

Plan to ease Cairo traffic chaos

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A GROUP of four ministers has gathered recently to tackle a host of files, on top of which is a project for developing the Cairo downtown area, including the Cabinet premises, ministries headquarters and other government offices. The chief aim of the discussions was to find solutions to traffic congestion and define the best means to benefit the most from the archaeological and historic value of these buildings.

During the meeting, the ministers formed a working team representing the relevant bodies to draw up a plan to develop the downtown area. They also stressed the need to study the volume of each ministry's labour force and draw up a timetable to execute the plan to move them to the east and west of Cairo.

Minister of Housing and New Communities Tareq Wafik says that the development project for the ministries' area is not new but was offered for implementation in 2005-2006. The project is being resubmitted to reduce traffic congestion in downtown Cairo, due to the high numbers of workers at these governmental bodies and of people seeking their services who come from all corners of Egypt, as well as the increased volume of vehicles using the area daily.

Regarding this project, professor of urban planning at Ain Shams University, Mohamed Abdel-Baqi, remarks that redistributing the ministries in new areas such as 6 October and New Cairo would partially solve the problem of traffic jam in Cairo.

However, he predicted that with the passing of time, these areas would also

face the same problem. He suggests that the ideal solution is to establish electronic-governance so that all dealings could be accomplished through the Internet with sub-sectors of these ministries in different Egyptian areas obviating inhabitants need to come to Cairo.

This would be complemented by Professor Abdel-Baqi's call for the development of post offices in rural areas so that they would represent different ministries. He also argued that these innovations would be conducive to transparency and would counter favouritism or bribe.

Soheir Hawas, professor of architecture, Cairo University stressed the importance of the downtown development project and of making use of certain governmental buildings constructed in different historic periods, such as Ministry of Health headquarter and Geographical Association.

Additionally, a number of palaces are being used by bodies such as the General Authority of Urban Planning and Ministry of Education, which should be evacuated into new locations, especially given that the grounds of these buildings have been degraded by unsightly new buildings.

She told *Akher Sa'a* magazine that she supports the idea of emptying the massive Mogamaa governmental services building "This complex includes a large number of departments, which appear as small islands affiliated to different governmental authorities. It could be turned into a distinguished hotel due to its renowned location at Tahrir Square".

Nevertheless,

Hawas noted that the ministries' area in downtown Cairo is in need of social, economic, cultural and urban studies, stressing that she opposes development at the expense of the unity of the urban appearance.

Ahmed Rashed, professor at the British University remarked that 80 per cent of civil servants could achieve their work at home using up-to-date technology, saving money, time and effort and contributing to reducing traffic jams.

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