

MERCTIMES



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Welcome to India's dirtiest capital city



Rakib Altaf

“Our heads hang in shame,” says Showkat Ahmed while looking at a huge heap of garbage near his house in Srinagar. “We knew our city was dirty. But knowing that we are among the dirtiest is a big shock.”

A Union Urban Development Ministry report in May ranked Srinagar as the fourth dirtiest among 423 cities of the country. The first three are non-capital cities making Srinagar the dirtiest capital city in the country. The survey was carried out scoring cities on a basis of 100 points and Srinagar has managed to obtain only 17.179. This city figures in the Red-Zone of the list indicating a need for “immediate remedial measures”.

In most parts of Srinagar city roadside dustbins placed by Srinagar Municipal Corporation are filled with garbage and generally go unattended for a long time. In

the downtown city, human waste flows into open sewers outside houses emanating foul smell.

Interestingly this is the case even at places where tourists are expected to be in huge numbers.

Abid Khan, who owns a shop at polo view market, says the garbage shed nearby is affecting their sales. “The government gets only roads and footpaths painted. Kashmir is a

tourist destination and they should have given a thought to the increas-

ing garbage on roads.”

A Union Urban Development Ministry report in May ranked Srinagar as the fourth dirtiest among 423 cities of the country. The first three are non-capital cities making Srinagar the dirtiest capital city in the country.

A dustbin continues to remain outside a school near the Dal Lake. The students say it is hard for them to concentrate on their studies. “The smell irritates us. We cannot sit in the class nor can we go out and play”, says Rifat, a student of eighth grade. “If it goes on like this for some more time, we will all fall sick. I don’t understand why the government hasn’t done anything yet”.

According to the report, the rankings were awarded with an aim to “recognize and reward improvements made by

a city towards becoming totally clean and healthy and achieving 100 per cent sanitation”.

The report drew a sharp reaction from the state’s chief minister, Omar Abdullah, who said every effort would be taken to remove this “stain on the city’s image”.

Deputy Chief Minister, Tara Chand, who is also the state urban development minister, says his government is paying for the insensitive attitude of the previous governments towards maintaining the city.

“The report has been published in view of poor drainage system, poor drinking water quality and a lot of other things”, he adds.

“Sewers of the city have been polluting our water bodies for so many years.”

Srinagar Municipal Corporation has been functioning without a Mayor due to delay in the municipal elections this year. Many people now believe outsourcing of garbage collection to be the only way of cleaning up the city.

“The municipality people should resign and the government should privatize this department. Only then something can happen,” says Asif Shah, a student.

But Tara Chand says the government has already begun to work things out. “We are trying to increase the manpower and get more equipment. Thirteen wards will be outsourced for door-to-door garbage collection,” he adds.

Director of the state’s Economic Reconstruction Agency (ERA), Vinod Sharma, says a land-fill site of 50 acres at Achin in Srinagar is being prepared for scientific waste management which will later be commissioned to the Srinagar Municipal Department. He says garbage dumping cells at the site will

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be filled with waste collected from

the whole of city and then rolled and layered with soil.

“A cell will be enough for containing 350 metric tons of garbage. Then we will cover it with grass and it will be converted into a park.”

This project, Sharma says, will help keep the city clean for at least fifteen years. “We are making fifteen cells and each cell will last for about one year”.

Jagmohan Singh, a social worker, says Kashmir was clean till 20 years back till militancy broke out in the valley.

“People from villages mi-

grated in huge numbers to the city out of fear. Then the whole system collapsed due to the situation. There could be no expansion and no cleaning of the drains and sewers. This led to overflowed sewers and huge heaps of unattended garbage. Thus the city got dirtier day by day,” he says.

Former Director General of Tourism, Mohammed Ashraf says the indifference of people towards government property and public places has played a major role in dirtying the city.

“I say in Kashmir we have become like islands. We only know

what is happening in our homes. The rest we don't care about. It is unfortunate that in Kashmir people think the government has to do everything.”

But the report has evoked a common feeling of regret among people who are now willing to offer their bit. Tariq Andrabi, a local shopkeeper, says it is high time that people make efforts to set things right. “This is an insult to us and the government. We want to make Kashmir a paradise again and we are ready to cooperate with them,” he says.

