



Football buffs decry Govt 'apathy'

Ishtiyak Malikzada

Maharaja Sports Club, one of the premier football clubs of Kashmir, has been grooming local players for the last over three decades. The club, however, complains of government "indifference" towards the promotion of the game.

The club was set up by a group of football enthusiasts in 1971 to promote professional football in the valley in view of the growing popularity of the game in Kashmir in 1970s. The club has representation of players from across Valley.

MSC has emerged victorious in numerous football tournaments held in the valley. Trophies and certificates in the club's Abi Guzar office stand testimony to its rich past. The club has so far trained almost 700 youngsters, many of whom went on to join the national clubs.

Along with its two sister clubs- Young Lal Chowk and Court Road Football Club- MSC has been training youngsters, both professionals and students, for the Super League for the last ten years. Most of these trainees have made it big by playing for Forest Department, J&K Bank, J&K Police and Food & Supplies Department.

The training session is held between 6:30 and 9 a.m. during which players undergo rigorous training.

"Discipline and dedication towards game is what the club demands from the players," said a young footballer, Prince.

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Nichhama residents demand reopening of lignite plant

We are working to start the plant again: Officials



Shabeena Ashraf

Nichhama, located 21 kms west of Handwara town, is rich in minerals, especially lignite. A lignite plant was set up here in 1983 by Department of Geology, Government of India. However, six years later in 1989 the plant was suddenly closed down, leaving the local workers jobless.

Twenty-years have passed, but the state government is yet to take concrete steps for reopening the plant though the officials of Department of Geology and Mining claim they have been working in this regard for the last four years.

The lignite plant is spread on 36 kms of land from which coal and kerosene were extracted. Lignite is found when six kilometres of soil is dug out while coal deposits are reached after further digging upto six kilometers. Nichama lignite is generally brown to dark brownish black in colour. It is comparatively soft, woody, friable and well foliated.

Mohammad Ramzan Mir, who worked as a clerk in the plant in 1983, said it was closed all of a sudden without informing the workers.

"Nearly 72 people worked there and they were paid Rs 560 to 900 per month at that time. The closure of the plant affected people of Nichhoma village badly as it was their main source of livelihood," Mir said.

According to Mir, "There were 12 machines and 18 compressors at the plant," which he alleges, "were later stolen and sold by some workers of the plant to dealers at Sopore."

"At Bunwader (a village near the plant) 45 huts, which were used by plant workers, were also burned down by unidentified men thereby worsening our problems," Mir said.

"I wrote an application to the geology department, but it was rejected on the basis that the plant is government run and we have no authority to write such an application," he added.

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Nichhama residents

People now use the land for agriculture purposes, but the natural resources lie unexplored underneath.

"Ministers came here many times with fake promises that they will start the plant again, but the promises were never fulfilled," said Ramzan.

Abdul Samad Mir, who worked as a chowkidar at the plant, used to earn Rs 560 as monthly wages. "After the plant was closed, my family suffered badly. I had no land of my own so I had to work for others. Two of my fellow workers, who were also poor like me and had joint families to feed, died after the plant was shut as it was their only source of income," said Samad.

Meanwhile, officials of Department Of Geology and Mining, Srinagar say they are working to revive the lignite plant.

"We are working on this project from the last four years to start the plant again. It will fetch lot of revenue for the state and the government is aware of it," said Nissar Ahmad, Coordinator Geology, Department Of Geology and Mining, Srinagar.

"We have talked to people whose land has lignite reserves. They are willing to cooperate with the government. This project will be beneficial for Kashmiri youth as it will provide jobs to them," Nissar said.

Football buffs decry Govt 'apathy'

"The club leaves no stone unturned in preparing us for professional football."

The club claims of catering to needs of players, but complains of lack of support from the government.

"We have been providing each and every facility to as many players as possible. We man-



age their daily requirements, but we are short of funds," said Secretary of MSC, Fayaz Ahmad Sofi.

Regarding the "poor policy" of the government, the executive manager of the club, Abdul Majeed Kakroo said, "Even in the 21st century, we are struggling to promote sports and I feel apprehensive about the future of the football in the valley. I fear it may fade away and die half-way."

"I love playing football, but lack of facilities here forces me to look for an alternative," said Prince, 22, who has been playing football for the last four years at MSC.

Muhammad Shafi Nari, a former international footballer from the valley, says besides the government "apathy", the game has also been witnessing indifference from the business houses.

"Government is doing least in terms of issuing funds for the promotion of the game. It is also disheartening to see that no one from big business houses and corporate sector is coming

forward with sponsorships and other help," Nari said.

Pertinently, there are presently almost 75 football clubs in the valley where in more than 1000 budding footballers are undergoing training.

