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Traditional copper utensils moving out of Kashmiri kitchen



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THE Echo

Special Edition



5 years and Rs 250 crores later, National Saffron Mission on path of failure in J&K

ZUBAIR AMIN

After five years and rupees 250 crores later, the ambitious National Saffron mission is proving a failure in the valley.

In the past five years of the programme that aimed to increase saffron production in the valley and to bring more land under saffron cultivation, not only the total production of saffron but also the yield per acre of land has decreased. According to the official

figures, the productivity of the saffron for the year 2015-16 in the state has been 9.6 tonnes as compared to 11.5 tonnes for the year 2010-11, when the ambitious rupees 400 crore project was launched.

"This year we had less production of the excessive rains during the flowering period of the crop. From the last two years the saffron crop has failed due to the excessive raining which affects the flowering of the crop and results in more vegetative growth," Chief Agriculture



FILE PHOTO OF SAFFRON FARMERS IN J&K

PHOTO: REUTERS

Officer Pulwama Ghulam Mohidin Bhat told The Indian Express. Pulwama's Pampore area is the saffron belt of Kashmir. In 2010, the highly ambitious Rs

371.18 crore National Saffron Mission was sanctioned by the central government to prevent the declining production of saffron in the valley. **CONT. ON PAGE 2**

Sufi music in Kashmir struggles for survival

SAJID ALI

With the modern and more engaging genres making their way into the Valley, the traditional Sufi music is losing its place in the Kashmiri society.

The traditional musical form, which has been partly associated with local customs and mysticism in Kashmir, is facing an onslaught from the modernity as it has remained confined to its slow paced avatar.

The Sufi music evolved from the combination of Persian and Indian classical music and was introduced in Kashmir in the 16th century with the inception of Islam, said Kifayat Faheem, a Srinagar based vocalist, who possesses a degree in Indian classical music.

Mushtaq Saznawaz, 50, is a seventh generation Sufi musician and lives in the Safa Kadal locality of Srinagar's old city. "Sufi music has the capacity to cure ailments of the heart and the head. It is the simplest way to realise God,"



Musicians from Saznawaz family.

TRIBUNE PHOTO

he said. "Earlier, Sufi music used to be the first choice of people. Now the trend has completely reversed, Sufi music is being ignored in the Valley," said Saznawaz, who is a listed A grade artist.

66 Sufi music in the Valley has remained stagnant. The musicians did not allow modern instruments and lyrics to mingle with the Sufi music. They remained confined to traditional ragas 99

"I have performed at Sangeet Natak Academy, New Delhi; Patiala and even in Switzerland, people would sink in the aura of Sufi music and tears would flow from their eyes like rain," recalled Saznawaz, who plays 'Saaz-e-Kashmir', a localised version of violin and one of **CONT. ON PAGE 2**



CMYK





drilling shakes downtown locality, damages house

MUZAMIL MATTOO

Underground drilling for laying 4G cables damaged a residential house in old Srinagar's Kawdara locality. According to Ghulam Mohi-ud-Din Lone, the owner of the house, the mishap occurred on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, when Reliance Telecommunication Limited was carrying out drilling in the locality.

He said his family members ran for their lives as their house, and those of their neighbours, had started shaking suddenly at midnight.

"We were sleeping at around 12 am. Suddenly, we felt a tremor, and rushed outside. I saw my neighbours too running out of their homes," Lone told *Kashmir Reader*.

"The tremors stopped only when the workers stopped drilling on seeing the people run out of their homes. We had not been given any notice prior to the start of drilling," he said.

Lone was promised compensation by the contractor, but he hasn't received it yet.

"In the morning, I noticed cracks in my house; the walls had also got damaged. I sought compensation from the contractor, but I didn't receive anything from them, so far.

"They just sent a mason to fix the cracks, not realising that the damage is beyond repair," he said.

The locals also complained against the discomfort caused by drilling at night.

The contractor, Javaid Ahmad, said the accident happened when a pipe broke while drilling.

He, however, said the damage to the house was not as bad as claimed by the family.

"The tremors stopped only when the workers stopped drilling on seeing the people run out of their homes. We had not been given any notice prior to the start of drilling"

"It is an old house. We have promised them compensation. We even asked the owner to get the house repaired and sent the bills to us, but he doesn't agree to it," he said. "We work in the night because we don't have permission to work in the locality during daytime."

Published by *Kashmir Reader* on February 21, 2016

From Editor's Desk

The Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) had been established by an Act of the Jammu and Kashmir State Legislative Assembly in November 2005. The university offers a stream of courses, diplomas and certificates of competence in several disciplines. Its specified courses are approved by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and All India Council of Technical Education (AICTE).

Among other courses, the university offers Masters in Journalism and Mass Communication under the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The degree is designed to groom students to work skillfully in various areas of journalism. Besides exposing them to different theoretical aspects of journalism, this course equips and trains students to expertly shift between dynamically changing media, especially print, television, radio and online journalism.

Every year, the department of Journalism and Mass Communication (DJMC) sends its students to various reputed media organisations for six to eight week internship during winters. The purpose of internship programme, which is an essential part of the course curriculum, is to help students get hands-on training in covering various situations, events and issues.

