

Date sent: Sat, 4 Oct 1997 20:20:01 -0400 (EDT)  
 Send reply to: vikram!NALINM@aol.com  
 From: vikram!NALINM@aol.com  
 To: Natural History of South Asia - General discussion and research  
 Subject: Jammu-Kashmir Wildlife Hunting Permits  
 Originally to: nathistory-india@lists.princeton.edu

To all:

This somewhat disturbing article on issue of hunting permits in Jammu & Kashmir appeared in the Indian Express of October 4, 1997. This may be an issue that needs to be dealt with by NGO's and Ministry of Environment in India.

>>>>>>>

Pay 'n' kill endangered species in J&K

Arun Sharma

JAMMU, Oct 3: You can kill and take away a Tibetan antelope, ibex or a Himalayan thar by just paying Rs 100 plus the licence fee in Jammu and Kashmir as hunting of these endangered species, banned all over the country, continues to be a sport in this border State.

What's more, it's a 'special game' or 'big game' in case of hunting of animals and 'small game' in respect of birds. And these games are permitted by none other than the State Government, which has not only fixed the shooting seasons but also the charges to enable the hunter to cart along what is euphemistically described as 'trophies' (animal's body). Officials told The Indian Express that it would cost only Rs 200 should one decide to shoot a Himalayan brown bear and Rs 50 for a Tibetan wolf. The money is paid by the hunter to the Wild Life Department as 'royalty' for the bird or the animal killed by him.

Significantly, this cruelty towards animals and birds has been licenced by the State Government, which, according to sources, has framed rules for the purpose in exercise of the powers conferred by the Jammu and Kashmir Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1978. These rules provide for the issuance of various kinds of hunting licences to the people by the chief wildlife warden.

An Indian citizen can shoot an Himalayan brown bear, serow or a wild yak by paying a licence fee of Rs 1,000 for the 'special hunting'. If he succeeds in killing any of these animals, -he has to pay, a royalty of Rs 200 each to the Wildlife Department for the release of the 'trophy'. The licence fee and royalty amount to be charged from a foreigner is, however, Rs 3,000 and Rs 500, respectively. The shooting season in respect to the Himalayan brown bear has been fixed by the State Government from May 15 to the end of October and for serow and wild yak from April 16 to October 15, sources added.

Similarly, the shooting of Tibetan antelope, ibex and Tibetan wolf is a 'big game' in the State. To participate in this big game, a licence can be obtained from the Wildlife Department by an Indian national subject to the payment of Rs 500 for the full season and Rs 300 for 60 days. However, the licence fee is Rs 1,500 for the full season and Rs 1,000 for 60 days in the case of a foreigner.

Besides the Tibetan antelope and ibex, the royalty payable by an Indian citizen for release of the body of the killed Tibetan wolf is Rs 50 only. Sources said the big game also includes the hunting of barking deer, hog deer and wild pig subject to the payment of a subject to payment of a royalty of Rs 50 each.

The other animals, whose hunting has been permitted by the Wildlife Department as part of this big game in the State, are bharal, sambar, chital, Himalayan thar, neilsar and the Himalayan black bear.

Sources said the shooting of birds in the State is, however, a 'small game' for the Wildlife Department. The licence fee chargeable from an Indian citizen for the purpose is Rs 125 for the full season, Rs 100 for 60 days and Rs 75 for 15 days or less. It is, however, Rs 300 for full season, Rs 250 for 60 days and Rs 200 for 15 days in the case of a foreigner. Significantly, each hunter has the bag limit of 10 snipe, wood cock and sand grouse between September 1 to March 16 every year. However, he is charged Rs 5 in case of the killing of each extra bird over the prescribed bag limit.

However, the bag limit for a hunter in respect to geese, ducks and teals is 20, chakore, partridges and jungle fowl (10), ram chakre and snow partridge (6), dove (15), hare (5) and pheasant (5). However, he has to pay Rs 50 in the case of each extra bird killed over the prescribed bag limit.

The Wildlife Department officials, however, said they have not issued any licence for the special and big game in the State since 1989. However, they attributed the non-issuance of these licences to the ongoing militancy in Kashmir Valley.

Though the Department discourages people intending to participate in big and small games, it cannot deny a licence to any person fulfilling all the requisite formalities, an official said. As such, it has proposed to the State Government to amend the Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife (Protection) Act by incorporating provisions available in the central legislation which banned the hunting of wild animals and birds all over the country, he added.

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# Police wink at 15-day duck poaching spree

VIKRAM JIT SINGH

HOKERASAR (J&K), MARCH 16

1E 17/3/98

off the Srinagar-Baramulla National Highway.

A KILLING spree is on at the Hokera wetland for the past 15 days with more than 20 poachers opening a barrage of shotgun fire at endangered migratory ducks and geese as they fly out at dusk to the feeding grounds.

The law-enforcing authorities in this troubled State have made no effort to put a stop to this illegal firing which commences every day at around 5.30 p.m.

The poachers, who have been identified as affluent businessmen hailing from the Dal and the Nageen lake area, have gone unchecked primarily because of the alleged connivance of the local police. The wildlife guards at Hokera were picked up by the Parimpora Police after they resisted the illegal shooting that commenced on March 1.

"False charges of gambling, womanising and drinking were brought against four wildlife functionaries who were taken to the Parimpora Police Station. They were assaulted and told that they should let the shooting continue unchecked. The SHO, Mir Hus-sain, has even gone to the extent to block the move to file an FIR against the culprits," a senior Wildlife officer told The Indian Express.

Encouraged by the police response, the poachers are only a step away from the core area of the Hokera reserve. They arrive daily in Maruti 1000s, jeeps and ambassador cars at around 4 p.m. and position themselves on the bandh and in the fields a mere 100-200 yards

By dusk, the area is resounding with the loud reports of shotgun fire as flight after flight of ducks gain in height and wing their way from the core area to shallow waters and feeding grounds. When this correspondent visited the spot last evening, the Parimpora Police led by Assistant SHO G M Shah did not investigate the firing or apprehend the poachers.

No action has been taken against the poachers identified as Rafiq Wangnoo, Farooq Wangnoo, Khaliq Wangnoo, Habib Wangnoo, Shafi Wangnoo, Aslam Wangnoo and Bashir Ahmad Pattloo. Other poachers fled the area after firing a few shots from the fields.

The Wangnoos are houseboat owners who acted as guides for foreign tourists interested in duck shooting during the time legalised hunting was regularly allowed.

Under the J&K Wildlife Protection Act, the hunting of migratory ducks is allowed only on the grant of a special license by the Wildlife Department. Ever since the controversial duck shoot at Hokera involving Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi, Sharmila Tagore, and the erstwhile maharaja of Patiala, the wildlife Department has not issued a single hunting license.

The penalties for poaching at the renowned migratory bird reserve at Hokera can involve imprisonment and steep fines, the wildlife department officer said.

Even licensed shotguns cannot be carried in the Valley without sanction for the exact purpose for which the weapon is being taken along.

Update 16

AK

Date: Mon, 02 Feb 1998 19:55:28 +0530

From: Bittu Sahgal <bittu@viasbm01.vsnl.net.in>

To: Natural History of South Asia - General discussion and research

<nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.EDU>

Subject: Jammu and Kashmir Birds in trouble

A very disturbing report has come in from Srinagar today suggesting that

the Wildlife Department of J&K is being pressured to certify that there

are too many birds in wetlands such as Hokarsar (where the Pataudis went

on their shooting spree). The idea is to alter the Wildlife Act to

allow culling. The fact is that all wetlands in the Kashmir Valley are

quickly silting over thanks to rampant deforestation, a by-product of

the near-archy that has ruled the state for years.

The only way to prevent this tragedy (legalising bird hunts) from taking

place would be to provide hard data on the decline of migratory species

overall and make a case for the protection of wetlands not only from

shooting, but also from reclamation, toxic dumping and pesticide

contamination. Does anyone have details of the annual waterfowl census?

This is an SOS of sorts as a change in the WL Act will result in mass

killings over the next few years.

