

# How 'Development' Undid Seaview

Over three decades, Karachi's public beach  
has slowly been reclaimed.

Researched, Conceptualized and Compiled by  
**Marvi Mazhar Associates**

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# Introduction



Photograph taken by Khadija Imran, MMA, 19/06/2019

Seaview is one of the only freely accessible public spaces in Karachi, ungated and unticketed, where people from every class can mix freely, and is an especially important recreational space for the working class.

This pluralistic space is however under threat from multiple directions, both environmental and economic. Untreated sewage spews onto the beach from storm drains, gated parks spread unchecked in every direction, and construction reduces space and restricts the ability to move through.

These development projects raise some very important questions - most importantly, **whose city is this?** And **who are we building for?**



Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 07/07/2019



**Pakistan Defence Officers Housing Authority**

2/B. East Street, Phase-I, DHA, Karachi-75500 (Pakistan)

Website: [www.dhakarachi.org](http://www.dhakarachi.org) email: [dha@dhakarachi.org](mailto:dha@dhakarachi.org) UAN: 111589589 Fax: 35886406

**TOWN PLANNING & BUILDING CONTROL DIRECTORATE**

In reply, please quote  
**DHA/TP&BC/107-Gen**

Dated: 16-APR-2019

To: **M/s Chaupal Desi Exotic Buffet**  
**Kiosk No.10, Abdul Sattar Edhi Avenue,**  
**Phase-VIII, DHA Karachi**

Subject: **Repair/Renovation Permission at Kiosk No.10, Abdul Sattar Edhi**  
**Avenue, Phase-VIII, DHA**

Ref: Your letter dated nil.

Dear Sir/Madam. السلام عليكم

1. You are permitted to carryout repair/renovation work on existing structure only as requested vide your letter referred above:
2. **No structural changes are allowed in the existing structure.** Original letter will be kept on site for verification by DHA staff and no work will be carried out after sunset, failing which work will be stopped at your risk and cost.
3. **This permission is valid for 90 days from date of issue.** If the work is not completed within the permitted time period, you are required to submit application within due date.

Regards

Yours faithfully,  
  
 Deputy Director  
 Town Planning & Building Control Directorate

Copy To: **ESTATE BR**  
**S&V DTE**



Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 19/06/2019

(left) A DHA form displayed in the window of an under construction building.

The construction is in clear defiance of the permission which only allows internal changes, and no structural changes.

(above) Extension taking place of restaurant in question.

The fabric of South Asian cities is weaved across various subcultures and communities. The cities embrace diversity and pluralism, yet their elusive, subtle and ever-shifting dynamics are beyond anyone's comprehension. During the British era the cultural, economic and social systems in colonial cities functioned through different dynamics.

When the British left, confusion and anxiety took over the cities due to rapid cross-migration and urbanization. This resulted in the emergence of South Asian cities as multi-faceted entities. In the age of neoliberalism, the forces in power and the subaltern forces are constantly trying to negotiate for space within the urban chaos—what can be referred to as a 'bazaar-like urbanism' which weaves itself through the city's landscape.

The elements within the city could be divided into two components: Kinetic and Static elements. Kinetic elements are ever-evolving and ever-shifting facets characterized by adjustment and local perspective. Static elements, on the contrary, are characterised by concrete structures, such as steel or glass.

South Asian cities are shaped by the tensions between the kinetic and static elements. The case of Karachi and other coastal cities of South Asia is very much alike—enveloping both the privileged and indigenous communities within their vibrant urban culture. Karachi is a nexus which shifts with the wind. Structures are built and demolished simultaneously.

The ever-shifting social and economic landscape of Karachi since Partition 1947 has led to serious challenges to the cultural, traditional and historical frameworks of the city. The modern aspirations for city development are not sensitive to the local environment—geographically and environmentally sensitive materials and structures are perhaps seen as anti-thetic to the high-rise steel and glass structures developers

want to build—these aspirations stem from an obsession to convert Karachi into a 'smart-city'. However, a city like Karachi is a living breathing city in its own right, known by its locals and the informal public spaces they occupy.

It brings us to the question:

**Is our vision for a city like Karachi 'humane' enough, is it 'accessible' enough?**



Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 07/07/2019



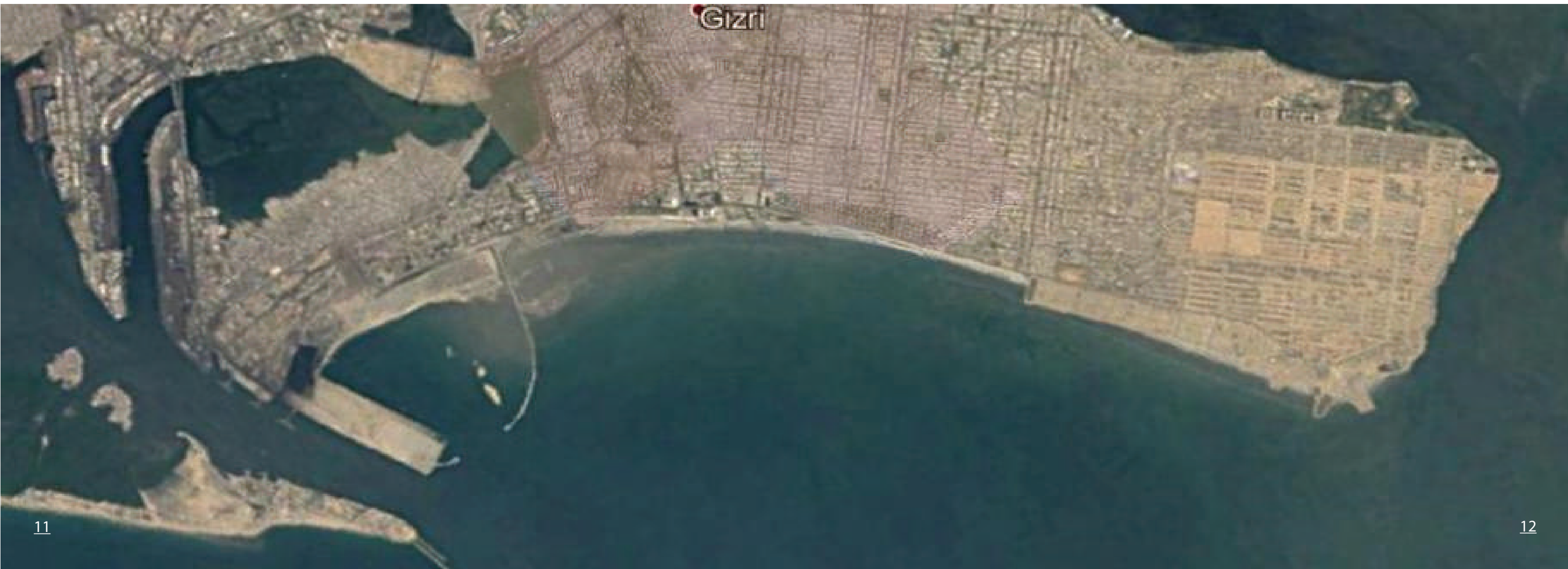
# Karachi's Coastline: 1984-2019

Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 07/07/2019

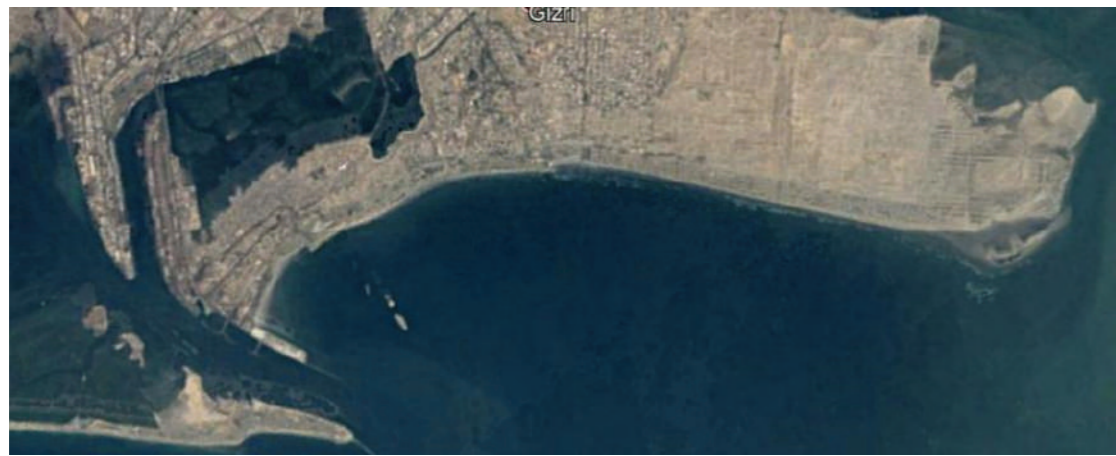
Architect and urban planner Arif Hasan draws a contrast between the designated spaces and spaces which become public spaces through ‘encroachment’ or public intervention. The designated spaces have their boundaries demarcated and mapped, however the latter type of public spaces cannot be formally mapped.

Karachi’s Seaview evolved into a public space through intervention by the people of Karachi. Seaview is much like the city itself, absorbing everyone in it—counterbalancing the divide along the multi-ethnic and multicultural lines. This open public space caters to all classes and indigenous communities alike—it is representative of how different communities function within the urban chaos.

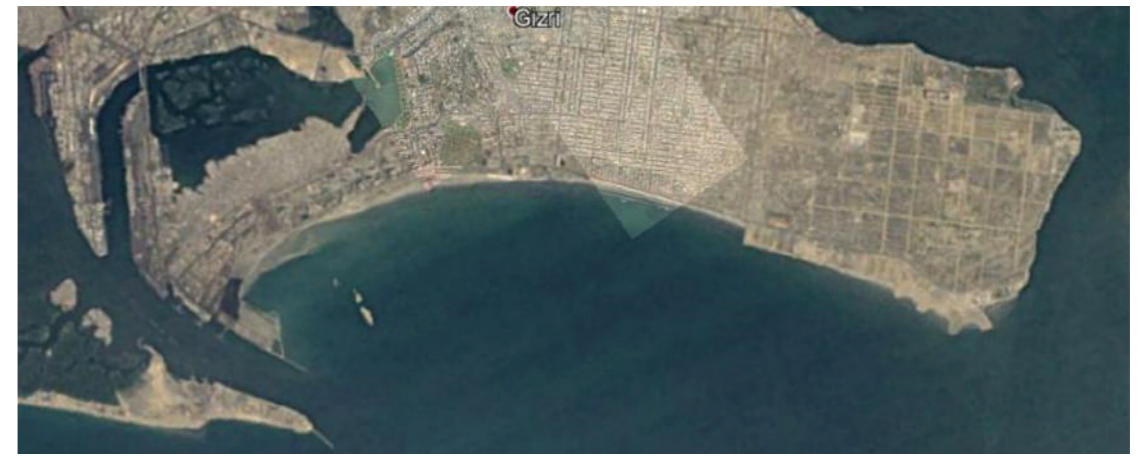
The development of coastlines takes place in multiple ways. It starts with the creation of a land, followed by its demarcation, which brings it into the fold of the official bodies. This is followed by commercialization of the ‘vacant’ land, which in turn leads to gentrification as corporate offices and recreational projects rush in to fill the vacuum. Bordered by two parks, a three-and-a-half kilometer stretch of shoreline, known as Sea View beach or ghareebon ka sahil, has been hit particularly hard by this wave of ‘development’.