This year, the print specialization students were provided the opportunity to work with various publications of repute, including *The Tribune*, *The Indian Express*, *The Financial Express*, *Greater Kashmir*, *Rising Kashmir*, *Kashmir Life*, *Kashmir Reader* and *Kashmir Times*. In fact, many of the students had been doing internship with some news organisations during the academic session. The current issue of *The Echo* is based on the selective internship stories of Journalism students.

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

5 Years

of saffron in the valley. The cost of the project was then escalated to Rs 411 crores. While the project was launched for five years, the centre approved its extension by two more years.

According to the officials of Department of Agriculture Jammu and Kashmir, 60 per cent of the total amount sanctioned under the project has already been spent.

In five years, the government has failed to set-up the bore wells needed for irrigation of saffron fields. Officials in agriculture department say that the mission envisaged establishing 109 bore wells with 100 per cent project support. "But till date only 86 bore wells have been dug," said an official. "And ironically, only four of them are fully functional."

The saffron farmers allege that the saffron mission has only worsened their prospects.

"Now, we have been using these 'scientific methods' for four-five years but the results are same," said Ghulam Nabi Reshi, President of the Saffron Growers Association. "This experiment of government to revive this crop is a complete disappointment. We now feel that the traditional ways (of farming) were better."

Another saffron farmer Feroz Ahmad says that the "National Saffron has destroyed our crop more than anything."

"Saffron is a kind of crop that grows in natural conditions," he said.

"Any interference with it destroys the crop. They (officials) asked us to use cow dung, fertilizers and other things. But all these methods have been unsuccessful," he added.

Opposing the claims of farmers, the Nodal Officer National Saffron Mission Pulwama Nazir Ahmad Bhat terms it a huge success.

"The National Saffron Mission has brought a new life to this industry which some years back was on the brink of extinction," Bhat said.

He, however, said there are some concerns like urbanization, pollution and illegal soil cutting of the saffron fields that are posing a serious threat to the industry.

The total area under cultivation of saffron in the valley has declined from 5,707 hectares in 1996 to 3,715 hectares in 2009-10 and now 3,674 hectares in 2015.

Overall 16,296 families are engaged with the saffron cultivation in the districts of Pul-

wama, Budgam and Srinagar.

The figures belie the claim of the officials of National Saffron Mission. While the land under cultivation of saffron has decreased by a meager 1.10 per cent since the launch of saffron mission, the productivity has decreased by more than 16 per cent in the same period.

Published by *The Indian Express* on February 11, 2016

Sufi music

version of violin and one of the five instruments used in the Sufi music performances.

The Saznawaz family has been trying hard to preserve the Sufi music, but has achieved little success so far.

Saznawaz's father, Ustad Ghulam Mohammad Saznawaz, had set up a musical training institute in 1984. "We trained many students, but most of them left halfway due to its poor scope in the Valley and underestimation by the departments like the Cultural Academy, Doordarshan and Radio Kashmir," he said.

The Sufi musicians have lately introduced local poetry as lyrics in their performances as the Persian lyrics, which were originally used for such performances, are difficult to understand.

Mohammad Ashraf Tak, Chief Editor (Urdu) at the Cultural Academy Kashmir, said the academy had formed a wing to teach Sufi music, but it was shut within a year following "poor response".

Program Executive, FM Two, Radio Kashmir Srinagar, Satish Vimal blamed the downfall of Sufi music in the Valley to its "stagnancy".

"Sufi music in the Valley has remained stagnant. The musicians did not allow modern instruments and lyrics to mingle with the Sufi music. They remained confined to traditional ragas," Vimal said.

Waheed Jeelani, a well known Kashmiri singer, agreed that the Sufi music was losing its popularity due to the use of conventional lyrics which are difficult to understand. "We need to make the Sufi lyrics understandable for the youth and coming generations," said Jeelani.

Published by *The Tribune* on January 13, 2016

Nature's bounty: How this man from the Valley turned his love for flowers into his livelihood

Firdous grows 70,000 different varieties of tulips in his ten poly houses and other varieties of flowers like Lilium, Carnation, Gerbera, and Gladiolus.



TULIP IN FULL BLOOM.

PHOTO: PTI

ZUBAIR AMIN

For eight years, Firdous Ahmad Mir would skip his classes to visit the famous Kashmiri gardens. He would happily do it for his love for floriculture.

His love affair with it continued for a long time until one day he decided to act on it. As soon as he graduated, he turned a big stretch of land at his native village at Kanipora, Kulgam into a flower garden and within years, Firdous expanded his venture from three to ten kanals of land. At the same time, he started attending floriculture workshops around the country to brush up on his skills.

Today, Firdous grows 70,000 different varieties of tulips – which he had brought from Holland- in his ten poly houses and other varieties of flowers like Lilium, Carnation, Gerbera, and Gladiolus.

Registered with the state Floriculture department, this 30 year-old floriculturist supplies flowers and seeds to prominent departments of the state and just last year he supplied tulips to Srinagar's botanical garden. Now, along with a group of young men, he's also started his own marketing team and delivers flowers to different parts of the country.