If any large, respected wetlands/conservation organisation is in a

position to write officially on their letter head that there is a

decline in waterfowl numbers migrating between the Trans Himalaya and

India, please send an opinion, quoting numbers or surveys to Mr. Vikram

Singh, Journalist, Indian Express, Srinagar, J&K, India, Fax:

+91-194-452661, Tel: +91-194-451672. (Send me a copy by email for

follow-up).

The message I got said that hard data was required: "The officials here

are not interested in opinions. They will be difficult to convince even

with hard data. We need globally accepted organisations to place on

record figures of declining waterfowl."

--

Bittu Sahgal,

issues confronting the Muslim community and highlight the Congress (I) Government's failure to fulfil its promises made in the election manifesto.

# Proposal to amend J&K Wildlife Act

JAMMU, March 28  
The Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife Department (JKWD) has formulated a proposal envisaging amendments to the State Wildlife Protection Act to protect wildlife in the State, official sources said here today.

The draft proposal aimed at amending Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife (protection) Act 1978 and prepared by top department officials in consultation with environmentalists and lawyers, would be introduced in the State Assembly and Legislative Council before being given a final go, the sources told PTI.

Under the State Wildlife Protection Act 1978, various kinds of hunting licences are issued by the Chief Wildlife Warden as, sources said, Jammu and Kashmir was the only State in the country where killing of endangered and general species was allowed.

Sources said that because of this reason several endangered species, including white leopard, white bear and black buck, had been showing a decline in their strength recently.

According to the present Act, it costs only Rs. 200 to shoot a Himalayan Brown Bear and Rs. 50 for a Tibetan Wolf in the State forests. The amount is paid to the State Exchequer as royalty.

The Wildlife Department as well as the Forest Department offices throughout the State display signboards indicating the seasons for hunting besides the cost of killing the animals and birds, the sources said.

The district police and civic administration in the State have been alerted and several raids conducted in the last two days in connection with the leak out, he added. — PTI

Categories have been made in hunting game with bird hunting falling under 'small game', hunting of animals as 'big game' and killing of some endangered species as 'special game', the sources said.

Under the 'special game', which includes hunting of Tibetan antelope, ibex and Tibetan wolf, licences can be procured from State Wildlife Department by any Indian citizen on payment of Rs. 500 for a full season and Rs. 300 for 60 days.

For a foreign tourist, the fee has been fixed at Rs. 1,500 for full session and Rs. 1,000 for a two-month period. Similarly, traders dealing in 'shahtoos' shawls can continue their business by paying an amount of Rs 25,000, although shahtoosh trade is banned all over the world, the sources added. — PTI

## Ahmedabad youth's feat to enter Guinness Book

AHMEDABAD, March 28.

A young man from the city has claimed to have foisted himself into the Guinness Book of Records by making the world's largest incense stick. The 14-foot-nine-inch-long and six-inch-thick incense stick weighing 6.3 kg burns in different colours and emits varied fragrances, Merzban Burjor Lahelwala told reporters here yesterday. The achievement has ensured his entry into next edition of the Guinness Book of World Records, he claimed. — PTI

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# Gunshots drown distress calls of the Kashmir Stag

1E (Delhi)  
7/2/98

VIKRAM JIT SINGH  
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 6

**T**HE Hangul or the Kashmir Stag is slipping towards extinction in its last bastion, the Dachigam National Park. Unofficial estimates point to an alarming decline of this majestic deer over the decade of militancy from 818 to its lowest-ever population at between 100-170 individuals.

Set up as a royal hunting reserve in 1910 and declared a sanctuary in 1951, Dachigam was voted the best National Park in the country in the 1980s and thronging with tourists, man's need and greed has reduced the reserve today to a mere shadow

of its former glory. It turned into a sanctuary for militants and renegades, who shot and injured an estimated 200-250 Hangul.

Lost in the political wilderness, Dachigam is a prime example of the devastation wrought upon the Valley by the years of turmoil. There are no more than 15-16 functionaries of the Wildlife Department to watch over the Park sprawling over 141 sq km, positioned between 1,700-4,000 m and home to 20 mammal species, 150 bird species and 50 species of trees.

At night, the Park is left empty barring those at the main gate. Most wildlife functionaries are nearby residents who flee the Park

at nightfall and the lurking threat of militants.

Besides poaching of the Hangul and game birds like the Monal and the Koklaspheasants, it was an open season for timber felling, extraction of charcoal, gravel, stones and boulders, and grazing with the connivance of either the wildlife functionaries or the militants.

The Park's splendid infrastructural facilities were nearly wrecked over the militancy years. The interpretation centre suffered a bomb blast, while the library lies in neglect and is used to billet the security forces. Wildlife functionaries were not spared by militants and a few fell to their rifles.

The crockery and other service material at the rest houses, offices and quarters is missing. However, wildlife functionaries are accused of partaking of a share of the spoils and then delegating all the blame to militants.

According to a senior official of the wildlife department, nearly 2,000 conifer trees have been felled since 1990. The Park's upper area, spread over 100 sq km, has seen the worst devastation, especially in Dagwan, Gatnar, Nagabaran and from Namblan to Tarsar.

A perennial source of impoverishment of the Park has been the annual migration, from March to September, of the Gujjar, Baker-

wal and Banyari tribesman to the upper areas of the Park at Lar, Shalakhund, Nagbal, Darakhor, Mular and Dagwan.

Poachers continue to sneak into the Park from the remote Khanmoo area with the advent of spring. Grass cutting, which used to be conducted on a commercial scale, is still to be weeded out. There are reports of wood being carried out on backpacks in the Darwan area. Contractors take out building material. All this either on the sly or by greasing the palms of some wildlife functionaries.

The deforestation accruing from these illegal activities has contributed enormously to the siltation

of the Dal Lake and a falling capacity of the woodlands to absorb the pollution from the urban areas. The Park forms half the catchment area of the Lake and the fresh water supply of Srinagar city. A mere two days of rain in the Park result in floods in the Dagwan river, which dumps tonnes of silt into the Lake.

The Hangul has been the worst sufferer, with poaching and large-scale disturbance in its habitat and breeding grounds engendering not only a fall in number but also an unfavourable sex ratio. Game birds such as the pheasant, too, have suffered a decimation of their populations, while the serow is not seen anymore.

Update 10

ashish kothari

From: KashmirEnvironmentalWatchAssociation KEWA <kewa\_com@yahoo.com>  
To: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species <cites@unep.ch>; Friends of the Earth International <foeint@antenna.nl>; International Snow Leopard Trust <isltserv.net>; Idmonte@bom3.vsnl.net.in  
Subject: K.E.W.A. : Wildlife law amendments a far cry from what is needed  
Date: Thursday, April 01, 1999 2:36 PM

<<<<< KEWA [ <http://www.geocities.com/~kewas/> ]>>>>>

Wildlife law amendments a far cry from what is needed: K.E.W.A.

Upon review and study of the proposal formulated by the J&K Wildlife Department for amending the state's wildlife law, the Kashmir Environmental Watch Association (KEWA) has termed the amendments as being a far cry from what is needed to save Jammu & Kashmir's endangered species.

The draft proposal aimed at amending the J&K Wildlife Act, 1978, to be introduced in the State Assembly and Legislative Council fails to introduce effective and strong measures to do away with the hunting of endangered species and protection of general species in J&K. As all wildlife populations in J&K, endangered or general, have seen alarming reductions with the loss of habitat caused by deforestation and hunting, KEWA believes there is an urgent need to implement sweeping changes to improve measures to protect wildlife. KEWA feels that the recently proposed amendments seek only to increase hunting and license fees to more profitable rates for the J&K Wildlife Department. It is regrettable that the proposal recommends increasing of license fees for hunting of species such as the Tibetan antelope and wolf, snow leopard, brown bear, and various bird species instead of banning the hunting of these species.