The government provides annual compensation of Rs 190000 to the different football clubs in the state. The clubs, however, complain that the amount is not sufficient to meet their requirements in terms of infrastructure and

training.

"Despite many requests to Ministry of Youth Sports and Services by MSC, the administration is not paying attention to our needs," said Kakroo.

Talking of medical facilities available in the various stadiums of the valley, footballers criticise the administration for "turning a deaf ear on their grievances".

"See football is an injury prone game. No one knows what can happen while playing. There should be proper medical facilities in place for the players," said Sohail Ahmad, who claims to be a hardcore footie.

Sports analysts say the game can touch new heights in Kashmir if the government comes forward with a "healthy" sports policy.

"There is a dire need of sponsors and tie-ups with outside clubs besides latest practicing techniques and tools. Otherwise the game will continue to struggle to survive," said Sajad, sports editor with a local news daily.

Women take to agriculture for livelihood, passion

Zubair Mohammad Wani

Growing presence of women in the fields of Science and Arts may have earned contemporary times the title of Women's Era, but in Kashmir a significant women population still spends most of its time in agricultural fields.

For some women, it is their share of family venture, passion for some and an opportunity to earn money for some others. Still for some benevolent women, it is a chance to help others. One such example is Misra Begum of Bandipora, who has been doing agri-

cultural work for almost past two decades.

"Being a village woman, zamindari (agricultural work) is not new to me. Besides mundane housework, going to fields during agricultural seasons is part and parcel of my life", says 39-year-old Misra.

"Apart from the work in my own fields, I also help neighbors and relatives," says Misra, who lives in Onagam area of Bandipora.

Some women join this field more out of compulsion than choice. "My husband passed away in 2004. Since then I had to take charge of our fields," says Habli Bano, a woman farmer from Bandipora's

Ward No. 16.

"Right from planting of saplings to harvesting, I put in my all efforts," she says, adding "I also accompany other farmers and we work collectively."

For women like Fahmeeda Bano, agriculture is more of a passion.

"I did my matriculation in 1996 and got a job in Aanganwari as a helper in 2001, but my interest for agriculture never diminished," says Fahmeeda, who lives in Ganderbal district's Kulan area.

Before marriage, she says, farming had been her passion besides reading books.

"Now after marriage, apart from house and official work, I help my husband and other farmers in fields," she adds.

For some women farming fetches them livelihood. "Besides helping my husband in the fields, I also work, if paid, in agricultural fields of other villagers," says Raja Begum, a woman farmer from Kulan, Ganderbal.

In today's world where women are competing with men in almost every field, there are women who stick only to agricultural work whether due to their own interest or habit or for the purpose of earning their livelihood.

New exam policy on cards to curb copying

BOSE to set separate question papers for each student

Mohammad Imran Parray

In order to curb the menace of copying, Board of School Education has decided to set separate question papers for each candidate in the coming board examinations.

"In future the question papers will be different for every student so that there is no room left for copying, which has ruined our education system," BOSE chairman, Prof Sheikh Bashir Ahmad told MERC Times.

"It was after discussions between policymakers, civil society members, police authorities and

board authorities over the previous examination policy that we decided to make the change," Sheikh said.

He said the question papers would be set in different series with different questions which will curb copying internally as well as externally. "When question papers are set differently there are no chances of copying inside the exam centers nor will it leave any room for external copy trespass," the chairman said.

Asked whether framing separate question papers was feasible, Bashir said they were ready to take any steps to control the menace. "It

will take time to frame different question papers for each student, but we are ready to stop the menace anyhow. It is the best strategy to end copying."

Bashir said Article 144 would be implemented strictly outside the examination centers.

"Law and order will be maintained during examination. Whosoever is seen breaking the law would be booked," he said.

The chairman said BOSE has decided to form a squad of 700 people who would be looking at different exam centers. "The group will have

complete support of police officials and would be surveying the examinations," he said.

He, however, said the policy would need public support for its success. "Parents, civil society members and other conscious class people have to support us. The policy will fail if people don't cooperate with us," Bashir said.

He said miscreants who had made 10th class results public via Facebook illegally in 2010 were booked under cyber crime law. "Those who had declared the results before schedule would be seriously convicted," he said.

When begging goes rampant

Basit Lone

Begging as a phenomenon has assumed menacing proportions in Kashmir. It is now viewed as a job rather than an act of shame or compulsion. Every nook and corner of valley is filled with beggars.

"Scores of beggars, especially children, who are forced into begging, mob you each time you step out of a mosque after offering prayers or pass through a busy street," says Yasir Mir, a student.

In this modern era, people seem to ignore the shame associated with begging. Initially beggars may be a bit coy, but soon they begin to love this profession because of the ease with which they get money.

"Earlier, we used to see beggars in really poor conditions, but today one is surprised to find that burkha clad women who don't look really impoverished have also taken to begging," says Rouf, a resident of Nowgam.

