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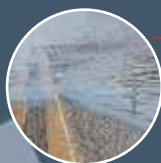
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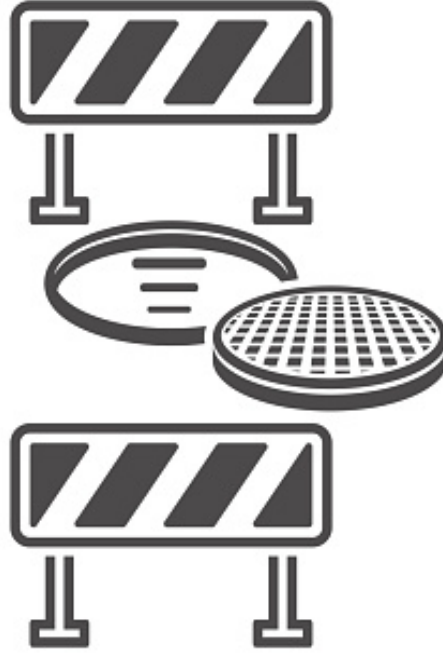
Tanweer Ahmad

Anantnag: A few hours of rainfall brings life to halt at bus stand Anantnag as people accuse concerned authority of failing to construct a proper drainage system. During heavy rainfall it becomes difficult to access the area as the market often witness water logging.

“Whenever it rains, we have difficulty entering the area. The passengers are forced to wait outside. It becomes really difficult to catch a bus”, said Rafi Wani, a college going student from the district.

“Wet weather is a routine in Kashmir. The drainage system is defunct. Majority of the drains are clogged causing rain water to accumulate in the area.” He added.

The ankle-deep waters in bus stand and on roads outside bus stand causes severe inconvenience to the passengers. The bus stand connects major towns in the district.



Locals blame improper drainage as the main cause of waterlogging in the area.

Being one the busiest bus stand in Anantnag district, it provides livelihood to hundreds of people, drivers, shopkeepers, fruit and vegetable vendors, and car mechanics but frequent water logging often forces them close their shops which affects their business. Even after repeated requests to the administration for the redressal of the issue, locals say that nothing on the ground has been done so far.

“Government has invited detailed project reports (DPR) from various agencies for setting up a proper drainage system so that the issue of water-logging can be tackled once for all”, Said Mohammad Shafi, President Bus Stand Anantnag. “But the work has been too slow”, he added.

Waterlogging, poor drainage system annoys Kangan residents

Sabreena Mir

Residents of Kangan town in Central Kashmir’s Ganderbal district alleged that defunct drainage system in main market Kangan is causing waterlogging and hampering pedestrian and vehicular movement. Due to clogged drains, the water gets accumulate on the roads causing inconvenience to shopkeepers as well as commuters which in turn affect the business.

“Despite being a tourist route, the area has been neglected by the authorities. The drains are continuously over flowing causing immense problems to the people in the area”, said Iqbal Ahmad, a local resident.

“A spell of moderate rainfall is enough to cause water logging. The garbage dumped on the roadside gets scattered all over the place. Despite tall claims by authorities the drainage system is yet to be rectified”, said Saqib Jameel, a shopkeeper.

“The over flowing drainage has also weakened the boundary wall of the adjacent Girls Higher Secondary School” He added.

Vice President Municipal committee Ganderbal, Jeelani Mir when contacted said that a project is in offing to mitigate the problem. “We will solve the problem as soon as possible. We are coming up with a project in which the water accumulated at the affected areas will be drained with the help of lifting pump.”





Harwan residents resent chopping of chestnut garden by PDD



Musaib Ismail

Despite strong opposition from the Horticulture Department and local residents, Power Development Department (PDD) in order to build a new grid station at New Theed Harwan, on Srinagar outskirts has cut down more than fifty chestnut and walnut trees, some of which were almost a century old. Construction of the grid station on the chestnut garden was opposed by environmental activists as well but their efforts have not borne fruit.

The land originally belonged to horticulture department but the project was given a go ahead by the district administration Srinagar. After the PDD went ahead with the construction, locals also filed a PIL (public interest litigation) in the High court to oppose the move.

“We couldn’t believe that district administration gave permission for construction of the grid station over the heritage chestnut garden” Said a local resident

Environmental lawyer and executive director, Wild Life Conservation Fund, Nadeem Qadiri while lashing out at the authorities said, “Hundred year old historical garden was destroyed to construct the project.”

It is pertinent to mention here that the site proposed for the aforementioned project is situated next to the world famous, Dachigam National Park which serves as an abode to myriad endangered wildlife species including Hangul.