It is condemnable that Jammu & Kashmir remains one of the only regions in the world where hunting of endangered species is still legal. Other national and local governments throughout the world have made it illegal to hunt endangered species, thereby shifting the responsibilities of wildlife departments to protection of endangered species and prevention of illegal hunting. While difficulties are faced in achieving total compliance at least there is an official injunction against hunting of endangered species. By simply increasing hunting fees, the government is continuing its official tolerance and endorsement of the hunting of endangered species. Thus, the current proposals can be added to the list of the failures of the government to protect the environment of Jammu & Kashmir, and even its official complicity in the approaching extinction of its endangered species.

KEWA believes that the wild fauna and flora in their many beautiful and varied forms are an irreplaceable part of Kashmir's environment and, indeed, the natural systems of the earth. KEWA encourages the public to become more conscious of the ever-growing value of wild fauna and flora

A step would be ending of the  
officially regulated hunting of endangered species in Kashmir

Nasir Tark.

**ashish kothari**

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From: KashmirEnvironmentalWatchAssociation KEWA <kewa\_com@yahoo.com>  
To: ashish kothari <ashish@viasd101.vsnl.net.in>  
Subject: recent Kashmir Times article on KEWA  
Date: Tuesday, April 06, 1999 1:12 PM

<<<<< KEWA [ <http://www.geocities.com/~kewas/> ]>>>>>

Kashmir Times article:

April 2, 1999

Amendment of J&K wild life Act an eyewash:  
Environmental watch group

**KT NEWS SERVICE**

**NEW DELHI, Apr 1:** The US-based Kashmir Environmental Watch Association (KEWA) has described the state government's proposal to amend the Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife Act, a mere eye-wash and a far cry to save endangered species in the state.

Instead of banning the hunting of endangered and general wildlife species, the state government has proposed to just increase the fee for hunting, leaving the room wide open for the modern day nawabs to kill animals for their sport.

Founded in April 1997 [correction~ 1998], KEWA is a non-political environmental organisation dedicated to the protection and preservation of flora and fauna in Jammu & Kashmir across the Line of Control (LoC) In a press release the organisation has said the draft proposals aimed at amending the J&K Wildlife Act, 1978, to be introduced in the State Assembly and Legislative Council have failed to introduce effective and strong measures to do away with the hunting of endangered species and protection of general species in the state.

The environmental organisation believed that the recently proposed amendments seek only to increase hunting and license fees to more profitable rates for the Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife Department. "It is regrettable that the proposal recommends increasing the license fees for hunting of species such as Tibetan antelope and wolf, snow leopard, brown bear and various bird species instead of banning their hunting.

The KEWA has called for sweeping measures to improve and protect wildlife as the wildlife population whether endangered or general have seen alarming reduction with the loss of habitat caused by deforestation and hunting in the state. The release said that it was condemnable that Jammu and Kashmir remains one of the only regions in the world where hunting of endangered species is still legal.

Other national and local governments throughout the world have made it illegal to hunt endangered species, thereby shifting the responsibilities of wildlife departments to protection of endangered species and prevention of illegal hunting. "By simply increasing hunting fees, the government is continuing its official tolerance and endorsement of the hunting of endangered species.

Thus, the current proposals can be added to the list of the failures of

the government to protect the environment of Jammu and Kashmir, and even its official complicity in the approaching extinction of its endangered species," said Mr. Nasir Tak one of the office bearers of the organisation. KEWA, he said, believes that the wild fauna and flora in their many beautiful and varied forms are an irreplaceable part of Kashmir's environment and, indeed, the natural systems of the earth.

He added that KEWA was engaged to encourage people across the LoC to become more conscious of the ever-growing value of wild fauna and flora from an aesthetic, scientific, cultural, recreational and economic point of view. The US-based organisation focuses on issues of deforestation, river preservation, endangered species protection, and general preservation of the bio-diversity of Jammu and Kashmir. It has also sought to preserve the traditional harmony in which the indigenous inhabitants of the region have lived with the environment for centuries.

The KEWA has planned to include in its goals: 1) -environmental awareness of the inhabitants of Jammu & Kashmir, 2) encouraging the growth of a local environmental movement in Jammu and Kashmir, 3) reporting on the environment of J&K to the regional and international environmental community and concerned organizations, 4) advocating against any environmentally unfriendly policies or actions taken by any administering government or organization in Jammu & Kashmir, 5) encouraging Eco-friendly industrial and agricultural methods by locals.

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Return to PS

**ashish kothari**

From: KashmirEnvironmentalWatchAssociation KEWA <kewa\_com@yahoo.com>  
To: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species <cites@unep.ch>; Friends of the Earth International <foeint@antenna.nl>; International Snow Leopard Trust <isit@serv.net>  
Subject: Kashmir Violence Takes Heavy Toll on Nature  
Date: Sunday, July 18, 1999 6:22 AM

Kashmir Environmental Watch Association (K.E.W.A.)  
our website: <http://www.geocities.com/~kewas/>

ABC NEWS

Earth War  
Kashmir Violence Takes Heavy Toll on Nature

By Lea Terhune  
Special to ABCNEWS.com

S R I N A G A R, Indian-administered Kashmir, July 16 — As India and Pakistani-backed forces wage a vicious fight in the disputed region of Kashmir, their struggle is changing the very face of the wild, beautiful land they're fighting over.

Though some problems existed before, 10 years of armed militancy in Kashmir is destroying its forests, lakes and wildlife.

As well as outright bombing destruction in the remote mountains, the ongoing fighting between India and Islamic guerillas has made forest work and patrols difficult and dangerous. Endangered wildlife is freely poached and human habitation is destroying the area's ecosystem, leaving its fate hanging in the balance environmentally as well as politically.

#### State Leaders Part of the Problem

The state of Jammu and Kashmir, as it is known in India, or Azad (free) Kashmir, as the Pakistanis call it, is located in and around the Himalayan mountain ranges in the Northwest of India, stretching from the plains of the Punjab to the Tibetan plateau in Ladakh.

The area is fabled for its beauty and remoteness, and for its unique wildlife.

In Ladakh, the northernmost region on the Tibetan plateau, Hemis High Altitude National Park in the rocky, desert-like Markha and Rumvak valleys hosts several endangered animals: the snow leopard — hunted and now endangered because of its beautiful fur — ibex, blue sheep, black-necked crane and marmot.

Yet hundreds of thousands of Indian army and paramilitary forces,

down precious cedar forests.

Further, from 1990 to 1996, during which the state had no elected government but was administered from Delhi, local bureaucrats diverted money away from public works and into their own pockets.

Over the past few months, an estimated 10,000 trees were felled in the old Srinagar City Forest to make way for a golf course, as ordered by the chief executive of the Jammu and Kashmir state government, Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah.

Though course is officially being built to promote tourism, some locals point to its proximity to the Minister's home as evidence of his personal gain from the deal. M.S. Khan, a local businessman, laughs in disgust when asked about the construction.

"Srinagar doesn't need another golf course. They should pay the government employees who have been waiting for months for their salaries instead."

*Shocking! A classic case of the Govt. cheating itself!*

#### Forest Patrol Hampered

According to the forestry department, much of the area has been devastated by military activity.

Along Wular Lake in Hajan, trees were chopped down for miles along the road by government-sponsored militants.

R.K. Mattoo, a retired chief conservator of forests, says the regional violence has also hampered conservation programs. A Forest Protection Group was formed last year, but it is not armed, and members are afraid to patrol the forests where militants may be hiding.

A horticulturist and farmer who gives his name only as Mr. Dar complains that residents are generally unconcerned about the environment. "The integrity of local people has been spoiled by the militancy. The people have changed. Values are not what they once were."

#### Formerly Pristine Lakes Now Polluted

Water pollution is another problem. Human population is encroaching upon the jewel of the Kashmir Valley, Dal Lake.

It will not survive another 30 years if conditions do not change soon, says Dr. M.R.D. Kundangar.

He heads a project that monitors the lake and attempts to de-silt and clear it of fast-growing weeds. Srinagar has no sewage system, and all effluent goes into the lake or the nearby River Jhelum.

*Why isn't there one? And are there steps to create one?  
Govt. should take steps to create one.  
Biosystemic animal waste*

Though the previous government earmarked funds to save the lake, this

Meanwhile a good deal of state and federal resources are funneled into security and defence.

