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Lahore Traders' Protests Halt Government's Circular Garden Restoration Plan

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Fierce protests by Lahore's traders have forced the Punjab government to pause its plan to demolish 2,285 shops for the Circular Garden restoration project under the Lahore Authority for Heritage Revival (LAHR). This article explores the traders' resistance, the government's response, and the tension between heritage preservation and economic livelihoods, highlighting the need for balanced urban development.

On July 20, 2025, the Punjab government shelved its plan to raze shops along Circular Road after traders' unions staged vigorous protests, decrying the move as an economic disaster. The Circular Garden, a British-era site encroached upon decades ago, was targeted for revival by LAHR, chaired by Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML–N) leader Nawaz Sharif. Lahore Deputy Commissioner (DC) Syed Musa Raza explained, “The shops were built by encroaching on the garden, but past administrations legalized them as tenants for revenue,” as told to Dawn. The traders, however, rejected mere compensation, demanding alternative premises before relocation, per The Tribune. Their resistance halted demolition operations, exposing the government's failure to consult stakeholders.

Punjab Housing Minister Bilal Yasin met with representatives of 18 traders' unions, assuring them that no relocation would occur until underground markets with modern facilities—water, drainage, electricity, and parking—are built at three sites. “We've accepted the traders' demands,” Yasin stated, alongside Lahore Development Authority (LDA) Vice Chairman Mian Marghoob Ahmad, as reported by Dawn. The new markets aim to preserve the traders' livelihoods while restoring the historic garden, but skepticism persists. Anjuman-e-Tajiran President Mujahid Maqsood Butt warned, “Disrupting Circular Road's wholesale markets would cripple Pakistan's supply chain,” per The News.

The clash underscores a broader issue: the government's heritage revival ambitions often overlook socio-economic realities. With Pakistan's economy strained—Karachi and Lahore traders recently struck against Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) tax measures—the Circular Garden plan risks alienating a vital business community. The government must

prioritize dialogue and pragmatic solutions to balance cultural preservation with economic stability, ensuring traders are not left in limbo.