

Minister says razing residential buildings on converted, amenity plots ‘not possible’

KARACHI: Although thanking the Supreme Court judges for their judgements aimed at regaining the past glory of Karachi, the provincial local government minister on Monday told the Sindh Assembly that the SC order to demolish hundreds of buildings standing on amenity and “illegally converted” plots “is not possible for our government, and will not be possible for any government in Sindh”.

“We have demolished marriage halls built on amenity plots; our mayor in Karachi has spearheaded a drive against encroachments and razed shops in the light of the court’s directive. We’ll clear the footpaths, but the buildings inhabited by hundreds of thousands of people cannot be demolished by us,” said Minister Saeed Ghani while giving a detailed statement during the Sindh Assembly session presided over by Speaker Siraj Durrani.

“I can tell you with firm belief that no one can demolish these buildings, not just our government. We are constitutionally bound to abide by the orders of courts, but there are certain things which are not possible for us to do,” he said.

He said over the past many years amenity plots were encroached upon and parks were occupied and subdivided to construct residential and commercial buildings. The authorities, he added, had demolished a good number of them.

‘No government can be expected to do something that leads to human misery’

He said the anti-encroachment drive had rendered thousands of people jobless. The provincial government was facing a variety of issues in rehabilitating them.

Mr Ghani said the Sindh government had filed a petition to review the order for demolition of houses, which was discharged by the court.

He said the local government ordinance promulgated during the rule of retired Gen Pervez Musharraf had given many departments, including the master plan office, to the defunct City District Government of Karachi. The then city government passed a resolution through its council and approved conversion of residential plots into commercial ones.

He said the master plan bureau was in control of the defunct CDGK till 2011 and since 2004 some 930 cases of conversion had been allowed. Some 454 cases of conversion were made till 2011 till the existence of the CDGK. He said it was “dangerous” to review all such cases, demolish hundreds of them and compensate the people affected by the demolition.

“Hundreds of thousands of people have stakes [in such properties]; they have their houses that they have purchased with their hard-earned money. We should not punish them for the wrongdoings committed by others.”

He said those responsible for the present scenario should be identified and punished.

“No government can be expected to do something that leads to human misery. We beseech the honourable judges that we are here to abide by their directives, but we should be given some time. If you want to change the face of Karachi, then it will need years and not weeks. It is clear stance of our government that we will not dismantle these houses.

“The Sindh government’s stance should be understood; it is a human issue, which should be seen and handled beyond legality and illegality.”

Mr Ghani also spoke on the issue of marriage halls; owners of the halls had called off their strike after some government assurances on Saturday.

“Despite this,” he said, “we made it clear to the owners of the marriage halls that those halls built on amenity plots would have to be demolished. However, the ones established on legally converted lands will not be touched”.

He said the court should guide the authorities to prepare lists of all such plots and categorise those which should be razed.

Resolution against attack on PTI MPA

The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf’s members created another ruckus at the outset when they asked Speaker Durrani to suspend the day’s proceedings and allow a resolution condemning the “attack” on MPA Ramzan Ghanchi. They alleged that the vice chairman of a union committee in Ranchhore Line belonging to the PPP had shot at their colleague during an argument over water.

They kept chanting slogans against the PPP government in front of the chair and tore up copies of the day’s agenda.

However, the speaker opted to continue the proceedings and began the Question Hour. Since all the questions were asked by opposition MPAs about the education ministry, the speaker kept calling serial numbers of the questions and concluded the segment in less than five minutes, making it apparently the quickest finish of Question Hour in recent years.

The situation remained the same during the segment for calling-attention notices. However, when Minister Ghani rose to move a resolution on the MPA’s issue, the chair advised the protesting PTI MPAs that they should go back to their seats as the resolution they were protesting for was being discussed.

Mr Ghani and Leader of the Opposition Firdous Shamim Naqvi moved the resolution jointly in which the attack on the MPA was condemned and police were told to conduct a fair inquiry into the incident; the Sindh government was asked to submit its report before the house within two weeks.

A number of members spoke on the resolution in which Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan’s Khwaja Izharul Hasan and Mohammad Hussain said such incidents showed how grave the issue of water shortages had become.

Mr Hussain and PTI’s parliamentary leader Haleem Shaikh said they faced serious threats to their lives and asked the government to provide better security to the elected representatives.

The minister said the UC’s vice chairman who was accused of the incident had won the LG election as an independent candidate and joined the PPP later. However, he said, his government would have adopted the same stance even if the accused was a known party worker.

He also requested the assembly members that they should not issue water connections on their own as they were not authorised for it. “Even I, the local government minister, cannot issue these connections,” he said.

Two bills passed

The house also passed two important bills after they returned from the select committees.

These bills were: The Sindh Institute of Child Health and Neonatology Bill, 2018; and The Sindh Injured Persons Compulsory Medical Treatment (Amal Umer) Bill, 2019.

About the first bill, the house was told that the Institute of Child Health and Neonatology would be established so that under its umbrella numerous branches of child health outlets could be established.