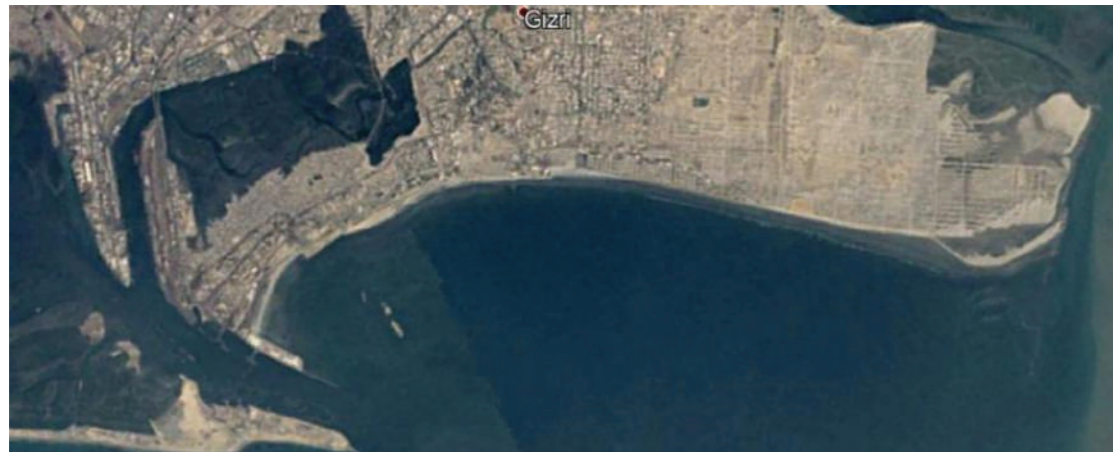




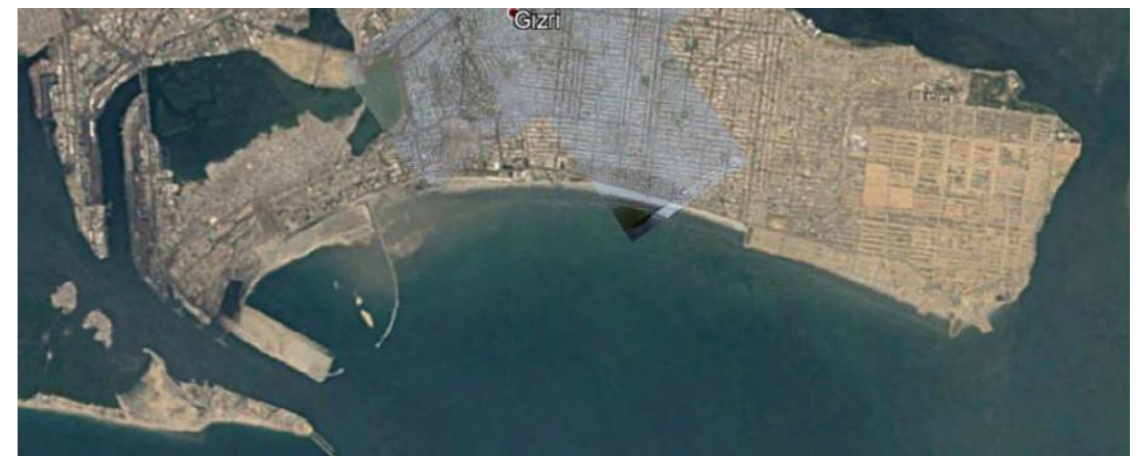
1984



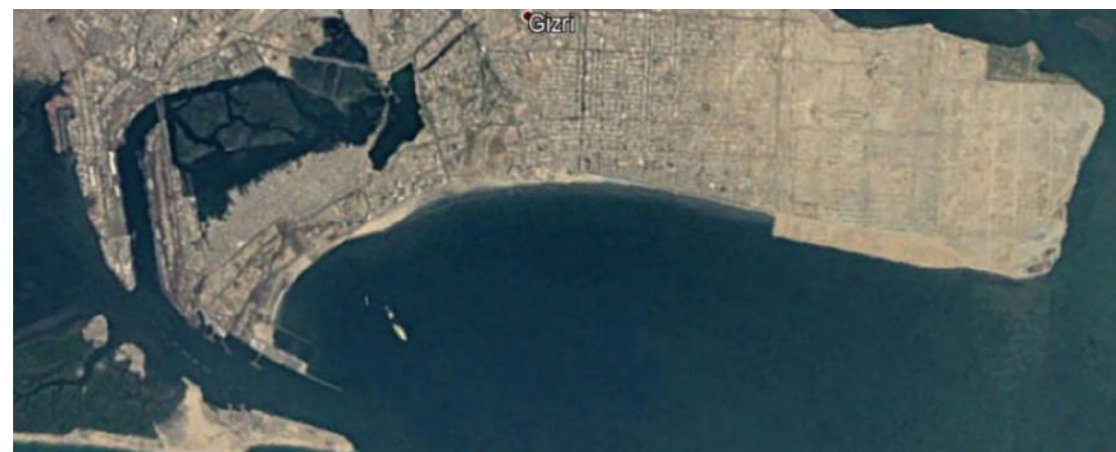
2010



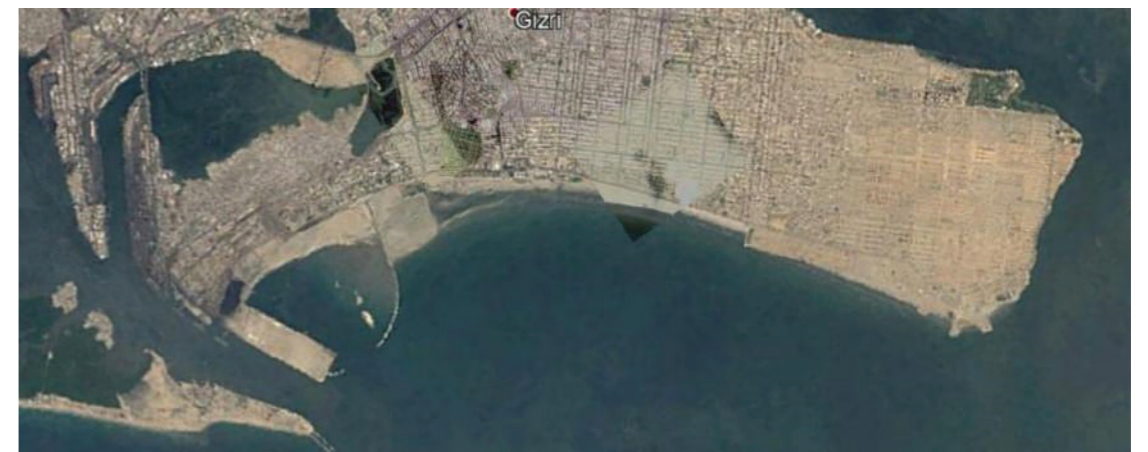
1990



2015



1999



2019

During the late 1900s and early 2000s, the government planned to attract foreign investment for real estate projects. Three mega projects were planned in collaboration with Dubai-based companies to develop the coastline in DHA and other areas.

In the wake of these developments, civil society began its protests on environmental, social and cultural grounds. According to civil society, these projects would not only affect the fishing community, but would impede public accessibility of the beach for recreation. Due to these protests, the projects came to a halt and DHA beach was presented to the public as a 'gift' from the government of Pakistan.

Despite this, construction kept increasing at a rapid rate in direct conflict with the KDSP Laws, plaguing the livelihood of the fisherfolk and other stakeholders. In section 4.8 of the KDSP 2020 plan, "reclamation along any section of the sea front either on the landward side or the bordering sea would not be advised" and "for any development to be sustainable and acceptable, the historical rights of the communities of the sea and the coastal village land they occupy ought to be respected".

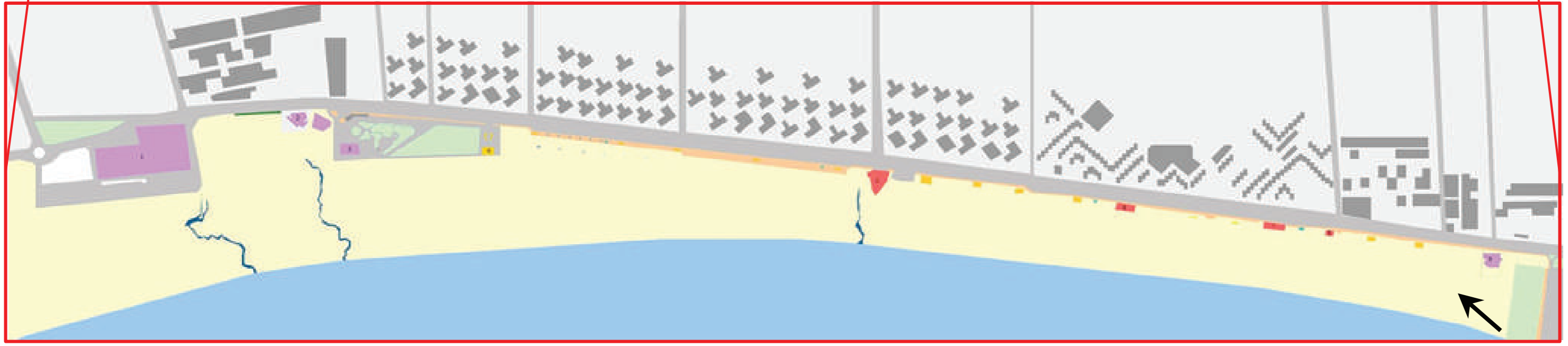


Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 07/07/2019



## The Uncertainty of Architecture

Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 27/06/2019



An illustration of the construction along the coastline at the sea view beach. Image by Marvi Mazhar & Associates

The construction above is a clear violation of the permission grant states that only internal renovation can place. The constructions along the coastline seem to be expanding exponentially since the last few years. The architectural manifestation of these 'development' aspirations along the Sea View coastline exhibits a certain uncertainty. The desire to develop comes in conflict with the desire to control. Corporate towers of steel and glass rise up as harbingers of more such construction to come. Unlike with Karachi's vibrant local-urban culture, shopping centers and food hains near Sea View are exclusive to a fraction of the public who can afford to access these spaces. This kind of architecture is devoid of a sense of place, and insensitive to the local climate, hence it requires immense amounts of power to air condition it.

