

# MERC TIMES

## THOUSANDS THROG HAZRATBAL SHRINE ON EID-E-MILAD



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# Unregulated tourism damaging Valley environment: Official report



❖ Nisar Dharma

**Srinagar:** Non-regulation of tourist flow in Kashmir would result in detrimental impact on the overall environment of the region, claims an official report by department of ecology, environment and remote sensing Jammu and Kashmir.

It says that the influx of tourists beyond the carrying capacity of scenic spots has put tremendous pressure on their existing resources and infrastructure.

Although Valley has been naturally gifted, the concerned authorities have so far not succeeded in developing new tourist places which in turn means the huge number of tourists arriving here have only selected places to visit putting a lot of pressure on these destinations.

Acknowledging that higher number of tourists visiting fewer spots is turning things from bad to worse, the report suggests government to explore new destinations to reduce the pressure on the existing ones.

The report says that unregulated tourist inflow increases pollution (more vehicles thronging in a particular place), creates pressure on drinking water resources, increases chances of unscientific waste disposal, and also creates a lot of congestion.

According to the official figures, 1314432 domestic and foreign tourists visited the Valley in 2011 excluding the Amarnath yatris whose number was 634000. In 2012, the number of

tourists and Amarnath Yatris was 1308765 and 621000 respectively.

The number of tourist arrivals dropped to 1171130 in 2013 and in 2014 their number was 116718. Over 10 lakh tourists also visited in 2015. However, most of these tourists visited only the most common tourist places (Gulmarg, Pahalgam, Sonamarg) as government has so far failed to develop other places which have the potential of becoming prime tourist destinations.

“We have only few tourist places which have the requisite infrastructure, the government has failed to regulate the tourists in these places which proves detrimental to our environment,” an official of Environment department said.

“We have to work on the lines of eco-tourism in the state; one way to do that would be to go on cycles or ride on ponies to tourist spots having fragile environment,” he said.

It has been seen that thousands of tourists and pilgrims visit tourist places with fragile environment which leads to degradation of environment mainly due to heavy fleet of vehicles carrying pilgrims and tourists to these places.

A senior official of Tourism department said the department was planning to implement the tourism policy in the state for regulating the inflow.

“It will also help us to upgrade the infrastructure at tourist destinations with proper water supply, sewage, drainage to ensure that environment is not affected,” the official said.

# It is Official: Food security of Kashmir at risk

❖ Sami Khan:

**Srinagar:** Kashmir is fast losing its cultivable land to an unchecked construction boom and unabated conversion of agricultural-land to residential and commercial purposes, official data reveals.

Data collected by state’s Statistics and Evaluation Department shows that the twin north Kashmir districts, Baramulla and Kupwara, lose at an average 150 to 200 acres of agriculture land annually to residential colonies, shopping complexes, roads and other government constructions.

In its annual report, the department shows the baffling trend in diminishing area of cultivable and grazing land in the two north Kashmir districts. For instance, the total available area in the year 2000-2001

under “permanent pastures and grazing fields” in Kupwara was 7107 hectares, which as per the department’s revised 2012-13 report has reduced to just 1949 hectares.

Officials in the agriculture department say “the unabated trend of land conversion is posing serious implications on the food

security of people and fodder for animals including wildlife, as forest land too is encroached, and converted”.

With the occupation and conversion of permanent pastures and grazing fields there has been a visible decline also in the number of livestock, says

the report. Number of cattle was 2,47,900 in 1997 as per the report, which has come down 1,96,740. The number of sheep was 2,91,000 and the same has now got reduced to 1,94,188 in the year 2011-12.

Experts link the unabated conversion of cultivable land to other purposes to state’s food grain deficit. An estimation made by the Directorate of Agriculture Jammu, food grain requirement for the State is 25 lakh MT per annum as against the tentative production of about 20.65 lakh MT during 2013-14. Therefore the State faces a deficiency of 4.35 lakh MT of food grains.