"Sometimes these beggars then take to stealing and robbery. We often find things stolen when these beggars enter our houses for alms," he adds.

Begging in the valley has taken a new turn as beggars work in organized groups and have created a web.

"These people work in packs. They send children and adults for begging. Sometimes children are permanently disabled and used for begging," said Iqra, a student.

"Today most of the beggars behave like well trained actors who insist you give them money, or else, they may insult or curse you." She says they have to face the "menace" everyday on way to the university.

"The government should do something to eradicate this evil from the society."

Chindalora orchards reap fruits of tourism

Ashraf-ul-Hassan

Tamal and Pooja Roy are posing for camera in the backdrop of apple cherry and walnut trees. A few times they ask other tourists to take their pictures. The honeymoon couple, currently visiting the valley, is elated to see the orchards at Chindalora, Tangmarg, overlooking the villages.

The orchards of Chindalora have emerged as tourist destination with the owners charging the tourists (Rs 10 for adults and Rs 5 for children) for each visit.

Since the place falls on way to world famous resort of Gulmarg, many tourists now-a-days prefer take a break at Chindalora.

Two years back, Dr. Younis, a Unani doctor by profession, started exhibiting his garden to tourists who stopped at the spot to take a break. "Tourists used to come and take pictures in the orchards. Since sometimes they would pluck fruits, we used to incur unnecessary losses," says Younis.

On a friend's advice, Younis decided to charge the tourists for visiting his orchard and also opened a restaurant in front of it. The decision proved fruitful.

"We charge because we never pick our fruit. We want to show it, till it lasts. So our whole fruit goes waste," says Younis.

Meanwhile, the tourists sound satisfied visiting the Chindalora orchards. "I had never seen apple, cherry or walnut trees before. It is very nice. My kids are very excited about it," says Dr. D.K. Dey, a visitor from Kolkata.

Another tourist, Kalyan Roy from Mumbai



seconded Dey. "I had never seen apple or cherry trees before. These trees are very beautiful and they are well maintained. I am very happy to see these trees because you do not get chance to see them every day," says Roy.

Owing to the tourist rush, several shops and restaurants have also come up at the place.

Around 150 people, including caretakers, gardeners, watchman and guides, are part of the booming tourism at Chindalora.

"I was working at Sonamarg as a manager of a hotel. But since it was far from my home and I am the only male member and earning hand in my family so I choose to stay back," says Manzoor Ahmad of an adjoining village, who now works as a manager of a local orchard.

As the popularity of Chindalora is growing with each day, more and more people are setting up their stalls on the roadside. They sell garments, fruits, dry fruits and handicraft items.

"I was a daily wage labourer. Now I earn more than before," says Zahoor Ahmad, who sells garments and fruits.

A JOURNEY TO THE MOON LAND

Places You Cannot Miss While In Leh



Over the years, Leh has emerged as one of the choicest tourist destinations of the state. Hajira Bano takes us on a journey to the 'Land of Gompas' (land of monasteries)

Located at a hilltop in Changspa area of Leh, the white domed structure, Shanti Stupa, is quite popular with the tourists. It was constructed in 1985 as part of the international collaborative effort between Japan and Ladakh to commemorate 2500 years of Buddhism and to promote world peace. The structure houses relics of Buddha. The outside walls of stupa are sculpted depicting the life of Buddha.

"I like Shanti Stupa the most in Leh. It truly reflects the pure and untouched beauty of the land," says Shafqat, a student of Home Science of Kashmir University.

The Namgyal Palace (Leh Palace): People interested in the ancient history of Leh visit Namgyal Palace. Built by King Singay Namgyal in the 17th century, the palace has nine storeys. The palace is famous for the three-storey long statue of Buddha situated inside.

Thiksey Monastery: Thiksey Monastery is 600 years old and one of the largest monasteries in Ladakh. The wall paintings showcase some of the prominent religious figures, Tibetan calendar



'Pangong' is the largest and most popular lake. Situated in the northeast of Leh, Pangong lake is famous for its clear blue-blackish waters.

"Pangong is a very beautiful lake flanked by naked mountains," says Muzzaffar Khan, a visitor. "A visit to Pangong is refreshing."

The lake is 144 km long with half of it running to the other side of Indo-China border.

Besides Pangong, tourists also visit Tsomoriri lake (mountain lake) situated in the middle of elevated valley in Rupshu village. The twin lakes-Tsokar and Taisaphuk Tso are also popular with tourists.

Tsomoriri lake is also known for the black-necked Siberian cranes. The marshy patches in the periphery of the lake act as breeding ground for these migratory birds.

Besides migratory birds, wild asses (kyang), phya, yak, red fox and snow leopard are also found in the area.

