



MAFIA LAND GRAB

Amir and his wife Fatima* won a government-run auction for a small plot of land on the outskirts of Karachi, and began saving to build a house. With time, the city's boundaries expanded and the site became prime real estate. As part of the agreement, Amir and Fatima paid regular contributions towards developing the local infrastructure. But the authorities reportedly failed to service the land with water and electricity, and link it to the regional road network.

Upon retiring, Amir returned to his plot of land with a view to finally building his home. He was greeted with a wall that had been erected around the site, watched over by armed guards. Amir claims he was barred from entering, and told that the property belonged to somebody else.

With proof of his ownership in hand, Amir went to the police station to lodge a complaint. When the police refused to file the report, he turned to TI Pakistan, and together they drafted a letter to the judiciary. In turn, the judiciary contacted the police, who lodged the report, hereby giving Amir the go-ahead to process his complaint through the courts.

But the case never came to court. Instead, a few months later, the wall around Amir and Fatima's land was mysteriously removed, and the guards vanished.

TI Pakistan subsequently learned that a local politician had allegedly been involved in the appropriation of Amir and Fatima's property, and had likely been deterred from pursuing the case by TI Pakistan's involvement.

Land grabbing by the so-called "land mafia" is reportedly prolific in Pakistan, particularly in and around Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi. In some cases, housing authorities have allegedly colluded with property developers, who employ private militias to secure the land.

Amir's case highlights how a lack of integrity in property and land issues in Pakistan can arise. He has been paying service fees for his land since 2005, but without water or electricity it remains ill-suited for development.

Nonetheless, TI Pakistan hopes that its successful intervention in Amir's case will encourage others like him to inform on illicit practices, and help bring about positive change.

*Names have been changed.

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