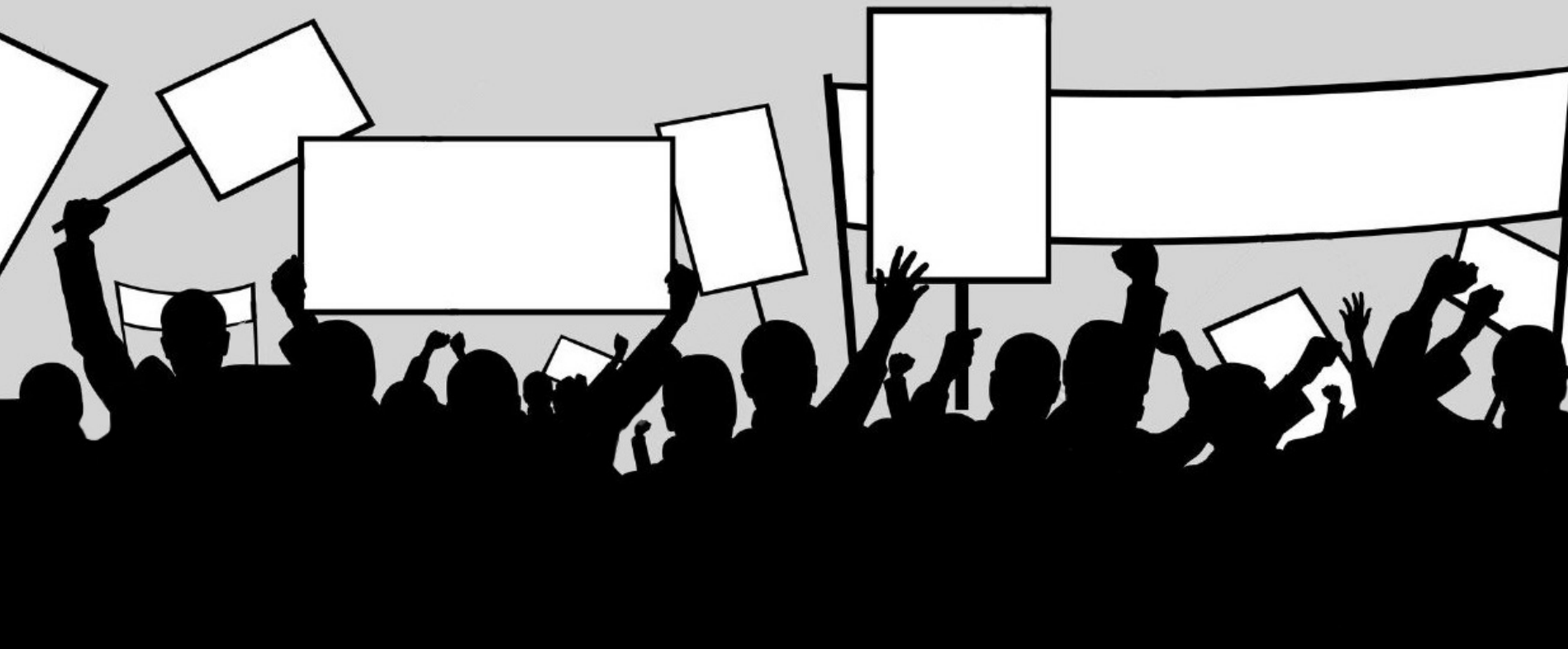
“The situation is of grave concern. If it was not controlled immediately, it may pose serious threat to food security in near future”, warned a top revenue official while talking to Merc Times.

As per the tentative figures with Jammu and Kashmir Land Accusation Department, the security agencies occupy 10,000 kanals of land in Kupwara district. The occupied area mostly includes cultivable land, of which security agencies pay rent to the owners. It, however, does not include the land the security agencies have occupied after eruption of militancy, as against which they don’t pay any rent.