While travelling towards Leh, visitors come across "Magnetic Hill". The hill gets its name from the magnetic phenomenon due which the ve-



and the 'Wheel of Life'.

Stok Museum: The museum has a vast collection of thang-kas, also known as "Tangka", which is a Tibetan silk painting with embroidery, usually depicting a Buddhist deity, famous scene, or mandala of some sort. The museum also houses collection of coins, precious stones, traditional clothing and ornaments from erstwhile Ladakhi Royal Family.

Hall of Fame:

Another museum 'Hall of Fame' is also popular among the tourists. Constructed and maintained by Indian army in memory of the soldiers who lost their lives in the Indo-Pak wars, the museum also houses weapons used during the 1999 Kargil war besides other things.

Masjid Shah-e-Hamdani: Fifteen kilometres from Leh town, a historic Mosque is situated in village Shey on the banks of Singay Khababs (local name for river Indus). Built by one of the greatest preachers of Islam Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (RA) it is the oldest mosque in Ladakh and has assumed significance of a shrine.

Pangong: Ladakh has four lakes of which

hicles slide up the hill even in neutral gear.

Those interested in adventure go for trekking to snow-capped mountains of village Stok and rafting down the Zaskar river. The popular rafting points are Phey to Nimo and Upshi to Kharu.

"Leh is an amazing place full of adventures. I will never forget the experience of rafting in Leh," says Shahid, a law student from Jammu University, who has been to Leh in 2009.

One can approach Leh from Srinagar and Manali. Leh is 434 kilometres from Srinagar and 485 kilometres from Manali.

"The best part of the trip was the journey to Leh by road. It was a wonderful experience," says Souzeina Mushtaq, who visited Leh in 2008.

"To absorb the beauty of Leh, one must travel by road so that the beautiful villages of Kargil don't go unnoticed, which otherwise are missed while travelling by air," she adds.

Leh has emerged as popular place for shooting movies. Several movies have been shot in the region with LoC Kargil, 3 Idiots, Lakshya, Dil Se and Tashan being the prominent ones.

Lack of mass awareness, official reluctance impedes RTI implementation in JK

Baseera Rafiquee

Two years after it was enacted in the state, the Right to Information Act has become a subject of debate with many RTI activists and legal experts accusing authorities of denying them information under the Act.

While the legal experts opine that the Act can ensure transparency and accountability in administration and governance, RTI activists assert that people are yet to reap its benefit due to denial of information by the different departments.

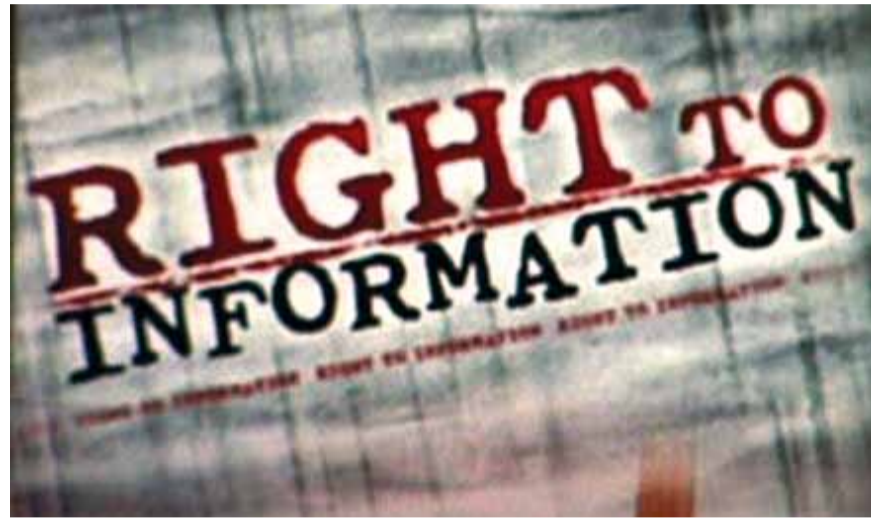
According to Dr Ayoub Dar, who teaches law at Kashmir University, the legal awareness about the law "can result in optimum public participation in governmental decision making and can refine our formation of opinion".

"RTI helps us in making sound and sensible judgements and above all makes government and its functionaries more accountable and responsible," he says.

Chief Information Commissioner, G R Sufi had recently asked PIOs (Public Information Officers) and APIOs (Assistant Public Information Officers) to conduct awareness camps to inform people about RTI so that people are able to avail the opportunities under the Act.

Experts have pointed out lack of awareness about RTI among people.