"I am currently sending flowers to Ludhiana, Delhi, Chandigarh and Jammu. After I realised it's growing demand I also started marketing it in south India," he says.

Firdous showed us a long list of clients across the country adding, "More clients are approaching me."

Firdous's mentor is his uncle Muhammad Sultan Bhat- who has been growing flowers since the past three decades, but when it comes to running the business, he is one step ahead. We say so, because other than marketing and cultivating flowers, he's into landscaping work.

When asked about how did he get into landscaping, Firdous says, "After getting registered with the floriculture department in 2009, I undertook a landscaping project at the Srinagar Airport where I groomed my skills."

People started recognising his work and the rest is history.

It will be an understatement to say that Firdous is at the right place at the right time as currently, floriculture has a major potential in the valley. The boom started in the 90s, 1996 to be precise when an area of 80 hectares for flower cultivation catapulted to a whopping 350 hectares. However, like everything else, there is still room for improvement.

Firdous says that the government can do more by providing subsidy on air freight as flowers cannot be transported through road pertaining to the high temperature outside the state.

"We have a huge market outside the state but it becomes difficult to transport flowers due to the high air fare. A kilo of flowers costs us Rs 28. If government provides us a subsidy on the fare, our business can develop manifold. This might even influence people to get into the business," said Firdous.

Firdous wants more and more people to take up floriculture and also has a message for the youths of the Valley.

"The youths of the Valley should not run after government jobs. Instead, they should explore other options. I want to expand my business, and provide job to many more unemployed youths of Kashmir."

Published by The Indian Express on March 4, 2016



An artisan works on a Pashmina shawl at his workshop in Srinagar. High quality Pashmina shawls are made from the fleece of Pashmina goats found in the Himalayan range.

TRIBUNE PHOTO: YAWAR KABLI

Infusing new life into Kashmiri handicraft

SHAH UZRAT/ UFAQ FATIMA

To revitalise the handicraft industry of Kashmir, the Craft Development Institute (CDI) is innovating new designs, implementing full-fledged courses on craft management and providing certification that can help preserve and sustain the cultural heritage.

The institute was established by the Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, and the Department of Industries and Commerce of Government of Jammu and Kashmir, in February 2004. It is working relentlessly on different parameters that could redefine handicraft in Kashmir.

"We have started design development programmes to recreate the previously available designs in handicrafts and also encourage the young artisans towards the profession," said Yasir Mir, a faculty member at the institute. Located at Nowshera, the institute started postgraduate courses in 2012 in affiliation with the University of Kashmir. The courses are in crafts management and entrepreneurship to educate aspiring students about new designs, enhance their managerial skills and develop a new sense of marketing in them. "It is a two-year degree course which includes design development, research, business consultancy and skill development," said Mir.

Talking about success stories, another faculty member said many alumni of the institution were successfully running their own ventures outside Kashmir.

"Two of our students, Mukeen and Manzoor, own a 'pashmina' and 'kani' loom business," said Sajid Nazir, another faculty member. "I am very passionate about handicraft business. Apparently, this heritage is dying and my aim is to educate people and take Kashmiri craft to new heights," said Safoora Farooq, a student. She said the students were being taught different craft designs, including colour schemes and patterns, and many workshops were being conducted by the institute to expose students to new possibilities in this field. Snober Shakeel said she wanted to start her own venture and support artisans linked to the profession. "I wish to start crewel and chain stitching business and want to provide opportunities to the talented artisans in the field," said Snober.

The CDI also houses a high-tech lab for GI testing and labeling of pashmina.

Geographical indication (GI) mark is a name or sign used on certain products, which correspond to a specific location or origin.

"We have installed a high-tech lab, which includes machines from USA, UK and Switzerland, for testing and labelling of pashmina," said Younis Farooq, manager, Pashmina Testing and Certification Centre. He said a unique label was put on pashmina, containing a unique code having hidden information about the artisans, dealer and other people associated with the particular product.

Every month, around 40-70 pashmina shawls are tested and labelled here, Farooq said.

The CDI is working for the approval of GI tagging to five Kashmiri handicraft products, including kani, sonzni, katamaband, papermashi and walnut woodcarving. So far, only pashmina has been approved for the GI marking.

To make people aware about the GI marking on pashmina products, Farooq said it was for the government to promote it by conducting workshops and exhibitions.

"The government can play an important role in making public aware about pure pashmina," he said.

Published by The Tribune on February 19, 2016

Stone Stories

The stone quarry at Athwajan is in debate for both environmental and human costs. **Riyaz Bhat** reports

In a span of less than three years, Guru family lost two of its members to Athwajan's death trap – stone quarry.

Brothers Mohammad Ramzan Guru, 45, and Abdul Razak Guru, 41, died in two different incidents, after the blast to extract rocks, brought down a large pile of debris, crushing them. The elder brother died in 1989, followed by young Razak three years later in 1992.

Since then, the quarry at Athwajan, a major source of raw material for construction material in Srinagar and

peripheries, is at the centre of debate, both for environmental and human costs.