“The area is surrounded by a huge population that is round the clock into multifarious activities. The proposed project is of immense threat to both the human population and the wildlife species that are residing around it”, Qadiri added.

“The project was commissioned in 2015 but the work could only be started in 2019. There are four big single phase transformers installed in this Grid Station known as GIS (Gas Insulated Substations) transformers. It is a high voltage substation in which the major structures are contained in a sealed environment with sulfur hexafluoride gas as the insulating medium. The capacity of one GIS transformer is 53.3 MVA,” Said PDD official.

“This is the only grid station in Kashmir in which GIS transformers are installed. The electric supply of this grid station will benefit the city”, he added.



Barbarshah residents aghast over water scarcity

Bisma Riyaz

Water taps in scores of households in Wazir Lane, Barbarshah locality of Central Kashmir’s Srinagar district run dry for most of the time, causing immense problems to the residents who are up in arms against Jal Shakti Department due to shortage of drinking water in the area.

“We are facing acute water shortage from last two months”, said Ghulam Mohammad Rather, a local resident.

“We have to suffer a lot”, he added. “The supply of the water is such that even a glass takes an hour to get filled. It’s difficult to survive without water in this harsh winter”, said Owais Majeed, another local resident.

“We have highlighted the issue to the authorities but no action has been taken, so far.” He added.

Executive Engineer (Jal Shakti Department) Kothi Bagh, Iftikhar Wani while commenting on the issue, said, “We’ll restore the water supply in the area as soon as possible.”





Amar Singh College bags UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award 2020

Zakia Qurashi

The historical Amar Singh College at Gogji Bagh, Srinagar bagged the prestigious UNESCO-Heritage award of merit for Cultural Heritage Conservation. The restoration project was headed by conservation architect, Saima Iqbal from INTACH, Kashmir.

Established in 1913 as a technical college to impart and teach skills such as carpentry, masonry, it was upgraded into a full-fledged college in 1942. The college's nearly 80 year old heritage building was in a dilapidated condition for want of care and restoration works that were long overdue. The 2014 floods in valley had caused further damage to the building.

Speaking to Saima Iqbal on the achievement, she said, "It's a very proud

moment for us and for the Kashmiri people. Out of total 48 entries in the Asia Pacific region. However, seven entries were awarded, one of which was our conservation project of Amar Singh College."

She further said that they had drafted the conservation plan for the building prior to the 2014 floods. After the plan was approved for funding, the restoration work was started in February, 2018.

"The building needed to be restored meticulously. We exposed the plinth area because the moisture used to get trapped and the building was unable to breathe."

"In addition, the ceiling was redone, the plumbing problems were taken care of and most importantly, we reinserted molded bricks in the original size and texture.

Training craftsmen to restore the bricks

was one of the biggest challenges", she added.

The conservation effort was led by Saima Iqbal (Project Head), assisted by architect Anjum Rafiq and Imran Bhat.

The award was announced on 16 December, 2020. The deliberations on the project entries were held online from November 20 to 22.

"The restoration of the Amar Singh College brought back one of the most prominent buildings in Kashmir to its former glory. Undertaken with a high level of technical proficiency, the project reversed major deterioration resulting from years of inappropriate additions, poor maintenance and catastrophic events such as the unprecedented flooding in 2014." The jury said in its comments about the work done on the project.

Khag residents upset over bad condition of roads

Imran Bashir

Irrked over bad condition of roads, the residents of Khag and its adjacent areas in Central Kashmir's Budgam district are up in the arms against the authorities and have demanded macadamization of their roads leading to different villages in the area. As per locals, the roads in the area are yet to be macadamized and have now become slippery because of the recent wet spells. The soil lumps have increased the risk of accidents on the roads.

Bashir Ahmad, a resident of Khag said that the condition of the roads in the area had made driving a risky affair. "All roads in and around were macadamized. Only our road was left. At least authorities should have removed these soil lumps from both sides of the road to avoid any untoward incident."

Another Resident, Ishtiyahq Ahmad, said that the passenger vehicles have to move at snail's pace to avoid skidding from road which leads to passengers arriving late to their respective



destinations.

"We prefer to walk instead of using vehicles on such roads. The condition is so bad that there are chance of an accident every time", Said Wajid, another local resident.

Accusing the authorities of not paying heed to their grievances, Shameema, a resident of Gumboora village in Khag, said, "Nobody is listening to us. We fail to understand where we are supposed to go if the authorities turn a blind eye towards our

problems."

