Environment Versus Investment: An Evaluation of Emerging Urban Design Trends and Practices in Coastal Belt of Karachi, Pakistan

Ravindar Kumar*

It has now become an irrefutable fact that land is transformed into a commodity through which money can be made; especially in urban areas land is the scarce merchandise. However; in Karachi land is believed to be the easily available stock where no control is evident and the buying and selling of land has become an industry of abuse that may not leave any ecosystem to exist. The desire for more and more money has become so overpowering that decision makers consider destroying human population and their habitat as an unavoidable act and call it 'development' as they propagate.

The most recent example of such kind of development is the announcement of 'Diamond Bar Islands City' project on two Islands i.e. Bundal (locally named as Bhoondar) and Buddo (locally named as Dhingi) in Indus Delta of Sindh Province at Karachi coast. With 85% equity in the project, 'Emaar Properties' the Dubai-based Public Joint Stock Company received Pakistan Government's approval to invest $43 billion and develop these islands as a model city with homes, apartments, offices and theme parks over 13 years.

There are various indicators which imply that, the proposed project has various spatial, environmental and socioeconomic implications that are not formulated with any explicit urban design intentions but profit making; furthermore it may lead to destruction of natural habitat and income source for local population dependent on these islands.

The objective of this paper is to explore the physical, social and environmental appropriateness of the proposed project. Conclusively this paper would provide an understanding regarding the emerging paradigm in urban development and

design in Karachi. The scope of findings includes process of launching and implementation of the project, its impacts on fishermen communities, natural habitat and on the larger urban design and development practices in Karachi.