

# Karachi: Allotment of twin islands termed unlawful

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KARACHI, Nov 16: The leader of the Opposition in Senate, Mian Raza Rabbani, has claimed that the decision taken by the federal government and its agencies to give away two islands located off Port Qasim to a Dubai-based real estate developer, Emaar, is illegal and in violation of the task mandated to the Port Qasim Authority.

In a statement issued on Thursday, he observed that resistance against the decision and the mega project on the twin islands – Bundal and Buddo – was building up as local fisherman might lose access to the open sea through the vital passages of Korangi and Phitti creeks, affecting the fishermen communities which operated more than 4,000 boats along the Thatta and Karachi coast for their livelihood.

According to the statement, the PQA Act envisages activities related to port development, and not developing new cities, and that too on ‘usurped’ land.

Mr Rabbani pointed out that these fishermen had already been prohibited from fishing in the area on the western side of the coast after development of PAF base and luxury clubs (Golf Club, Marina Club, Boat Club, etc.) by DHA and after the emergence of the new project, they were bound to lose the remaining fishing grounds.

The mega project may ruin Ibrahim Hyderi, the largest settlement of fishermen in Karachi forcing more than 120,000 people of the area to move out due to the blocked access to the open sea.

Furthermore, Karachi coast would be deprived of its rich mangroves nurseries and cyclone barriers. He recalled that the mangroves forest in the Indus Delta had been reduced from 263,000 hectares in 1977 to only 80,000 hectares in 2002.

Local fishermen also use these islands as fish-drying and net-repairing yards since they don't find enough space on the mainland. These are vital activities of their fishing-related livelihood which they will lose, besides being deprived of a place of cultural importance i.e. the shrine of Yousuf Shah on Bundaar island that is frequented by thousands of devotees on the occasion of a two-day annual mela, locally called ‘Bundaar Waray Jo Melo’.

Mr Rabbani pointed out that the country had a large homeless population that deserved development for being rehabilitated more than any other people. According to the official statistics, urban areas of Sindh need at least 135,000 new housing units each year, and to meet the backlog, 200,000 residential units are required to be built every year over next 10 years. The mega projects like the one in question would only add money kept by rich people in their lockers, rather than providing a roof to the homeless.

He also pointed out that while allotting the 12,000-acre land of the two islands, the federal government had not taken the Sindh government into confidence, which was evident from the chief minister's Oct 3 statement.

Mr Rabbani claimed that the ownership of the islands was disputed, and argued that the Sindh government had been maintaining that the lands involved had never been leased out to the PQM whereas Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, during his Karachi visit on Oct 14, had decreed that the islands belonged to the PQA. The city government had also its claim over the islands and according to reports appearing in the print media on October 8, 2002, the CDGK and four firms, including one based in Thailand, had signed a memorandum for establishing an IT infrastructural project, namely The Karachi Technology Island City, on the disputed land.

The PQA itself is interested in the islands for setting up an L&G terminal and has also allotted same land to the Pakistan Navy "without any authorisation." The Navy shifted the project to the Emmar, but still lays its claim on the land. The DHA has also approached President Musharraf to get the Islands.

According to the Senator, the Constitution also supports the Sindh Government's claim as its Article 172(1) 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."

Senator Rabbani referred to the high level meeting reported in the press on the October 29, 2006, and said that the chief minister had stated that the islands had not been allocated to the PQA and according to some documents, in September 1973, land measuring 13,685 acres had been allocated by the government of Sindh to the PQA for its operational facilities which did not include the said islands.

Mr Rabbani also made mention of the allegation that the federal government had obtained the consent of the Sindh government for an MoU signed with the Dubai-based company to develop Sindh beaches only, but the Centre used it as a pretext to give away the twin islands to this real estate developer firm. The said MoU was signed on May 3, 2006 and the beaches mentioned were Hawkesbay, Sandspit, Clifton, Dhabeji and Jheel Range.

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\* From Dawn and its reporter: <http://www.dawn.com/2006/11/17/local15.htm>