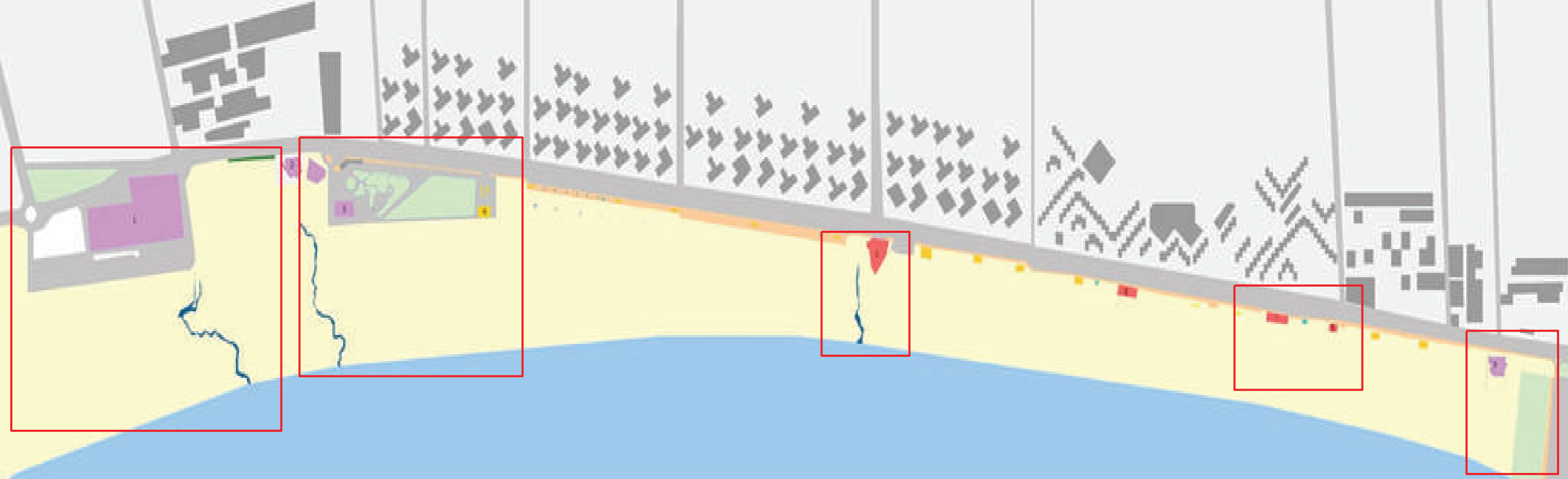
The idea that such projects symbolize progress, needs to be questioned as the city is much more than just its smallest fraction. What is progress, can it be measured, and is there a need to re-define it?

The satellite images at the top of this story show the extent of land reclamation that has taken place in the last three decades. Talking of progress, the beach is losing its characteristic of being a permeable zone since fences and barbed wires arise from the undulating plane. The creation of an enclosed, gated, and ticketed spaces within a public space seems counterproductive. The local authority had built kiosks for vendors to set up shop within them; in time eateries opened up, none of them have, however, lasted for long, unlike the multinational franchise on the western edge of the park. The reason for this franchise's longevity being the much stronger internal infrastructure available.
















Another, far more insidious force at play on the beach are the storm drains which are meant to direct rainwater into the sea, but instead, spew raw sewage from the city's overburdened sewerage system onto the beach and into the sea. These streams of raw sewage are clearly visible in satellite imagery, the pungent smell arising from the pools and streams impossible to ignore on the ground. The unceremonious dumping of waste effluent onto the beach and into the sea where thousands of people bathe throughout the year, not only reduces the amount of accessible public space but is also a serious health hazard.



# Types of Structures on Seaview



Current map of seaview from Dolme-n mall to end of beach

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
|  Shades        |  1 Type A |  6 Type E  |
|  Encroachments |  2 Mosque |  7 Type F  |
|  Sidewalks     |  3 Type B |  8 Type F  |
|  Grass         |  4 Type C |  9 Type G  |
|  Kiosks        |  5 Type D |  10 Type H |

Over the years, as the sea has receded, or been made to recede, different structures have developed on the expanding beach. In the map above, 5 sections of the beach have been marked with a dotted line. Each of these segments houses a different kind of building typology within it, representing multiple ideals and aspirations: from corporate and contemporary, to dismantlable and eco-friendly.

## Type A: Contemporary Corporate



Built on the eastern end of the seaview strip, Type A is a tower complex which houses a shopping mall, hypermarket and corporate offices. The satellite images below show how the site has changed over the course of 16 years. Sindbad was previously situated on the site, but it was demolished around 2004 to make way for the towers. The land left behind by the receding sea was incorporated to make a parking lot. The complex is a contemporary steel and glass structure which is reminiscent of Dubai skyscrapers, and represents the aspirations of turning the city into a “world class, international metropolis”.

Dolmen mall exemplifies the aspirations of developers in Pakistan who are obsessed with the idea of turning Karachi into Dubai. However, the question that is not taken into consideration is what this kind of development means to the people of the city beyond a certain class which can afford to access these spaces.

It also demonstrates a certain lack of environmental responsibility, in terms of the amount of energy these glass towers consume in Air conditioning and the impact of land reclamation on the ecology of the sea