The deputy chief minister says the government has plans to launch

a public awareness campaign in the coming days. Various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other social organization will be roped in for spreading awareness around the city in different schools and colleges.

But Altaf Hussain, a senior journalist, says there is also a need for change in the work culture in Kashmir. “You see the schools in the city start at 8 am. But sweepers from the municipality come to work much after that. This report should have been a shock treatment for the government. But alas! They seem to be too insensitive to it.”

Shehr-e-Khas: From Cynosure to Eyesore



Bilal Ahmad

Once a cynosure, the old city or Shehr-e-Khas has now turned into an eyesore. It is a tale of neglect in which its glorious past has been lost and only ugliness prevails.

Roads with potholes, stinky drains, packs of stray dogs, heaps of garbage are some of the features of present day Shehr-e-Khas.

“In my childhood, this part of the city was properly maintained and attracted everybody's attraction,” says octogenarian Mohammad Ashraf Baig.

Many people blame the official apathy and wrong policies of successive governments for the plight of old city.

According to social activist Arshid Mehraj, “The administration go into slumber when it comes to this downtrodden part of Srinagar. From the last 20 years, only handful of developmental projects have been taken up in this area. It seems that other parts of the state are prospering at the cost of old city.”

“Recently, Srinagar city was adjudged fourth dirtiest city

of India. The city owes this title to Shehr-e-Khas which is getting dirtier with the day,” says a shopkeeper Nisar Handoo.

Some people attribute the government “indifference” towards old city to “political vendetta”.

Some residents believe that since they hold a particular ideology which goes against the mainstream political parties, they are being deliberately ignored by the ruling governments. Zameer Pandit, a local youth, says “Though some developmental projects are initiated in parts of old city, they are not implemented due to continuous disturbances in this part of the city.”

Whatever the reasons be, Shehr-e-Khas is losing identity and is a cause of major concern for people who have been a witness to its rich past.



Private tuition centres rule the roost

Waseem Ahad

Private tuition centres in the valley have been witnessing exponential rise over the years. Many factors are held responsible for the trend including decline in the education standard of government institutes, increasing competition and disturbed academic calendar due to frequent shutdowns.

Competition

Yasir A Malik, a class 12 non-medical student, goes to private coaching centre as he wants to score above 75 per cent in Mathematics. He said he paid Rs 4000 to complete the Mathematics syllabus.

Parents also seem hell-bent to send their children to private tuitions because they expect them to score more and more marks.

“There is enormous competition in the world and I want my children to excel. I think private coaching is crucial for that,” says Ghulam Muhammad, a businessman.

Decline in teaching standard

Prof Abdul Khaliq, lecturer at SP Higher Secondary, runs a tuition centre at Hyderpora. According to him, a roll of 150 to 200 students in one class of the school is very difficult for teachers to manage. Khaliq blamed lack of staff and infrastructure in the government schools for their “mismanagement”.

However, many students contest the opinion that the roll of students has anything to do with the proper functioning of schools.

Tariq A Parray, a student, says, “In the private coaching centre where we study there are 100 students taking class in one shift while in the school the roll of our class is only 85.”

Many people believe that the government school and college teachers prefer to use their experience and teaching skills at their private tuition centres. The centres are able to attract large number of students including those studying in private schools. The preoccupation with the centres is so much that both teachers as well as students arrive at schools late in the morning and leave early in the evening. This way working in the schools gets affected. Besides, the students rely on private centres for completion of their syllabus.

Frequent hartals and holidays



only add to this problem. While the schools are shut, most private tuition centres remain open.

Indifferent Teachers:

Mufeed Ahmad, who takes private coaching for MBBS from NIET Parraypora, blames the teachers for decline in education standards at schools and subsequent rise of private tuition centres.

“The teachers of government schools do not show interest in teaching at the schools, while they are more particular about their private coaching centres,” he says.

“They (teachers) are more regular and punctual in the private centres than in the schools,” Mufeed says, lamenting, “No one is going to hold them accountable.”