The experts suggest an uncompromised blanket ban on the purchase, conversion and selling of agricultural land.







## Authorities to come down heavily on encroachers in baramulla

❖ Anayat Sultan

**Srinagar:** The department of irrigation and flood control has intensified the anti-encroachment drive along the river Jhelum in north Kashmir's Baramulla district to restore the river to its past glory.

The anti-encroachment team led by Executive Engineer Tariq Ahmed Lala demolished various illegal structures in Khawaja-Bagh, Kanispora, Kralahar and Jahama areas of the district and freed the river banks from the illegal occupation.

"The drive has been conducted in view of the court orders and the department will act accordingly to restore the pristine glory of the river", said Tariq Ahmed Lala, executive engineer, Irrigation and flood control department, District Baramulla.

The Executive Engineer also appealed people to "desist from raising any structures" along the river banks and impressed upon the illegal occupants to "raze down their illegal structures themselves otherwise the department would be forced to utilize the state machinery for the same purpose".

The officials of the department revealed that the demarcation of the illegal structures has already

been done in the first phase with the help and support of the revenue department.

The anti-encroachment drive, according to officials, comes in wake of the J&K High court's order which directed the officials to demolish the illegal structures along the banks of the river Jhelum so that the pristine glory of the river could be restored and catastrophes like September floods - which wreaked havoc across Kashmir - could be averted.

The serpentine river, which originates from the south Kashmir's Verinag spring, has shrunk over the years due to the unabated encroachment right from south to the north Kashmir. And according to the experts, this shrinkage was the main contributor to the September floods.

People from different walks of life have hailed the anti-encroachment drive against the encroachers and termed it a step in the right direction. "The concerned department should continue this drive so that the river is restored to its past grandeur and stature", said a local, Mohd. Ashraf Wani. "If concrete steps like this aren't taken in time, there will be nothing left for the posterity", he added.

## Beehama shopkeepers protest over delayed rehabilitation

❖ Idrees Ahmad

**Ganderbal:** Not rehabilitated yet, the shopkeepers of main market in Beehama, Ganderbal took out a protest to express their anger against district administration's decision of demolishing the shops of locals for road widening.

According to Ganderbal Municipal Committee(GMC) official, eight

shops are to be demolished in the chowk near bus stand, and deadline to vacant shops for shopkeepers is January 25.

"I am earning my livelihood from this shop for about 15 years. My father used to manage this shop for 30 years. This shop is the sole livelihood for me and my family. We are not against the road widening but

development commissioner to clear the land for road widening. We are not the authority to rehabilitate or compensate them," municipal officer Ganderbal, Anees Chowdhery told Merc Times.

"The land belongs to municipal committee and we have already given them notice to vacate these shops," he added.

However, the shopkeepers claim that the District Commissioner has many a times assured them substitute land for the shops near bus stand Beehama or in Tawheed chowk Duderhuma, but nothing has been done so far.

Assuring the early solution District Commissioner Ganderbal Showket Aijaz said that they have taken the demands into consideration. "I am in talks with stakeholders and very soon we will reach to the conclusion about the future of Beehama Chowk shopkeepers," he added.

Meanwhile, the traders union Tawheed chowk, has opposed any decision taken by district administration for the rehabilitation of the shopkeepers.

"In future, many shops may also be demolished for road widening here. Where will we be rehabilitated that time if the land is provided to shopkeepers of other places?" they asked.

I AM EARNING MY LIVELIHOOD FROM THIS SHOP FOR ABOUT 15 YEARS. MY FATHER USED TO MANAGE THIS SHOP FOR 30 YEARS. THIS SHOP IS THE SOLE LIVELIHOOD FOR ME AND MY FAMILY

it is the responsibility of government to rehabilitate us," Gulzar Ahmad Shah, a shopkeeper, said.

