increase the quota.

The MD also came up with new and strange excuses like:

'...owing to non-payment of payments of dues [Rs:320 million] to contractors engaged in installation of hydrants and supply of water through tankers, it was impossible to immediately shut the illegal water hydrants.'

The CJP observed that KWSB would not be resolving the water shortage issue in the port city. He questioned from where the tankers were getting water if there was shortfall in the metropolis. The court adjourned the hearing for 10 days.

In ending 2015; the KWSB had only enough water to meet 50 percent of its needs, and around 30 percent of the water was wasted or stolen; out of water stolen, over 70 percent was reportedly being sold to big businesses.

The Karachi's administrative authorities, tried to tackle the issue through crack downs on the practice, carrying out raids on 200 pumping stations but the leaders of "underwater world" not only resisted the moves but continued operating and - the cost of illegal water in Karachi was simply doubled. The illegal dealers held that:

"...powerful and well-connected individuals are to blame for the continued illegal practice. They are holding us by the necks basically and this is all because a few big people are involved in this and who are the caretakers and who are the people making money - there are people on higher levels involved." [Ref: Kamran Khan's Dunya TV program dated 21st October 2015]

The miserable fact remains that the situation of WATER CRISIS in Karachi is still continuing with the same vigour and acuteness – even today in ending 2016.

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On 27th December 2015; the KWSB demolished 11 illegal hydrants in the vicinity of Teen Hatti *on the directives of the Supreme Court*, which while hearing a human rights petition had ordered that all such hydrants be shut down and demolished.

Some of the hydrants were draining out subsoil water while others had taken illegal connections from main pipelines. The water connections of these hydrants had already been severed by KWSB staffers. Most of the hydrants were established on over 1,000 sq yard plots; were being portrayed as junkyard where the operators of the illegal hydrants parked old and dilapidated vehicles only to deceive the authorities.

Had the residents not helped the KWSB it would have been very difficult to locate the hydrants. KWSB Chief Misbahuddin Farid said that the illegal hydrants were not only stealing water and robbing the people of Karachi but also creating problems for the area residents. The roads were in dilapidated condition due to the movement of heavy duty water tankers.

WATER CRISIS WORSONED:

On 3rd August 2015; experts at a seminar titled *“Water Governance in Pakistan”*, organised by the US-Pakistan Centre for Advanced Studies in Water [US-PCASW] discussed various aspects plaguing water management in the country, especially in Karachi. The US-PCASW is a joint venture of the Mehran University of Engineering and Technology [MUET], Jamshoro and the University of Utah, USA.

Sindh's Finance Minister Murad Ali Shah [later the CM Sindh in 2016] in his keynote address spoke of the persisting issue of water wastage in the Arabian Sea because of lack of dams in Sindh that consequently affected efficient and optimal use of water. Shah, while speaking of the debate surrounding the construction of the Kalabagh Dam and the Diamer-Bhasha Dam, said:

“Water from Mirpurkhas and Tharparkar cannot possibly be stored in a dam built in the northern parts of the country. To debate the feasibility and technicalities of the issue is meaningless in the absence of a political will and acceptability of the stakeholders.”

The seminar noted that Pakistan had, for the first time, touched the mark denoting water scarcity in 1991, and then in 2005. Indicators suggested that by 2025, the country would rank among absolute water-scarce countries. A constant increase in population, urbanisation, industrialisation and

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agricultural activities had led to a shortage of water by 11pc in 2004 which could further rise up to 31pc by 2025.

The water poverty index of Pakistan showed that the majority of the country's population did not have access to water even for the purpose of drinking and washing basic items including clothes and utensils. As far as the quality of water was concerned, 80pc of water available was unsafe for human consumption by even the weakest standards.

Citing Karachi's water distribution, one participant Dr Mari said the city received 650mgd of water daily but its poor distribution system had rendered several areas of the metropolis waterless. An ageing infrastructure that included worn-out pumping machines, lack of maintenance, institutional incapacity and poor performance in addition to challenges such as climate change were some of the other factors.

Pakistan was among the top 10 countries in the world vulnerable to climate change; the then severe heat waves in Karachi like of 2014-15, that claimed over 1,800 lives, was a clear example of the fast-changing climatic conditions. Among a few causes affecting climate, key ones included deforestation, glacial melt, loss of biodiversity and rise in sea level.