Ironically, despite spending more money on their studies in private schools the students are largely seen going for private tuitions. It seems the matter of money for them.

Polarization:

Many people fear that the increased dependency of students on private coaching has led to polarization of education. Students from well-off families go to reputed private schools as well as attend private tuition classes while as relatively poor families just manage to

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send their wards to government schools and cannot afford to arrange private tuition for them.

“Upper class families manage to send their children to private schools and private coaching centres as well while as students from poor families have neither of these advantages. This creates an educational imbalance in the society,”

says Jahangir Malla, a Medical student of class 12.

Prof Khaliq is of the view that government should conduct district or tehsil-wise tuition centres during winter vacations for poor students where they can be offered free coaching.

Dr Parvaiz Ahmed, who teaches at Kashmir University, says tuitions are important for those who want to go for competitive exams, but cautioned that it might cause over-dependence.

“The factors for increasing number of students taking private tuition centres may be many ranging from need, compulsion, obsession or popular trend- but one thing is for sure that the centres use it to their advantage,” says Farhat, a varsity student.

Earlier this year, the government decided to frame rules for regulation of private tuition centres. However, people remain apprehensive of their implementation and effectiveness to check commercialisation of education.

The move has received mixed response from people.

“Rules are only good if they are implemented. There are so many regulations for private schools which are only on papers and are never implemented. How can we expect that the new rules will be implemented?” questions Farhat.

Kawadara Hakh cultivation on decline

Farmers blame increased population, rampant constructions



Shah Waseem

Hakh or Kale is a commonly used green leafy vegetable in the valley with Kawadara Hakh being one of the most popular varieties. Once found across vast stretches of agricultural land in Kawadara area of Srinagar, from which it derives its name, its cultivation has decreased over the years.

Increased population, rampant constructions and reluctance of younger generation of farmer families to rely on vegetable cultivation for earning their livelihood are viewed as main factors for the decrease in hakh production.

Muhammad Farooq supports his family by cultivating Kale. He attributes the conversion of Kawadara hakh farms for construction purposes to the escalating cost of land elsewhere.

“Cost of land has increased manifold. We can’t afford to buy land in other parts of city so under compulsion constructions are coming up on this land,” he says.

While Farooq says that earning from Kale cultivation is enough for sustenance of the farmer families, Ghulam Muhammad Makroo, who also makes a living by cultivating hakh, says it is no longer sufficient to meet daily expenses.

Besides low profit, Makroo says the new generation is also averse to hard work needed in its cultivation.

“There is a sort of inferiority complex attached with this work,” he says.

A thought seconded by another farmer Ghulam Nabi.

“The new generation of farmers is looking for other alternatives for earning their livelihood. Some of them even sell their land which is then mostly used for constructing houses. All this leads to less production of hakh,” says Nabi.

Farman Malik, who works on environmental issues, holds unplanned urbanization responsible for less production of Kale in Srinagar.

“Unplanned urbanization in Srinagar and other adjoining areas is the main factor respon-

ble for less production of Kale,” Malik said.

According to him, due to unplanned construction of roads, natural channels of water have been blocked. Besides, low precipitation due to global warming has also resulted in depletion of water table in Valley especially in Srinagar which also contributes to less production of hakh.

“Moreover, rampant constructions in Srinagar stop the active capillary movement on ground which is very much essential for the growth and development of hakh,” adds Malik.

Construction of tall buildings, he says, also reduces photo-period of farm land under Kale cultivation “as the shadow of the buildings fall on the vegetable beds”.

To compensate for the loss of land, Malik says, “We can adopt the technique employed in Israel and Brazil where large plastic tubs are kept on roofs and filled with soil and little pipe is placed up to base of tub for air circulation in the soil. This can compensate the shrinking of space and reduction of photo-period.”

As per statistics 38 per cent of valley’s population is associated with agriculture and allied sectors. Experts believe encouraging Kale cultivation and adoption of new methods and techniques will reduce the dependence of valley on food imports at least by three months per year as on average every household in Kashmir consumes kale twice a week.

Experts say government must step in and encourage kale farmers by granting subsidies which can also help in developing it as an industry.