"If we don't get funds soon, I am really afraid we will have to close this project down. When I have to run to the government to beg for our salaries, there is no question of getting money for lab supplies or programs," he says.

A few years ago, Yasmin Ali co-founded Green Kashmir, a non-government organization that tries educate people about the proper disposal of garbage.

They provided garbage baskets and established collection routes. But without funds, sustaining such projects is difficult. The local population also has other matters on its mind.

"I guess people have lost their concern for the environment because there are more pressing agendas," she says.

With an uneasy cease-fire in the region only recently established, it may be a long time before attention is paid to the land itself.

#### Shawls of Death

The chiru, or Tibetan antelope, is at the top of the endangered animals list in Kashmir. There is strong evidence that it is killed for its exceptionally soft throat hair, which is used for making shawls of the finest of Kashmiri materials, "shahtoosh."

One Tibetan estimated at least 20 animals must die to make one shawl. The antelopes wander into Indian territory alive at the border of Ladakh, in the Chang Chenmo Valley.

Though favored by fashion divas, the shawls are illegal; nearly 300 were seized by Indian customs during the first quarter of 1999.

Still, the Jammu and Kashmir state government continues a policy of allowing trade in endangered animals.

Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah, when asked what the state intended to do about the shahtoosh trade, said, "The trade will be stopped over my dead body. I don't care who says it's illegal. Thousands of people depend on that trade."

One naturalist has said the chiru, with its graceful, slender horns, is among the animals that gave rise to the fable of the unicorn. If shahtoosh continues to be made, say conservationists, the Tibetan antelope may also soon inhabit the realm of myth.

Pashmina shawls, also in vogue, are made from the wool of another Himalayan resident, the long-haired pashmina goat, which has been domesticated and raised for its hair. Luckily the animals are combed, rather than killed, to obtain the hair. — Lea Terhune

# J&K govt. sets up panel to update wildlife act

The Times of India News Service

JAMMU: The government said on Thursday that a committee had been set up to examine what amendments were needed in the state's Wildlife Protection Act to update it.

Minister of state for forests Bashir Ahmed Nengroo, responding to a question in the legislative council whether the government intended to extend the 1972 wildlife protection law to the state, said it had its own law which was "adequately effective in protecting" wildlife and was also being "properly implemented".

Mohammed Aslam of the National Conference, who had raised the question, insisted that wildlife in the state, including endangered species, was getting depleted.

Environment expert Goverdhan Singh Jamwal (Nominated) said public wildlife wardens, conversant with their areas, should be appointed for effective curb on wildlife de-

pletion. *for 11/23/2000*

At present, there are government wildlife wardens against whom there is a general charge that they are "corrupt and ineffective". Naseer Ahmed Shah (Nominated) said that some of the wildlife loss was on account of a "bonhomie" that used to exist between the border guards of India and Pakistan by which the Pakistanis used to push pigs into Indian territory, which was reciprocated with the driving of neelgai into Pakistani territory.

He also said that hunting expeditions by influential people were being "winked at". Mr Nengroo said migratory birds landing in the Gharana wetland were largely falling victim to Pakistani shelling.

Several experts have lately urged the need for the state to adopt the Central law in view of the controversy over the killing of the Tibetan antelope for making shahtoosh shawls.

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17/4/2000

# NATION

THE NE

## Border firing scares away winged visitors

By CHANDER SHARMA

**Jammu, April 16:** For the winged visitors, borders have no meaning but the intermittent firing on Indo-Pak border has scared the seasonal visitors over the years up to the extent that their number is constantly decreasing every year in the Gharana Wet Land Reserve situated along the no-man's land on R S Pura International border, 35 km from Jammu City and 28 km from Jammu airport.

These avian species which include common Teal, Coot, Pinail, Mallards, Gadwall and Snipes start arriving in flocks from several parts of Russia, China, Afghanistan and other colder places in mid-November to stay in various Wet Land Reserves, including Gharana up to middle of March, maximum up to first week of April.

Earlier, over a lakh avian guests used to arrive in the Wet Land Reserve of Gharana but border-firing scared them to the extent the season just en-

ded (1999-2000) that the figure was below 20,000 against about 50,000 last winter (1998-99), said the Wildlife officials. They are worried over the drastic decrease in the number and feel that during next winter, the winged guests may opt for other safer places away from the firing zone.

Gharana, a small Wet Land Reserve of about 1 square km size, (though earlier it may have been much larger) plays host to a number of water birds. The main feeding source

are army ditches through a *Kucha nullah* and rain water from the surrounding catchment areas.

The Wet Land is surrounded by a large expanse of marshy area most of which is infested with weeds and is utilised by locals for agriculture. Gharana is part of about 96 sq-km wet land reserves, scattered in different parts of the

State. But this, including many others in the surrounding areas, being ideal for the winged guests attract more

birds than others. However, the border firing which starts all of a sudden on the border anytime, has scared the avian visitors and they start flying or chirping even in the mid-night or take shelter in the water or the weed.

But those who fly sometimes are hit by the bullets. This is the main reason that has diverted many of these migratory birds to other safer Wet Land Reserves scattered in various parts of the state and in Pakistan.

**ECOVIGIL** THE BIRDS ARE BACK IN JAMMU, BUT THE WETLANDS THEY'RE HEADED FOR ARE DRYING UP BY THE DAY

## Flying sorties from across the border

Although winged visitors have been arriving in Gharana and other wetland reserves in Jammu along the Indo-Pak border, the wetlands themselves are shrinking so fast that they no longer offer hospitable environs. **S. CHANDER SHARMA** reports

**M**IGRATORY birds are some of the lesser known casualties of firing along the Indo-Pak border. They wing their way in from Siberia and other parts of Central Asia to the wetland reserves of Jammu. Now that there has been a ceasefire for good spell, the birds are flapping their way back in larger numbers than ever before. It's a great pity, therefore, that not just the number of wetland reserves in the region, but their area, is constantly shrinking.

Wetland reserves in the Jammu region, including Gharana and Kukrian situated on the zero-line of the Indo-Pak border in the RS. Pura Sector, which is about 35 km from Jammu; the Pargwal reserve on the border in Akhnoor sector, and the Mansar and Sannasar reserves have been playing host to lakhs of birds every winter for generations. The temperature and food at the wetland reserves provide the birds the ideal habitat to rest their wings in.

The Gharana, Kukrian and Pargwal reserves, situated on the Indo-Pak border, have always been the choicest winter homes for the birds. During the last two winters, their number dropped because of cross border firing.

Only 15,000 birds were noticed at the Gharana Reserve near R.S. Pura last winter (1999-2000) (see box).

But after the guns fell silent on the border after the ceasefire, the birds started flocking to reserves once again. And during the first fortnight of their scheduled arrival time in November, over 15,000 had already arrived at Gharana with about 20,000 at Pargwal Reserve in the Akhnoor Sector. The numbers are increasing every day and the officials are hopeful that this season will be good for these

guests, provided ceasefire conditions continue to prevail over the border.

Wildlife officials were jubilant over these developments, but now a problem has surfaced—the shrinking of the reserves. The filth that has accumulated in these waterbodies over the last three years could not be cleared because of the constant cross border firing all through the year. After taking over the reserves one by one over a decade, the Wildlife Department had been clearing the silt and the filth from these reserves in such a way as to ensure that the job is completed before the winged guests arrive.

### Number of birds at Gharana

Before 1997: over a lakh
1997-98: one lakh
1998-99: 50,000
1999-2000: 15,000
2000-01: 30,000

But, thanks to the border firing and the strict restrictions imposed by the Border Security Force (BSF), especially after a landmine blast in which a BSF jeep along with all the officers and the driver sitting inside was blown up early last year, the Department's staff could not access the area. Even labourers who are deployed to clean the reserves refused to go there for fear of their lives. As a result, a large number of birds which are now arriving there daily do not find the space to house and feed themselves and, in the process, are turning to some other reserves, including some in Pakistan.