The process of production, transmission and distribution of potable water this year [2016] was no different from the past years as demand of the utility rose to 1242 MGD, with estimated increase of 100 MGD over the year. Then the board was drawing 650 MGD water from River Indus and Hub Dam, the two available sources.

The SC had directed the two high officials of KWSB to formulate a policy to end persisting water crisis in the metropolis but no scheme appeared on surface till the ending of the year 2016.

The owners of the industries made a contract with the subsoil water hydrant operator in Sakraan, Balochistan and the water carriers started supplying water from there for industrial use. The quality of subsoil water brought from Sakraan was tested in the laboratory and declared harmful for human health.

As it was nearly impossible to meet the demand of 1242 MGD with total supply of 650 MGD, the board decided to increase the interval between supplies of water. In some areas, KWSB was supplying water every other day, then increased the interval to 2-3 days. The residents, who were getting water twice a week, got water only once a week.

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On 26th August 2016; the Supreme Court directed the provincial government to file a detailed report on supply of potable water and operation of illegal hydrants in the city.

A three-judge bench headed by Justice Amir Hani Muslim also directed the Chief Law Officer to place on record the details of the cases against the operators of illegal hydrants within a week. The bench was conducting *suo motu* proceedings on failure of the KWSB in ensuring smooth water supply to the city.

Justice Hani remarked that people of the entire city were left at the mercy of the KWSB 'valve men', who supplied water to the localities of their own choice. The water utility patronized the water tanker mafia; it was held.

Another bench member said that he grew up with the tap water, but then under-privileged people were also compelled to drink bottled water as the water utility had miserably failed to ensure smooth water supply. The judge asked MD KWSB about the mechanism of distribution of water in the city and why water meters were not installed at certain points.

The reply from KWSB was surprising that as many as 20 meters were installed, while 121 meters could not be installed due to non-availability of funds. Replying to a court query, the MD said that there were over 10,000 water tankers and 13 legal hydrants in the city.

The bench observed that the number of hydrants must have been much more as such a small number of hydrants could not cater to thousands of water carriers. The apex court remarked that the district judges could be assigned the task of inspecting hydrants.

The KWSB Chief confirmed that positive results were achieved by taking action against illegal hydrants.

The same bench of the SC, meanwhile, issued a show-cause notice to the federal finance and planning secretaries for not providing funds for the project of Right Bank Outfall Drain [RBOD] one and three of the Manchhar Lake Projects.

The bench was conducting the *suo motu* proceedings regarding contamination of the Manchhar Lake. The Chief Secretary Sindh and the General Manager of the project said that the treatment plant was being delayed due to non-availability of funds from the federal government.

The bench expressed extreme displeasure over the non-availability of funds and poor linkage between the federal and the Sindh governments – and what else those poor judges could do.

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Till summer 2016 at least; the water problem of Karachiites was not solved; tanker owners locked horns with KWSB over reduced piece of the pie after SC closed down illegal water hydrants.

The undocumented business of supplying water to the residents of Karachi lost attraction following increasing imbalance in the number of hydrants and the water carriers.

The tanker owners were in a fix following the closure of all the subsoil or illegal water hydrants by KWSB on the directives of the Supreme Court. Owners of the water carriers were in a state of clash with the Board *"to gain illegal benefits"* amid closure of illegal water hydrants. Hundreds of tankers went parked there for days and weeks, waiting for their turn; burden on existing hydrants increased manifold.

Supplying water to the water-shortage areas had emerged as so profitable business in the city that even edible oil carriers as well as carriers of petroleum products had made a fortune in the business. An owner of a water carrier earned Rs:15,000 - 25,000 per day particularly in summer when water shortage in the city reached its peak.

In addition to the edible oil and petroleum products carriers, the tanker owners also added more water carriers in their fleet to earn more from the unsolved water crises.

Referring to one owner in the 'Pakistan Today' dated 6th June 2016:

"Supplying water is our family business. I saw my grandfather supplying water on donkey-carts. My father joined my grandfather and invested money to buy a truck for supplying water. When my father handed this business to me, I had only one tanker; today I have 50," Irfan Dogar, a tanker owner, told the correspondent.

The Sindh government demolished tens of water hydrants during 2016 and reduced it to 11 in Karachi; the city was facing water shortage of 600 MGD then. There were 8,000 water tankers in the city and it was nearly impossible to refill all the water carriers with the available hydrants. The tanker owners used to get their carriers filled three times a day till ending 2015.

The water issue in Karachi is still in doldrums, despair and depression.