But Kale farmers in Srinagar allege government apathy.

“No subsidy is given to us as is given to village farmers. Government doesn’t pay any attention towards Kale farmers. Few years back our entire crop was rotten due to bacterial and fungal disease. We went to SKUAST (Sheri-Kashmir University of Agriculture Sciences and Technology) but no one turned up and no survey was done. They only draw fat salaries for research but do no substantial work,” laments Farooq.

Official vegetable of Kashmir!

“Hakh ti Bati” (kale and plain cooked rice) thus goes the Kashmiri phrase for a common man’s livelihood. Kale or Collard, a green leafy vegetable found in abundance in Kashmir is used throughout the year usually and also occasionally in Wazwan, traditional Kashmiri feast served on marriages. Interestingly on famous social networking site Facebook there is a community by the name of ‘Hakh’ which is dedicated to the vegetable. The community has even termed Hakh as ‘Official Vegetable of Kashmir’. Its members are Kashmiris living in different parts of the world.

Though in Kashmir there are different varieties but Kale of Kawadara popularly known as Kawadara Hakh stands out from the rest in taste. It is mainly cultivated in Kawadara, a downtown locality in Srinagar, and thus its name.

According to Abdul Aziz, who has been carrying his family tradition of Kale cultivation from past 60 years, “Here the land is more suitable for its cultivation.”

Ghulam Muhammad Makroo, a resident of Kawadara, adds, “Being a traditional vegetable of Kawadara we have learnt the art from our ancestors and the kind of toil we put in is matchless.”

Before sowing the seeds of Kale, Makroo says the soil is well prepared.

“Leaves in the bud are harvested by pinching in early spring when the dormant buds sprout and give out tender leaves. 35 to 40-day-old seedlings as well as mature plants are pulled out along with roots. When the extending stem bears alternate leaves in quick succession during on-season, older leaves are harvested periodically. Before the autumn season, the apical portion of stem is removed along with the whorled leaves,” Makroo said.

Farman Malik, who works on environmental issues, says few decades back Kashmiri women especially housewives used to grow Kale in backyards of their houses and used to consume it in raw form while chopping it before cooking.

“This was the reason why pregnant women of that time were having least iron deficiency as compared to modern times. Now presently gynecologists prescribe Folic Acid and other Iron preparation to pregnant women right from the first trimester,” says Farman.

Bad times for HMT

Company in losses, faces closure;
Employees resent VRS

Rouf Ahmad Dar

“Jis factory ko khooon se seencha woh factory hamari hai.”

These lines written in red paint on the main entrance of HMT Chinar Watches Limited greets you indicating the anger of employees as the closure of this public sector undertaking looms large.

While walking inside the factory it gives a look of a deserted alien land having a huge assemblage of obsolete machines and defunct workshops. The closure of this factory would deprive thousands of people, directly or indirectly linked with it, of their bread and butter.

HISTORY

The idea of establishing an industry was first conceived in 1971 by former chief minister G M Sadiq as the state was industrially very backward due to absence of a major public sector industry. After a long thought process, HMT 3 Watch Factory (sister concern HMT Watch Factory 1&2) was set up as the climate here was suitable for such industry which itself was eco-friendly.

In 1975 the HMT Watch Factory was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister of India Indira Gandhi in the regime of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. The initial assembling capacity of mechanical (spring winding) watches of the factory was near about 300000 watches per year and the number of employees was 600-700 which was increased slowly and the number reached to 1200 employees.

The production increased upto 50000 watches per year by the end of 1980s. The work was done in three shifts (A: 7am-2pm, General=9am-5pm, B: 3pm-11pm) according to the choice and convenience of the workers. The wrist watches manufactured here included popular brands Janata, Janata Delux, Pilot, Kohinoor and others having a price range of Rs 400-1500. They were exported to Oman, Germany, Maldives and Sri Lanka besides marketing through 24 outlets spread through India and one located at Karan Nagar, Srinagar.

DOWNFALL

The downfall of the industry started in 1990 when the General

Manager of the HMT Watches Ltd Srinagar H L Khera was kidnapped and killed. As a result, Kashmiri Pandits, who constituted about 80 per cent of officers, migrated to Jammu lending a severe blow to the company.