"RTI has recently been introduced



The Jammu and Kashmir RTI Act was enacted as well as implemented from 2009. According to the legislation every government and semi-government department, public undertaking, government company, statutory bodies, etc. have to designate PIOs (public information officers) and APIOs (Assistant public information officers) for rendering public information, besides having the State Information Commission as the final Appellate authority. RTI empowers common people to have access to information to secure:

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|---|
| • transparency in public life; |
| • accountability of public men; |
| • better planning based on free flow of credible information; |
| • to help in creating informed citizenry as a democratic process; |
| • ensuring the responsive behaviour of public authorities; |
| • and empowering common people to have access to information. |

in J&K, but it has not gained much familiarity among people," said Deputy Secretary, State Information Commission, Mushtaq Ahmad Wani.

As per the official website maintained by General Administration Department (GAD), more than 600 information providers are designated under RTI Act across the state.

Many organisations like Jammu and Kashmir Right to Information Movement are working for spreading information about the Act.

"Many people and NGOs, working for this cause, have started campaign against various social evils like corruption in public offices, red-tapism, favouritism and political vendetta through the use of RTI campaign," says Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat, chairman of JK RTI Movement.

He says more than 1000 RTI applications have been filed by his organisation alone. "But many departments and organizations conceal the information on one pretext or the other," he adds.

Seconding Bhat, former Deputy Inspector General of Police, A M Watali said RTI is a powerful instrument to get relevant information, "but one has to go from pillar to post to get appropriate information".

"Lot of expenses are incurred to get substantial information from the authorities because of high fee," he added.

Jehangir Chowk-Rambagh flyover

Residents, traders seek immediate rehabilitation

Abid Hafiz

As the work on Jehangir Chowk-Rambagh flyover is set to begin this month, the shopkeepers and godown owners complain that the government is asking them to vacate even when the shopping complex meant for their rehabilitation is yet to be completed.

According to officials, 366 shops and 82 houses are to be relocated from Jehangir Chowk-Rambagh stretch. The shopkeeper's association Hazuri Bagh has demanded their immediate rehabilitation.

"We are running our shops here for the last 40 years. We are wholly and solely dependent on our shops for our livelihood. We are not against the construction of the fly over or any other development, but the government should

formulate a people-friendly rehabilitation programme," said Mushtaq Ahmad Trambo, president of the association.

While speaking to MERC Times, Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Dr Asgar Samoon said, "Economic Reconstruction Agency is constructing two commercial complexes, one near Exhibition Grounds at Jehangir Chowk and another at Ram Bagh. The work on the complex at Jehangir Chowk has already started through JKPCC."

Samoon, who is also heading the rehabilitation programme, said in the first place the shops will be relocated in the commercial complex at the nearby site of erstwhile PDD office which was gutted in 2010.

"The work on the complex has already begun," he added.

Giving the details about the complex, the divisional commissioner said

it will have four floors and a semi-basement floor for parking of vehicles.

"Floor 1 and 2 will have shops and godowns for the displaced shopkeepers of the project as also for street vendors. Floors 3 and 4 are intended for government-offices that were previously housed in the gutted structure," Samoon said.

"We have made a full-fledged programme which will cater to most of the demands of the affected people," he added.

The other rehabilitation complex planned under the project is proposed at Rambagh. Srinagar Municipal Corporation will also rehabilitate 100 shopkeepers of Cheap/Kabadi market in a shopping complex being constructed by the municipal corporation.

Earlier, Samoon chaired the first meeting of the High Level Committee (HLC) constituted vide Govern-

ment Order No: 605-GAD of 2011 dated 25.5.2011 for implementation of Resettlement plans of J&K Economic Reconstruction Agency (ERA) Projects under Jammu and Kashmir Urban Sector Development Infrastructure Project (JKUSDIP).

"The implementation period of JKUSDIP is eight years. Tranche-I of this Loan, amounting to Rs 292 crores, became effective on 25th March, 2008 and is presently under execution," he said.

The other projects proposed under Tranche-2 of JKUSDIP include construction of Elevated Expressway Corridor (Flyover) from Jahangir Chowk to Rambagh-Natipora in Srinagar city. The project involves acquisition of land to the extent of around 40 Kanals and 60 structures, mostly commercial establishments.

Smoking picking up among girls?



Safienna Nabi

Hookah smoking among women folk of Kashmir, particularly the elderly ones, may not be as popular as it used to be. However, there has been a subsequent rise in the number of women cigarette smokers in the valley.

A survey conducted in 43 villages of Kashmir valley by an NGO, Voluntary Health Association revealed that 37.7 percent of people, comprising 27.4 percent of men and 10.23 of women are smokers in Kashmir valley.

The number of women smokers worldwide is projected to almost triple over the next generation from the current 200 million to more than 500 million. The biggest rise in female smoking is projected to be in less developed countries.

Some experts believe that many educated young women perceive smoking as a symbol of liberation from traditional gender roles. Peer pressure and advertising, they say, encourage even educated women to smoke.