Wildlife officials put the tentative figure of birds having arrived so far at Gharana at about 30,000 but no official counting of the migratory birds has been done. This, they say, is due to high grasses and weeds that are impeding the counting operations. However, they told *The Indian Express* that the response in Kukrian and Pargwal is still very



### After the guns fell silent, the birds started flocking back to the reserves

tors. Once we get the permission, we hope to also take care of the birds," says Pant.

According to him, the number of the winged visitors was about one lakh every season and the locals were killing the birds due to a lack of awareness. But after the department took over the Reserve and told the locals about the importance of migratory birds to the local environment, people stopped poaching.

But soon after this, the constant border exchanges of fire have come in the way of efforts to attract more and more birds. Incidentally, these birds start to return to their summer homes in West Asia during the middle of March. By April, almost all the visitors leave the reserves. The ceasefire, then, has its supporters in the most unlikely of places!

**EXPRESS  
FOCUS**

poor to date, which perhaps indicates that there is no room for complacency just yet.

Meanwhile, some other wetland reserves, including Sangral and Nanga, are yet to be taken over by the Department due to the ongoing cash crunch in the militancy-marked state. But Gharana, fortunately, is once again alive to the chirping of colourful migratory birds, including the Coot, the Common Teal, Pintails, Mallards and Gadwalls.

Regional Wildlife Warden of the Wildlife Department, Manoj Pant pointed out to *The Indian Express* that the denial of permission to them by the BSF, which was for genuine reasons, was the main cause for the filth in the reserves. "However, now we have taken up the issue with the BSF and are planning to launch cleansing operation and the formal counting of the winged visi-

# PSUs have the cake and eat it too

■ Private players demand level playing field, remind government of broken promises

GEORGE MATHEW  
MUMBAI, FEB 10

IF there is one area where the private sector is unable to do anything against the might of the public sector companies, it is in the parallel marketing of LPG. Thanks to subsidies (only for the PSU oil companies), absence of a level playing field and the Government's failure in fulfilling its promises, private LPG companies are reeling under heavy losses and regretting their entry into this public sector domain.

With the Union budget less than two weeks away, private LPG players are back again reminding the Government about broken promises and unfair sops doled out to PSU oil companies. The main grouse of private LPG players is: While PSUs get a subsidy, private firms don't get any such sop from the Government. "Either abolish the subsidy or give subsidy on LPG marketed by private players as well," they say.

Seven major players (including three multinationals) entered the

parallel marketing of LPG and set up large import terminals in major ports. These companies also set up a number of bottling plants in the area served by the respective terminals struggling hard to get established in the particular market. The private companies together have, at present, an estimated consumer base of nearly a million. They also cater to around 50 per cent of the total industrial/commercial LPG market. The total investment of these companies in putting up LPG infrastructure facilities in the country is around \$150 million (Rs 650 crore).

"The pricing of LPG for domestic bottling in India is one of the lowest in the world and the Government provides substantial subsidy on each cylinder marketed by the PSU oil companies to domestic customers. The Government had declared a policy stating gradual reduction of the subsidy and bringing it at a level of 15 per cent of import parity cost by the year 2002. While the Government's noble intent in subsidising this basic necessity for any Indian

citizen is appreciated, this has provided unfair edge to the PSU oil companies in the domestic market vis-a-vis the private marketers," SK Hazra, president of the Indian LPG Industry Association said in an SOS to the Petroleum Ministry.

"LPG is sold by PSU oil companies both controlled as well as a decontrolled (free market) petroleum product. The controlled market in which domestic cylin-

## LPG MARKET

ders are supplied constitutes 88 per cent of the PSU sales. The balance 12 per cent is sold by PSUs as a decontrolled product. Accordingly, the LPG price of PSUs for commercial cylinders and industrial bulk users is totally decontrolled," he said. PSU oil companies source 87 per cent of their LPG locally from refineries as well as gas processing units and only 13 per cent is imported. In contrast, private players have to import 100 per cent of their requirements; an unfair disadvantage as they do not

have access to cheaper priced domestic production.

The policy of the Government is that PSUs will fix their price for any free market product (as also for free market LPG) on import parity basis. In the international market, the LPG price is fixed on the first day of the month by main supplier Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, on true import parity basis, free market LPG price of PSUs should change every month in line with landed cost of imported LPG. "PSUs may calculate their prices and add their storage/distribution cost and their marketing margins. Till the financial year 1998-99, PSUs had been fixing their free market LPG price on true import parity price in line with Government policy. Prices were more or less revised on a monthly basis in line with increase/decrease of Saudi monthly prices. However, since the beginning of this financial year (1999-2000), this policy has not been followed by PSUs," it said.

This has resulted in huge loss to the private LPG marketers.

"Further, due to artificially fixing a very low price by PSUs, the Indian Government lost revenue as well. Most disturbingly, however, is that customers of the private companies have been confused by the inconsistent PSU pricing and seem to have lost confidence in the competitiveness of the private sector," Hazra said.

Private LPG companies have no option but to import the product through their port import terminals. "In order to provide a level playing field, the Ministry had earlier declared that PSU oil companies will charge the actual freight to free market customers. This freight would be calculated from the nearest import terminal. This meant industrial and commercial (19 kg) customers buying LPG from PSUs will pay the freight from the nearest import terminal of PSUs. Although this policy was followed by PSU oil companies for a short period of two months, it has since been discontinued from the beginning of this financial year, further eroding the level playing field," Hazra said.

# The Enron project: Battle begins now

## Cheques & Balances

SUCHETA DALAL



THE Maharashtra Government has finally set up a review committee to go into the contract with Dabhol Power Company (DPC); but its mandate, far from being 'sweeping' is restricted to finding a way out of the present payment crisis, reviewing the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) or finding a way to foist the entire mess on to the Central Government. The review committee's truncated mandate and the two-month wrangling over its composition indicates the pressure under which it will have to work. The committee is now a combination of independent and upright members, whose nomination was strongly opposed by the Sharad Pawar faction and opportunists who were supported by it.

If that was not bad enough, there is also pressure to try and push the expensive project on to the Power Trading Corporation so that the high tariffs charged by Enron would be distributed across the country. This move would have plenty of political support.

After all, Union Power Minister Suresh Prabhu, represents the Shiv Sena, which cancelled the project alleging corruption and re-negotiated it with thrice the capacity. Finally, there is the BJP-led Government which had controversially re-ratified the counter-guarantee during the dying moments of its 13-day reign, and after it was certain that it would lose the confidence vote. The extent of political support to Enron is obvious from the fact that even the Swadeshi lobby has maintained a stunning silence about this multinational and its shenanigans. The vested interests are heavily stacked in favour of Enron. Moreover, the MNC has a clear game plan for using this support to its advantage, while the State-Government has none - all it can do is bleat about how the Enron problem will affect foreign investment in India.

Enron's game plan is smart and subtle. Having got the departing US Ambassador Richard Celeste to indulge in some sabre rattling on its behalf, it has now turned on the heat by invoking the sovereign guarantee and pushing the problem on to the Centre. Enron could easily invoke the Rs 135 crore Letter of Credit from the Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB), but that would only have postponed the problem instead of allowing its supporters in Delhi to

Purchase Agreement (PPA) will have to be accompanied by reforms at the bankrupt MSEB, say DPC officials.

If the payment crisis indeed forces the Maharashtra Government to press ahead with MSEB reforms, it may be the single positive by-product of a bad deal. While Enron is working to an obvious plan, Maharashtra Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh has been raising the age-old bogey about how the controversy would affect foreign investment. That is a load of hogwash. The situation in 2001 is a far cry from 1994 when Enron managed to get the world to heap opprobrium on India for cancelling the project. Today, multinational companies in India are operating in every area of business from cosmetics to computer hardware, to liquor, clothes, consumer durables, food and bottled water. They have, without exception, gained a smooth entry to the large Indian market. They are competing for their business without gold plated contracts and guarantees, face no persecution, and are loved by consumers. If Enron remained the most controversial MNC in India for the last 8 years, it is because there is substantial basis for the charges made against it.

