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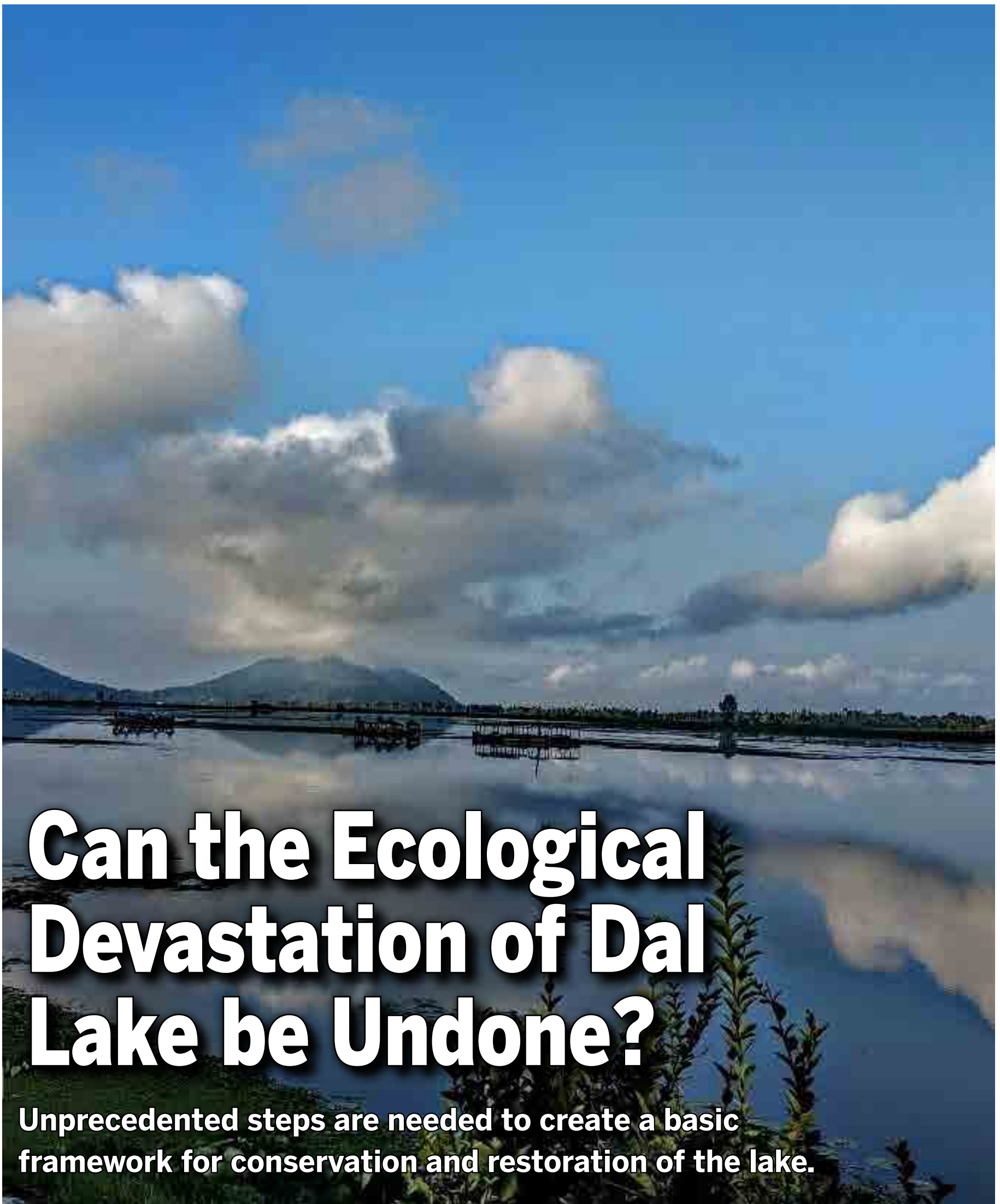
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Can the Ecological Devastation of Dal Lake be Undone?

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framework for conservation and restoration of the lake.

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Kashmir Needs Collective Fight against Glaring Drug Abuse

A recent study by the Department of Mental Health and Neurosciences in collaboration with the Department of Health Services suggests a serious increase in drug abuse across all districts of the Kashmir valley.

The findings of the study have revealed a dark underbelly that needs immediate attention. The study has concluded that the deadly opioid drug heroin has become the main source of addiction, replacing milder drugs such as painkillers and cannabis.

The survey also concluded that most of the addicts are in the age group of 17 to 33 years, though doctors have previously reported addicts as young as 10-year-olds in the region. The survey has also found that the addiction is widespread among all sections, whether rich or poor, men or women, young or old.

The menace is so widespread that Kashmir may now be leading most of the states in India in a grim record of highest number of drug addicts. A study by AIIMS had noted that Punjab, the erstwhile drug capital of India, has 1.2 per cent opiate users while the latest Kashmir-based study has found the percentage of opiate users at 2.5 percent.

The study has found that most of the addicts are daily users and a heroin addict consumes around 1 gram of the dangerous drug on a daily basis, costing around 3000-4000 INR. The severity of the drug abuse can be gauged from the fact that, according to the study, 33 thousand syringes are used to inject heroin on a daily basis in Kashmir.

While the study has provided a dataset of the pandemic of heroin addiction in Kashmir, the reality was prevalent and visible in the region for the last several years.

The growing number of heroin addicts in Kashmir is a troubling reality that will have an impact on generations to come, if it is not contained immediately.

The rampant use of heroin and other drugs has been happening across Kashmir for the last

several years. Many young men and teenage boys died because of the overdose of drugs and their families, fearing ignominy, concealed the cause of these deaths. In the process, these concealments caused more harm than good to the society.

The horrendous increase in the drug abuse is a collective failure and all sections of the society are to be blamed - the family, the civil society and the administration.

The family being the first and immediate circle of the drug addict should respond instantly to the first signs of addiction. The failure of guardianship by parents is the first failure and the first step towards drug addiction. A stroll along Lal Chowk's bund or any other place

awareness against the drug abuse and should be joined by doctors to lead a major awareness campaign.

Schools, higher secondary schools and colleges also have the potential to become fortresses against drug addiction by administering counseling and reporting such cases to the administration. The education institutions also need to guard their campuses from becoming a hub of drug peddlers as many college playgrounds are frequently visited by known drug-peddlers.

The biggest of the onus in the fight against drug addiction lies on the administration including police. The police in Kashmir have a robust and hi-tech surveillance mechanism and it is not possible that they cannot effectively deal with this crisis.