Young girls, especially college going girls, are believed to be more prone to smoking when they consider it to be part of fashion or a trend worth following. "I started smoking following the trend. My friends use to smoke so I began to follow them. I want to quit smoking, but I am not able to do so as I have become addicted to it," said 18-year-old Bushra (name changed).

"I was suffering from mental stress and one day when I switched over to smoking I felt relaxed," said 15-year-old student, wishing not to be named.

Noted psychiatrist, Dr Arshid Hussein said the young girls may get addicted to smoking considering it as an experiment worth trying.

He believes in the process of adapting to modern times, youngsters, including girls, may ignore their moral values. Dr Arshad believes it must a matter of concern.

"It is not mental depression or a disorder that can be cured. If it is happening, we should be concerned about it, curb it at the beginning or else it will be too late," he said.

Unsafe Sumbal-Nesbal bridge risks pedestrians' lives

Mohammad Imran Parray

Despite a signboard of precaution to prevent any untoward incident, people still cross the Old Sumbal-Nesbal bridge, which has long been declared dangerous for pedestrians.

An R&B official said the bridge could collapse anytime. "The bridge has no guarantee from our side, it can collapse anytime," he said on the condition of anonymity.

The official said the people still use the bridge even after they put a signboard of precaution on its either side. "They cross the bridge ignoring the orders," he said, adding that they could have used another bridge.

"There is another bridge here but they don't use it as it is very

far from the locality," he said.

Meanwhile, the local residents said there was no other alternative in place for the old bridge. "From the very beginning I have been crossing this bridge.

use the new bridge, he said it was too far for convenience. "The new bridge is three kms from our locality. It is impossible for us to approach that bridge," he said.

Amin said the old Sumbal Nesbal bridge was almost two centuries old and was later banned for public use 30 years back.

"People have been using this bridge for a long time now. Authorities banned it by declaring the bridge unsafe," he said.

People said the absence of an alternative bridge in the locality was the main reason for the old bridge crossing. "When we don't have an alternate bridge, how can we cross the river?" questioned a local,

Ghulam Mohammad.

The absence of a new bridge in the locality, according to people of Sumbal, has put local people at risk.



As there is no other alternative to cross to the other side, we are forced to use it," said a local shopkeeper, Mohammad Amin Shah.

Asked whether or not they

WDC organizes mass awareness camp at Rafiabad

Rizwan Geelani

In a bid to educate women in the locality about the empowerment schemes launched by the government for promotion of their economic independence, State Women's Development Corporation organized a mass awareness camp at Watergam, Rafiabad on July 11.

The day-long programme was presided over by Divisional Manager WDC, Showkat Ahmed Rather.

Speaking on the occasion, Rather briefed the local women about the various entrepreneurship schemes meant for them.

"Skilled women can have a sustainable livelihood only when they find a proper channel and platform."

Rather said there has been substantial change in the past years with women taking higher positions at both local and national levels.

"Women have shown their capability to lead and write their own destination."

Drawing parallels with the developed societies, he said there is hardly any job left which women cannot perform.

"The innate capability which women have been showing is a clear indication that they can work shoulder to shoulder with men in every field."

He said government has earmarked on Rs. 20 crore project 'Empowering Skilled Young Women' for the current fiscal to help prospective women entrepreneurs to venture into business and other income generating activities. "We wish to see women folk emerging as potential stake holders in economic development of the state."

Hundreds of women of Watergam and adjacent villages converged at the camp to listen to the speeches of corporation functionaries. The officials of Social Welfare, Health and Education departments also participated in the programme highlighting welfare schemes of their respective departments.

Rich rose water tradition breathing its last

Faisal Rafiq

Step inside the shop of Abdul Aziz Kozgar at Fateh Kadal in old city and you will be greeted by aroma of rose water coming from antique glassware, decanters and flasks arranged neatly on the wooden shelves of the dark and dingy room.

Aziz learned the craft of making rosewater from his father at the age of 17. Kozgars are the only family in the valley practicing the art of making rose water and other herbal syrups manually. Some 400 years ago, Kozgar's forefathers came from Central Asia and settled in Kashmir. They set up a shop at Fateh Kadal.

According to Aziz, his ancestors started production of rose water on a large scale on the orders of Mir Mohammad Hamadani, the son of revered Islamic preacher, Mir Syed Ali Hamadani (RA). The rose water was used to be sprinkled on people who assembled in shrines and Mosques, gradually becoming an integral part of such gatherings.

"Some 400 years ago our ances-

tor Syed Mohammad Nooristani accompanied Mir Muhammad Hamadani to the valley. He knew the art of making rose water manually and initially showed his devotion to the Sufi preacher (Mir Muhammad Hamadani) by sprinkling rose water on the multitudes that gathered

ling through the mass of coils are condensed and distilled," says Aziz, adding that pure rose water is the distilled water of roses.