"We got the orders from district

# Thousands throng Hazratbal Shrine to celebrate Eid-e-Milad

❖ Moosa Hayat

**Srinagar:** Thousands of people on wednesday reached Asar-i-sharif, the Hazratbal shrine, in the city outskirts to celebrate the Eid-e-Milad(SAW). Devotees from all corners of valley had gathered here to participate in the night long prayers and to have a first glimpse of Holy relic that was displayed after Fajr (pre-dawn) prayers.

According to official sources ,around 1.5 lakh worshippers thronged Hazratbal shrine locally known as Dargah Sharif to get a glimpse of the holy relics of the Prophet Muhammad .

Special arrangements were put in place by Traffic Police for smooth movement of people to and from the shrine. Besides private and public transport, State Road Transport Corporation (SRTC) had made arrangements for ferrying devotees. Divisional administration had made arrangements of security and other necessary facilities.

Various religious, social, business and political organizations had erected banners on roads and shops outside Hazratbal shrine, greeting people on the occasion while local traders decorated the markets and announced discount on various items. The devotees, who had gone for night long stay and those who reached the shrine at afternoon prayers expressed satisfaction over the arrangements made by Waqf Board. Vice-Chairman Waqf Board Peer Mohammad Hussein told Merc Times that they had made special arrangements for the devotees to ensure



smooth conduct of congregational prayers.

“It is the most beautiful and joyous day for us as our beloved Prophet was born on this day,” said a local, Moulana Masroor Ahmad. “This is the real Eid for Muslims as on this day, Allah gifted humanity with the most important and pious person ever.”

Rajah Begum, of Tral said that she has not missed any Shab-i-Milad for the last 60 years. “I have been coming to Dargah Sharif, Hazratbal on every Milad to have a glimpse of the holy relics,” she said. “It’s the love of my Allah and

Prophet Muhammad that I come here on every Shab(night of prayers) to seek blessings.”

Some 1.5 lakh devotees have thronged Asar-i- Sharif Dargah to pay obeisance. The devotees asked for forgiveness in night long prayers under chilly conditions of 4.4 degree Celsius temperature.

“Everything is beautiful here. I cannot express the feelings that how I am feeling inside,” said Aaliya shah, a devotee from Nowhatta. “This day is remarkable for every Muslim and we all should follow the right path which

has been laid by our beloved Prophet Muhammad .”

Around 9000 meters lighting wire has been used to beautify the Hazratbal Shrine and its outskirts. The hot water supply has been maintained in all washrooms with kehwa and Noon-chai(local tea) for the devotees.

For the toy shop owner Abdul Majeed , the day has been a productive one. “I earn nearly 6 to 8 thousand rupees per day on Milad days. Since there is a huge rush of kids on this occasion, they love to buy different kinds of toys. So the Milad days bring prosperity to us,” he said.

❖ Rafia Rahim

## State Institute of Education organizes workshop for teachers

**Srinagar:** To improve the quality of teaching and learning process at elementary as well as secondary level, the State Institute of Education (SIE) organized various workshops on different themes at SIE complex Bemina.

The workshops were held on mathematics, science and education technology in which a huge gathering of teachers participated.

The organizers said

the workshop on capacity building of elementary level mathematics teachers, themed “Development of Mathematics Lab” was conducted by the Mathematics wing of SIE in which 27 teachers participated.

Another workshop was held on basics of computer for elementary level teachers conducted by the Educational technology wing. The aim of the workshop was to acquaint the teachers with the basic skill and

knowledge about the operations of the computers.

Similarly 26 teachers participated in the orientation course on “Module making for secondary level”.

Joint Director Trainings-Principal SIE during her valedictory address stressed upon all participants to take benefit of the orientation programme and use the skills and techniques for making teaching learning process more interesting.

## Sangarmal lacks basic facilities; authorities unmoved



❖ Ubaid jeelani

**Srinagar:** Famous as ‘Sangarmal City Centre’, the Sangarmal Shopping Plaza which was once flaunted as the significant achievement of Srinagar Development Authority(SDA) faces the shortage of some essential facilities which has in turn hindered its development in becoming one of the best shopping centers of valley.

