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MERC TIMES

MASSIVE
JOB CUTS IN
KASHMIR

See P3



LAYOFFS

FLOODS COST RS 1565 CR TO KASHMIR HORTICULTURE

JK govt mulls relief package for fruit growers



● **Yusra Khan**

Horticulture sector considered the mainstay of Kashmir economy has incurred an estimated Rs 1565 crore loss due to recent floods in Kashmir.

The Horticulture department has submitted a preliminary report to Divisional Commissioner Kashmir and Secretary Horticulture saying that the horticulture sector in Kashmir has suffered a loss of Rs 1565 crore.

Director Horticulture, P K Sharma confirmed that the department has submitted an assessment report to the state government. "We have submitted the report wherein the post and pre-harvesting losses to the horticulture sector have been estimated at Rs 1565 crore," he said.

Sharma said that it is a preliminary report which needs to be vetted by other agencies like the Revenue department in order to work out rehabilitation packages for affected farmers.

A senior official of the department said that Horticulture Minister, Raman Bhalla had called a meeting of horticulture department which was attended by various fruit grower's and dealer's associations in which measures and means for rehabilitation were discussed.

"The fruit growers are demanding that state government should waive off their loans. However, the state government is mulling a package for horticulture sector which will include reduction in interest rates on loans already taken by growers under Kisan Credit Card scheme," he said.

Government might also announce moratorium of two-years on repayment of loans by the farmers. "The government may offer soft-loans to farmers for re-starting their businesses. The soft-loans will be given at the minimum possible rates probably at 2 to 4 per cent," he said, adding that the government was awaiting assessment report from Horticulture department in order to take any further steps.

Reacting to the rehabilitation process, President New Parimpora Fruit Mandi Association, Bashir Ahmad said that the government should come up with comprehensive scheme for horticulture in order to revive the sector.

"Reducing interest rates on KCC loans won't help as not many growers have taken loans under the scheme," Bashir told Merc Times.

As per the fruit growers, apple production has badly affected due to inclement weather earlier in the year, but now the rains and flood have proved to be the final nail in its coffin. From South to North Kashmir orchards have been washed-off by the floods.

Orchards in South Kashmir and several areas in North Kashmir like Tangmarg, Pattan, Sangrama, and orchards surrounding Wular lake like Zaingeer Rafiabad, Tarsoo, were inundated by floodwater which has not only damaged the crops but also wiped out the trees.

Last year the apple export was recorded at Rs 4500 crore, however, this year as per the dealers the export figure will hardly touch Rs 1000 crore.

SONAWARI STILL PARTIALLY INUNDATED

● **Afshan Rashid**

Post floods, Sumbal Sonawari area of district Bandipora is slowly returning to normalcy. However, the main source of livelihood, farming and animal rearing, still remains badly affected.

The crops in the area have been fully destroyed. The paddy fields that were about to harvest before floods resemble a murky lake now. The fodder of animals has also been washed away.

"All my land is still partially under water, the crops have been damaged, nothing is left in our fields", said Mohammed Afzal, a resident of Sumbal.

Many people in the village have sold off their cattle because there is no fodder to feed them and in many other cases the flood has washed away their shelters.

"I had to sell off my two cows because all my crops were destroyed and I can't afford to buy fodder", said, Ghulam Ahmad, a 60 year old farmer.

The Agriculture Department, in its survey report to the government, has put the damage to the crops and fodder at staggering Rs 3,675 crores. This loss excludes the damage suffered by the farmers on account of soil erosion, which the authorities say would cost another Rs 453 crores.

"Apples worth lakhs of rupees of my orchard are floating in water", added Afzal.

The loss caused by the floods cannot be fully compensated as the magnitude of destruction is high. Even as the Agriculture Department in its report to the government has recommended compensation to the affected farmers under State Disaster Relief Fund (SDRF), however the amount recommended is too meagre to compensate the actual losses suffered by the farmers.

D.C Bandipora, Shah Faisal said, "We are preparing the estimate of loss to the crops, once the process is complete, people will be compensated accordingly."

KASHMIR UNIVERSITY HOSTS WORKSHOP ON MICRO TEACHING

● **Gazanfar**

equipped teacher.

In a bid to make would be teachers more effective in the classroom, University of Kashmir's Department Of Education has organized seven day long workshop on micro teaching.