"It is usually made by stream distillation, and it smells heavenly and tastes delicious."

If concentrated rose water is re-

pares some syrups like tshandan arq, kaah zabaan and arqineelofar, which are considered to be effective medications for stomach and kidney related ailments.

While he narrates the rich background of rose water and its applications, Aziz is not too sure about the future of the art.

"A few decades ago, there used to be large scale of production of rose water and other products. Rose water was sold in all parts of the valley, but now they prefer allopathic treatment which has affected the rose water production," he says.

"People want fast results where as our system of treatment aims at removing the root cause of the ailments so it takes more time."

There are some other factors also responsible for the decline of rose water tradition as Aziz says,

"In the past pure Kashmiri roses were used in making rose water, but since other rose varieties were introduced into the state, it started to dilute the quality."

"This art is going to die. I run this business to uphold the legacy which is fading fast."



to hear his sermons," says Aziz.

The process of making rose water, he says, does not involve any complex mechanism.

"The process is very simple rose petals and other herbs are boiled in a cauldron, and the vapors travel-

quired the process is repeated. The rose water can be added to tea, coffee, and sherbets. It is known as an effective body cooler.

"The rose water can be applied topically for skin diseases too."

Besides rose water, Aziz pre-

pared some syrups like tshandan arq, kaah zabaan and arqineelofar, which are considered to be effective medications for stomach and kidney related ailments.

Lack of funds hits City Vet Dispensary

Huda Ul Nisa

Government Veterinary Dispensary Nowhatta is facing shortage of medicines due to lack of funds. Besides, a single person holds two positions- Block Veterinary Officer and Assistant Surgeon.

The dispensary has a large catchment area. Seven sub-units of Srinagar city (known as Insemination Centre Departments or ICDs) come under the dispensary.

The other dispensary, located in Rainawari, caters to the outskirts making Nowhatta dispensary as the only one serving the city.

Block Veterinary Officer, Dr Syed Anwar Andrabi accuses the government of ignoring animal husbandry.

"The animal husbandry sector has always been ignored by the Government. And same is the case with this dispensary," he said.

Andrabi complains of lack of medicines at the

dispensary.

"I get the medicines but I have to distribute them among the seven sub-units and I always have to face the shortage. Then I have to write market prescription posing inconvenience to people," he said.

Andrabi blames lack of funds from the government for the shortage.

"Budget is very low and medicines are very costly. It is all upto the government; if they increase the budget, there will be no shortage of medicines."

A Mini Laboratory for disease diagnosis has been constructed but for the lack of staff it is yet to start functioning, he said.

"In 1990s the dispensary was gutted after which a new building was constructed, but the damaged building is still in ruins. We have asked the government for funds to build outdoor veterinary hospital at the site of the damaged building," said Dr Andrabi.

The government, Andrabi said, should take measures for the development of the sector.

According to him, there was 10 per cent increase in poultry production when the government lowered the tax by one rupee in 2009.

"Since then 50 per cent poultry was produced and 50 per cent was imported from outside state. Now we produce 60 poultry and only 40 poultry is imported. This increase is by lowering the tax only by one rupee," he said.

Despite lack of funds and manpower, Andrabi said, the dispensary is trying to implement different schemes.

"Milk potential has been increased by administering Germplasma to the local cows. We also make sure that vaccination is given to the animals to avoid outbreak of any disease."

The dispensary, he said, also helps interested people in marketing poultry products.

"Poultry products marketing was introduced in the dispensary for the locals where the live bird is sold at lower rate as compared to the market rate," he said.

PROFILE

Scripting success with hard work, perseverance



Dr Shakil Ahmed Romshoo is one of the prominent scientists of the valley. Coming from a multidisciplinary academic and professional background which includes Geo-informatics, Remote Sensing and Hydrology, Dr Romshoo has gained international repute. Currently he heads Department of Geology, Geophysics and Geoinformatics, University of Kashmir, Srinagar. Dr Romshoo shares his experiences with Souzeina Mushtaq

Born on April 13, 1964 in Bijbehara, Dr Romshoo did his schooling from Higher Secondary School, Bijbehara and Intermediate Science from Govt. Degree College, Anantnag.

Right from his childhood, he was a bright student. "I always used to stand first in my class." He got his first scholarship while in 7th standard on the basis of his good academic performance. "The amount was Rs 700. It was a huge amount at the time when the pocket money used to be one rupee or 0.50 paisa. After that I never sought money from my parents for studies as I continued to get scholarships."

Dr Romshoo wanted to become a doctor and he was so sure of his selection that he did not join any col-

lege. "I had taken success for granted. I thought I was born with a silver spoon in mouth and thus can make it easily to MBBS."

To his dismay, he was not selected. "It was a shock for me. Though I performed well, but I was dropped by the interview board."