COMPETITION

Besides, during Rajiv Gandhi's regime government gave license to private companies like Titan, Allwyn, Timex, Lober and Gemini to manufacture watches and the government also lifted ban on import of foreign watches. In the face of a stiff competition the company could not compete with private players and imported watches mainly from Switzerland. Moreover, the trend of transition from mechanical to quartz and electronic watches also virtually pushed the company to backfoot.

Taking cognizance of the problems faced by the company the management in 2004 started importing modules of Quartz watches from Japan where as the remaining components were made by the company itself. The hybrid product thus formed was named as HMT Quartz.

Despite producing Quartz watches the company could not regain the profit. The magnitude of losses the company has suffered over the years can be gauged from the fact that the Central Excise Duty paid to the government has reduced from Rs 10 lakhs per month in 1980s to just about Rs 1900 per month this time.

WORKERS QUIT

Upto 2002 the company was a public enterprise but it was soon handed over the status of a subsidiary company and the name was eventually changed to HMT Chinar Watches Limited. By the end of 2004 the company management started to pressurise the employees to go for VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme). Fearing that they may be denied the wages, many employees quit the job. The number of employees reduced to just 140. This eventually had a negative impact on the production of the company which fell to about 10 per cent of the total installed capacity.

'ENFORCED' VRS

The Department of Heavy Industries (DIH) Government of India has informed the employees that they will not get their wages after June 30, 2010 and only before that if anybody goes for VRS shall be liable to be paid the pay for 1.5 times the time remaining in the retirement otherwise he or she will not get a single penny from the company.

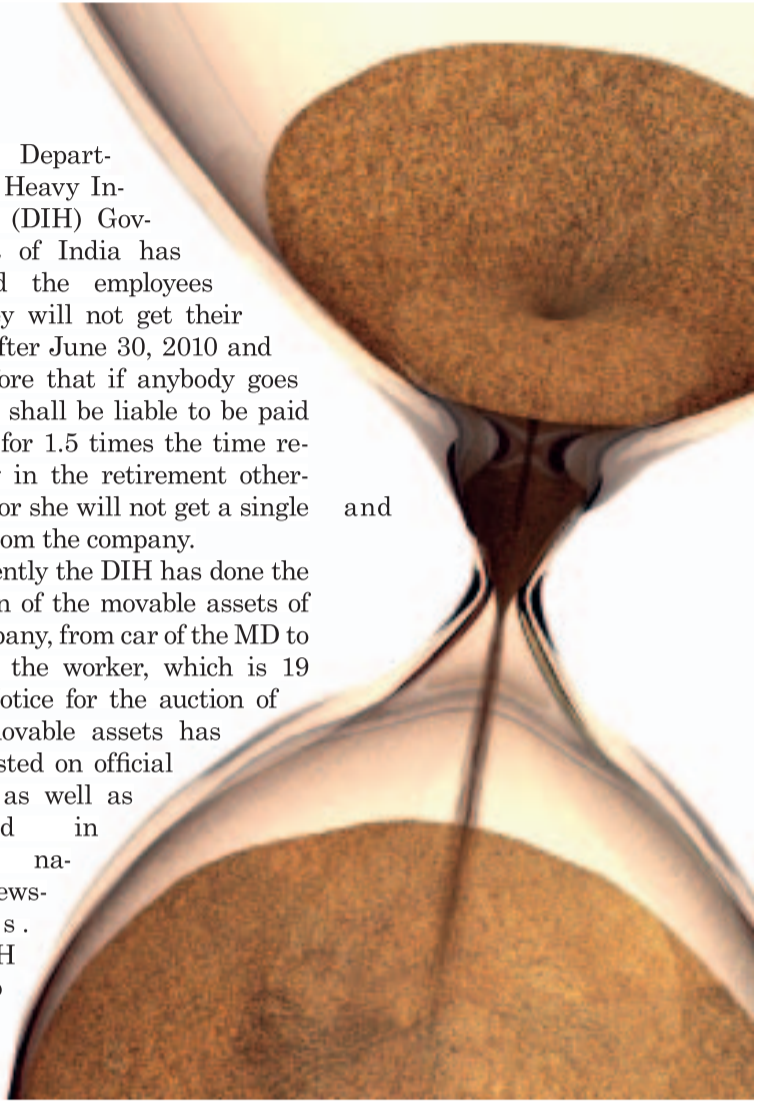
Recently the DIH has done the valuation of the movable assets of the company, from car of the MD to chair of the worker, which is 19 crore. Notice for the auction of these movable assets has been posted on official website as well as published in leading national newspapers. The DIH has also evacuated Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) last