The review committee, may find it worthwhile to examine the legal aspects to the deal before tackling the commercial terms of the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). Leading legal experts have already opined that the contract violates several statutory provisions of the Electricity Supply Act 1948. Since Enron has invoked a constitutional guarantee, it is important to examine the validity of such a comprehensive guarantee which eliminates all risk inherent to business.

On February 10, 1994, the Government of Maharashtra agreed to irrevocably and unconditionally guarantee payment to DPC and to indemnify it against any loss sustained by it by reason of the invalidity, illegality or unenforceability of any of the provisions and ancillary agreements under the PPA. The Government is constitutionally and statutorily bound to act in accordance with the law and simply cannot indemnify any contractor against all illegality. On September 16, 1994, a tripartite agreement was signed with the Reserve Bank of India which guaranteed payment of Rs 1,500 crore a year by the Union Government if the Maharashtra defaulted on its payment obligation. The RBI would simply deduct all amounts and interest payable to Enron from the State Government account into which the State share of central revenue is deposited.

If the review committee exposes the absurdity of the multiple guarantees then Enron would be far more likely to negotiate a sensible PPA with Maha-

## Forex reserves cross \$41 b

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
MUMBAI, FEB 10

INDIA'S foreign currency reserves have crossed \$41 billion for the week ending February 2 following increased institutional inflows and remittances from abroad.

The upsurge continued with fresh inflows of \$347 million during the week ending February 2 and the foreign currency reserves touching \$41,274 million compared to \$40,927 million the previous week, according to the Reserve Bank of India's weekly statistical supplement.

The rise was mainly due to foreign currency assets growing by \$407 million at \$38,515 million compared to \$38,108 million a week earlier.

# 'Hunters' get pride of place

■ Conservationists dropped as ruling party politicians favoured in J&K

MUFTI ISLAH  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 30

THE Jammu and Kashmir Government recently reconstituted its Wildlife Advisory Board, packing it with ruling party politicians and giving conservationists a wide berth. What's more interesting is that among the 22 members are at least four hunters, and two among them make no bones about their track record. They are the secretary of the Fur Association of Kashmir, Mohammad Ashraf Lily, and a retired police officer, Allah Bakhsh.

Lily told *The Indian Express* he was not surprised to find his name in the list. "I have been a regular on the board for many years now," he said. When asked about his hunting prowess, he replied: "I still have a 12-bore locally manufactured gun with me. It's a special thing to possess and it is licensed with the wildlife department. I tested my

hunting skills last in 1988 on some ducks at Hokersar Wildlife Reserve. It was great fun... In 1984 I killed a black bear at Dachigam National Park." But now he regrets all that.

Lily, however, acknowledged that Bakhsh was "more skilled" than him. Bakhsh, however, said he had learnt his lesson and that shooting wild animals was bad. "My experience has taught me that migratory birds in a flock contract disease if some among them are hit," he said. Ridiculing the current preservation methods, he observed, "Wildlife protection was at its best during Maharaja Hari Singh's rule. Hunting was prevalent then but only a select few could do it."

"I still possess a Holland-made gun and will tell you about my shooting abilities later," he said, adding that he was in mourning over the death of a nephew.

"God bless the department if

they have nominated people who have indulged in hunting," said Mir Inayatullah, a former chief wildlife warden of Jammu and Kashmir and a noted advocate of wildlife preservation.

Inayatullah and another retired chief of the department, A R Wani, were dropped from the board this time. Wani, according to sources, has fallen out of favour "for being uncompromising on wildlife conservation."

"I don't care whether I am on the board or not," he told *The Indian Express*. "I don't care what they do but wildlife should be preserved at any cost in the State."

Politicians and legislators from the ruling party and bureaucrats dominate the board at the cost of the actual conservationists. The eight political persons on the board include Sheikh Nazir Ahmad, general secretary of the ruling National Conference.

The board is constituted on the

recommendations of the chief wildlife warden, in consultation with the State forest minister, to advise the Government on wildlife preservation.

The State has an exclusive Wildlife Protection Act, which was drafted in 1978. Wildlife experts have been vociferous in demanding the Act be amended to make it more stringent and effective.

Lily, who claims to have reformed, has some suggestions to offer to the State Government. "The Government should settle the controversy over the fur stocks the wildlife department has been holding for more than five years. If these are destroyed, hunting can be easily detected," he claims.

The wildlife department has seized more than two lakh animal skins, valued around Rs 7 crore, since it banned the fur trade four years back. The Fur Association says the cost is more than Rs 12 crore.

# Unwitting victims of a world at war

Associated Press

GHARANA (J&K), Dec. 19

20/12/01  
H&K  
HAVING survived bombs and anti-aircraft fire on their flights from Siberia through Afghanistan, some 2,500 migratory birds cannot even rest at night in this wetland near the Pakistan-India Border.

As soldiers of the two nuclear-armed neighbours fire at each other with handguns and rifles, the mallards, pintails, snipes, teals and coots scream and wheel through the air,

afraid to land. "Leave aside wars, these birds are sensitive to even small-arms firing. They love peace," said Tahir Shawal, Wildlife Warden at the Gharana Wetland in Jammu-Kashmir, which is also claimed by Pakistan. "What tragedy for these birds that they cannot even sleep during the night due to the firing," he said.

During a ceasefire along the border last year, some 25,000 birds arrived for their winter sojourn, he said. This year only 10 per cent of that number have

come, and Shawal attributed it to the war in Afghanistan, as well as the border firing that increased after the State Assembly was bombed.

"The birds might be taking a different, longer route, so they may arrive late," Shawal speculated. His deepest concern is that many may have been killed on the way, or that the heavy fighting in Afghanistan has caused them to choose new destinations.

Apart from the bumper crop of birds during last winter's

AV 34  
J&K  
cease-fire, the usual number of arrivals at the 1 sq. km Gharana Wetland has been 8,000-9,000 in recent years, said Manoj Pant, the Regional Wildlife Warden in Jammu.

Local villagers — whose homes are encroaching on the wetland and who hunted the birds until the early 1990s — nevertheless feel sorry for them and are worried about their dwindling numbers. "We are emotionally attached to these birds, who have been our guests for centuries," said Inder Ram



LUNCH STOP-OVER: Cranes gather in Hula Valley, north Israel, where three tonnes of corn are spread out every day to feed various migrating birds. Some 30,000 cranes, about 20 per cent of the world's population, migrate from Russia between October and November. While the majority fly on to Africa, the 10,000 or so that stay behind are fed on corn, with farmers, Israeli nature protection agencies and some international sponsors sharing the cost. — AFP

## Wular mirrors Kashmir's woes

Reuters

SRINAGAR, Feb. 24

25/2/02  
HBL

"WHAT the Nile is to Egypt, Wular is to Kashmir". That's how a famous Kashmiri poet once described the exquisite emerald green Wular, a freshwater lake surrounded by giant pine and willow trees in the Indian-ruled Himalayan region of Jammu and Kashmir.

Local officials, ignoring the more obvious claims of Siberia's Lake Baikal and other contenders, fondly refer to Wular as Asia's largest freshwater lake. But years of neglect during a bloody rebellion that has converted the idyllic mountain State into a paradise lost have reduced the once sprawling lake to a shadow of its original self. The waters of the lake located at a height of 1,580 metres — once a popular tourist attraction in the State of lush green fields and vast apple orchards — are muddy, weed-infested and ringed by a huge expanse of marshy land.

And while migratory birds from Central Asia such as pintails, shovellers and mallards still visit the shrinking wetlands around Wular every winter, the cackle and honking call of whooper swans, curlews and sandhill cranes has been silenced by the booming of guns. Instead, navy commandos in motor boats patrol the lake to keep rebels out of the waters of Wular that are a source of livelihood for about 80,000 fishermen.

"Siltation, agricultural activities, erratic plantation and human settlements on the lake shore

over the past decades have reduced the lake from its original size of 202 sq km to 24 sq km," said M.R.D. Kundangar, director of the Jammu and Kashmir Lakes and Waterways Development Authority.