Policing in Kashmir needs to prioritize the initiative against drug peddlers across all districts of Kashmir valley. There is also a strong requirement to book them under stringent acts of law including frequent imposition of Public Safety Act. This is the only way to keep the drug peddlers out of business and stop the inflow of drugs into the society.

The police also need to go after the entire structure of drug peddlers and not merely go after the lower rung peddlers. The crackdown on the entire structure, those involved in procuring consignments of drugs and those involved in transportation and logistics, should be a top priority.

Without the proactive involvement of police, it is not possible to contain this deadly scourge. The administration needs to incentivize the fight against drug-abuse.

All sections of the society need to play their role. Homes, schools, mosques should become part of the campaign against this devastating avalanche of drug abuse. Leniency or laziness on part of anyone in the society can become a costly affair. So effective awareness and educational programmes and a simultaneous and swift crackdown on drug peddlers and kingpins is what is needed to end Kashmir's plunge into further darkness.

The menace is so widespread that Kashmir may now be leading most of the states in India in a grim record of highest number of drug addicts. A study by AIIMS had noted that Punjab, the erstwhile drug capital of India, has 1.2 percent opiate users while the latest Kashmir-based study has found the percentage of opiate users at 2.5 percent.

is the first exposure towards the scale and intensity of the drug addiction as young boys and girls, some in school uniforms, walk the dangerous paths.

While the failure of families to respond instantly and in time is the first failure, the civil society including the mohalla-level committees are also failing to respond to the crisis. The committees should respond proactively and prevent their colonies and neighbourhoods from becoming a hub of addicts and peddlers.

The mosque leaders and clerics should also initiate and lead a sustained struggle to create



Photo Essay The Houseboat Festival

The history of the Kashmiri houseboats dates back to the 19th century.

JASPREET KAUR

The houseboats of Kashmir are famous for their unique and rich designs and hospitality and they attract a number of tourists from across the globe. There are about 950 houseboats in Dal and Nigeen lakes.

To celebrate the uniqueness of this floating marvel, the Department of Tourism celebrated a two-day 'Houseboat Festival' earlier this month, originally scheduled for September, 2022. The previous houseboat festival was organized in October 2021 as part of the Iconic Week Festivals.

During the two day festival inaugurated by J&K Lt Governor Manoj Sinha, emphasis was laid on the heritage value of the houseboats on these two lakes. The festival featured a floating stage, live music, and cultural events, art exhibition, besides showcasing of varied culinary and cuisine specialities. Illuminated houseboats and laser light show were also part of the festival. Music included traditional folk music with live performances by local bands. Other activities included screening of iconic films and documentaries depicting Kashmiri culture, heritage on floating cubical screens in the Dal waters, 3D laser show and water screen, displaying of documentaries regarding houseboats of Kashmir, visit to the backwaters of Dal lake and exhibition of local handicrafts.

According to Director Tourism Kashmir, Fazlul Haseeb, the festival was organised as the houseboats have played a unique role in attracting tourists from across the globe and are being promoted as this winter season's main attraction. A record number of over two million tourists visited Kashmir this year so far and the houseboats in Dal and Nigeen lakes witnessed 80-90 per cent occupancy this year. However, with the onset of winter and cold weather conditions, the occupancy has dropped in the houseboats to 20-30%. The message that the Director Tourism wants to send through the Houseboat Festival is that that 'Kashmir is truly warm in winters as well'. However, the houseboat owners feel that the festival would have been more fruitful had it been organized earlier in October.





Glittering Shikaras over the Dal lake with Zabarwan hills in the background amid minus-degree temperatures is a view that can only be witnessed in Kashmir. Houseboats which are generally fully booked in summer are for the first time preparing to host guests during the winter season.

The main purpose was not to just show the houseboats but the whole of Kashmir for the winter season. Such as ski courses, not only in Gulmarg but also in Yusmarg, Sonmarg, Pahalgam and Doodhpathri. Pahalgam is also going to remain open to the tourists in winter.

Shikaras were also a major attraction of the festival. A *shikara* is a type of wooden boat found on Dal Lake and other water bodies of Srinagar in Jammu and Kashmir. *Shikaras* are of various sizes and are used for multiple purposes, including transportation. A usual *shikara* seats six people, with the driver paddling at the rear. Like the Venetian gondolas, they are a cultural symbol of Kashmir. Some *shikaras* are used for fishing, harvesting aquatic vegetation (usually for fodder) and transport, while most are covered with tarpaulins and are used to ferry tourists. Some are also used as floating shops.

The craft relies on deodar wood (which does not decompose in water) ranges from 25 to 41 feet in length. The pointed front end is followed by a central section made of 8 planks of wood and the boat eventually ends in a flat rear segment. Two planks of wood lend to each of the side elevations a vertical height of 1.5 feet. It has a conspicuous spade shaped base.

The nails and iron clamps used for joinery are flush and fixed into the wood diagonally when they are red hot, to ensure stronger bonding. Care is taken to keep them hidden for the visual aesthetics of the boat. Caulking uses a paste containing poplar seed. The boat is created over 10 to 12 days.

Seating arrangements are organized in the central segment of the boat by positioning cushions and related upholstery over the built-in storage space underneath. A canopy is supported on four pillars. The centre and the ends are equipped with iron anchor rings and wooden pegs, which are used to fasten the *shikara* on the banks of the lake. The *shikaras* are eventually painted in



The two-day houseboat festival inaugurated by Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha showcased the heritage value of the houseboats on Dal and Nigeen lakes. Featuring a floating stage, cultural events, art and culinary exhibition and live music shows were organised among other activities.

Images: Shah Jehangir and Jaspreet Kaur



bright colors and may further be polished, engraved and embellished.

The history of the Kashmiri houseboats dates back to the 19th century and in the earlier days, they were used more for personal use and not for tourism. It was a daily style of living among the people who built boats to live on the lake. In the early days, only British officials of the East India Company were allowed to build and stay in the houseboats as the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir did not allow the British to buy property. Today, there are nearly a thousand houseboats in the Kashmir valley and most of them are used for tourism purposes.

The Kashmiri houseboats are floating houses that are anchored along the banks of some of the most beautiful lakes. The houseboats are like a blend of hotel and homestay on the water. The houseboats have been crafted with great care and are adorned with intricate woodwork that displays the exquisite art and fine craftsmanship of Kashmiri artisans.

In the late 19th century, the boat-dwelling *hanji* community of Srinagar started building floating homes or houseboats for English visitors and residents, who were not allowed to own land in Kashmir.