Ongoing construction on complex

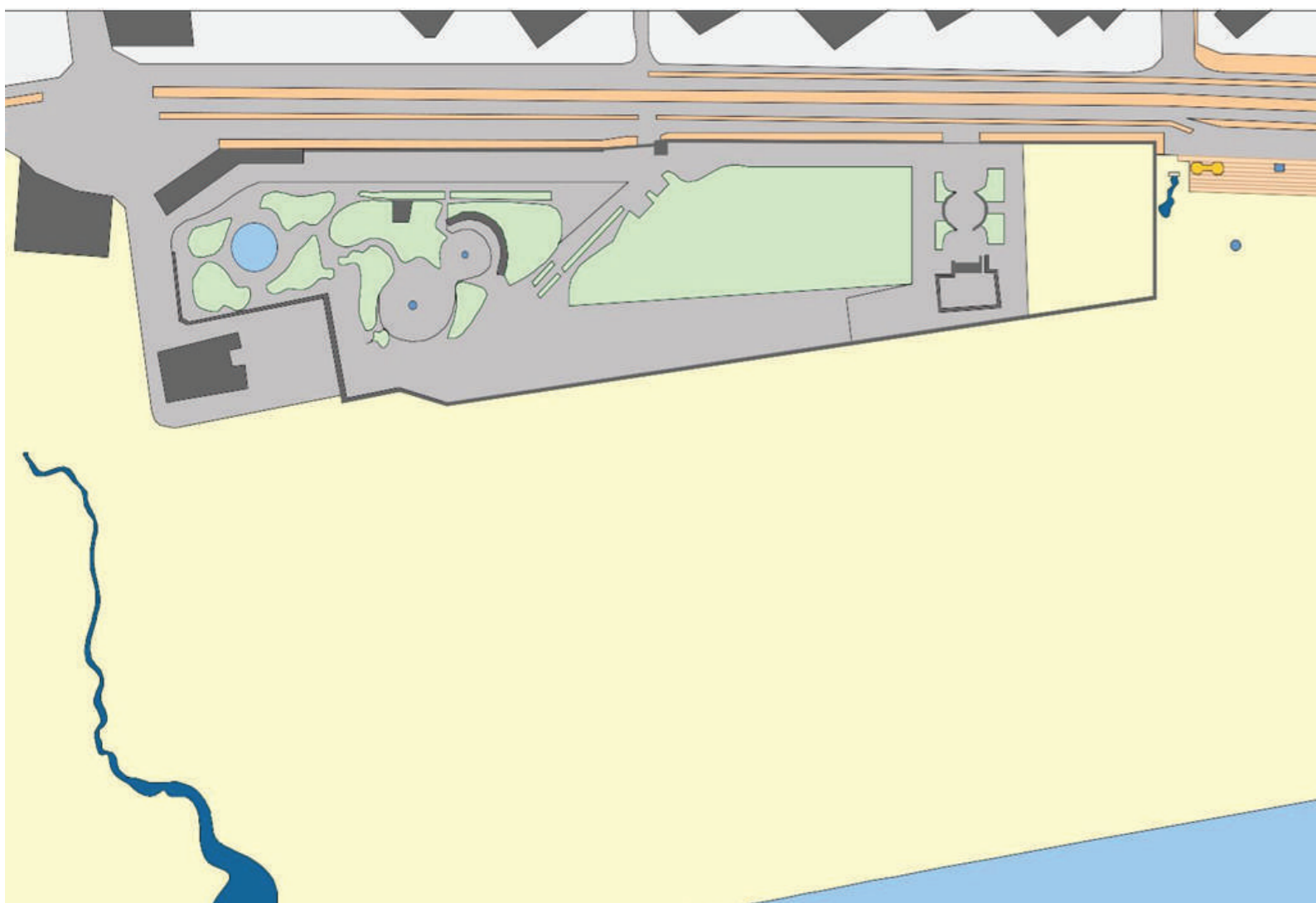


North Elevation of Dolmen Mall



West elevation of Dolmen Mall

## Type B & C: Multinational Franchise and Nationalist Monument

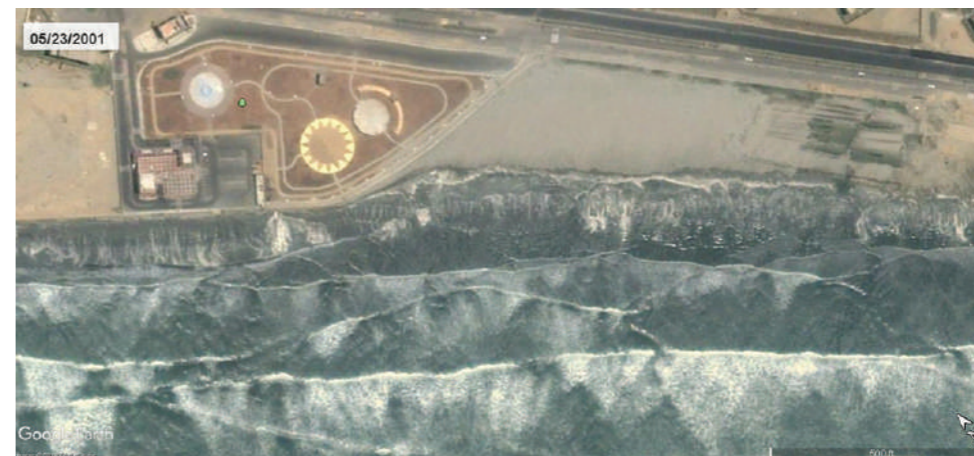


Map of Type B & C: Mcdonald's and Nishaan-e-Pakistan

Type B is a multinational corporate restaurant (Mcdonald's) which has been built according to prototype without any regard for place.

Adjacent to the restaurant is a gated and ticketed park which as the satellite imagery below depicts has rapidly spread towards the southeast in the last 16 years, incorporating a large expanse of the beach.

Type C, a nationalist monument celebrating the martyrs of the armed forces.



Satellite image of Park on 22/02/2001



Satellite image of Park on 22/02/2012



Satellite image of Park on 23/02/2017



Untreated sewage with Mcdonald's in the background

A multinational franchise, McDonald's, architecture follows an established prototype and is also devoid of any sense of place. Unlike other eateries on the beach strip, this franchise has stayed upon since its establishment due to its stronger infrastructure.

According to a study launched by the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO) in 2016, a disease-causing bacteria was found in the coastal waters in varying amounts. The study revealed that the untreated sewage that is being dumped into the sea is a major cause of sea pollution and skin diseases which come with it.

There is a dire need for a paradigm shift in the narratives surrounding development and land reclamation. What is development, and who is it for? Are some encroachments more illegal than others, and is the law different for different sections of society? If we keep in mind the recent trends in architecture and city planning, we can ask what is the future of Karachi?

As important it is to inquire about the government bodies which regulate city planning projects, it is also important to ask questions about the narratives around land reclamation and development.

Nishan-e-Pakistan is yet another way to reclaim and legitimise state power. The architecture is devoid of all cultural, historical roots and the concrete light-yellow coloured walls share a stark resemblance with the Gadap Stone; it is perhaps a poorly executed attempt to historically legitimise the structure. The colonnade on the fence enclosing the plinth where the flag stands, has been collapsed and deformed completely.

The AK Khan park stretches roughly across 1700 ft. The enclosing the park have barbed wire on it, therefore limiting the view of sea-shore for people visiting the park. The space is gated and ticketed and therefore reserved for a very specific fraction of public. There is no shade in the park and most of the space is poorly utilized.



Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 01/07/2019

### Gate of The Militarized Architecture:

The entrance to the Nishaan e Pakistan Monument is through an ornate gate, painted to look like carved stone, it is in fact, made of concrete.

This gate, however, is not the only one of it's kind, The Gulshan-E-Jinnah Bagh which used to be the Old Polo Ground also has a similar gate. What is interesting to note is the militarized programs of these parks. The Nishan-E-Pakistan as a monument to the martyrs of the armed forces, and the Gulshan-E-Jinnah as a space for military parades. Given these very militarized, nationalist programs, one wonders, where do these gates come from? And what are they supposed to represent?



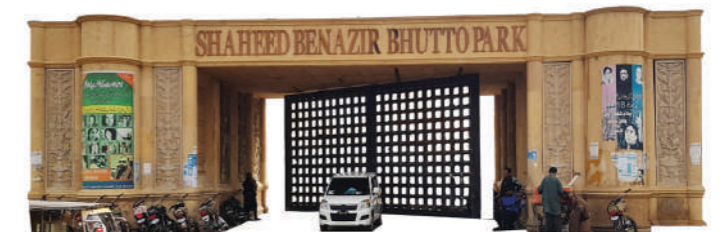
Memorial of the Martyrs



Overtured Columns



Entrance gate to Nishaan-E-Pakistan.



Entrance gate to Benazir Bhutto Park, a city level park



Entrance to Gulshan-E-Jinnah



Entrance to Umar Sharif Park, a local neighbourhood park

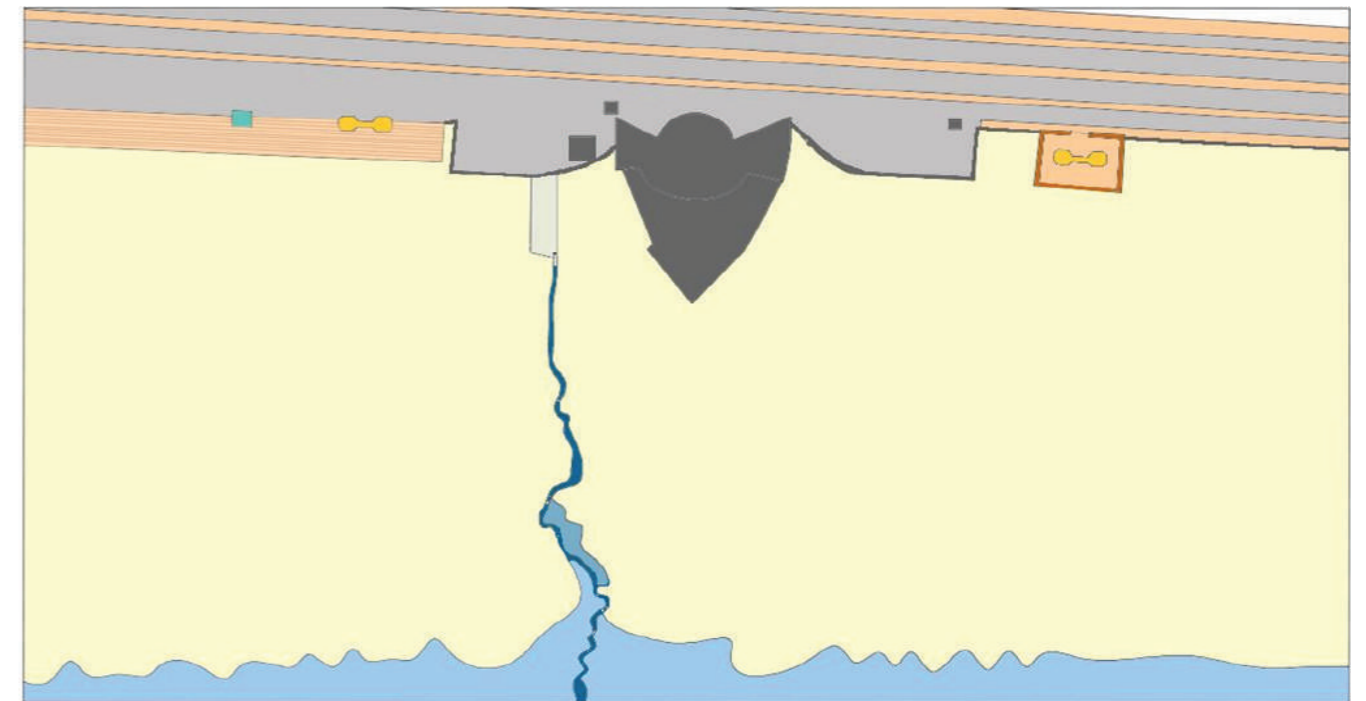
## Type D & E: Amusement Park and Dismantlable Structures



Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 27/06/2019

**Type D:** Chunky Monkey is an amusement park completed in 2015 on seaview beach, under the Pioneer Amusement Services (a subsidiary of the Dolmen Group). The sea-themed amusement arcade has a ship-like structure made of concrete. The structure stretches across the beach which limits public mobility and interaction. The space is ticketed and therefore is exclusive for the people who can afford the ticket price, unlike the rest of seaview beach which craters to mixed communities.

This massive concrete structure in collusion with the storm drain which spouts sewage now, impedes public access across the beach. Adjacent to Chunky Monkey is a pier with a storm drain underneath its surface; this pier is utilized as a resting surface by hawkers and other stakeholders who work at the beach.



Map of Type D & E: Amusement Park and Shinwari Nights

These pictures portray how the sea has receded in the span of 18 years due to both human and natural activities.

The untreated sewage which is being dumped into the sea water along with Chunky Monkey amusement park has made a serious impediment for the stakeholders at the sea view beach (whose livelihoods depend on it); rapid development & reclamation by private investors and corporations has led to the fragmentation of this public space.



South Western Elevation of Amusement



South Elevation of Amusement Park



Pier being utilized as resting surface

**Type E:** Shinwari Nights is a restaurant utilizing the kiosks made by the Defence Housing Authority in 2004. The restaurant has walled in the space reducing public access to the beach from the sidewalk. The structure creating the impediment however is made of bamboo and is dismantlable and more environmentally friendly.

The Restaurant has, however, been closed for about a year because of a court case over a rent dispute between the owners and the local authority.



Entrance to Shinwari Nights



Horizontal spread of restaurant along sidewalk.



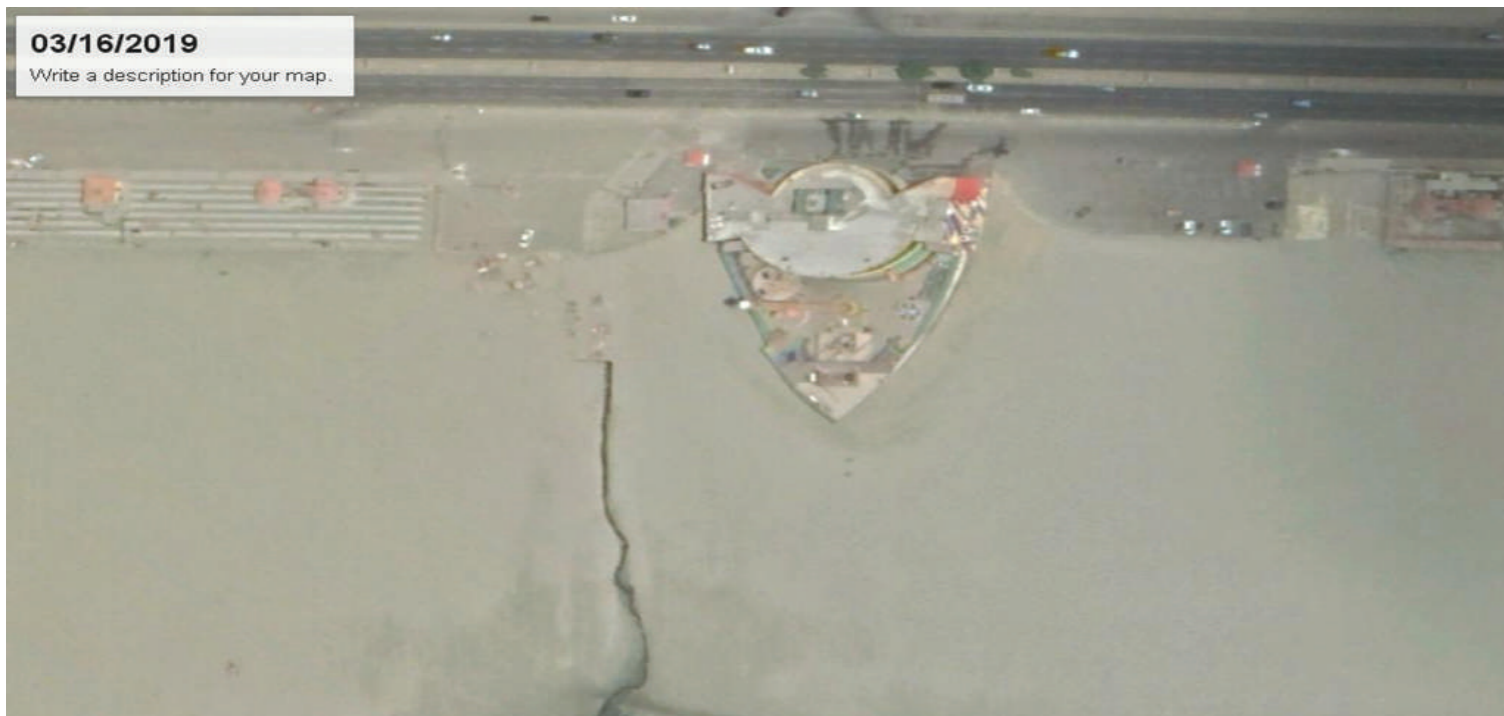
The encroachment on the beach



Amusement Park 22/02/2001



Amusement Park 22/02/2012



Amusement Park 23/02/2017

**Type F:** The Restaurants that exemplify Type F are Chaupal, Bruno's and The Playa Bar. These relatively more upscale eateries not only block accesses to the public beach but also create a space which due to their expensive nature are inaccessible to the class that visits here. This form of gentrification will only lead to the further degradation of public space

**Type F** is a form of permanent structure encroaching upon public land. This involves the creation of a plinth jutting out towards the sea inhibiting movement of the public.