In 1990, Wular was designated a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, a global treaty that provides the framework for international co-operation for the conservation of wetland habitats. But the 12-year-old revolt in the region has prevented the Government from taking any measures to conserve Wular which also acts as a huge absorption basin for flood waters in the Himalayan region.

"It is painful to see Wular shrinking and more painful is the situation in Kashmir which does not permit us to help the dying waterbody," said 75-year-old Manzoor Fazili, a retired professor who lives near Wular.

Local residents say it is important to take immediate steps to rescue Wular since about 12,000 families depend on the lake's resources such as water chestnuts and fish for a living.

"Wular contributes about 60 per cent of fish in the Kashmir valley," an official spokesman said. "Thousands of poor people of the area are directly dependent on the lake. Its survival is important," he said. He added that the Government planned to launch a programme to revive the lake, which included recovery of land that had been encroached and continuous monitoring of water quality.

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## Plan to protect Dal Lake

By Our Correspondent

**JAMMU, MARCH 19.** The Jammu and Kashmir Government has formulated a comprehensive plan to protect the Dal Lake from degradation and pollution.

Accordingly, all the unauthorised residential areas around the lake are being vacated and a drive been launched to

clean its water.

Making a statement in the Assembly, the State Housing and Urban Affairs Minister, Ghulam Mohiuddin Shah, said there was an urgent need to protect the water bodies in the valley, particularly the Dal Lake.

He said, "financial constraint is the main hurdle for the smooth execution of projects, initiated for the protection of

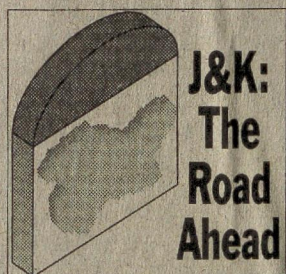
the Dal Lake, but the lake will be protected at any cost."

Though a lot of encroachments have come up on the banks, acquisitions of structures within the lake body were being carried out.

"A moratorium on undertaking repairs to the existing structures around the water body has been announced."

# How green is this Valley?

It was the other kind of violence that the Valley also had to endure—eco-terrorism. The result: fading wetlands, polluted rivers and lakes that dot the Kashmir Valley today, says MUFTI ISLAH



**G**OHAN, Tengpora and Wathlangi are three villages on a mission. Recently, residents here teamed up, quashed a bund, and are now ready to cultivate paddy on an otherwise unarable land. Their inspiration: the neighbouring Aukhanpora village that has already brought 1,500 kanal

of such land under cultivation. Only, what they are reclaiming is not wasteland, but a world-famous wetland.

The result: the reputed Hygam wetland 50 km north of Srinagar, has shrunk from 4.5 sq. km to less than 1.5 km. Once home to exquisite species of migratory birds, Hygam is now grazing ground for cattle.

It is part of a developing story in J&K, one where a paradise is being consistently plundered by its successive

governments and citizens.

Or take the Dal lake, a picture postcard image synonymous with that of the entire Valley. The lake, which witnessed profuse farming over the years despite a much-publicised 'Save Dal' programme has shrunk from 16 sq km in the 1980s to under nine sq km today. The purchase of faulty dredgers—procured at crores of rupees—to clean up the lake, did not help the matters. A case probing these

procurements is pending with the State's Vigilance department.

The case of Wullar lake, one of the largest fresh water lakes in Asia, isn't any different. Situated in the north Kashmir district of Baramulla, its water quality has considerably deteriorated over the last few decades. A huge portion of the lake has become a cesspool and soon would be fit for paddy cultivation.

Anchar lake, near Srinaga-

gar, is the next in the line, getting choked from the effluents from State's biggest hospital — the SKIMS. The emerald Nigeen lake in Srinagar, is perhaps the only saving grace, its health being kept intact, thanks to the constant vigil of an NGO.

Hokersar, 12 km north of Srinagar is another world class wetland. Like Hygam, this wetland which used to play host to 2-3 lakh wintry avian visitors from Siberia, North Europe, China and Central Asia is today facing death. The reason: The Doodganga channel, aimed at getting rid of flood water, runs parallel to the wetland, often pumping in tonnes of silt.

The wetlands of the state, besides sustaining a rich aquatic vegetation and large avi-faunal population of both resident and migratory species are famous for rare and endemic fish species like snow trout, mahseer, rainbow trout and schizothorax. The avian visitors include common teals, mallards, pintails, gadwalls, wigeons, coots, greylag goose, shovellers, red crested pochards, white-eyed pochards, duck and rails.

All this will be left only in history text books unless eco-terrorism is checked. And all is not lost yet, but ecology has a curious habit of abiding by the domino theory. The new administration has its task cut out to make sure that Kashmir remains what it is — a paradise on earth.



JAVEED SHAH

## In troubled waters

■ Dal lake: 16 sq. km in 1980, 9 sq. km today

■ Shrinking wetlands: one-third of Hygam left as it is, Hokersar chokes in silt

■ Wullar isn't a 'fresh' water lake anymore, could soon be a paddy field

JK 13

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## Mufti government halts projects around Dal lake

TIMES NEWS NETWORK & PTI

**Srinagar:** The Jammu and Kashmir government has ordered a halt to all projects around Dal lake, initiated during the regime of Farooq Abdullah. The government has also formed a three-member committee to identify officials who had granted permission for construction work in the area, designated as a green belt.

Speaking to Times News Network, minister of housing and urban development, Gulam Hassan Mir, said the committee, headed by divisional commissioner Kashmir Pervaz Dewan, had been asked to submit its report within two months.

Mir said construction work in the green belt was banned under the city's master plan, prepared by the state government in 1971.

The minister said that in violation of the prohibitory orders, the National Conference (NC) government had gone ahead with the construction of the chief minister's office-cum-residence and police chief's residence and had sanctioned Rs 25 crore for the purpose. Other constructions include about a dozen huts of a five-star hotel chain, owned by hotelier Lalit Suri, and a golf course.

The NC government had also allowed the construction of a guest house for the Jammu and Kashmir bank, along

with residential houses for certain influential people in the prohibited area, said Mir.

He said once the committee submitted its report, legal action would be taken against the guilty. The committee would also list all encroachments in the green belt since 1971.

The minister said necessary steps would be taken to ensure continuation of work on the lake's clean-up drive. In this direction, he said constant power supply would be maintained for the sewage treatment plant.

Platforms between houseboats would be removed and land identified for people displaced from the Dal lake, said Mir.

1013 ✓

4/17/03

# Migrant birds flock to Kashmir

By Shujaat Bukhari

**HOKERSAR (KASHMIR), JAN. 16.** The booming of guns has not deterred lakhs of birds from Siberia, North Europe, China and Central Asia from flocking to their favourite spot in Kashmir this winter. Four-lakh avian visitors are expected here this year.

The Hokersar wetland reserve on the Srinagar-Baramulla national highway had played host to around 3.5 lakh birds last year in spite of a low rate of migration in the initial weeks due to the bombings in Afghanistan following the 9/11 events.

Hokera, as the Hokersar is also known, is a major destination for a variety of migratory waterfowls including goose, shoveller, red-crested pochard, white-eyed pochard, common teal, mallard, pintail, gadwall, wigeon, coot and greylag. These birds begin their flight to Kashmir in early September and stay till spring. The other wetlands in Kashmir include Hygam, Mirgund, Narbal, Shalbugh and Gantimulla. The lakes are Wullar, Manasbal, Anchar, Dal and Nagin. The Wildlife Department



**Even as tourists stayed away, winged visitors from China, Russia and other countries kept their date with Kashmir and throng the Hokersar wetland reserve.** — Photo Nissar Ahmad

is concerned over the dried conditions of small spongy lands such as Indranagar, Narkara and Khushalsar.

The officials say rain helps in two ways: one, the water surface area increases; and two, the birds get more food in deep waters. They cite better habitat and protection as also the avail-

ability of food as prime reasons for waterfowls flocking Hokera. The population in other water bodies is likely to swell once food becomes scarce at Hokera.