While reacting on the issue R&B Department official said that the people of the areas had genuine grievances and the reason behind not macadamizing the road was a stay order from a court. The stay order was later revoked but by then the summer season had ended."

"We'll remove the soil lumps and macadamize the road in summer this year", he added.



Government gearing up for vaccine storage

Shehreen Pandit

The UT government of Jammu and Kashmir has finished the preliminary work for acquisition COVID-19 vaccine and the administration is now readying its machinery for storage and distribution. With effectiveness of 62% for those given two full doses and of 90% in those given a half, then a full dose, the government plans to immediately vaccinate at least 28 lakh people in the Union Territory.

The outcome on the effectiveness of the vaccines were rooted in a pre-specified combined analysis of phase 3 trials in UK and Brazil (11,636 people) parallel to a safety data from a total of 23,745 participants in 4 trials in the UK, Brazil and South Africa.

Each participant who volunteered for the trial has recovered or is recuperating. The Oxford vaccine utilizes a chimpanzee adenovirus viral vector that is more beneficial for not causing disease in humans and indicates the SARs-COV-2 spike protein.

In Jammu and Kashmir the vaccination drive would be conducted in phased manner. In the first phase health and frontline workers including police personnel would be covered. The next group would be persons above the age of 50.

Gradually entire population of J&K will be vaccinated.

Covid-19 vaccine delivers the spike protein genetic code into vaccinated people's cells that can produce the protein and instruct the immune system to identify and attack the virus.

"Your chances of getting sick or dying are much greater going to the grocery store than going to get a vaccine", said Barry Bloom, research professor of public health and former dean of Harvard T.H Chan School of Public Health..



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Rise in theft cases in Budgam, people anxious



Mubashir Bashir

Central Kashmir's Budgam town has been witnessing a rise in theft cases in last two months with burglars breaking into many shops and houses during night hours. Accusing police of inaction, people said that police had been unable to nab the perpetrators and prevent further thefts in the area.

"Burglars have turned so courageous that they strike the same houses again and again", locals said. The repeated instances of theft and burglary has caused panic among the locals.

"On 11 December, burglars damaged the two windows of my house during the night time and looted cash and gold worth around 4 lakh rupees, for which I filed a FIR but no action has been taken yet," said Lateef Ahmad Shah, a resident of Choon Budgam.

Lateef's son said that the thieves had taken his clothes which also had his admit card. "Theft of admit card caused me a lot of problems as I had to appear for my exam, the next day."

"Thieves are lifting utensils, shoes, crockery items and other valuables from shops. Police arrive, report and leave without any concrete action," said Aijaz Ahmad, who owns a shop in the main town. Affected traders alleged police of giving free hand to burglars who according to them have organized gangs and are looting chosen areas.

Similarly people in Chadoora also complained of rising theft cases. Meanwhile traders and Civil Society Budgam have condemned the increasing incidents of theft in the areas and appealed the authorities to take stringent measures so that such acts are not repeated in future.

Sehpora, Gdb'l residents demand public transport

Sayima Ahmad

Commuters and passengers in Sehpora village of Central Kashmir's Ganderbal district are complaining about the lack of public transport in the area. The students of the said vicinity are routinely waiting to board a bus for long hours every day.

"It is a daunting task to find a ride to town," says Rafiya, a local student from Sehpora.

"Just when we are about to leave for school it seems like all the buses evaporate into thin air, never to be seen again."

Sehpora is a remote village in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district, particularly lacking in terms of public transport which has proven to be a reason of great discomfort for female students especially in the morning and evening hours.

"If you plan to reach University on time, you have to prepare yourself the night before", says Shayista, an Islamic Studies student at University of Kashmir. "The earlier you leave the house the better chances you have of catching a bus."

"That is another matter if the bus shows up or not, or makes you wait another hour or two."

"But it isn't as easy. The buses are usually overcrowded and not a very suitable mode of transit for girls", says Rafiya. "You might have to pass on even two or three buses if they're severely overcrowded and it takes a lot of time."

"If you decide on boarding a congested bus you'll certainly encounter ill-intending people trying to touch you, vouching their safety on your good behaviour. And these kinds of people are present everywhere, always on the lookout for women in such compromised spaces."

"The government should increase the number of buses operating in the area so that our problems are eased", the group of girls said in unison.





CWSR organizes webinar on domestic violence



Ifra Hassan

Amid global rise in domestic violence cases during the Covid-19 pandemic, Kashmir University's Centre for Women Studies and Research (CWSR) organized a webinar on the issue.