In last six years, there has been 13 deaths in Athwajan quarry so far, says police station Panthachowk. Majority of these deaths happened in 2013-14. "Most of those died belonged to Banihal and Ramban areas," said a police official. "Apart from that, there were around 22 cases of serious injuries as well."

Once a source of income for the locals Athwajan quarry has now become part of the lore for all the wrong rea-

sons.

"My father was crushed by a rock and killed while working at the quarry," says Mohammad Ayoub Pandit, who survives by working as labourer far from the quarry. Pandit's father Abdul Rehman Pandit, 60, left a family of four behind – two daughters, a son and wife.

After Rehman's death, his family was approached by labour department telling them that they are liable to compensation under Workmen's Compensation Act (1923). "An investigator from the bank approached



us, took pictures and recorded statements. But nothing has happened so far," says Pandit. "We have visited labour department at least a dozen times so far."

Because of incidents like these a number of people who live in Athwajan, Summerbug, Panthachowk and other adjoining areas have abandoned working in the quarry.

Ghulam Mohammed Mir, 45, who lives half-a-mile from the quarry in Pandrethan, worked for around nine years there before quitting. "I saw one of my colleagues getting crushed by the rock. He survived, but I couldn't dare to go back after witnessing death so closely," says Mir who now extracts sand for the living. "Besides you are on your own if you get injured. Getting insurance money takes ages, if at all it comes."

But the high rate of deaths, serious injuries and hazardous working conditions has forced locals to rethink their association with the quarry. The gap is now filled by the non-locals, mostly from far flung Banihal and Ramban areas.

"A labourer is paid between Rs 500 and 700 a day, while an experienced one gets better than that," says Mohammad Maqbool Para, president stone quarry union Athwajan.

"However those who blast the quarry are highly trained professionals and get around Rs 12000 a month," says Para.

These blasters, as they are called locally, are key to the operation as they have to work in the early hours. "If anything untoward happens, the owner of the quarry is liable to take care of a labourer's family till they get the insurance money," says Para. But that rarely happens.

However, despite safety concerns, geology and mining department issued

fresh permits on condition that the extraction will be done only up to three feet.

"In last five years many deaths have taken place at these quarries. Workers work under extreme dangerous conditions. But nobody seems to care," blames an ex-official of geology and mining department on condition of anonymity. "Even labour department seems powerless."

"Overexploitation has turned Athwajan into menace," feels Shakeel Romsho, who heads Kashmir University's Earth Science department, "It is risky."

Romsho feels, "the concerned authorities should identify extracting areas" and keep in view the "influence of quarrying on local population and the environment hazards."

According to locals, quarrying in Athwajan is going on since more than last fifty years, thus being a source of livelihood for people living around it. "Around fifty thousand people are associated with quarrying," says Mohammad Ashraf Mir, who represented the area in state assembly till January 2016. "Every day around 2500 trucks leave this quarry, which is huge. It earns state crores of rupees."

Despite that, alleges Mir, there has been no police to safeguard the lives of labourers by any government so far. "The compensation is always provided by the owner rather than the government," says Mir.

A labourer from Banihal, who has been working at the quarry since last two years, says they literally work under the shadow of death. "Government should make owners responsible for our safety."

Published by
Kashmir Life on March 8, 2016

Despite huge potential, valley produces only 4000 quintals of honey

ZUBAIR AMIN

Even as Kashmir has a huge potential for honey production, the valley produces only 4000 quintals of honey every year. The government has failed to attract people towards bee keeping and there are only 2500 bee keepers registered with J&K's Apiculture department.

The official figures reveal that Kashmir has only 40,000 bee colonies which experts say is less than half of the potential of the valley that has a diversity of flora.

"While numerous varieties of flora are cultivated in the valley, the wild plants bloom for the most part of year," says Ghulam Rasool Ganie, Assistant Entomologist at Department of Apiculture Kashmir. "We have a potential to sustain one lakh bee colonies. On average, a colony produces 15 kilograms of honey and thus we have a potential to produce 15000 quintals of honey every year."

This year, the valley has produced only 3800 quintals of honey which is 200 quintal lesser than the last year. Officials blame a drought like situation in north Kashmir of valley for the low production.

"We had almost zero per cent production from Bandipora, Kupwara, and Baramulla districts of the valley resulting in lower production," said an official of the department.

According to the official data, around two lakh hectares of land are under cultivation for oil seeds and horticulture crops in state which excludes the area under the cereals and other crops that are self pollinating.

Dr Suresh Kukroo, a retired Associate Professor of Sher-i-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences says that people are reluctant to raise bees for commercial purposes as they are not aware about its other by-products.

"Besides helping in pollination, the people should know they can develop businesses by making honey, wax and other products by rearing bees," says Kukroo.

The bee keepers say the business is not profitable and that is why more people are not attracted towards it.

"We do not get much profit from beekeeping. That's why lesser number of people are in this trade," says Suhail Ahmad, a beekeeper. "Because of cold winter and flower less season, we have to take these bee colonies outside the valley in winter. It incurs huge costs and also affects the bees". Suhail also blames the state government for lack of cooperation and help.