Some specifically trace the houseboat phenomenon to around the 1880s to a shop owner, Pandit Naraindas, who used to cater to foreign tourists. When his shop burnt down, as wooden structures in Srinagar are wont to from time to time, it is said that Naraindas moved his inventory to a small boat used by the boat-dwelling *hanjis* and moored it. With some improvements, he became the first proper houseboat. Later, Naraindas sold his boat to a European, realised the potential in the idea, and started commissioning boats. He became locally famous as 'Naav Narain' and his first houseboat was named *Kashmir Princess*.

However, British explorer Sir Francis Younghusband is known to have credited one MT Kennard with the idea of a floating house between the years 1883 and 1888. It is said that for a long time locals used to call these 'the boats of Kennad Sahib'. Younghusband wrote that, by 1906, there were hundreds of houseboats in Kashmir.

The early European boats were called *HB Duke Wells*, or *New Buckingham Palace*, in honour of the settler's memories and sensibilities. These houseboats now have fancy names inspired by Hollywood, Bollywood and names of celebrities.

Jaspreet Kaur is a New delhi-based architect and urban designer. She is the trustee of Lymewoods and Span Foundation.



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Right on the Money

Explained: What is a Credit Score and Why is it Important?

Credit score is a summary of a borrower's past and current borrowing and repayment history.



SAJJAD BAZAZ

Some time back, a student, who had approached a bank for education loan, shared an interesting story with me. His application was rejected despite his parents having sufficient income on the ground that their credit score was bad.

The parents were surprised as they had no idea what 'credit score' meant.

While seeking the exact meaning of 'credit score' from the bank official who had done appraisal of the study loan application, they were astonished to learn that the bank knew about their poor repayment of earlier loans taken a few years back from some other bank.

It is now a practice with the banks to check the credit scores of parents whenever they receive a study loan request. The reason for taking credit scores of parents into account while processing an education loan application is that students will not have any such credit history and as such the parents for being co-borrowers (as per education loan scheme it's mandatory for parents to be co-borrowers) of the loan are to be assessed under the credit score system.

In the post-Covid scenario, the financial system and the regulations governing it are undergoing never-seen-before changes, especially in the retail credit market. Consequently, banks are forced to respond to the changing scenario by redesigning their customer management frameworks. They are continuously realigning their loaning strategies in line with new set of COVID-induced risks. The banks are now exercising extraordinary caution while lending to different sectors of the economy, especially in the retail segment, where risk mitigation procedures will be stringent.

In fact, the loan appraisal procedures were already stringent. If we peep into the pre-COVID banking scenario, we find the banking industry was already crumbling under the burgeoning non-performing assets (NPAs) or what is commonly referred to as bad loans. Even as huge corporate loans are major contributors to this bad loan scenario which has already put survival of some big banks at stake, it is mainly the retail segment constituting of individual borrowers, which was also facing the brunt. The brunt was induced by the banks as they had done away with the liberal loaning policy. In other words, the loaning in pre-COVID crisis had already become more stringent as banks, while reviewing a loan application, were observing certain stringent risk-measuring tools to decide whether to extend the loan or decline the request.

Now in the post-Covid scenario, the banks have come under unprecedented

pressure to keep their asset quality intact and avoid slippages. The loaning norms are more stringent and the prospective borrowers, those who look to banks for financial assistance through varied loan schemes, would be facing a tough time while complying loan eligibility norms.

Now, let's have a look at the issue of credit scores in the context of the student loan which was denied to the parents for 'bad credit score'. So, awareness about the subject makes sense. While talking in the context of J&K, the most interesting part is that most of the customers are unaware that their credit history is at the fingertips of any bank or financial institution. They are unaware that their behavior towards borrowing and repayment of loans earns them credit scores which are precisely defined as good or bad scores.

It's the lack of financial awareness among people here which is a matter of concern. Otherwise, the primary responsibility rests with the financial institutions to make their customers aware about the nature and impact of financial transactions of whatever nature they conduct at their outlets. The awareness has not to be confined to the products and services they offer, but it has to be broad-based. They have to regularly update their customers about the changing landscape so that total financial discipline in line with the envisaged rules and regulations is observed by them. Nevertheless, a financially disciplined customer is an asset for banks/financial institutions.

Credit score is a number summed up on the basis of a credit report - a summary of borrower's past and current borrowing and his/her repayment history. This report is prepared by a credit

bureau agency. If a borrower has been regular with his/her loan repayments, credit score is likely to be higher. It is the credit score that reveals a borrower's repayment capacity and even helps banks and other financial institutions to assess the chances of a borrower defaulting on the loan.

Meanwhile, when we think of credit scores, mentioning the Credit Information Bureau (India) Limited (CIBIL) is inevitable. CIBIL, mostly referred to in credit scores, is an agency that provides the credit score and reports on an individual's payments pertaining to loans and credit cards. It's this CIBIL score which shows borrowers' creditworthiness and indicates the probability of a default on the basis of their credit history.

Remarkably, there are other credit bureaus, namely, Equifax, Experian and CRIF High Mark. It is these credit information bureaus that generate credit reports.

In the given financial landscape and the stringent lending scenario, it's inevitable for the borrowers to maintain a financial discipline of highest order to register themselves with high credit scores. They should utilize the loan limit efficiently without diverting funds from the core activity for which the loan has been sanctioned/dispensed. After availing the loan, they have to make sure that they pay their installments well on time. If they own a credit card, then let them pay the bills in full one time, rather than making a due payment every time. It's equally important for them to be a guarantor for only those people whom they consider creditworthy. Never allow your cheques to bounce.

It's in the fitness of things to exhib-

it a safe appetite for loans and display good financial discipline to earn a good credit score.

A credit report (also known as CIR i.e. Credit Information Report) is an individual's credit payment history across loan types and credit institutions over a period of time. It does not contain details of your savings, investments or fixed deposits.

As all of us know, banks ask for a guarantor for certain loans as a means of security for the loan amount they provide. Let it be clear that a guarantor, for any type of loan, is equally responsible to ensure repayment. The guarantor provides a guarantee to the bank that he/she will honor the obligation in case the principal borrower is unable to do so. Any default on the payment of the loan by the principal borrower will affect the guarantor's credit score as well.

A high credit score essentially means less probability of a default. A low CIBIL credit score reflects high probability of a default.

RBI has made it mandatory for the banks to comply with an individual's desire to access his or her credit report. If a bank declines a credit card or loan application, you can ask for the control number of your credit report. You can then contact CIBIL at info@cibil.com and communicate details of errors in the report.

