

## Endangered Heritage

Dear Editor,

I almost cried when I saw the photograph of a revoltingly ugly RCC structure standing immediately next to the 113 year old Town hall, known as the *Ghanta Ghar* of Multan, (April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Dawn). This hideous example of matchbox architecture looked taller than the beautiful minarets of the Town Hall. What a sad sight!

I know this despicable act of construction does not bother the down trodden masses who are entrapped in their own *roti, kapra and makaan* problems, but the irony is that it even fails to offend the visual or moral sensibilities of the officers in charge of real estate/building laws in Multan. It is a shame that the same structure is decaying for the lack of funds or apathy. But I feel it is also because of lack of awareness and lack of compassion for the built environment and the will to do it right. It is quite unfortunate that greed, corruption and lust for ill-gotten wealth have overshadowed our moral senses and national conscience.

The exposure of this appalling eyesore should act like (yet) another reminder and a wakeup call to powers that maybe in Islamabad or wherever, that it is time this desecration of our national heritage should be stopped. I would go a little further and suggest that the owner of the building next door should be compensated with another plot of same size else where in the city and demolish this ghastly structure. If this cannot be done then at least the top two floors should be demolished with due compensation. The officer who approved this plan should be declared enemy of the state and taken to task.

There is an urgent need that a national committee on heritage should be formed (similar to the Heritage Foundation in Karachi) not only to enlist all the protected buildings across the country but to start a awareness and conservation program to actually save all the dying buildings and monuments. The government can start helping by contributing some funds from the national exchequer solely for this purpose. It is truly depressing reading every now and then about the dying heritage and culture. If we cannot create new structures, we should at least protect the ones what we already have.

Danish A. Zuby

5<sup>th</sup> April, 2001