The officials, however, say that the government is trying every possible way to strengthen this industry.

Planning Officer at the Department Nazir Ahmad says the government provides subsidies to the farmers under schemes like Rashtriya Yojna (RKVY) and National Horticulture Mission to boost the

of providing equipments on subsidy, Under National Horticulture provided Rs 4 lakh subsidy for 500 bee colonies and Rs 4 Lakh subsidies to 500 hives,"

Published by The Indian Express on February 26, 2016

Krishi Vikas industry.

"In addition Mission we have Nazir says.

Officials say the department has also opened demonstration centres at every district to train people in beekeeping.





Omar Abdullah meeting delegations in Beerwah assembly constituency on Dec 18, 2015.

FILE PHOTO

Of Omar's 'Humble Pie' Politics, and 70 Visits to Beerwah

RIYAZ BHAT

After moving to hills in a fight to retain his assembly seat in last state elections, former CM and NC working president, Omar Abdullah, made a record visit to his constituency.

After union government announced Rs 32 crore grant for road construction in Beerwah, excited Omar said that he made his critics to "eat humble pie" and he would "make Beerwah constituency a model one across the state".

Omar said that at the time when he contested the 2014 assembly elections from Beerwah, he was targeted by his opponents, saying that he would never ever visit the people of the constituency till the next elections. "In just one year, I have done more than 70 tours of Beerwah. I know it, people and the problems they face every day. What I am striving is to mitigate their sufferings with utmost efforts. I have spent more than rupees 3 crore out of the CDF for the overall development of Beerwah. I would do more and will keep striving for the peoples' welfare," Omar said. The former chief minister maintained that now his critics have to eat their words as the people of Beerwah are witness to the fact that "they saw me every next day in middle of them".

"By choosing me as their candidate, they have done a great favour to me. I have resolved that I would return this great favour with best of my capacities and capabilities," Omar said. The union government had on Tuesday sanctioned Rs 32 crore for the maintenance of roads in Beerwah. "Omar Abdullah has spent more than Rs 3 crore for the public works as he has given five ambulances for Gondipora, PHC Narbal, PHC Magam, and PHE Poshkar. He has also provided 45 electric poles for 45 Halkas of Beerwah constituency. He spent Rs seventy Lakh for transformers in the area and much more like medical aid to people from modest background, Rs two crore for maintenance of streets," said Abdul Rashid, who works in NC working president's office.

Rashid informed that Omar used to visit Beerwah almost every week to meet the people to know their problems. Omar has established two offices in Beerwah and Magam where he meets public.