The Wildlife Department is trying hard to store water. "We have not allowed any water to go waste at Hokera despite a prolonged dry spell. We have

managed it well and sprinkled foodstuff to attract more and more birds," the officials said.

Poaching has become an irritant for the winged visitors. This time the department is geared to check the menace. Six persons have been booked so far on charge of poaching. Night vigil teams are also in action.

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6/7/03

## Tourism hits Ladakh ecosystem

By Aarti Dhar

**NEW DELHI, JULY 5.** The opening up of the high altitude wetlands in the Changthang region of Ladakh for tourism is disturbing its extremely fragile ecosystem. Modernisation, development and a sudden increase in tourism is breaking down the traditional management systems, affecting local culture and communities. Tourist activities are causing disturbance to the wildlife, degrading the pastures and adding to the pollution. The worst impact is felt between June and September, when tourism is at its peak.

Changthang was opened to visitors in 1994 and since then the number of visitors and their impact on the environment has been increasing every year — from a couple of hundreds in 1996 to a few thousand in 2000. The sudden and dramatic increase in the number of trekkers' pack animals — donkeys, mules and horses — in the region has started putting pressure on the few pastures in the areas. Increasing activities of Government agencies and development works are some other potential threats, according to a report 'High Altitude Wetlands of Ladakh: a Conservation Initiative' prepared by the World Wildlife Fund for Nature-India.

The high-altitude wetlands in Ladakh are mainly found in the Changthang region between 4,000 metres and 5,000 metres from sea level, situated in the south-eastern side. The most striking feature of this region is the absence of a consistent slope which would enable water to drain away. Surveys of trekkers' groups between 1999-2000 has shown that 1,300 trekkers visited Changthang in 2000, indicating an alarming increase of 60 per cent over that of 1999. The number of non-trekkers during the same period showed 2,600 visitors in 2000, a steep 100 per cent increase over previous year.

The latest developments show that the State Government's policy to settle down Tibetans has added to the disaster. These refugees have been given marshy lands for farming, but this has played havoc with the wetland ecosystem driving away several migratory and vulnerable species of birds. Erecting electric poles has restricted the flights of the birds.

The WWF-India took up the three largest and most vulnerable wetlands of Ladakh — Tsomoriri, Tsokar and Pangong Tso — for study and conservation efforts. The Tsomoriri lake constitutes the prime habitat for breeding water fowl, including the globally-threatened black-

necked crane and the bar-headed goose. Tsokar plays host to a variety of water birds, including one of the 13 pairs of black-necked crane recorded in Ladakh.

The Field Research Laboratory, a unit of Defence Research and Development Organisation, has recorded 700 plant species of which 285 are used in the Tibetan system of medicine.

Also, not many know that the region has six species and an equal number of subspecies of sheep and goat and is an important reservoir of genetic material for any future improvement of domestic stock. Many of these are on the verge of extinction, mainly due to excessive hunting by outsiders in Ladakh, in the past and lately due to severe competition with livestock and loss of habitat due to increasing human and livestock populations, the WWF-India report says.

The WWF-India is now trying to motivate the security forces, deployed in Ladakh, to refrain from conducting shooting exercises near the lake besides involving the Indo-Tibetan Border personnel in cleanliness campaigns. The Army has provided space to the WWF-India in Leh to set up a Nature Interpretation Centre that would be used for orientation of Army personnel posted in Ladakh.

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FEB 12 1982 TO RAJESH PROJECT HANGUL SOCI. 1.5

**JAMMU, Feb 11:** Jammu and Kashmir Government is launching an in-depth Project Hangul for preservation of the rare specie of stag, mostly found in mountainous ranges of the Kashmir valley.

To be tailored on the pattern of Project Tiger and Project Elephant at the national level, the Project Hangul envisages conduct of proper census of the specie, its habitat management and creating awareness among people about the threat to this fast dwindling animal, the pride of the valley. The broad details of the project were discussed at a high level meeting here this evening with Chief Secretary Mr Ashok Jaitly in the chair. The forest department would formulate and undertake the project.

Mr Jaitly called for a multi-disciplinary and a pragmatic approach for preserving Hangul and said that the concerned personnel should be trained to manage the habitat. For creating adequate awareness among the people, especially the younger generation, he said setting up of the nature interpretation centers could go a long way in achieving desired goal. He said the project should be conceptualized properly to achieve long-term gains in increasing the population of Hangul in the valley.

The Chief Secretary also sought effective enforcement of wildlife laws and said that stern measures should be taken against poachers. The sanctuaries would not only promote wildlife but could be of immense tourist attraction for the nature lovers who have been thronging the beautiful valley, especially from abroad, for years. This will definitely give boost to economy that is predominantly dependent on tourism, he added.

He also sought formulation of a project for wetland development that is the destination of varied species of migratory birds round the year. This has been the glory of Kashmir that has to be preserved and promoted at all costs, he said.

The Hangul population has increased in the valley over the years and the available statistics suggest their number at about 483 in Dachigam National Park, over 100 in Sonamarg and a few in Kishtwar area as well. This reflects their growing number that has been faced with a threat of extinction worldwide.

Among those present in the meeting were the Financial Commissioner, Planning and Development, Mr K B Pillai, Commissioner Secretary, Tourism, Mr N Lehtaq Ahmed, Commissioner/Secretary, Forests, Mr B S Jaswal, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Mr P P Sharma, Chief Wildlife Warden, Mr S B Swatantra and an expert on the wildlife, Mr A P Wani.

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MAY 21

J-K likely to convert six forests into sanctuaries / Nishit Dholabhai

*PAV 34 ✓*  
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Jammu, May 20: The Jammu and Kashmir Cabinet is discussing a proposal to turn six major forest areas in the militancy-affected Poonch and Rajouri regions into wildlife sanctuaries.

Apart from protecting the endangered plant and animal species in the area, declaring the forests sanctuaries will also help bring in more much-needed Central funds to maintain the areas which are now managed only by poorly-equipped state forest department. In addition, the move will also help earn revenue from eco-tourism that can be started once the basic infrastructure is in place.

The proposed forest areas range from 900 metres above mean sea level to as high as above 4,700 metres. In the sensitive eastern Surankote range there have been reported sightings of rare animals like the snow leopard and the endangered markhor. Himalayan black bears have attacked villagers, and brown bears live there as well. There is also evidence that Kashmir flying squirrel still inhabits forests in Dhera Ki Gali.

Though working plans over the past 100 years indicate exceptionally good distribution of wildlife, these forests have not been accorded any special status. Forest officials say that the very existence of brown bears, monal, kaleej pheasants and flora like oak, fir and spruce apart from several species of herbs, are enough to have them declared sanctuaries.

However, there are many hurdles to be crossed and much red tape to cut before the forests can be declared sanctuaries. Once the Cabinet approval comes through, the Wildlife Department will prepare a 10-year management plan for each sanctuary. On the basis of this, an annual plan of operations (AOP) will then be presented to the Union Government and subject to availability, funds will be released. This year, Rs 1.2 crore has been earmarked for sanctuaries and national parks in the state. With an increase in number of sanctuaries, the funds too will hopefully increase in the coming years.

Presently the area does not have infrastructure of any kind — no roads, no lights and no human resources for managing tourism. In fact, the Wildlife Department here has one wildlife warden and a guard to take care of hundreds of hectares of forest.

How the infrastructure will be created is debatable; the entire area is militancy-prone and there is hardly anything the state government can do in the regard. Officials, however, maintain that administration has not collapsed though they admitted that militancy was slowing things down.

Moreover, there are numerous Gujjar settlements in the area and declaring the areas inhabited by them as sanctuaries will mean telling them to vacate the core areas. Getting them to actually do so is another matter altogether.

The rules say an initial notification by the Government is enough to start the process of conversion. But the fact is that years may pass before a settlement over rights is reached with the people who live in the forest and objections by villagers resolved. For instance, there are several areas in the state — sanctuaries in Ladakh, for instance — which are still awaiting final notification.

For the state government however, it will be the money which will count. "The money will come after the initial notification," said a forest official. And, this is one good reason for the government to give the proposals a go-ahead as soon as possible.