month and replaced them with Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Presently the production of the company is 0 per cent and the technical staff is totally idle as the company does not have the money to import the modules of Quartz watches from Japan.

EMPLOYEES ANGRY

The decision of the government to close the factory has infuriated the employees and some of them are suffering from anxiety and depression. Many of them fear that they might have to sell their houses or land to pay the loans they had taken from the banks for the marriage of their daughters or the construction of houses while some of them might have to call back their children studying in professional colleges as they would not be able to pay their fees anymore.

One of the senior officials on the conditions of anonymity told MERC Times that HMT Chinar Srinagar comes on fourth position in terms of losses incurred after HMT Bangalore, HMT Tumker



HMT Ranibagh but due to some “hidden agenda” only HMT Chinar is being made the “scapegoat”. He said there might be many persons eyeing the valuable 50 acres of factory land.

“If our company is being closed it will send a wrong signal outside Kashmir which is not conducive for public or private investment here,” the official says.

“We had lot of expectations from Prime Minister's recent visit to the valley that he might announce some package for us, but he didn't even utter a word of sympathy for us. We had approached the state as well as central government in the past but nobody paid attention to our pathetic condition. That is why we are now in danger of losing our bread and butter,” he adds.

A A Hussaini, Personal Secretary to Assistant General Manager Production and Assets Management says, “Government seems in no mood to revive this company so I am opting for VRS. This is a better option for me because I am nearing my retirement age.”

Narbal junction: favourite spot for sweetcorn lovers

Rohi Jehan

The Narbal intersection on Srinagar-Baramulla Highway is known for the roadside sweetcorn stalls. Tourists usually halt here to buy corn before proceeding towards the world famous resort of Gulmarg. Locals also relish the sweetcorn sold here.

The vendors try their best to woo the costumers. Many of them could be seen convincing the commuters or tourists sitting inside the vehicles.

Talking to this reporter, a vendor, Irfan, said, "We work from 7 am to 9 pm and we get much exhausted. We can't even sleep in the night due to the irritation caused in the eyes by the smoke while preparing the sweetcorn during the day. Yet next day we have to start our work again."

The business season for the corn vendors is April to December.

About the income, another vendor, Bashir Ahmad said, "Our



average income is Rs 1000 per day per group and each group consists of four to five persons."

"Here there are about 100 persons in 20 groups of vendors," he added.

A visitor from Delhi, Neelu Sharma was buying sweet corns for herself and her family.

"It does not taste as good as in Delhi, but we eat it to satiate the hunger," she said.

Another visitor from Himachal Pradesh said, "We have our own corn fields and they are much tastier than this."

A vendor, Mohammad Akbar said, "These sweet corns are from Punjab and they are less tasty as compared to Kashmiri sweet corns."

To add to the taste, the vendors sprinkle salt and lemon on the corns.

Vendors say their main customers are the visitors though Kashmiris also do not lag behind and often take them raw and bake at their homes.

Timber smuggling goes unchecked in Rafiabad



Muhammad Rafi Dar

Timber smuggling is going on unchecked Rafiabad forest range. Locals allege nexus between smuggling mafia and some of the forest officials in the area.

The local residents say despite the deployment of forest guard personnel and forest check posts to

monitor any illegal mobilization of forest products, the smuggling is going on unabated.

"The forest officials are working hand in hand with them (smugglers) and they brief them when to operate and carry out their activities," alleged Ghulam Hassan Wani, a local resident.