Sajjad Bazaz heads Internal Communication Department of Jammu & Kashmir Bank Ltd. The views expressed are his own and not of the institution he works for.

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Can the Ecological Devastation of Dal Lake be Undone?

Unprecedented steps are needed to create a basic framework for conservation and restoration of the lake.

AKSHAY KAUL

The 1990s saw a sharp reduction in the quality of lakes, rivers and other water bodies, particularly in Asia, Africa and Latin America. For us, the 1990s in Kashmir also reflect a watershed moment of a different sort that had a significant impact on the environmental legacy of the valley. The causes of lake degradation are quite similar when you look at them, especially in developing countries. Lakes are complex living systems because their health and water quality depend on both internal conditions as well as, and probably more significantly, external conditions in their larger catchment region. The release of often untreated wastewater from the catchment, runoff from adjoining agricultural areas or industrial waste is slowly released into the soil.

In agricultural soils, nitrate-N can easily drain down through the root zone and enter the ground and surface waters. Nitrate-N renders groundwater unsafe for drinking when concentrations surpass acceptable limits. It stimulates phytoplankton productivity in surface waters, widespread depletion of oxygen availability to plants, biodiversity loss, and hazardous algal blooms that can impact even fisheries. In various regions of the world, these loads have different tendencies. Although loads of nitrogen can also contribute, anthropogenic loads of phosphorus are often what cause lake eutrophication.

Researchers think that the Dal Lake was once an expanded oxbow in the flood plain of river Jhelum instead of being formed by gradual shrinking of a glacial lake. This is based on the

lake's location near river Jhelum and studies of its form, shape, and structure. Many people, like D.N. Wadia, viewed the Kashmir valley as a level Pleistocene alluvial plain from which the lakes of Kashmir were produced. We can only guess where it came from, but since the 1990s, when the National Lakes Conservation Plan (NLCP) and the Dal Lake Conservation Plan (DLCP) were created, there have been clear efforts to fix it up.

1997 was a watershed year when the Lakes and Water Development Authority (LAWDA) was created, now renamed the *Lake Conservation and Management Authority (LCMA)*.

The Dal Lake Conservation Plan that was made had various action plans for pollution abatement and it included addressing the encroachment problem. The slow progress in improving the situation resulted in the filing of petitions in the Supreme Court in the years 2000 and 2002 on behalf of the people of Kashmir by two different people from the valley. The court referred it to the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir as a PIL, which led to the creation of a three-member committee to look into the condition of the lake in October 2005.

More than Rs. 298 crores were given in 2005 for the interception and diversion of pollutants entering the lake, the construction of six STPs, desilting, de-weeding, clearance of encroachments in the project area, etc. Up until 2006-07, the central government had provided the project with 70 crore rupees to be completed by March 2010, which went on until 2013. Since then,

huge amounts of money have been granted from time to time for various projects, like STP, de-weeding, siltation control, relocation of Dal dwellers, and land acquisition. Various committees, including a Rajya Sabha Parliamentary Committee, were formed to look at it as a national asset and concern. Despite the fact that the mandate is clear and the intentions are strong at the highest levels, progress and processes on the ground have been slow, fragmented, and uncoordinated, making it difficult to demonstrate any significant improvement in water quality.

Enraptured by the beauty of the Dal, Sir Francis Edward Younghusband writes in his book, Kashmir: "Numerous kingfishers of brilliant sky-blue plumage flash across the water; and gorgeous yellow-golden orioles dart from tree to tree. Clumps of noble Chinar trees with the Kashmir chalet houses are grouped along the banks, and often overhang the mirror waters. Orchards of quince trees with their delicate pink and white blossom and fields of brilliant yellow mustard line the shores. Cows and their calves, sheep and their little lambs, graze on the fresh green grass; and pretty but dirty little children, geese and goslings, ducks, and ducklings, dabble in the water, and all tell of the rich abundant life now bursting into being."

The once-pristine lake has been the subject of numerous attempts at restoration since the 1971 Master Plan. The first Master Plan Srinagar (1971–1991) acknowledged the existence of flood absorption basins and water bodies in its east, west, and south. The conserva-

tion-oriented tourist development plan was developed by Stein in 1970, along with the Vastu Shilpa Foundation. Its founder architect Doshi focused on working at the Dalgate area and organising the shops along the promenade till the Shankaracharya hills. Stein's plans had little to do with the actual conservation of the lake's water quality or ecology but with his role as a planner for the redevelopment of the area as mandated by the then-chief minister, Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah. The plan was more to reorganise the houseboats in Dal Lake and the floating gardens. His scheme also included clustered development near Chasma Shahi and Nishat.

A New Zealand-based company, The Enx Consortium Report (1978), was recruited to develop a proposal for Dal conservation. The Enx report made several crucial recommendations, one of which was to construct an earth bund to isolate the lake's open water parts from the floating garden area. It also recommended to reforest the area surrounding the Dal lake catchments, manage grazing to restore the area's ground cover and create a water basin to contain most of the silt and insoluble nutrients entering the lake from Tulail Nala on the north shore. For connections to the houseboats, it recommended to construct trunk sewage, power, and water pipes on the proposed bund separating the floating gardens from the freshwater region. Also, rearranging the houseboats' mooring area was recommended, as had already been suggested by Stein in 1970.

The UNESCO Mission Report on Environmental Degradation in Kash-



Stabilized roads and parkings inside the lake with dwelling units and electricity aren't a rare sight. Image: Akshay Kaul

mir and the Dal Lake Development Report in the Valley of Kashmir (Riddle, 1983) followed Enx proposals which, if worked upon, would have made an impact on the lake's water quality. The most thorough strategy can be found in the last Conservation and Management Plan for Dal and Nigeen lakes, undertaken in 2013 by the Alternate Hydro Energy Centre (AHEC), IIT Roorkee. With an emphasis on sustainable, environmentally responsible, and economically advantageous methods that demanded least number of interventions and displacement, the mandate was clearly stated to rehabilitate the lake and its ecology. The catchment management plan and the restoration and development plan, which addressed the greater context of the watershed management, were divided into two categories called 'interventions'.

The J&K state administration invited the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Manitoba, Canada, to investigate the issue of lake deterioration in March 2018.