Constructed by the SDA at a cost of Rs 18 crore, the mall is plagued by several problems including lack of power back-up and central heating system.

“60 per cent shops at the mall are unsold as SDA has failed to put in place primary facilities. The fountains that were constructed at a cost of Rs 45 lakhs have been rendered dysfunctional. Even the fire fighting system is not in place. People who visit the mall shiver with cold in absence of central heating system,” said Sheikh Manzoor, President of the Sangarmal Traders Welfare Association.

The Association accused the SDA of causing inordinate delay in construction of the proposed multiplex facilities which includes indoor games, health club, gym, cyber café, cafeteria, exhibition, art gallery, library, multipurpose hall, a coffee shop and three theaters.

“We were promised tele-cable communication system and individual meters for power, water and air conditioning. However, these have not been installed yet. The fine print of the mall promised us an electronic security system which has also not been installed,” Manzoor said.

Vice –chairman of SDA Tahseen Mustafa refuted the claims of the traders that central heating system was part of the original plan. “Faulty lighting and generator were recently made functional. I recently visited Sangarmal and noticed that a lot of up gradation needs to be done. However, there is no provision for central heating in the mall,” the VC said.

## Staff shortage cripples health care in Baramulla

❖ Nelofar jahan

**Srinagar:** At a time when state government is boasting about its ‘success’ for ensuring better health care in the primary and secondary health institutions, the Baramulla hospitals are facing the worse.

The claim of the Government about their success however falls flat when it comes to Baramulla District which is almost crippling in the wake of shortage of doctors and the paramedical staff. Not only peripheral hospitals even the newly shifted specialty District Hospital Baramulla faces the major paucity of man power.

As per official data, for more than 10 lakh population, District Baramulla has total 200 health institutions which include 01 district Hospital, Mother and Child Care Hospital, District Tuber

the 1498 total sanctioned posts.

The only super speciality and main, 200 bedded functional District Hospital Baramulla which caters heavy rush of patients from its peripheral hospitals, faces dearth of 25 specialist doctors and assistant surgeons against the 74 total sanctioned posts. The hospital is short of 54 paramedical staff members against the total of 118 sanctioned posts in various categories.

Ironically, despite being the only super specialty Hospital in the district the process of night surgeries is yet to take place due to shortage of medical and paramedical staff.

Doctor Bashir Ahmad Chalkoo, who is heading the hospital as Medical Superintendent said that four doctors man the night service in the Hospital while 10 doctors remain on call if need arises.



The staff shortage has heavily taken toll on patient care besides has put extra burden on the existing staff. According to Officials the staff shortage is main cause behind referring the patients to Srinagar Hospitals.

In District Hospital Baramulla 935 patients were referred to Srinagar Hospitals from April 2013 to Jan 2014. “From DHB, 174 patients were

referred to Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences Soura SKIMS, 175 to Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital (SMHS), 403 to Lal Ded, 168 to G.B panth Hospital and 43 to Bone and Joint Hospital for specialized treatments,” the data reveals.

Closes center, 06 sub district hospitals/ Community health centers, 31 primary health centers, 02 sub health centers, 20 Allopathic dispensaries, 125 sub centers and 13 medical Aid centers.

The district comprises 10 medical blocks that face shortage of 40 specialist doctors against the 78 sanctioned posts, while 88 positions of Assistant surgeons are vacant against the 234 sanctioned posts and 6 posts of dental surgeons are also vacant in various hospitals of the district. More over the district faces shortage of 342 non gazette staff against

referred to Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences Soura SKIMS, 175 to Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital (SMHS), 403 to Lal Ded, 168 to G.B panth Hospital and 43 to Bone and Joint Hospital for specialized treatments,” the data reveals.