On the inaugural day Dean Department of Education Prof. Mehmood Ahmed apprised all the participants about the characteristics of a fully

Mohammad Amin Coordinator of B. Ed Program formally welcomed all the participants and hoped that this workshop will benefit would be teachers in many ways. 190 teacher trainers from whole Kashmir valley are participating in the workshop. Manzoor Ahmed Rather Assistant Professor in the Department of Education coordinated the inaugural function.

Milestone **Achieved**

KU GIVES ENGINEERING COLLEGE TO KASHMIR

'Making every possible effort to be competitive with rest of the engineering colleges of country: Prof. Bhat

● **Nazir Gillo / Nisar Dharma**

Achieving a major feat, the University of Kashmir has made operational the newly established Kashmir University Engineering College (KUEC) at Zakura campus at a distance of about 800 metres from the main campus Hazratbal.

It is now the only government engineering college in Kashmir region after the conversion of Regional Engineering College into National Institute of technology in 2003. Previously, the entire Kashmir division had only one private engineering college, SSM College of Engineering and Technology, with a limited intake capacity.

Inaugurated on November 12 by the Vice Chancellor Prof Khurshid Andrabi, KUEC at present has an intake capacity of 183 students. It offers undergraduate engineering courses in Electrical, Mechanical, and Electronics & Communication streams. The admissions are provided on the basis of candidates' Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) and 10+2 score.

New buildings are being constructed to have more space for departments and hostels. Satisfied with the way things have progressed so far, the students feel the need for a dedicated bus service, a canteen, and upgraded laboratories.

"The college can be better with all these facilities," a first semester student said.

The Dean of the college Prof G M Bhat praised the efforts of the former Vice Chancellors in reaching "this milestone".

"The entire curriculum was meticulously drafted after consulting various experts in the field of engineering," he said.

"We do need to have permanent faculty to run the smoothly. Other improvements may include continuous electricity supply and frequent workshops. I am sure that the University administration would wholeheartedly support the institution and provide everything that is necessary," he said, promising to start a shuttle service between the main and the Zakura campuses for immediate relief to students.

Prof Bhat said the varsity will make every possible effort to be competitive with rest of the engineering colleges within or outside the state.

The idea of having a government engineering college seems to have public acceptance as can be guessed from the interest parents are displaying.

DEVASTATING FLOODS LEND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY TO VALLEY YOUTHS

● **Marouf Gazi**

The damage caused to thousands of vehicles by the devastating September floods is proving to be a source of employment for amateur mechanics in the Kashmir Valley.

The rush of damaged cars is forcing the established garages to hire unprofessional or semi-professional mechanics for quick repair and delivery of the vehicles. And in the process, a number of youths with some knowledge about vehicle repair are able to find easy employment.

"The rush (of damaged vehicles) compelled me not only to extend my work hours but also to hire three more people for assistance," Manzoor Ahmad, who runs a repair shop at Batmaloo yard here, said. "I even hired people who are new to the profession because I do require men for less technical work."

Ajaz Ahmed is one among the men hired by Manzoor after the floods.

He said: "I have a family to support, and this is the best business for me as of now. There are so many vehicles that I can experiment on to learn car repairing. One day I may be able to have my own garage."

Reportedly, the floods damaged about 15,000 vehicles in the valley. The major service centers such as Jamkash Vehicleleads and Peaks Auto are flooded with damaged vehicles including cars and load carriers.

Maruti Suzuki has temporar-

ily deployed nearly 700 technicians, including 400 from outside, to speed up the work. The reputed companies like Hyundai have started SMS service to help their customers in getting the vehicles repaired without any hassle.

Yet, the customers have to wait for months to get their vehicles back.

Ashfaq, a resident of Alochi Bagh here, said, "My car's Engine Control Module (ECM) is to be changed. It has been in the service center for a month, but they are yet to repair it. I even stopped calling them now."

For the people, the situation is turning grimmer with the early onset of winter.

"Travelling in cars is not a luxury anymore; it's a necessity, especially in the harsh winters. With so many people working on vehicles, I hope we get them back before the first snowfall," said Shaista, who is now bound to travel in local buses.

The situation is leading people towards the local mechanics who are thus receiving an unusual rush of customers. But not everyone is happy with the kind of the service offered at the local garages.