## Type F : Permanent Extensions



Generators take up the sidewalk in front of Bruno's

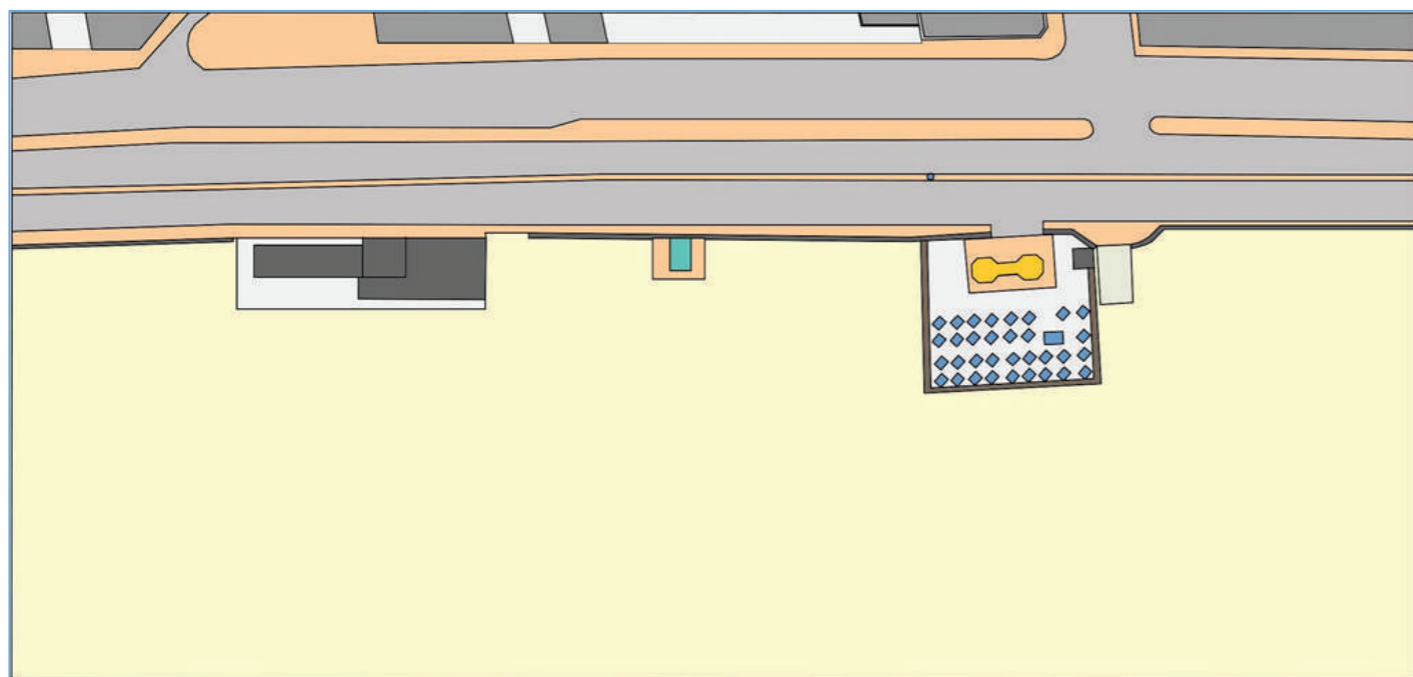


Playa bar encroaches upon the beach



Bruno's encroaches upon the beach





Map of Type F: Playa Bar and Bruno's



Satellite image of Park on 20/01/2004



Satellite image of Park on 22/04/2016



Satellite image of Park on 23/08/2018

## Type G: Piloti Structure



Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 27/06/2019



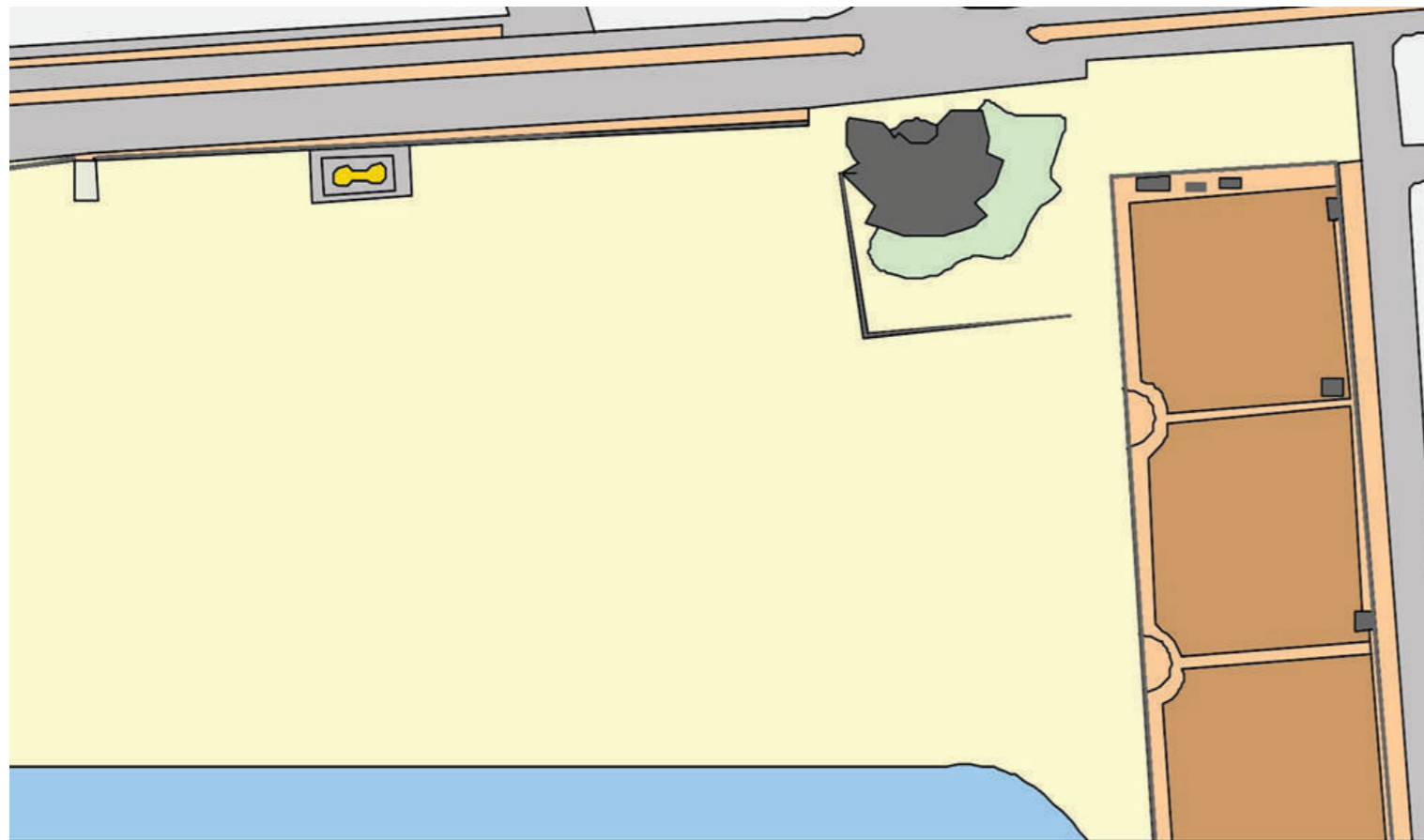
Satellite Image of Sewage on Seaview Beach, 30/11/2018

**Type G** is exemplified by the Salt and Pepper restaurant. A type of architecture which is more sensitive to its location. The structure raised on pilotis would allow the structure to remain unharmed when high tide would sweep in.