Officials said, the district hospital falls short of essential equipments also like Digital X-ray, MRI machines while C.T scan machine is on cards.

Similarly the shortage of staff is followed by medical block sopore, Sheeri, Kreeri, Dangi wacha, Uri and pattan.

# Alleging misbehavior, doctors at SMHS go on strike

❖ **Murtaza Fazili**

Srinagar : Resident doctors at SMHS hospital here on Friday went on strike to protest against the alleged assault on a doctor by the attendants of a patient.

“ The SMHS administration has failed in protecting doctors from marauding mobs who target them for every grievance. We have been forced to take the extreme step of strike because the administration had refused to pay heed to our complaints,” said the doctors.

Medical Superintendent SMHS Hospital said, “ We are on the job of mitigating the crisis and tomorrow we will have a conclusive meeting with the concerned police station about beefing up the security in hospital.”

Dr Adil Ashraf, President Resident Doctors Association, said from Saturday the resident doctors of GMC and its associated hospitals will also be on strike. “ We will only work in casualty and emergency of the hospitals. From tomorrow, no resident doctor will work in any GMC Hospitals till our demands are met,” he said.

The doctors demanded that hospital puts in place adequate security to prevent manhandling of

doctors by mobs.

They also demanded that a patient grievance cell be formularized. “ This grievance cell should be available to help patients and redress their genuine issues. Doctor cannot do everything but without a system in place, attendants expect him to do everything from getting a trolley to fetching the medicines,” said Dr Faisal Majid at SMHS hospital.



As per the hospital records, the patient whose attendants thrashed the doctor on duty was suffering from multiple life threatening conditions and his prognosis had been explained to the attendants. “ He was in hospital from two days and we had ex-

plained that his heart and kidneys had problems. He had a chronic kidney function disease and Myocardial Infarction, but still they beat up the doctor who was trying to resuscitate him,” said a doctor who was on duty at the time of the incident.

However, an attendant whose patient was also admitted at the same ward where the death had taken place said that the doctor on duty had called anaesthetic for intubating the patient. But the concerned anesthetic had left for dinner and returned when the patient had already expired.

“ This is what infuriated the attendants who asked the concerned CMO to take action against the doctor,” he said requesting anonymity.

The RDA refuted the allegation saying that doctor who had to intubate was present but some relatives of the patient had refused to get him intubated.

Meanwhile, SHO Karan Nagar Police Station said no formal complaint was received from the attendants and relatives.

“ The matter was resolved at the hospital only,” he said, adding that as per the inputs he received from the deployment at the hospital, the attendants were angry and complaining against the ‘ absent doctor’.

# 4 years on, Noorbagh Bridge still incomplete

## Will complete in September 2017: Chief Engineer R&B

❖ **Yasir Gaffar**

Srinagar: How would you describe the authorities of a place where it takes them five to six years for completing a bridge barely few metres? Well, the higher officials here in Roads and Buildings(R&B) department Srinagar have informed Merc Times that the Noorbagh Bridge would be completed in the month of September 2017.

While the bridge has already crossed around four years since the construction was started, the authorities have fixed the completion date 20 months from now thus extending the total construction period to more than five years.

Satish Razdan Chief Engineer R&B department said, “The work is currently going on. The project comes under the government of India scheme. It depends upon the funds that we receive. We are working according to the funds released.”



Aqib Mir a resident of Qamarwari said the government is taking too much of time to complete this bridge. We want the Bridge to be completed soon. The already existing bridge is around 40 years old and the growing rush of vehicles over this bridge has made travelling from this route a tough task.

The Qamarwari-Noorbagh bridge is an important link for the people of not only local areas of Sri-

nagar but also for the people who come from far off places like northern parts of the valley most of whom are the students or patients who have to visit Kashmir University or SKIMS hospital respectively.