Published by Kashmir Life on February 10, 2016

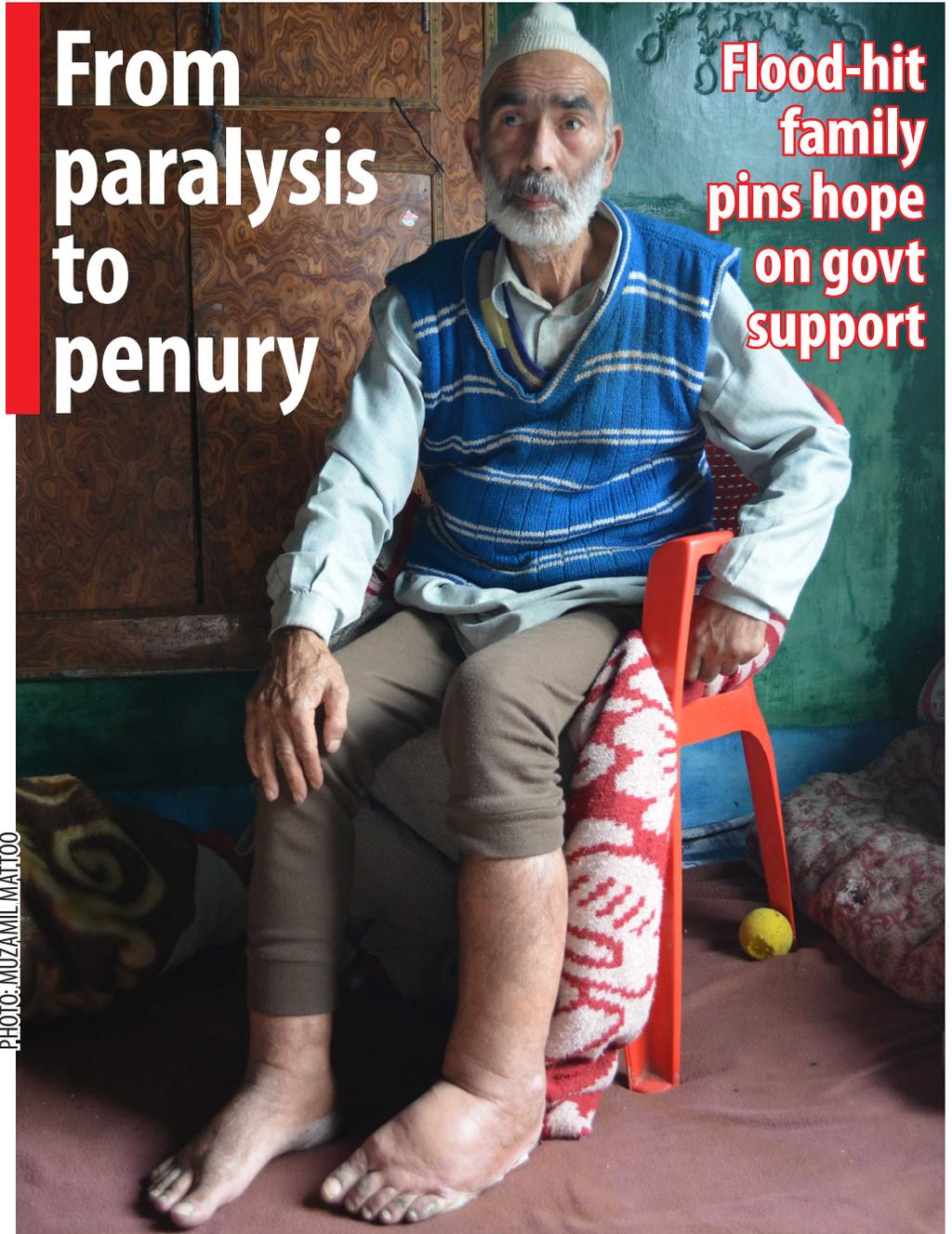


PHOTO: MUZAMIL MATTOO

From paralysis to penury

Flood-hit family pins hope on govt support

MUZAMIL MATTOO

Seventy-year-old Muhammad Shaban Bhat is a living example of the horror wreaked by last year's devastating floods. Shaban suffered from brain hemorrhage after the sudden entry of flood waters into his village rendering him paralytic.

On the intervening night of September 4 and 5, panic gripped Padgampora village of south Kashmir's Pulwama district as water gushed in. Shaban was sleeping in his room when he heard people crying for help. By the time he jumped out of the bed, water had already entered his house. Finding himself in water, he lost consciousness and was taken to the nearest mosque with the help of neighbours. "When he lost consciousness we called some local boys and with the help of my sons we took him to the nearby masjid which was on a higher ground," recalls Shaban's wife Jana.

After three days, when his health started deteriorating, Shaban was shifted to SMHS Hospital Srinagar where he was treated for walking paralysis.

"Doctors said he can recover if he gets proper treatment, but we cannot afford regular visits to the hospital. We have a monthly income of Rs 3000. We haven't received any relief from the government," says Jana.

"We had to take loan for his treatment but we cannot manage more. We don't know what to do," she adds.

The agricultural land which Shaban's family possesses was the primary source of income for the family of the eight. His son Tariq Ahmad, who was studying in class 12, left his studies to take care of his father and started looking after the land to support the family. "But unfortunately the 2015 floods again destroyed the crops," says Tariq.

The hapless Bhat family has pinned hope on financial assistance promised by the government. Many other families in the area continue to live in makeshift rooms. With the winter approaching, they are also eagerly awaiting government help.

As many as 300 people died in the September 2014 floods which ravaged large parts of Kashmir valley, sweeping away houses and cars and turning lush farmland into a muddy wasteland.

According to the official figures, apart from damage caused to 261361 structures, farm sector of 3.27 lakh hectares of agricultural land and 3.96 lakh hectares of horticulture land also suffered damage.

A year after the deluge, the flood victims feel hard done by the governments at the Centre and in the state, complaining that little has been done for their rehabilitation.

Published by Rising Kashmir on October 19, 2015



Shut dumping site or relocate us: Achen residents to Govt

People take
to streets to
protest
against SMC

MUZAMIL MATTOO

Residents of Achen Syedpora Eidgah on Saturday took to the streets to protest against Srinagar Municipal Corporation's "unscientific dumping" of the solid waste at the Achen dumping site.

The protesters who were demanding closure of the dumping site said the site has become a health hazard for the surrounding localities. Protesters burnt tyres and blocked the road for the vehicles carrying garbage to the site.

Ghulam Mohammed Syed, a local, said foul stink emanating from the dumping site is affecting health of residents living in surrounding areas, mainly the children.

"From past 23 years, SMC is dumping the waste in the area and we are suffering health because of it since," he said.

Mohammed Sidiq, another local, said SMC failed to resolve the issue in the area despite spending crores of rupees into the "failed projects".

"Before few years, SMC built a 90-foot dumping cells in the area but those cells are full now. We can't even breathe properly. Almost every family in the area is facing health issues," said Sidiq.

Locals claim they have themselves sent samples from the garbage dumping site for laboratory tests, which proved the site is dangerous not only for peoples' health but of ecology too.

"We have spent thousands of rupees and performed laboratory tests on waste samples which clearly stated that the samples have long term effects on the people living in the area," the locals said.

They said if the government is not willing to shift the dumping site, "why don't they relocate us by giving us alternate residential houses."

SMC Joint Commissioner Syed Qasim told Kashmir Reader that the corporation was charting out a plan to tackle the issue.