The Sustainable Asset Valuation (SAVi) assessment technique was utilised by IISD. The paper makes assumptions about some of the major problems, such as the urgent need for renovations at the sewage treatment facilities in and near Srinagar and their frequent overflows during heavy downpours. During outages, sewage treatment facilities and pumping stations frequently shut down. One of the largest sources of untreated sewage is thought to come from the houseboats. Untreated sewage inflow is accelerated by the encroachment of squatters living on and around the lake's edge. Additionally, the nearby wetlands are being destroyed by these lake residents. These populations continue to fill in areas of the wetland, construct shanties and live near the lake's edge despite the availability of compensation funds for relocation and social housing in other sections of Srinagar.

Dal has a sizable catchment area; estimations from reliable sources place it at 337.17 sq. km., with the greatest portion being made up of Telbal, Dachi-

gam, Zabarwan hills, Srinagar city (North and Central), and the lake itself, totaling 18.5 sq. km. Dal Lake receives water from about 10 to 12 smaller canals and it also contains several springs. The lake's water is discharged by the Dalgate exit and Nallah Amir Khan channels, two enduring outflow routes. Dal Lake was reported to be 31 square kilometres in 1859 and 24 square kilometres in 2013. However, it has not decreased significantly since then. According to more recent studies, the lake's open water extent is only 11.5 square kilometres. Floating gardens cover a sizable (20%) portion of Dal Lake, leaving only 59% of the lake's surface as open water.

The lake has a rich cultural past that includes hamlets and floating gardens. Some of the old houses in these hamlets are more than 150 years old. We are given to understand that new construction is completely banned. These small hamlets in the lake that would once collect night soil from the old city, dry it up and use it as manure have turned into mini settlements with motorable roads,

electricity and voting rights, except for a proper waste disposal system for both solid and wastewater discharge.

The reproduced maps of 1859–60 show primarily baghs—Batmazar, Ashai Bagh, Burra Bagh, and Lalla Shah Ke Takkar—in the lake on the west of the Oont Kadal. The 1890 gazetteer mentions them. It also mentions the growing of vegetables and melons along the lake edges. If one looks at the land use transformation decadal maps of the Dal itself since 1859, the built-up area within the lake has increased 40 times, from 0.05 square kilometres to more than two square kilometres in 2013. With little to no sewage treatment facilities, there are currently an estimated 58 communities within the lake, mostly in the Lokut Dal and Gagribal regions. It may be necessary to estimate the true population of people who live within the lake in the hamlets and in dongas, houseboats and the abutting land to carry out any meaningful conservation and management.

The Hindustan Times is said to have reported on the September 1950 floods, which claimed 100 lives and wrecked more than 15,000 dwellings. It is thought that to drain the Dal Lake, the level of Nalla Amir Khan had to be decreased and then the new land appeared. Since then, more land has been reclaimed by using mud and silt from the lake and aggregating it with popular plantings that camouflage the new dwellings.

The lake is used to cultivate a lot of vegetables and fishing is another source of income in addition to tourism. Naturally, there has been a significant increase in the discharge of phosphates and nitrates into the lake, which has altered the ecology completely. The increase in land mass created through reclamation has resulted in greater use of fertilizers, which increases the nutrient load and weeds within the lake. Findings from analysis of land cover and land use maps by Kashmir University indicate that 32% of the lake falls under severe degradation and 48% under medium degradation. 20% of the waters are relatively clean.

The Lokut Dal, the Bod Dal, the Nigeen and Hazratbal basins have historically been used to categorise the lake's water. Studies by Earth Science Department, Kashmir University, comparing the years 1979 and 2014, revealed that throughout those 37 years, the lake's nitrate (nitrogen) had increased 15 times and its phosphates had increased 27 times. From 2.91 sq km in 1859 to 8.64 sq km in 2013, the floating aquatic gardens, which are vegetation on the lake's surface, have tripled in size. The construction of the foreshore road in the 1970s separated a significant portion of the lake's marsh land from the current lake system, resulting in a significant loss of marshy area on the lake's northern edge.

Although there are significant anthropocentric activities around the lake that need to be addressed, the catchment's relatively fewer steep areas are mainly used for agrarian, plantation, horticultural and built-up land uses, all of which have seen an increase in anthropocentric activity over the past few decades. Luckily, there aren't any significant polluting industries around the lake or in its catchment areas. Dal lake receives considerable anthropogenic nutrient loads, which may contribute to or hasten its eutrophication.

Like any urban lake, the Dal is severely harmed by human activities in the hamlets, agricultural practises inside

The Dal Lake Conservation Plan that was made had various action plans for pollution abatement and it included addressing the encroachment problem. The slow progress in improving the situation resulted in the filing of petitions in the Supreme Court in the years 2000 and 2002 on behalf of the people of Kashmir by two different people from the valley. The court referred it to the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir as a PIL, which led to the creation of a three-member committee to look into the condition of the lake in October 2005.

the lake and its catchment and untreated sewage flow from the catchment, all of which have a negative impact on the lake's water quality. The hilly regions are largely covered in natural vegetation and arid land, whereas the mountainous regions are primarily covered in woodlands, meadows, and scrublands. Most of the surface runoff that carries degraded soil and sediments originates in these rocky, steep catchment areas. These silt loads often contain nitrates and phosphorus.

In the early 1990s, the Republic of China worked towards cleaning its lakes that had been polluted due to sewage discharge, agricultural and industrial discharges, or leaching. Much like the Dal Story, it also met a similar fate largely due to the failure to create an effective, cross-jurisdictional management system to address major externalities associated with aquatic ecosystem rehabilitation. In 2007, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) began to look closely at the issues of lake rehabilitation with the rapid appraisal of various ADB-assisted rehabilitation projects. It looked at more than 28 lakes as case studies where restoration of the lakes had been undertaken successfully.

Though there were different factors, and each case had a unique combination of factors, the analysis highlighted four key elements for success: strong and consistent political leadership, integrated planning and analysis, effective management structures and financial engineering to address externalities. If we really look at the issues of the Dal lake, it is more of an administration issue and one that requires continuity of political will, institutional empowerment and accountability to create a success story much like the Metro in India under Sridharan, the communication revolution under Sam Pitroda or the Amul revolution under Dr. V. Kurién. However, lakes are a more complex systems than an infrastructure, task, or assignment. It needs long-term vision and multidisciplinary partnerships to bring about a real change.

A long-term partnership between CLMA and sociologists, anthropologists, urban and spatial planners, ecologists, hydrologists, seismologists, hydrogeologists, social scientists, landscape architects and urban designers with partnerships with universities, industry, CSIR institutions, national and international professionals, and academicians with proven expertise would be ideal because lakes are complex, interconnected living systems that demand a multidisciplinary approach and expertise. A noteworthy example is the WWQA Ecosystem, which was formed in 2021 and is managed by a core group that includes the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission, the World Bank Group, IHE-Delft, Wageningen University and the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH).