"My car seemed fine after the repair, but after some days the engine didn't start. There are some mechanics who don't even know what they are doing. They have taken the advantage of this unfortunate situation," Zahoor Ahmed, who had taken his Alto K10 to a local mechanic for repair, said.

KU HAS 150 SPECIALLY ABLED STUDENTS ON ROLL

● **Aaqib Makdoomi**

With the increasing rate of accidents and uneven situations, the population of specially abled persons in the valley has taken a huge toll from last couple of decades. Official figures reveal that the population of specially abled people in the state is near about 3% of the total population.

A data available with the University of Kashmir Special cell Department of students welfare says that over 150 specially abled students are on roll with the institution. The data says that such students are enrolled in under graduate, post graduate and various professional courses.

The University of Kashmir opened a Special cell for specially abled students in 2009 to suffice the specially abled students of the institution. The university has kept the special reservations for such students in admission, examination and other academic activities. The data says that the university offers 3% reservation in the total admission quota for the specially abled students.

"So far 1000 specially abled students completed their degrees from the institution, since the inception of the special cell for them in the campus," says Shaheel Mohammad Coordinator Special cell. He adds that, "Once such students get enrolled here, our cell offers them scholarships and fellowships from state and from national level institutions as well."

Shaheel says that, "we facilitate such stu-

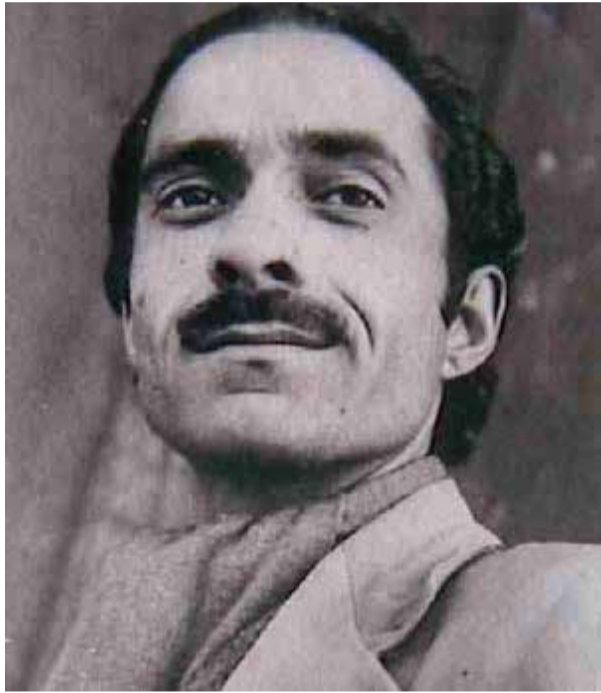
dents even after completing their degree with career planning and guidance."

He further says that, "such students are exempted from the examination fee and they are bestowed special reservations at the examination level like extra time or helper who assists the student in writing the exam."

An official of the university said that, "special arrangements for such students have been made in Allama Iqbal Library as well."

Among 150 specially abled students, 8 are visually impaired. Shahnawaz Samoon a visually impaired student of Department of Urdu, who hails from Gurez, says that the university is supporting them in all best ways but modern technological facilities are not available in university.

KASHMIR'S LITERARY ICON AMIN KAMIL PASSES AWAY



● **Irfan Mehraj**

A distinguished Kashmiri poet and short story writer, Amin Kamil, passed away Thursday morning in Jammu. He was 90.

Kamil is credited for putting the Kashmiri poetry, particularly Ghazals, and short stories on a new trajectory with his unique style of writing which blends irony, humour, social commentary and politics.

He also employed the same method in his poems which made him a popular poet.

Kamil was a recipient of many awards including the Sahitya Academy Award in 1961 for his book of poems, *Laveh Te Preveh*.

He has won Jammu & Kashmir Cultural Academy award, Robes of Honor from many prestigious organisations, International Irfan Foundation Award and Kashmir University's Lifetime Achievement award.

Kamil also received Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award in India.

Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages published a special issue of its literary magazine, *Sheeraza*, on Amin Kamil's life and works which was released in Srinagar in a function in the summer of 2011.

Kamil was also known as a scholar of high calibre. He was a literary critic and wrote reams of literary criticism on Kashmiri poets and language.

Kamil began his literary career in Kashmiri in 1953, leaving behind his flirtation with Urdu poetry.