Shabir a student of Kashmir University and the resident of Qamarwari said, “There is a little space for the motorists to pass through the bridge. The huge water pipe which has been laid on one side of the bridge

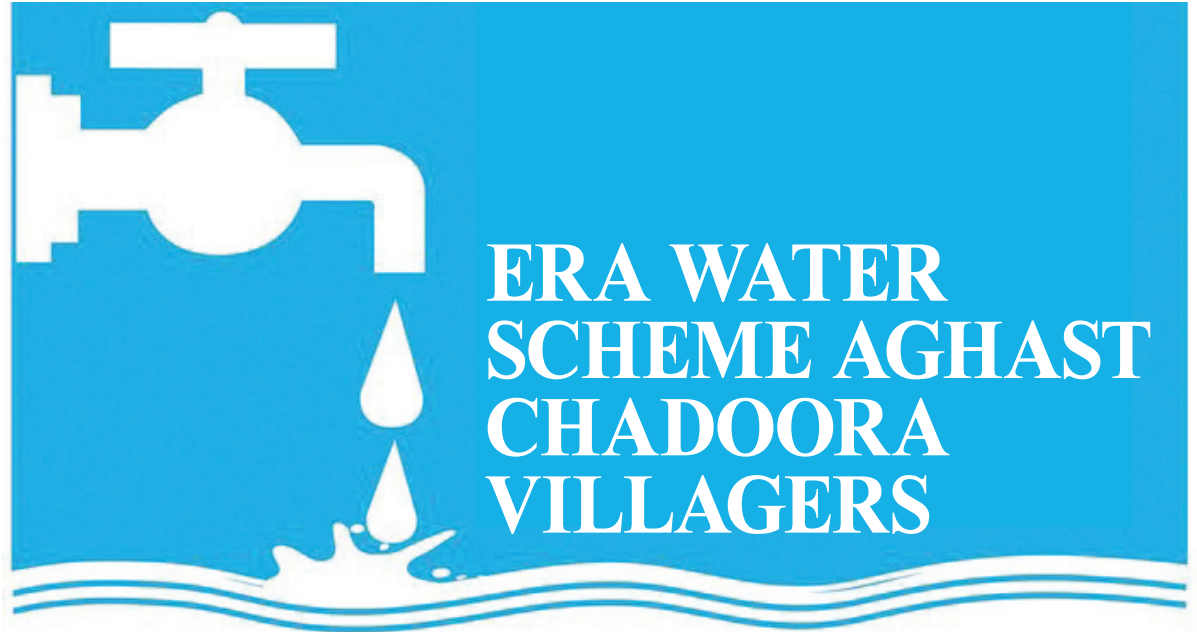
has obstructed the smooth flow of traffic and is thus giving tough time to both motorists and pedestrians.”

“This also causes heavy traffic jams due to which people especially patients and students suffer a lot. Moreover it gets very difficult for the pedestrians to tread on the bridge as they fear accident”, Shabir said.

“The new bridge will not only help in minimizing the heavy rush of vehicles on the already existing Cement Bridge but will also help in reducing traffic jams”, said a group of locals.

It is important to mention that a portion of the already existing Noorbagh Cement Bridge had sunk in September 2013 and had left behind a huge void for which the R&B department officials had said that it was due to the leakage of the water supply pipeline of the Public Health Engineering Department which runs over the Bridge.

The work is currently going on in full swing, of course with police and paramilitary personnel guarding the workers and the machinery all day long



## ERA WATER SCHEME AGHAST CHADOORA VILLAGERS

❖ **Irshad Ahmad**

**Srinagar:** The locals of tehsil Chadoora on 24 Dec held a protest against the Economic Reconstruction Agency's (ERA) decision to go ahead with the proposed water scheme.

The ERA's water scheme for few villages of tehsil Chadoora has evoked sharp criticism from the locals who resorted to stone pelting to press for their demands.

Sources said heavy stone pelting was reported in Sogam and adjacent villages of Chadoora tehsil with the

local youth demanding to stop the on-going work on the water scheme.