However, what needs to be formulated as the first step is a chronological collation of the research papers, studies, various reports, and recommendations from different committees and reports since 1970. The success of Dal conservation and management would depend entirely on the dynamism and experience of the person leading the Lake Conservation and Management Authority and the level of the professionals who form the team. Unless the mandate is to seek the best professionals, the Dal Lake restoration may meet the same fate that it has since the 1970s. LCMA will benefit from the leadership of a domain specialist. Its current setup



This settlement is deep inside on the south-west end and several other settlements can be witnessed inside the lake. Image: Akshay Kaul

needs to be upgraded along with a focus on capacity building.

For Dal lake conservation and restoration, unprecedented steps are needed to create a basic framework. The key steps would be: (i) the development of a coherent and comprehensive master plan; (ii) the creation of an administrative structure that places most of the catchment within the jurisdiction of a single administrative body; (iii) the building and upgrading of the capacity of the Dal and Nigeen Conservation and Lake Management Authority (CLMA) as the institution with prime authority and responsibility for managing the lake, apart from the technical studies and work that would be needed within the lake and its catchment area.

Simple turnaround stories are available and visible. This writer's last visit to Gangtok in Sikkim was an eye-opener. The flight arrived from Delhi into Bagdora and passed through the state of West Bengal before the long ride into Sikkim. Even at the border that separates the two states, the marked difference is visible. There is litter and plastic, rampant pesticide usage and unorganised parking in the West Bengal region. You enter a region free of plastic and pesticides as soon as you arrive in Sikkim.

Sikkim's Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling, declared his intent for the region to become India's first organic state in 2003. The state introduced the 'organic' action plan in 2010, outlining the steps to take to achieve the goal of making the entire state organic. The strategy was successful when Sikkim proclaimed itself the first organic state in the world in 2015.

The state government had well-defined goals and strategies for achieving them, as well as a strong political commitment and consistency in its policies. To accomplish a full transformation of the entire food system, the plan mixed legislative limits, including a phased prohibition on artificial fertilisers and pesticides with aid and incentives. Since certification was viewed as an essential component of the transition, between 2010 and 2014, 80% of the funds were allocated to enhancing the capabilities of the farmers, rural service providers, and certifying organisations as well as helping farmers obtain certification. Al-

though it takes a lot of work in the back-end, declaring the lake catchment as organic is the simplest, most cost-effective and a long-term strategy to reduce the nitrate and phosphorus load in the lake.

Much like Sikkim, Bhutan's success story, which spans an area that is more than double that of the Kashmir valley, is one that should be studied and emulated. It is a tale of having a vision and putting it into action with precise guidelines and plans. Again, these programmes and revolutions are made feasible by strong political will and empowering and enabling mechanisms. Bhutan, a tiny Himalayan country, is now carbon negative. Today, trees cover more than 70% of the nation. Bhutan's extensive tree cover has made it a carbon sink.

The success stories from Indore and Surat are equally remarkable, much like Colombo, Sri Lanka, which is spotlessly clean. Surat city's transformation from a garbage-strewn mess to one of the cleanest cities is a story worth remembering. Today, Surat and Indore Municipal Corporations are two of the most professionally run civic bodies in the country. Policy initiatives and programme funding have provided impetus to urban local bodies. Structural and financial reforms in the SMC lead to transformation.

In India, comprehensive lake restoration is in its infancy especially the urban water bodies or urban lakes. Very few technical proven models are available that may be emulated directly, more so for cold climate regions. Delhi Jal Board's coherent and comprehensive Master Plan for the pilot Rajokri, lake cleaning project in Delhi is another example. The Team was led by a dynamic CEO, professionals and CSIR organization. The wastewater inflow model was based on decentralized wastewater system treatment developed by NEERI. The success was acknowledged by the National Green Tribunal, and later recommended to the states for scaling it up countrywide. Bangalore and Coimbatore are working on cleaning up their lakes for some time with measured success. It is important to understand that Delhi had more than 500 ponds and lakes combined that have been lost to urbanization. The active engagement of the civil society and taking up the cause with the judiciary is the primary cause of

The once-pristine lake has been the subject of numerous attempts at restoration since the 1971 Master Plan. The first Master Plan Srinagar (1971–1991) acknowledged the existence of flood absorption basins and water bodies in its east, west, and south. The conservation-oriented tourist development plan was developed by Stein in 1970, along with the Vastu Shilpa Foundation.

restoration and revival of these ponds by the government mandated by the court.

Lake restoration must be understood as a continuous process. Creation of Conservation and Lake Management Authority and Comprehensive Lake Management Plan for Dal Lake would not in itself be everything. The application of economic incentives to change people behaviour in the catchment with focus on facilitating green entrepreneurship involving youth may provide livelihood-based sustainable economic solution.

Akshay Kaul is a renowned landscape architect known for his environmentally sensitive work. He is a recipient of various national and international awards.

Cover Photo: Akshay Kaul

A Brief Anatomy of Parliament Attack

The world stood with India in strongly condemning the attack.



SHOME BASU

It was a warm, sunny December day. New Delhi was going about its usual business. The posh Connaught Place area was gearing up for a carnival as Christmas was just around the corner. I was at the Bangla Sahib gurudwara for a photo story. At the gurudwara, I was planning to have my lunch at the *langar* which was about to start. Suddenly, at around 11:30, a loud explosion was heard along with some gunshots. I stepped out of the gurudwara to check. Outside, on the road, people looked tense and a bystander broke the news that the Parliament was under attack. Hardly a kilometer away, I ran towards the Parliament where I saw a huge contingent of men in olive fatigues surrounding the Lutyens building. For a moment, I thought it was a coup. "It is a terrorist attack," a policeman told me. India's Parliament was under siege.

13 December 2001 is etched in the collective memory of the Indians. It was around 11 in the morning that a white Ambassador car with a red beacon and stickers, similar to those issued by the Home Ministry, pasted on the windcreens, crossed the security barrier from the gate which opens on the Parliament Street and Talkatora Road roundabout. Kamlesh Kumari, a lady constable from CRPF's Bravo Company, was posted at gate no. 11 when she waved the car to pass before seeing five people snuggled inside which made her suspicious. She ran towards the next gate to stop the car. The men inside started spraying bullets killing her on the spot. But just before that, Kumari succeeded in flashing the message about the car on

her wireless set.