Within no time, he was shaping and enriching the changing literary scene along with his contemporaries including Dina Nath Nadim, Rehman Rahi, Akhtar Mohiuddin, Ali Mohammed Lone and others.

Kamil's versatility and virtuosity exhibited in various literary forms, coupled with his characteristically native voice made him an outstanding literary figure in Kashmir.

His critically edited collection of Sufi poetry (*Sufi Shair*, 3 vols., 1964-65) remains a definitive text which has been widely acclaimed. He has also edited the collected verse of Nund Reshi, a 10th century sufi poet, and that of Habba Khatun, an 18th century love poet.

Kamil has also written a foreword to the first volume of Abdul Ahad Azad's three volume literary history of Kashmir, regarded as a seminal text in Kashmiri language and literature.

Kamil was born in 1924 in a small village named Kapran Shopian. He moved to Srinagar in search of livelihood during his youth. It was in Srinagar that Kamil developed into a mature poet who would later on become a legend of Kashmiri literature. He did his BA from Panjab University and he also had a law degree from Aligarh Muslim University.

Kamil's collection of short stories, *Kathi Manz Kath* published in mid-60s includes his masterpiece, *Kokar Jang* (*The Cockfight*). *The Cockfight* is considered as the most popular story in the Kashmiri literature. It has been translated into many Indian languages.

The Cockfight has also been included in the school and university curriculum in Kashmir.

Amin Kamil was a resident of Natipora, a suburb of summer capital Srinagar of Indian-administered Kashmir. With his death, Kashmir has lost a literary hero and his absence will be deeply felt among readers and literary circles.

DEVASTATED BY FLOODS, KULGAM VILLAGES WITHOUT BASIC FACILITIES

● **Sheema Farooq**

Ari Gutan, Chamgund and Aachi Thal villages of Kulgam were completely uprooted and destroyed by the September floods, but the government is still unable to rehabilitate the people living in these villages. The homeless villagers are anxious as winter is approaching and they are yet to be rehabilitated. The government has provided tents which the villagers complain are not 'sufficient to shelter us during the harsh winters.'

"I have lost my two houses. We were given these tents but how can my five children survive in these tents during the winter," says a house wife, sheltered in one of the relief camps.

She complains that the ration that was provided was very little and cannot provide for her entire family. "How can we survive on this little ration. We have asked for help but no one is listening to us," she says.

With the destruction of their crop fields and residential lands, many people are unable to identify their belongings. Pathwaris and Tehsildars are in process to identify the solution.

"We have visited the flood affected villages. We are trying our best to solve the problem but it is very difficult to identify which land belongs to home as everything has been turned into a rock field, said Tehsildar Kulgam.

These villages have not only lost its residential houses but they have also lost their rabi fields and apple orchards, which have turned into rock fields due to the overflowing of river Vaishu. "I have three canals of land but I am unable to identify which land is mine," said a farmer of Aari Gutan.

"Our only means of livelihood, whether they are apple orchards or rabi fields have been completely destroyed," he added.

During the flood it was not the government who have helped the people during the floods but the local people showed the courage, they not rescued the people but they have provide tents, vegetables, blankets, fire pots etc to them. But post floods, the government has done very little to rehabilitate the homeless people.

"Tents cannot help us in winter. We need concrete structures but the government is unable to provide even basic necessities of life," said Abdul Rahim, a villager from Chamgund.

While the people of these villages demand a substantial help from the government so that they can survive in the winter, the authorities claim that help was provided where it was due.

"We have provided them tents and ration. That is what we can provide at the moment," said DC Kulgam. "We have considered the issue of concrete structures. We are trying our best to see what we can do," he added.

FLOOD AFTERMATH: MASSIVE JOB CUTS IN KASHMIR

● **Sheikh Omer**

With floods hitting trade and commerce badly in Kashmir, private sector here has seen a steep rise in job cuts. According to traders livelihoods of over four lakh youth have been directly affected by the worst ever floods in a century that Kashmir witnessed earlier last month.

“Things are going to be worse in the coming days. Already 4.5 lakh youths have been rendered jobless as the business sector has been the worst hit in the floods,” President Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industries (KCCI) Shiekh Ashiq.

The hoteliers in Kashmir following dip in tourist arrivals in the wake of floods in Kashmir have started terminating the jobs of many youth.