The day long webinar titled "Domestic

violence: chronicling the ordeal and the way out", was organized on December 9, in collaboration with UGC. The webinar was attended by several students and scholars. Dr Nisar Ahmed Mir in the inaugural speech put forth his views on rise in domestic violence amid Covid19.

Dr. Mir while giving some statistics

stressed on the need for more awareness and robust counselling system.

Noted author and social activist Rashmi Anand talked about the impact and ways of addressing domestic violence in our society. "What we need to do is to understand the roots of this issue and find some effective ways to eradicate the issue of domestic violence in our society."

Most of the students and research scholars who attended the webinar appreciated the CWSR for organizing webinar on such important issues.

"I like the idea of conducting webinars. I have been attending webinars on different issues and this webinar was very significant and informative one", said Iram Farooqi, a research scholar from the department.

"The speakers talked at length about the issue and gave their perspective on how to tackle it." While talking about the importance of highlighting such issues through webinars coordinator CWSR, Prof. Tabassum Firdous said that CWSR has been at the forefront in generating awareness about different issues prevailing in our society, particularly about women."



Two-day Mega Music Festival held at GDC Handwara

Aaqib Naseem

A two day mega music festival under the Flagship of "Kashmir-ke-Sitare" was organized at Government Degree College, Handwara by 21RR of the Indian army. The event was organized on 20 and 21 December to 'promote' Kashmiri culture and Sufi music.

"We organized this event to prevent Handwara youth from drug addiction and other illegal activities. We want them to brighten their future by participating in events like these", an army officials said. "This event also gave a platform to the artists who have recently earned fame

and glory".

Among the performers was the valley's recent singing sensation, Waqar Khan whose singing has earned him comparisons with legendary singer Nusrat Fatah Ali Khan. Also present at the event were Kabul Bukhari. Comedian Anil Pandit Chingari, Nargis Khatoon, Shady Rockstar, Aamir were among others.

Waqar and Kabul mesmerized the audience with their soulful voice.

Aamir, who was performing in Handwara for the first time said, "It was overwhelming. People of Handwara are kind hearted. They gave us respect and enjoyed our music."

Shady Rockstar who is also a resident of Handwara received applause from the local audience. While talking to him, he said, "Music is my life. I want to represent Handwara wherever I go. I want to make my people proud."

"The army is doing the 'job' of the government. It's great to organize such events. Local artists get a chance to showcase their talent", he added.



Hokersar wetland in danger

Minhaj Masoodi

Kashmir's famed Hokersar wetland has seen a steady decline in the number of avian visitors. However, this year, the number of migratory birds has decreased by over 50 percent. The decrease in number of birds has been attributed among other factors due to drying up of the wetland.

Spread over 13 square kilometers, the wetland's condition has deteriorated since 2014 floods. Range officer Hokersar Wetland, Sohail Qazi blamed excessive siltation caused due to floods.

"2014 floods deposited maximum silt in the Hokersar wetland. The capacity of the wetland as a consequence was drastically reduced."

Also, the haphazard dredging by irrigation and flood control department has changed the gradient of the wetland causing the incoming water to exit the wetland much quicker. The Range officer also claimed that the

feeding nallas are not bringing much water into the wetland.

"The I&FC department after dredging their nallas was supposed to install entry and exit gates at Hokersar to enable the water to accumulate. From the last four years no progress has been made in that regard. This has led to extreme dryness in the wetland."

"Despite considerable dryness, we still have around 2-2.5 lakh migratory birds at the wetland this year", he added.

The abode of Mallards, Gladwalls and Pochards has dried up to the extent that the boats that used to ferry people to the lake are lying unattended in the peripheries.

Ghulam Mohuidin Mir, who is a guard at the wetland said, "It was almost impossible to reach the lake without boats. Now, we can reach the lake wearing knee high gumboots." "The wetland is on the verge of extinction."

Talking about encroachments,

Warden, Wetland's division, Afshan Devan said, "The dryness has also increased the threat of encroachments and poaching. It has become easier to access the lake where the birds are present." "We continuously send squads to ward off poachers and encroachers."

The locals of the surrounding villages also accused some the landholders of deliberately breaching the bunds to divert water from the wetlands to their fields.

Ghulam Mohammad, a resident of the Zainakote village said, "The landholders of the lower villages breach the bunds to water their fields thereby not allowing the water to accumulate in the wetland." Contesting the 2.5 lakh claim of the officials on the number of migratory birds, he said, "This year the number of birds must be only in thousands. The wetland has considerably dried up. The department is quoting an exaggerated figure."