At that moment, the lower house of the Parliament was adjourned and the parliamentarians were spread across the building premises. As the winter session was on, the staff, the security, the marshals, the catering, the clerks and the politicians were all busy.

Meanwhile, on the courtyard, four security personnel were killed in the exchange of fire. Four of the five attackers were gunned down while the fifth one detonated his suicide vest. The battle was over in thirty minutes.

Back in Aabpara in Islamabad, where the ISI is headquartered, one man was watching the attack closely. Ehsan-ul-Haq, the then director of ISI, was an experienced military man with deep technical knowledge. He was somewhat dumbfounded but could connect some dots. Pakistan was in for some trouble, he thought.

In New Delhi, Home minister L. K. Advani, who was also the Deputy PM, gave a statement that all the five attackers were from Pakistan. Incensed by the deadly attack, people across India and from all sections of the society protested, demanding a fitting response.

In two days, Delhi's crime branch headed by the infamous ACP Rajbir Singh zeroed in on a suspect, claiming to have found a postpaid SIM at the encounter site. The number, 9810081228, belonged to S A R Geelani, a professor from Delhi University's Zakir Hussain College. Geelani, a Kashmiri, was arrested from his Mukherjee Nagar residence. Two more Kashmiris, Afzal Guru and Shaukat Hussain, were also arrested while they were on their way to Srinagar from Delhi.

During the investigation, police found some calls placed to J&K from Geelani's SIM which led them to Guru and Hussain. When the police raided Guru's residence in Delhi, they grilled his pregnant wife Afshan Guru. A day later, Guru and Hussain were arrested en route to Srinagar.

All three of them were booked un-

Forensic results and police interrogation were taken as evidence and, as result, Hussain was given a life term while Guru was sentenced to death. Guru became an overnight hero as the people in Kashmir saw him as another Maqbool Bhat who was sent to the gallows by an Indian court.

der POTA (Prevention of Terrorist Activities, now a defunct law). Police from the Lodhi Road Crime Branch unit claimed that the duo was on their way to Kashmir to handover a laptop, which carried sensitive information, to the mastermind of the attack, Ghazi Baba.

Ghazi Baba was a top commander of Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). Born in Pakistan's Bahawalpur, he had entered Kashmir and married there. Baba and his partner in crime, Tariq Ahmad, were responsible for many attacks across India.

Prior to the Parliament attack, ISI somehow got to know that Ghazi Baba was up to something big. ISI used their moles to penetrate JeM but little could be learnt about what was brewing. ISI was somehow convinced that Tariq, a commander who could execute deadly operations, had been coopted by R&AW and IB. It upset Eshan-ul-Haq but there was precious little he could do about it. He knew that, in Delhi, his counterpart Vikram Sood and his predecessor A S Dulat were smart enough to penetrate into JeM, HuA and LeT.

As all the fingers pointed towards Pakistan, the world stood with India in strongly condemning the attack.

The US, meanwhile, was busy clearing up Al-Qaida terrorist in its 'War on

Terror' in partnership with Pakistan. Military dictator Musharraf was under attack from his own people as the non-state actors were planning to assassinate him for allying with the US to wipe out terror outfits from Afghanistan and Pakistan. India, meanwhile, called back its High Commissioner Vijay Nambiar from Islamabad and, at the international border, the Cold Start Doctrine was initiated. Atal Behari Vajpayee wanted a surgical strike on the training centres of JeM at Binori and Bahawalpur but the idea was dropped after some deliberations.

Dy SP Davinder Singh of the Special Operations Group of J&K Police is said to have introduced Afzal Guru to the militants before they attacked the Parliament.

Guru had a chequered life as he worked for different militant outfits before surrendering and deciding to settle down in life. He married Afshan and moved to Delhi but the ghost of militancy kept chasing him.

Dy SP Singh was known as a man of questionable credentials. Nineteen years after the Parliament attack, Singh was arrested by police, while on his way to Delhi, ferrying two militants in a car. In 2021, Singh, while lodged in Jammu's Hira Nagar jail, was terminated from his services.

Delhi Police seized INR 10 lakh and two SIM cards from Guru and Hussain. All the evidence went against them after the two were questioned in police custody and cross-questioned at the POTA Court by Justice S N Dingra. Forensic results and police interrogation were taken as evidence and, as result, Hussain was given a life term while Guru was sentenced to death. Guru became an overnight hero as the people in Kashmir saw him as another Maqbool Bhat who was sent to the gallows by an Indian court.

Shome Basu is a New Delhi-based senior journalist.

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Why Does Team India Fail Consistently?

There are multiple factors that could be responsible for India's poor performances.



BILAL AHSAN DAR

In the first Test of the ongoing bilateral series that began on December 14, India inflicted a crushing defeat on home team Bangladesh at Chattogram. While India's performance at test level has been reasonably satisfactory, the same cannot be said about its performance in the white ball cricket over the last few years.

It was not so long ago that star all-rounder Hardik Pandya claimed: "I think India can pick two more teams and win any tournament in the world." He was referring to the bench strength that India has built in the recent years.

BCCI is the richest cricket board in the world. The last IPL was worth more than \$6bn. Its franchises have already taken the leagues to the UAE and South Africa and are eyeing the Big Bash and the Hundred in Australia and England. BCCI is a member of the big 3 who run the game today. Yet, with that power and wherewithal at its disposal, India hasn't been able to stamp its authority on the field.

It has been 11 years now when they last won a world cup trophy - the 2011 World Cup. Since then, they lost the 2014 T20I final, 2015 World Cup semifinal, 2016 T20I World Cup semifinal, 2017 Champions Trophy final and 2019 World Cup semifinal. The World Test

Championship final in 2021 against New Zealand was no different for India. In 2021 T20I World Cup, India was knocked out in the group stage.

Though, during this period, the Indian team has been among top-five teams across formats. This raises the eyebrows as to why the team hasn't been able to deliver when it really matters.

This year, the team faced an unceremonious exit from the Asia Cup, followed by semifinal defeat to England in the T20I World Cup. Then an ODI series loss to New Zealand and now another ODI series loss to a lower ranked Bangladesh.

Former England captain Nasser Hussain, while talking about this inconsistency, said: "Indian team doesn't play fearless cricket. You have got to go out and express yourself. They have got so much of talent." While this may be one of the factors, which probably stems from the overly high expectations of the fans, a close observation reveals there are multiple factors that could be responsible for inconsistency and flop shows when it comes to big games.