“Most of the job cuts have been in the tourism and its allied sectors, as also in the general trade which have been worst hit by the floods,” he said.

He said the labour industry in Kashmir has suffered the most. Jammu and Kashmir government has already estimated the losses at Rs 1 lakh crore (1 trillion) in housing, business and other sectors in the recent floods.

“Many companies and outside state concerns which were operating here left Kashmir after the floods. Similarly, the commercial hubs and prominent markets like The Boulevard, Lal Chowk and Karan Nagar, where thousands of youths were engaged in different businesses, were badly hit by the floods,” Ashiq explained.

Chief spokesman Kashmir Economic Alliance, Siraj Ahmad said the central government should announce a massive economic package for Kashmir to give some relief to the flood-affected as also to the jobless youth.

“Already there was widespread unemployment in Kashmir and now the floods have added to the problem,” Siraj said.

Health experts said that the spike in the unemployment will add to the depression among the youths. According to them in the last two decades of political unrest in Kashmir, number of patients with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder has tremendously increased.

“This has to be understood in a proper context. People have already lost their homes and everything, and now when they lose their jobs, this adds to their stress,” Dr Mansoor, Registrar Department of Psychiatry GMC Srinagar said.

POOR BSNL CONNECTIVITY TROUBLES SUBSCRIBERS

● **Sibtain Hyder**

Subscribers of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, the government owned telecom subscriber, are upset over their down and out telecom connectivity in Srinagar.

Even though the floods have bygone and life is returning to normalcy, cellular companies especially BSNL continue to take its subscribers for a ride.

No internet connection, call drops and network congestion adds to the miseries of people.

“Phone remains useless most of the time. Since floods, I have not received full connectivity on my device. It is out of reach every now and then. It becomes very difficult for me to make or receive important calls”, said Abid Ali, a Government employee.

The subscribers complained that the concerned authorities failed to provide quality services to them. According to them, the authorities could not succeed in maintaining the connectivity towers after floods. With this, some of the subscribers have decided to move to court.

“It’s their job to provide good quality to customers. Our grievances are completely sup-

ported by the Consumer Protection Act. No one from the BSNL office is ready to listen. They give a false hope that services will be restored in two days but nothing happens.” said a customer.

Meanwhile most of the customers also complained about the pathetic conditions of landline and broadband services.

Pertaining to this grievance, Chief General Manager of BSNL, J&K RN Sudhakar said

“We are trying our best. Our 2G services have been restored fully as it requires minimal technical work but we are still getting problems in installing new 3G equipments. Our main sites in Karan Nagar and Rajbagh were heavily damaged.

Further talking about landline and broadband services, he added

“We have to dig four feet from the ground level to locate our damaged cables. But after digging one or two feet, we are welcomed by water. Its very difficult for us but everything will be restored in next 10-15 days.”

Two months have passed since floods devastated Kashmir, it seems that the telecom authorities are still working at an extremely slow pace adding nothing but miseries to people.

JOB STARVED JK GETS FIRST ONLINE JOB SEARCH PORTAL

● **Nayeem Rather**

While Jammu Kashmir continues to remain job starved, Interface Technologies - a Valley Software Development and Mobile Application Development Company has expanded its online portfolio with the launch of <http://jobsinterface.com/> (link is external) as a specialist jobs search portal for the unemployed youth.

Supported by national press, radio and online campaign, Jobsinterface.com aims to become the destination for skilled job seekers and freshers from Jammu Kashmir looking for their next position, and a valuable resource for EMPLOYERS seeking skilled workforce.

Interface Technologies CEO Ravees Bhat said, “The new website offers unprecedented opportunities for Jammu & Kashmir’s Youth and all the EMPLOYERS across the state and country. Our integrated multi-platform publishing model gives employers and Job Seekers the right tools to make the right connections to get the right Jobs. Whether they are Software Developers, Business Professionals, supply chain professionals or Marketing Professionals, most of our Youth still have a strong preference for Online Job Portals for discovering opportunities,” he said, adding “Many also value the search-ability, immediacy and efficiency of an effective easy-to-use website. Listing all JOBS ONLINE Job Portal effectively doubles the opportunity for employees and recruiters.”

Bhat said that for professionals and job seekers, managers and executives, jobsinterface.com brings a vast array of relevant jobs into a central portal that is easy to navigate, and increases their chances of finding the job suited to their particular skill set. It’s truly a win-win scenario.