"Our team visited the spot and heard grievances of locals. We are discussing the issue and will soon come up with a proper plan to tackle the crisis," he said.

*Published by
Kashmir Reader on March 6, 2016*



Proposed bus stops nowhere to be seen

SAJID ALI

Despite collecting Rs 2 crore as fine from traffic violators last year, the state government has failed to ensure proper bus stops in the city, which has worsened the traffic congestion situation.

Srinagar, the state's summer capital, has a population of nearly 1.3 million. The city requires more than 300 bus stops but the absence of the same continues to be a cause of concern for locals, for whom travelling has become a difficult experience.

"The buses do not have proper stops here. They stop wherever they like and this causes traffic jams and wastes time. Nothing is being done to bring an end to it," a commuter said.

Earlier this month, Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, Asgar Hassan Samoon had said the work to build 10 new passenger sheds in city was going on. However, the locals blamed that the work was going on at a snail's pace and at a few places only.

The already constructed bus stops and bus bays remained out of service as authorities have failed to implement the regulations and have done little to create awareness among transporters. Also, the lack of maintenance has turned the existing bus stops into garbage dumps and parking spots, they alleged.

Senior Superintendent of Police, Traffic, Maqsood Zaman said the department collected a fine of Rs 2 crore from 1.25 lakh violators in 2015. It was working on construction of modern bus stops in the city to ensure traffic discipline.

"We are trying to get the bus stops constructed in collaboration with private entrepreneurs. We have also sent the proposal for the construction of 115 bus stops to the Road and Building Department. We have already constructed and renovated 29 new and modern bus stops in collaboration with Delhi Public School," he added.

Published by The Tribune on February 29, 2016

MUZAMIL MATTOO

An increasing preference to shop through online retail have added to the boom of e-commerce service providers in valley, but this growth is now telling on the health of delivery boys who carry these products, who are witnessing an increase in back and spine problems.

With an average travel of 30 to 40 kilometer on bikes, delivery boys say that bags on an average weigh above 30 kilograms and are to be carried for long periods, this does cause pain mostly in lower back.

Ishfaq Ahmad who has been employed with Ecom Express Logistics, a delivery service provider here for about a year says that for a customer shopping might have eased, but for the delivery boys health ailments are increasing.

“It is not an easy task to be a delivery boy, working six days a week with a bag that weighs up to 30-40kg and covering long distances that too in city traffic, does either create back ailments or aggravate them,” he said.

Adding that many boys also have frequent sore throats, get eye infections, but it is these back ailments that are worrying us the most.

Many of the delivery boys say that after losing hope on landing in government jobs, opting as delivery boys was a better choice.

One of delivery boys told Kashmir Reader that

many of the delivery boys are graduate and post-

Jibran Ahmad who also works as delivery boy, told Kashmir Reader that apart from salary, the company provides us with the fuel and phone expenses but for these health related issues there is no reimbursement.

“Many have opted out of this profession only because of these back ailments,” he said.

Jibran added that it is not only the bag we have to carry some of the customers do order products that do not even fit these bags are need to be carried alongside separately that add to problems while driving and can even cause accidents.

According to doctors regular bike riders do face the risk of back and spine ailments or suffer facet joint hypertrophy.

Dr Najeeb Drabu, orthopedic surgeon, JNLM Hospital Rainawari told Kashmir Reader that we do find such ailments setting

in bikers within in after the age of 40, but among delivery boys who carry heavy loads, that can be witnessed earlier.

“We still do not witness many cases as of now, but if they do not alter their mode of working the number patients from this profession will increase,” he added.

Published by Kashmir Reader on February 10, 2016

E-Commerce increasing back ailments among delivery boys



graduate within an 20 and 28 years, who spend eight to nine hours in the field and earn around Rs 8,000-10,000 per month.

Many logistic service providers companies told Kashmir Reader that there are 1500 youth employed as delivery boys with online product selling websites engaging them for delivery of products.

Traditional copper utensils moving out of Kashmiri kitchen

SHAH UZRAT

The use of exquisite and traditional copper utensils, which have been part of Kashmir's culture for a long time, is declining as it faces challenge from cheaper ceramic and modern cookware.

The artisans linked to the trade said the use of plain copper utensils had become obsolete and the sale recorded a considerable drop over the years.

“Since past few decades we are observing a decline in the sale of copperware, but the reduction has not been more than 15 per cent,” said Sheikh Muzaffer, a city-based trader, who has been associated with the selling of copperware for the last 20 years.

To overcome the dwindling sales of plain copper utensils the artisans are working on making their products more decorative.

In the contemporary times, people prefer decorative copperware for gift-



Kashmiri copper utensils on display at a shop in Srinagar. TRIBUNE PHOTO: AMIN WAR

ing purpose and use of plain copperware is becoming obsolete, said Muzaffer.

He said with the demand for machine-made utensils, which are cheaper in cost, was picking up and use of copperware for household purpose was on a decline.

With a dip in the demand, the skilled

artisans and craftsmen, who shape the decorative copper utensils, are now taking little interest in the work.

