

Commercial use of residential properties will harm city's liveability, experts warn

Arif Hasan says civic institutions largely focus on making money from citizens

By Waqas Ali Ranjha

KARACHI: Experts have warned that the provincial government's decision to permit commercial activities in residential areas of the metropolis will degrade the quality of life for citizens by increasing vehicular traffic, fuelling pollution, harming the environment and triggering unregulated structural changes in homes

to support commercial use among many other problems.

They said this while speaking at a discussion held at the Urban Resource Centre (URC) on Tuesday where it was also pointed out that many neighbourhoods in the city were already facing issues due to the unchecked spread of 24/7 street hotels and shops selling dangerous stuff such as gas cylinders and "smuggled petrol and diesel", all of which have made several residential areas increasingly unlivable.

URC vice chairman Dr Noman Ahmed said the recent amendments to the Karachi Building and Town Planning Regulations 2002, which allow commercial use of residential properties, were very concerning.

He spoke in detail about the objectives of the Karachi Building Control Authority, now known as the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) and said that one of its main purposes was to regulate commercial and residential use of properties and ensure that the latter is not used for the former purposes.

Dr Ahmed said that if commercial use of residential spaces was allowed, it would negatively impact environment in the residential areas as there would be more vehicles and fuel emission. Increased number of vehicles would also lead to traffic congestion and noise pollution.

"Moreover, changes would be required in the infrastructure of residential places to make them work for commercial

use, which is another problem," he said, adding that "it has been already observed that people either sold their houses or just left them in the areas of the city where commercial activities were allowed".

Referring to the rising number of fire incidents in the city, particularly on Shareef Faisal and Rashid Minhas Roads, Dr Ahmed said one of the reasons behind them was that the infrastructures where blazes erupted were not constructed and equipped for commercial activities. That's another threat which is likely to grow after this move of the government, he pointed out.

During the discussion, a citizen

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pointed out that there were gas cylinder and "smuggled petrol selling shops" in residential buildings which posed many threats. Additionally, the "tea hotels" are open 24/7 and their seating arrangements are spread across streets and footpaths, which create inconvenience for residents.

A civil society member pointed out that the government's decision

would lead to further increase in the population of the metropolis as people from other cities might come to benefit from the opportunity in such a big city. The government should work on expanding commercial and economic opportunities in other cities of Sindh, he added.

Architect and town planner Arif Hasan said the civic institutions in the metropolis were largely focused on "revenue generation" and making money from citizens

instead of doing their actual work and resolving peoples' issues.

He said that most often it is the case that the plans and projects made for resolving issues are "based on assumptions" instead of research and proper planning, which leads to such plans' being incapable of meeting the desired goal and, therefore, many people are left out from such plans.

The event was moderated by Member URC Zahid Farooq.