

Karachi package

KARACHI is often described as an ‘orphan’ city, and with good reason. With its potholed, sewage-filled roads, rampant crime and garbage-strewn lanes, it can be rightly concluded that, despite being Pakistan’s economic powerhouse, Karachi is a metropolis without ownership. Therefore, whenever governments — federal or provincial — announce ambitious ‘packages’ for the city’s development, the news is received with cautious optimism by the inhabitants of Karachi, mainly because such promises are high on rhetoric, and low on substance. On a visit to the city over the weekend, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced a multibillion-rupee package for Karachi’s uplift — Rs162bn to be exact. The amount is intended to cover a range of areas including transport, sewerage and infrastructure development. While this may be music to Karachiites’ ears, much political wrangling has followed the announcement, with the PPP, which rules Sindh, saying the centre’s moves are ‘unconstitutional’ in the wake of the 18th Amendment. There has also been some controversy over the fact that the Sindh chief minister did not attend or —depending on whom one asks — was not invited to be part of Mr Khan’s activities in Karachi.

It is unfortunate that rather than working together to solve Karachi’s massive socioeconomic and infrastructure problems, the centre and Sindh governments are politicking over the issue. Indeed, the Sindh government should not be bypassed where the provincial capital’s development is concerned, and the chief minister should have been part of the events related to Mr Khan’s visit. Having said that, it is also a fact that the Sindh government has neglected the megacity as well as other major urban areas of the province — mainly by taking over municipal functions under Sindh’s current local government law. While devolution of powers from the centre to the provinces must be supported for a stronger federation, it is also essential for the provinces to delegate powers to the district and local governments. The Musharraf-era local government law may have had many flaws, but it was delivering on several fronts, and Karachi witnessed considerable development under this system. The fact is that the Sindh capital needs all the financing it can get. And along with the money, there needs to be a strong elected local government answerable to the citizens of the city. Islamabad and the Sindh authorities must stop politicking over Karachi and give the city the attention and funds it badly requires, along with an effective local government system.

Editorial