“Audience engagement is central to our success and we’ll deliver content on any platform the customer desires. With the launch of jobsinterface.com we have married the reach of our Industrial Partnerships with the technical capabilities of our online products, to give employers and Job Seekers the right tools to find the right jobs for the right people. Coupled with the core demographic profiles and industry knowledge, <http://jobsinterface.com/> (link is external) Jobsinterface.com delivers the right audience using the right channels.”

HR Manager Jobsinterface, Arif Latief Shah said, “Not only this jobsinterface has also paved way for the students currently pursuing professional programs like BBA, MBA, BCA, MCA, B.Tech and all others to taste the flavor of big companies of the country and do their professional practice there before getting a good job. These students can register on jobsinterface.com and undergo skill updating and training with jobsinterface after which their pre-interviews will be taken for filtration. Therefore, their skills will be made visible to India’s big names like Infosys, Google, Twitter, Facebook, Genpact, Tata consultancy services, Convergys, HCL, NIIT, Wipro, HDFC Bank, snapdeal, FLIPKART, Bajaj Allianz, Pinkerton, Aon-Hewitt and others. I guarantee that we will give these companies country best workforce.”

Jobsinterface is focused on rejuvenating the dormant talent which is the outcome of recent deluge. The floods of 2014 that hit the Srinagar city recently has marked a very negative impression on the minds of the skilled youth here which needs a strong lift. Jobsinterface is inclined to make Kashmir rise again.

All the job seekers and EMPLOYERS in the valley can register on www.jobsinterface.com (link is external) <<http://www.jobsinterface.com>> (link is external) for free

AS WINTER APPROACHES, KASHMIR FLOOD VICTIMS FRET OVER THEIR FUTURE

'Temporary tents can't protect against the freezing cold'

● **Aadil Bagdadi**

As darkness falls, Shabroza Ganai begins preparing tea for her family. These days, all five of them live crammed into a single room, which once was a teashop. Moreover, as winter approaches, the family fears what the coming months will bring.

Ganai lost everything, including her two-bedroom house, in the floods that hit the Kashmir Valley of Jammu and Kashmir State in early September.

"We do not have enough clothing and blankets to cope with the harsh winter of the valley. I have no clue how we are going to survive," Ganai told Merc Times.

In winter, the temperature dips below zero degrees Celsius and snow is common.

According to data released by the Indian Home Ministry, 390 villages were fully submerged in the water.

Though the state government has provided tents to those affected by floods, many say tents are not enough to withstand the severe winter temperature. "The mornings and evenings have started to become cold. Afternoons are still tolerable because of the sun. How can the government expect us to survive such a harsh winter in a tent? We need layers of blankets and warm clothes to survive," said Ahmed

Ali Usmaan of Wakhoo village in Pulwama district.

Though the government has given compensation of 75,000 rupees to those whose houses were destroyed and 17,000 rupees for those whose houses were partially damaged, the victims say that this is not enough.

"What will I do with this small amount? This money is not even enough for clearing away debris from my damaged house, let alone constructing a new one," said Sudesh Sahni, a resident of Srinagar district.

Many are now faced with the dilemma of whether to use the money to build a house or save it to spend during the harsh winter.

Sajjad Khan, district collector of Pulwama, says that they have almost exhausted the amount given to them for relief efforts in Pulwama district and have to estimate how much more they need.

"We have used over 200 million rupees in providing bedding, utensils, tents and blankets to the affected people. The state forest department is also providing timber to people to construct houses," Khan said.

"We have to help each other in this time of need. Everyone is affected in one way or the other. With God's grace we will stand up again and prosper," Shabroza Ganai said.

TRANSPORT GOES OFF AS DUSK SETTLES IN CITY

● **Muzamil Bashir**

As dusk falls, the public transport goes off the roads and hundreds of passengers are stranded on the city streets. The government says it cannot do much about it.

Every day in the evening, hundreds of passengers from different corners of the city could be seen stranded in the Lal chowk area of Srinagar waiting for bus or a minibus.

"We are required to work till late in the evening. And in the evening, we suffer a lot due to non-availability of buses," said a salesman Mohammad Ashraf.

"Sometimes we walk on foot to reach to our homes and sometimes ask for a lift from private car owners".