"Some forest guards even re-

WE NEED AN OVER HAUL OF THE FOREST DEPARTMENT. WE LACK ADEQUATE MAN POWER AND FACILITIES." "CORRUPTION CAN'T BE RULED OUT BUT WE NEED SUPPORT FROM LOCAL PEOPLE TO PERFORM OUR DUTY AND TO SPREAD AWARENESS REGARDING FOREST PROTECTION: FOREST RANGE OFFICER RAFIABAD,

ceive money as commission from these smugglers in lieu of their help," he added.

The timber is smuggled out of the forests on horses and then supplied to different areas. The horsemen say though they know it is illegal but poor economic conditions force them to do it.

"We know it is illegal but we are poor people and government doesn't care for us so we earn our living by turning to nature," said Abdul Rashid, a horseman.

Forest Range Officer Rafiabad, Mohammad Ayoub said, "We need an over haul of the department. We lack adequate man power and facilities."

He didn't rule out possibility of corruption and links between smugglers and forest protection personnel.

"Corruption can't be ruled out but we need support from local people to perform our duty and to spread awareness regarding forest protection," Ayoub said.

He added that lack of security also hinder smooth functioning of forest protection personnel.

From dream to disappointment

He always dreamt of becoming a professional athlete but lack of proper training and uncertain future meant that he had to sacrifice his ambition. Though he works in media, his heart continues to beat for sports.

Rifat Abdullah ended up working as a correspondent for a private news channel E TV though he always aspired for becoming a professional athlete

Rifat never missed any athletic meet. He represented his school, college and then university in various competitions winning many titles. Besides his enthusiasm, he was also encouraged when he won his first inter-district athletic championship. He went on to represent J&K in various national-level athletic competitions. He wanted to carve his career in long-distance racing. It had become goal of his life.

Despite his skills and hard work Rifat couldn't become a professional athlete. He blames the "wrong policies and step-motherly treatment" by the authorities for the wastage of his talent.

Besides official apathy, he also terms job insecurity as a major factor behind his decision to give up his dream of becoming an athlete.

"Even now I want to go for NIS coaching camp, but the only thing that pulls me back is that there is no future in sports here," he says.

Rifat shares his dream and disappointments with *MERC Times* reporter, **Mansoor Altaf**.

THE STATE SPORTS COUNCIL AND OTHER ASSOCIATIONS ARE JUST ORGANIZING EVENTS. THEY ARE NOT MAKING ANY EFFORT TO ENCOURAGE SPORTS PERSONS. THERE IS NO PROPERLY TRAINED COACH AVAILABLE WITH THEM.

Why did you quit athletics even though you were so passionate about it?

I always wished to become an athlete. It was the only aim of my life, but some unfavourable factors forced me to abandon the idea of becoming an athlete. When I used to participate in any event, I was never praised for my work. Most of all, the indifference of the government towards athletics led me to part ways with my ambition. Due to their negligence, I lost all my hope and gave up my dream.

Do you think the sports scenario is suffering in our state?

Of course. We do not have any sports policy. Our state has no major achievement in any sport. Our football team has never qualified for the national games. No one from our state has won any title in athletics at national level. The funds provided for sports development are being misused. Sports were never recognized as part of academics here. In other states, athletics are among the major sports, but in our state this is not so. Due to government negligence major sports disciplines like martial arts are slowly dying.

Can we say Sports council and various other associ-



Rifat Abdullah

here other than the official apathy. We have an edge over other states in respect of climatic conditions. We are acclimatized to high altitude and can sustain running longer distances than our counterparts from other states.

6. People are gradually realizing the value of sports. Do you expect things to change for better?

Yes, things have to change with time.

But by that time dreams of countless talented athletes are shattered. We cannot afford to wait for long if we have to see the players of valley representing the state at an international level.

7. What are your main regrets?

I have only one regret in my life that I couldn't become an athlete and that too with no fault of mine. I was very much dedicated and hard working, but still wasn't able to fulfill my dream of becoming the first professional athlete of the valley.