Next year he applied for the course in Forestry. There was only one vacancy in the state and the number of applicants was 700.

"This time luck favored me. Unlike others, my interview session lasted for half an hour and at the end of the day, everybody was so impressed by my demonstration that I was selected."

He got bachelor's degree from Birsa Agricultural University, Ranchi in Land Use Planning and Forestry. He was the first Position holder among 35 students and a Gold Medalist with outstanding Merit Scholarship.

Dr Romshoo wanted to join Forest Department as Range Officer. But again destiny had some other plans for him and he joined the newly inaugurated Department of Environment and Remote Sensing as Scientific Assistant under the able guidance of Dr M A Kawoosa, the then director of the department.

"In my tenure of seven years in that department, I learnt many things from him. To be independent always was the best thing that I learnt from him and I carry this gift with me even today."

But he longed to complete his post graduation. He wrote to many embassies expressing his desire to complete his degree outside and he got two offers, one from UK and another from Bangkok. So without giving a second thought, Dr Romshoo quit his job and joined Department of Space Technology, Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Bangkok, Thailand for the completion of his masters in Remote Sensing & GIS. He stood second among 30 students and was awarded NORAD (Norway) Scholarship. He was also offered an International Scholarship by Asian Development Bank to complete his Ph.D in Hydrology and Remote Sensing from the prestigious Institute of Industrial Sciences, Department of Civil Engineering, University of To-

kyo, Japan.

"During my academic/research career spanning over almost twenty years, I visited 32 countries including USA, Canada, Argentina, Britain, Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, Australia, China, Indonesia, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran in connection with the presentation of my research findings, conferences/meetings, field campaigns, short trainings/assignments and research collaborations.

"Travelling to these countries exposed me to the new world and gave me insight."

During the 10-year period of working outside India, Dr Romshoo worked as scientist in Institute of Industrial Sciences (IIS), University of Tokyo, Japan and in Earth Observation Research Centre (EORC), Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) Tokyo. Back home, he has worked in The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi as a scientist.

Ask why he left his job outside when he was earning comparatively more; he cites his closeness to his parents as the reason.

"I have always been close to my parents. When I came to know that my mother was ill, I had to pack my bag and come back without a second thought. Moreover, I was satisfied with the money earned."

He has to his credit three international, five national and two University awards for his research work. His 'Best Paper Award' researches include Influence of Surface and Vegetation Characteristics on C-band Radar Measurements for Soil Moisture Content, Geo-informatic Tools for Comparative Studies of Pollution Analysis in two Micro-watersheds, Satellite Remote Sensing for Determining the Changes in the Glacier Geometry and Dynamics, Estimation of Forest Biomass in Temperate Forests Using Airborne Multi-frequency Polarimetric SAR Data.

He has also been conferred 'Best Teacher' award and a certificate of Merit from University of Kashmir for his outstanding contribution in teaching and research.

Dr Romshoo is also the life member of Fellow IEEE Transactions on

Geosciences and Remote Sensing, Japan Society of Civil Engineers, Japan Association of Hydrologists and Hydraulic Engineers, Indian Society of Geomatics (ISG) and Indian Society of Remote Sensing (ISRS) and President of the Indian Society of Geomatics (ISG).

He also holds the membership of scientific and policy making bodies like UN-SPIDER- working group on Knowledge Management, Technology Transfer and Capacity Building for Asia, Chairman of the Kashmir Chapter of the Indian Society of Geomatics, Asian Development Bank Expert on Clean Energy Development, Member State Disaster Management Committee, Member State Level Nodal Agency, Member Wullar Lake Conservation Committee, Member of a number of Project Formulation and Review Committees at the ISRO and a special invitee to the Amarnath Shrine Board Sub-committee on Environmental Protection.

He is also reviewer/editor of the national/international journals which include Remote Sensing of Environment (Elsevier publication), IGRASS (IEEE Society on Geosciences and Remote Sensing), SENSORS Journal (MDPI, Switzerland), Journal of Spatial Hydrology, International Journal of Geography and Regional Planning (Academic Journals), International Journal of Forestry and Horticulture (Academic Journals), Indian Journal of Remote Sensing (Indian society of Remote Sensing), Indian Journal of Geomatics (Indian Society of Geomatics) and Journal of Environment and Development (CORD, UK).

For his research work on developing Geo-informatics techniques for pollution studies of Kashmir lakes, Japanese government awarded 6th Kasumiguara International Prize to Dr Romshoo.

"The research technique developed quantifies and pinpoints sources of pollution from the catchment areas of the lakes/wetlands. The award carries a Citation and a cash reward of ₹250,000. The prize was announced the 13th International Lake Conference organized by International Lakes Environment Foundation, at Wuhan, China from 1-5 November, 2009."

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