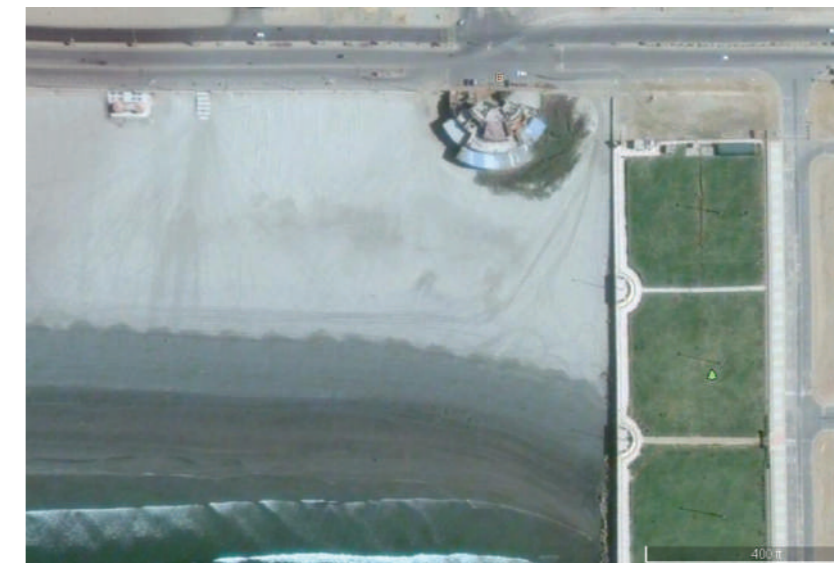
However, as the satellite images on the following page show, the receding sea means that the pilotis no longer reaches the structure, and that over the years, the restaurant too has laid claim to the beach by building a wall.



Sand builds up against the wall



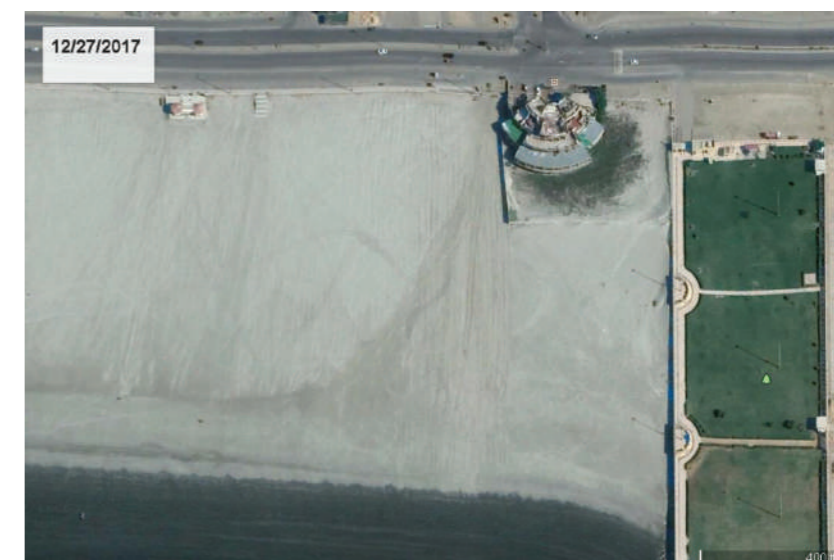
Map of Type G: Salt and Pepper Village and Adjoining



Amusement Park 26/02/2014



Amusement Park 07/02/2016



Amusement Park. 27/12/2017

According to online sources, inception of the Salt ‘n Pepper village took place during the year 1992.

The pilotis lifting the building of Salt and Pepper outlet near the seaview allow the sea water to pass through the structure during the time of high-tide, therefore it does not restrict the sea flow. The building does not cover much of the seaview land, allowing mobility to its visitors and stakeholders. The recently constructed concrete walls encapsulating the building however now create an impediment to both the beach and it’s visitors.



The pilotis raise the structure



A wall encapsulates area

Photographs taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir,  
MMA, 27/076/2019



## Environmental Hazards

## Industrial and Domestic Effluent Structures



Among the many infrastructure and governance challenges, foremost among them is the worsening situation of the water supply sewerage and its management. There are currently three treatment plants in Karachi, amongst which only one is functional. Municipal and industrial effluents discharged into the Lyari river and untreated sewage from nearby residential buildings, commercial buildings and restaurants all end up at Karachi's coast.



Photographs taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir and Khadija Imran, MMA, 02/07/2019



Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 02/07/2019

# Interaction with the Seafront



Photograph taken by Sana Mohsin, MMA, 2021



## Week Day



11 AM: The area is sparsely populated during this time due to the hot weather.



4 PM: The vendors start to accumulate and fill up the seaview strip to sell their assortment of goods. Gradually more people start to visit the area.

Photographs taken by Amna Ashraf  
and Khaidja Imran, MMA,

## Week Night



9 PM: At night, the camels and horses pander around and the population density increases as everyone gets free from their work routines.



There is a varying odour of foods being sold near the sea and small economic businesses (from jewellery to antiques) can be seen on the bustling space of seaview.

Photograph taken by Abdul  
Rehman Qadir, MMA, 28/06/2019

## Week End



7 PM: The amount of activity on the weekends increases exponentially compared to weekdays, and the large sections of the working class population occupies the seaview space as the place is not ticketed; the coastline is free for all. The space can be referred to as awaami where accessibility is not a hindrance. Seaview is the sole public space where there is no discrimination on the basis of class differences; the place is not inaccessible and the lack of ticketing is a much needed salvation.



Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 07/07/2019



## Public Space Structures

The view of AK Khan park's swings from the other side of the boundary wall.

## Nishan-e-Pakistan: monumental glory or a misdirected effort?

While issues like broken pipes, water shortages and flowing sewerage on Seaview beach plague the residents, Nishan-e-Pakistan is hailed as the epitome of the area's development. However, following the inauguration period, both the monument and the area surrounding it are no longer deemed worthy enough to maintain - as is evident through the negligence of the broken columns and umbrella lying on the shore.

At first sight, Nishan-e-Pakistan appears to be a recreation space open to the public, but it seems the space is only accessible within certain limits. The barbed wire prevents direct civilian access to the water, and the only viewing points are strategically placed at different parts of the AK Khan park right next to the monument



The waterfront is not accessible from AK Khan park as it is surrounded by barbed wires.



The columns constructed from fibreglass have deteriorated due to the fragility of the structure.



Although the umbrella's steel base is firm enough to withstand Karachi's weather, the plastic material has disintegrated.



# Conclusion

Photograph taken by Abdul Rehman Qadir, MMA, 07/07/2019



Satellite Image of Dumping Activity by Trucks, on Seaview

Having surveyed the extent of “development” along the Seaview coastline, this brings us to the question: who is this development for? And does it have an expiry date? Does the development only cater to a certain section of Karachi’s population? And what is the purpose of demarcating boundaries with barbed wires even within public spaces like Seaview, such as those surrounding AK Khan park?

It seems that this development comes with its own terms and conditions, the brunt of which is disproportionately faced by the working class. With the alarming rates of land reclamation in recent years, newer attractions such as Nishan-e-Pakistan are advertised for the public, but the ticketed entry serves as a barrier for those who cannot afford it. Does this mean that enjoying the view of the waterfront is only for the elite? If so, then due to the rate at which the seafront is artificially expanding, Seaview might soon become a misnomer. The future may just bring with it the complete overshadowing of the waterfront by the looming architecture, and perhaps the awaam will have to find some other source of free, uninhibited entertainment in Karachi.

# Contributors

**Researched, Conceptualized & Compiled by**  
Marvi Mazhar & Associates

**Research Assitants and Photographers:**

Amna Ashraf  
Ailiya Nooruddin Merchant  
Abdul Rehman Qadir  
Khadija Imran  
Wajiha Ghazanfar Farooq

(2019)

**Layout Design**

Sana Mohsin  
Zoha Shahzad

(2022)

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