8. What would you suggest to improve the sports scenario of J&K state?

First thing is that sports should be taken seriously at every level. The main problem is sale of certificates in minor games which should be stopped and sports quota in appointment processes should also be stopped once for all. This way the sports are not being taken seriously by the players. With regard to the sports agencies, they should appoint SAI (Sports Authority of India) coaches for local athletes. They should also depute their already appointed coaches and trainers for refresher courses. We cannot expect to hold any national event here because of poor infrastructural facilities. We should try to build and renovate the existing grounds on modern lines.

ations are not playing their role properly?

The State Sports Council and other associations are just organizing events. They are not making any effort to encourage sports persons. There is no properly trained coach available with them. No one is professionally qualified there. They organize events just to draw funds from the government.

5. Can we blame any other factor for the miserable condition of sports in our state?

We cannot blame any other thing for the bad condition of sports



A distant view of Kargil Town after crossing Drass Sector



Serpentine roads of lower Zoji La pass with Baltal below



Seventh century rock cut statue of Budha at Sankoo, Kargil



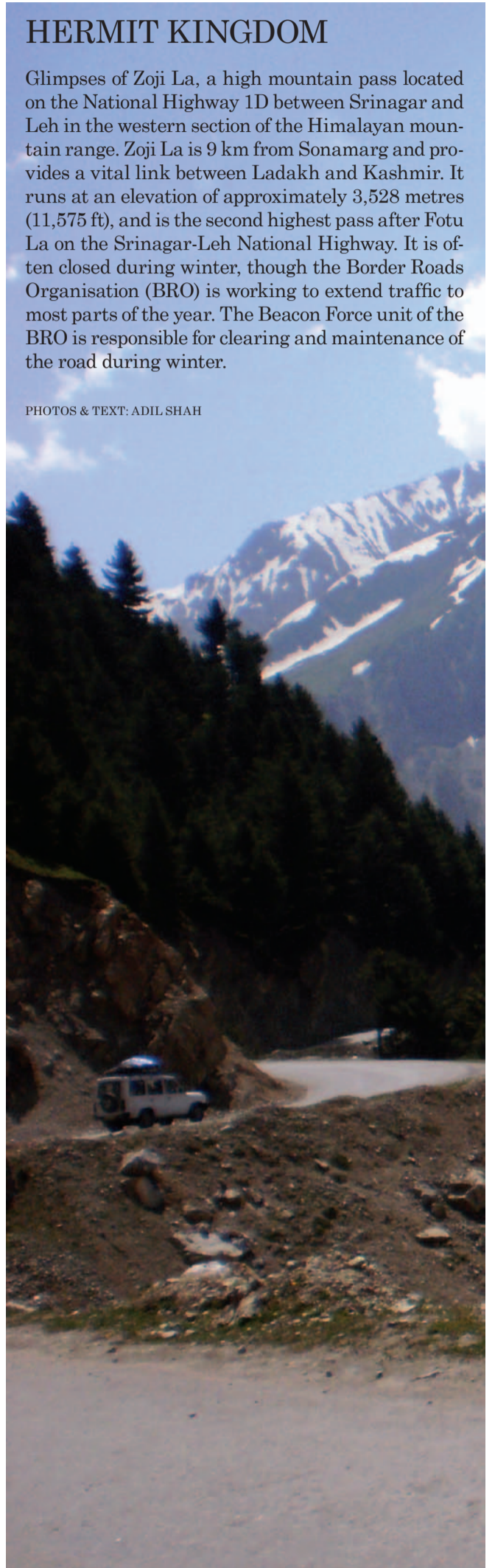
Road leading to Zoji La pass near Baltal



A sign board in Drass Sector near LoC



One of the coldest inhabited places in Drass sector



HERMIT KINGDOM

Glimpses of Zoji La, a high mountain pass located on the National Highway 1D between Srinagar and Leh in the western section of the Himalayan mountain range. Zoji La is 9 km from Sonamarg and provides a vital link between Ladakh and Kashmir. It runs at an elevation of approximately 3,528 metres (11,575 ft), and is the second highest pass after Fotu La on the Srinagar-Leh National Highway. It is often closed during winter, though the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) is working to extend traffic to most parts of the year. The Beacon Force unit of the BRO is responsible for clearing and maintenance of the road during winter.

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