The scheme being executed by the ERA is a 43-crore project funded by the Asian Development Bank. The ERA proposes to source water from the famous Doodhganga River at Nowhar, some 20 kms from Chadoora carry it to Kralpora filtration plant and then supply it to uptown Srinagar.

Locals who fear that the scheme will "dry up the river" have earlier in May expressed their resentment after the Economic Reconstruction Agen-

cy (ERA) dumped the pipes in Sogam and started the work of laying the pipeline from the village downwards.

"The protests against the scheme at that time forced the concerned officials to stop the work. However it was again started in this month", said a local who wished anonymity.

The villagers of Sogam village alleged that the police, without any provocation, ransacked their houses and "ruthlessly" banged the window-panes which compelled youth to pelt stones at them.

The officials however played safe

and claimed to have "taken the people into confidence". Director ERA, Malik Basharat said that the scheme will not dry up the river and that the people have been taken into confidence, which the locals totally deny.

The authorities also admitted that they took the help of Police and other paramilitary forces to pacify the protesters.

"The work is currently going on in full swing, of course with police and paramilitary personnel guarding the workers and the machinery all day long," said a senior official.

## Bumpy ride for commuters on messy Malik Bagh-Rawalpora link road

❖ **Sarwat Nabi**

**Srinagar:** The link road at Malik Bagh in Rawalpura area of Srinagar which is without macadamization is giving a tough time to both motorists and the people who tread on this path.

The road which is without macadamization from past few years links Kralpora and Rawalpura and has become a preferable route since other roads linking the two areas are in most terrible condition as these too are filled with potholes which make the journey of commuters cumbersome and time consuming.

Karim Wani, a local said, "The roads here are poorly maintained.

The condition of roads here is so bad that even a slight rainfall waterlog the entire stretch that makes the movement of locals of Malik Bagh from one place to another difficult."

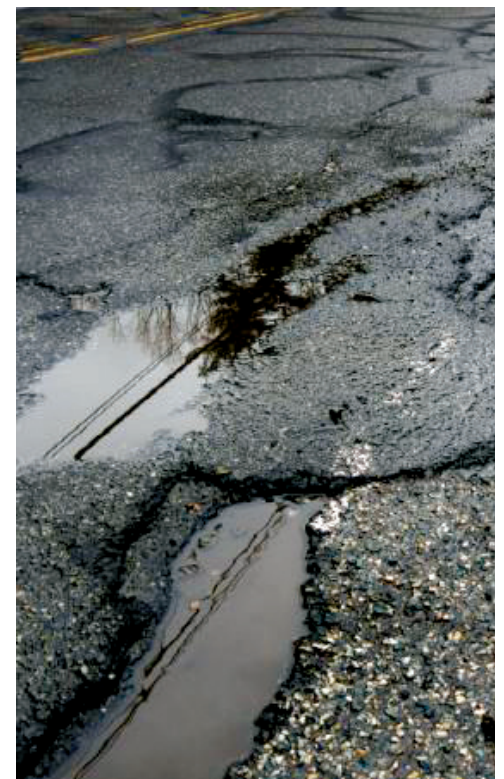
"The uneven surface has not only damaged our vehicles but pedestrians also get troubled. This has made our lives very difficult and we request the authorities for their attention towards the matter," he added.

The road is also of huge importance for most of the people residing there as it also leads to Industrial Estate Rangreth, Air force station and serves as a link road to Srinagar Airport via Humhama.

Amir Mir, a local said "the dilapidated condition of the road has seriously damaged our vehicles. I recently got my car serviced and was surprised to see that the wheel alignment had got affected and had to get tyres replaced."

Despite being a residential area, heavy vehicles are also seen plying on this route which has further deteriorated the condition of the roads.

Chief Engineer Road and Buildings, SatishRazdan, acknowledged the problem "We are aware of the dilapidated condition of the road and will soon undertake its upgradation including repairs and black-topping."



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