It is not only the salesmen who suffer but students, who study in various coaching centers of the city, are also affected by this. "When we leave from our homes to our Centre, we get the service of buses but at the time of leaving, the buses are not available," said a girl Bushra Afzal of Hyderpora in Srinagar.

The shortage of public transport in the evening means business for the auto rickshaws which charge exorbitant rates. "I am working as a shopkeeper in Lal chowk but every day on my return to home, I have to hire an auto," said Nisar Ahmad, a resident of Hazratbal. "The buses are not available in the evening".

However, the bus drivers have their own perspectives. Ali Mohammad Dar, a bus driver says they can't run in losses.

"There are not many passengers to pick up in the evening," he said. "During day time, there is a rush of commuters but in the evening we are unable to pick up too many passengers".

The government, on the other hand, says it cannot do much in this regard. Regional Transport Officer Kashmir Mehmood Shah said the problem would persist until the government doesn't press into action the State Road Transport Corporation (SRTC) vehicles.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS AGHAST OVER EARLY WINTER BREAK

Government's decision flawed : PSUF

● **Junaid Nabi Bazaz**

The Private Schools United Front (PSUF) has expressed its anguish over the recent decision of government to close down schools from November 24 without announcing any assistance for flood-affected students. The front termed the decision 'flawed'.

"These students didn't get any scholarship, new books from the state government," said, G N Var, President PSUF.

The front termed the government decision as a unilateral decision with no regards for public opinion. "They didn't consult school heads or parents while deciding the vacations. No logical reason was given," said Var.

The front also termed the earlier closure of schools as a political stunt as the elections are round the corner. "The first phase of elections starts on November 25 and they have strategically closed the schools on November 24," said Var. "This way they have made themselves available the entire school infrastructure for elections."

Var also accused state government for 'inopportune' timing. According to him, "This year the concerned officials have broken all records of mismanagement. They had set the opening date for schools as 23rd February. Till date there is no history of schools being opened in February which is part of bitter winter," Var said. "Unfortunately winter vacations continue to be held hostage to the whims of certain officials who along with their families want to enjoy the warm weather of Jammu as soon as Durbar Move shifts."

The front said that if the previous

weather pattern continues like the record snowfall in March this year, the schools next year are expected to open by April 01. "There is often below freezing point temperature in February and number of areas is cut off, so schools won't be opened. At that time they will again extend the vacations till April," said Var. "Thus our students would lose precious academic time this year and next year and some won't be able to prepare for national level competitive exams."

The front also rubbished the government's decision of not giving mass promotions to the students until class seventh. "Even the student's up to class 7th were not given mass promotion despite the fact that their examination is just a formality, as unit and term tests had already been completed; where nobody can be retained."

The front said that if the students were granted mass promotion they would have better utilized the winter vacations for studies.

ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTIONS EVERYWHERE, SMC NOWHERE

● **Sheikh Uzair**

In brazen violation of Master Plan, scores of illegal constructions are coming up in almost all the areas of the City with the commercial hub of Lal Chowk, and areas like Karan Nagar and Jawahar Nagar bearing the brunt.

The enforcement squad of the SMC seems to be hand-in-glove with the violators. At places in the City center where some demolition drive was undertaken, the violators were allowed to resume work within hours of the “enforcement drama.”

At places where a single-storey under construction shop was initially demolished, the SMC allowed the violators to complete even two floor structures. The same, as per complainants, holds true for areas like Regal Chowk and Sheikh Bagh where scores of illegal constructions have been allowed.

With main shops closed and no business activities in the commercial hub, those undertaking illegal construction, seem to be reaping benefits of the devastation the City met in the recent floods.

In areas like Karan Nagar if a compound wall had collapsed in the devastating floods, the concerned authorities allowed construction of shop lines. “Residential areas like Karan Nagar, Jawahar Nagar and Raj Bagh which have already remained the victims of Master Plan violations are for now facing the worst,” said a civil society activist saying they would move High Court against the “wrongdoings of the concerned agencies”.

With government action against illegal constructions visible nowhere, the enforcement squads have “guided the violators to complete the work at an earliest when everything in administration is chaotic.” “Given the non-serious approach of the government, the enforcement people are minting millions as kickbacks from violators,” said a source privy to the deals.

The brazen violations are coming up at a time when a PIL on Master Plan violations is pending before the state High Court. On the other hand apart from the civic body, Srinagar Development Authority, office of District Development Commissioner and the Revenue officials were bound to keep check on Master Plan violations. But they too seem to have failed.