“Kashmiri handmade carving had a great reputation, but the local artisans are no longer interested in the trade, resulting in its decline,” Muzaffer said.

Imran, who owns a shop at Gonikhan market in the city, however, said the copperware remained relevant despite a downtick in its sales. “It represents the prestige. People enormously admire copperware gifts during marriages,” said Imran.

In the recent years, modern appliances and cutlery, which is cheaper in cost and lighter in weight, has taken over the space in a Kashmiri kitchen. “People do not prefer copperware because of its weight and also the price being so high,” said Mehraj-ud-Din, a local.

Introduction of wide range of glassware and porcelain utensils have also resulted in a decline in the use of copperware in family kitchens. “The demand for glassware is increasing day by day as copperware fails to compliment a modern kitchen,” said Arif Bashir, who runs a crockery shop at the Lal Chowk.

Published by The Tribune on January 9, 2016

SHAH UZRAT

Although winter is tightening its grip over Kashmir valley, the city's bookshops are witnessing a rush and an increased sale as book lovers are finding enough lazy hours to read novels, non-fiction works and other genres.

Among various books available at the stores, the preferred readings are fiction works of some prominent authors, including Paulo Coelho, Khali Hussani and Khalil Gibran, and non-fiction works related to Kashmir, several book sellers said.

"People largely prefer reading fiction. Winter has approached and novel reading can help them pass their time and also prove helpful in enhancing their reading skills," said Sheikh Shaheen, who owns a bookshop on Residency Road in the city.

She said mostly students and housewives were rushing to her shop and buying novels. "Many housewives visit the store and ask for books, which include both fiction as well as non-fiction. Since they have to remain indoors, reading novels can help them overcome the boredom," Shaheen said.

She said the reading habit in Kashmir was diverse, depending on qualification of shoppers and their taste. Shaheen said tourists also visited her store and showed interest in Kashmir's polity, culture and history.

Imtiyaz Ahmad, the owner of Password Bookstore, said there was almost a 50 per cent increase in sale of novels during winter months. "In summers, people, specifically students, purchase books that are recommended in their syllabi, otherwise novel buying is given more preference," he said.

Fayaz Ahmed, another bookseller, said they had a wide variety of books, ranging from syllabus based to novels, refer-

ences and encyclopedias.

"I have included every type of book in my store as people ask for different books, which range from references to novels and books that are part of their academics."

He said novels made a huge sale at his depot as the reading habits among people were changing with time. "Books of Paulo Coelho are being enormously purchased, because people, especially the youth, feel that he is one of the inspirational writer," he said.

Another bookseller at Residency Road said the demand for books related to civil services had grown enormously in recent years. Bookstores located in the Lal Chowk area

of the city are also selling a wide variety of

books.

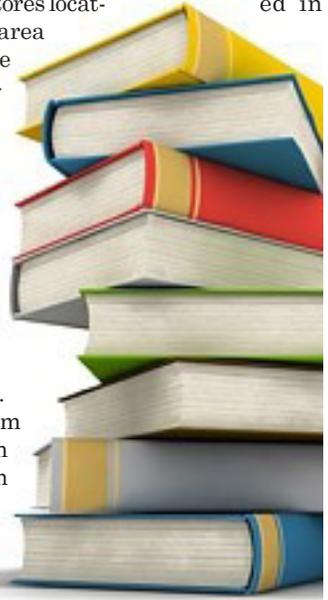
"I am very much interested in reading books related to my sub-

ject. I spend most of the time reading psychology, which I find very interesting," said Sabrina Bashir, a student.

Published by The Tribune on January 18, 2016

SALE of books goes up this winter

"I have included every type of book in my store as people ask for different books, which range from references to novels and books that are part of their academics"



AirAsia X starts direct New Delhi-Kuala Lumpur flights

SHAH MOHSIN

With the take-off of its maiden flight on Wednesday from Indira Gandhi International Airport, the AirAsia X started direct flights from New Delhi to Kuala Lumpur. The Asia Pacific bound airline group now provides India with better connectivity, low-fares and high-value service straight to the capital city of Malaysia.

AirAsia X has announced a promotional offer that provides all-in-fares from New Delhi to Kuala Lumpur from as low as Rs 6,790 one way for standard seats or

from Rs 29,990 one way for the award-winning Premium Flatbed seats.

The online booking for promotional fares stated today through their website airasia.com and new mobile app on iPhone and Android devices, and mobile site at mobile.airasia.com.

Benjamin Ismail, Chief Executive Officer of AirAsia X Berhad said, "We are excited to be here today, to celebrate the return of AirAsia X flights to New Delhi. We now have stronger foundation to be in this market, complementing the existing route network of our

affiliates AirAsia Berhad, Thai AirAsia and AirAsia India, in addition to the growing demand for connectivity between New Delhi and Kuala Lumpur."

Benjamin added, "In 2015, our affiliates Malaysia AirAsia and Thai AirAsia carried over 1 million guests in and out of India, and with AirAsia X's entry into this market, we can provide even more connectivity for our Indian guests to the rest of Asia and Australia through our extensive route network, especially through our Fly-Thru product."

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