When contacted SMC Commissioner said the matter was being seriously looked into. “We’ll demolish all illegal constructions,” he said.

AS WINTER SETS IN, SALE OF KANGRIS GOES UP.

● **Junaid Rafiq/Khalid Bashir**

As the harsh winters has set in Kashmir, the sales of Kangris— traditional earthen fire pots used by people to keep them warm in winter – has shot up in Valley.

Though modern heaters and conventional devices have replaced Kangris in some homes but the Kangris are always in high demand among the masses especially during times of snow-fall in Jammu and Kashmir.

The sale of Kangris has increased despite people complaining of increasing prices, with hawkers from different parts of the state thronging city centers with colorful Kangris.

Khaliq Mir, a Kangri maker, who sells Kangris at Boulevard said that the sales were good. “I sell Kangris in summers as well as the winters. Even tourists like to buy Kangris as a gift for their loved ones. In winters I sell almost 20 to 30 Kangris a day. The price of a normal Kangri ranges in between Rs 200-300,” he said.

Another reason for this increase is that many people have lost their homes and all other

belongings because of the floods, and to keep themselves warm in this chilling winter Kangri is the cheapest way.

The mobility factor keeps the age-old traditional, indigenous heating instrument much in demand. “I still prefer to have a Kangri over a blower or a heater. One can buy every possible classy electrical appliance but given the unreliable power service in the Valley, it is the Kangri alone which you can count upon when it is cold,” said Suhail Ahmad.

Another Kangri lover, Showkat Ahmad, said “I always keep myself warm with Kangri. It is much better than the artificial system of heating which causes headache besides becoming a nuisance at times. Kangri is movable and can be carried anywhere,” he said.

Apart from its heating qualities, during the times of snow in Jammu and Kashmir, Kangris also provide seasonal employment to people in the Kashmir Valley. There are no official figures on how many people are directly or indirectly engaged in the Kangri trade, but the number is believed to be in the thousands.

FROM DOMESTIC HELP TO LAWYER

Shahid Andrabi

It was 2005 when Mohammad Aslam came to Srinagar for a job. Languishing with the miseries of his family, he started working as a domestic helper in the localities of HMT.

Aslam, 26, hails from district Baramulla’s village Badan Singtun Uri. After his primary schooling, he for further education went to the hostel run by the social welfare department in Uri.

“The conditions at my home were not favorable at all, I thought of leaving the studies and supporting my family. But somehow I managed the situation and continued my studies,” Aslam says.

With meager resources at home, Aslam, after appearing for his 10th grade exam, moved to Srinagar. He worked as a domestic helper at Nazir Ahmad Khan’s house located in HMT.

With help and support from his employ-

er, Aslam joined Zainakote Higher Secondary School. Aslam used to spend on fees, books and uniform whatever wages he got from Khan.

“I used to do every sort of work in my employer’s home and I never felt ashamed in doing any task,” says Aslam.

After completing his 12th, Aslam’s employer wanted him to get admission in Government Degree College Bemina. But Aslam always wanted to study Law and that was his dream.

“Despite all aware of the situation back home, I started chasing my dreams. The financial crunch at home always restricted me but I never lost faith in Almighty and confidence in myself. Finally I appeared in Kashmir University’s Law entrance test and made it,” Aslam says, proudly.

However, this was not the end of the sufferings in Aslam’s life. “My employer told me that he has agreed to pay the fee for admission in Bemina Degree College but the

assistance to pursue Law was out of question,” Says Aslam, closing his teary eyes.

“My father sold his cattle and arranged money for my admission,” he murmured in a stammer.

Presently representative of the Kashmir Gujjar and Bakerwal youth, Aslam wants to join politics. “I have passed through the difficult stages of life and I am well familiar with the kind of problems we have to confront,” Aslam Says.

“I want to work for the betterment of my people, I cannot see them suffering the way I did,” he said.

Aslam is of a view that hardships and tough times are inevitable but one should not forget their goals in these times. “Adversity always presents an opportunity. Every tough interval of life comes with the bulk of avenues and if we stop the discourse of life on those particular moments, we may lose the game,” Aslam says in a piece of advice for the youth.

GOLDEN AUTUMN



Clicked by: Suhaib Mansoor

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