Frequent Experimentation

Too much of experimentation has done more harm to the winning combination than any good. In the last three years, 35 players have debuted for India and the team used as many as 34 players in 22 ODIs in 2022 alone. In all likelihood, this frequent experimentation doesn't allow players to settle down and feel secure in the side, thus affecting their performance. It also means sometimes an in-form player is rested and replaced by another, and by the time he returns to the side, his form has dipped.

IPL Performance

There can be no denial that IPL gave India the likes of Jasprit Bumrah and Hardik Pandya or the most dev-

Too much of experimentation has done more harm to the winning combination than any good. In the last three years, 35 players have debuted for India and the team used as many as 34 players in 22 ODIs in 2022 alone. In all likelihood, this frequent experimentation doesn't allow players to settle down and feel secure in the side, thus affecting their performance.

astating batsman in the world today, Surya Kumar Yadav aka SKY. It gave a new lease to the career of players like Dinesh Karthik and gave India the bench strength of the likes of Washington Sundar and Shardul Thakur, both of whom helped the team beat Australia at Brisbane on debut. IPL produced players who know playing in the presence of big crowds and in pressure cooker situations. That, needless to say, should have made the Indian team the most dominating on the field. What is that extra bit that the players are missing at the international level that affects the team's performance adversely? Maybe a lack of acknowledgement of the value of the Indian cap and the responsibility that comes with it. Several former greats like Sunil Gavaskar have been voicing their opinion on this and advocating not to make IPL the yardstick, but rather make the players toil harder to earn the blue cap. The big money that the young players get may also be a fac-

tor that diminishes the urge to respect the responsibility that comes with wearing the blue jersey.

Too Much Cricket

Indian cricket schedule is probably the most chockablock among all the teams, from tours to home series and the IPL that lasts for months and requires continuous travel across India. Only recently, just after finishing their world cup tour to Australia, the team straightaway flew to New Zealand for a T20I and ODI series. They toured Bangladesh for another series. Although many key players were rested according to a proper plan, but again this leads to too many changes in the team, impacting the performance of the players.

Politics within BCCI

There have been a number of examples which suggest the Indian cricket has too much politics within its structure and outside as well where the BCCI has acted as an instrument. Given the enormous financial growth of the board by virtue of the IPL and popularity of the game in the country, Indian politicians have a keen interest in the board. Ideally, one would expect the BCCI to be run by former players and capable managers. Instead, the top-most positions by individuals with strong political connections. This nepotism in turn enables the BCCI to act as an instrument of Indian politics. According to the Lodha Committee established by the Supreme Court of India in 2015, there were broad conflicts of interest in the case of many individuals holding ministerial posts at the BCCI. There have been several reports of nepotism in selection and cases of caste discrimination as well.

Bilal Ahsan Dar is a blogger and cricket buff.

What is Ailing Pakistan?



LT. GEN. (RETD) TARIQ KHAN

The government solution to a problem is usually as bad as the problem.
~Milton Friedman

We are an accommodative nation abounding in conspiracy theories, rumours and labels. No one understands that we, as a nation and society, are held hostage to ignorance and stupidity.

Our economy is in shambles and a semiliterate accountant rolls his pearls of wisdom while the fan club sits in wonder trying to pick up nuggets of wisdom from the utter nonsense he rattles off.

No nation has suffered from a lack of intellectual capacity and functional collapse the way we have and, then, having destroyed the little that we ourselves built, such as our airlines and steel mills, we continue bravely on our journey to self-destruction. Rumours, romantic narratives and divine interventions are the stuff of our conversations - 'economic hitman', 'hybrid warfare', 'Islamophobia' and 'the only Muslim nuclear State' are the oft-repeated words and phrases we get to hear from pseudo-intellectuals. Every office at every level has some imbecile sitting in a chair of pomp and authority, oblivious to his own lack of qualification and competence.

Being who we are, we have forgotten how great names assisted in the making of this country. The Nawab of Bahawalpur budgeted the nation's pay and allowances in the early days, we do not even know who organised and successfully steered the referendum for the NWFP to join Pakistan against a sitting Provincial Government of the Congress. Or then how the three lashkars of the Pushtuns won parts of Jammu and Kashmir and facilitated the army operations later. We do not recollect that entrepreneurs left home and hearth in India to set up enterprises in Pakistan giving it the little industry it has. How Dawood set up industries in the then East Pakistan and lost it in 1971. He then reestablished it in whatever remained of Pakistan only to lose it to Bhutto's Nationalisation Programme. Determined and relentless, the family name resurfaced in the corporate world and lives on even today, contributing to the economy of Pakistan. Yet we curse the elite and mistake upstarts for feudal. Those who grabbed land and became lords are now guests of honour at our gatherings and parties. Zardari is a good example but he is neither feudal, nor can ever be one. The Nawab of Kalabagh was and many more such as him who contributed towards the development of Pakistan. Yet, people in their enthusiasm to find someone to fault and others to blame have made it fashionable to accuse the elite and the feudals - labels that they picked up while studying overseas. It sounds bold, so all-knowing, so with-the-times but nowhere near truth.

We are in the hands of incompetent leadership. The country today is somewhat like a plane in the flight with a monkey in the cockpit. 'Default' and 'TTP', the buzzwords these days, are the problems of our own making. I shall leave the default issue for another time - a product of greed, corruption and total lack of capacity - and instead focus on TTP, the pressing issue of the times we live in. There is a rumour that some sort of a policy was made under which it was decided to negotiate with these criminals. I suppose there is a point to all this madness. After all, if the Sharif brothers can be absolved of all the crimes they did, why not the TTP? Nevertheless, I for one am curious to meet or at the least see the gentlemen who advocated the soft approach and negotiations with the TTP. I would really like to see what makes such a person tick, how he lives and what are his values just for the benefit of my own education. I am certain that the people, whoever they are, do not belong to the KP areas, aren't Pushtuns, haven't been employed in any combat and have never served in the border regions but have somehow convinced the powers that be that, despite their total lack of experience or exposure in such matters, they are the only experts around.

They bask in glory for the two minutes of attention that illuminates them as they let fly their oratory, not bothered about the damage they are about to unleash.

This was done in the merger of Swat where the FCR was removed and our constitution forced upon them, which, when it failed, was once again replaced by the same FCR. The people questioned as to why the State insisted on applying a constitution that had failed everywhere else in the country but they were never given any explanation. So we had the dubious distinction of having a settled area administered by a PA and a tribal area governed by a DC. We merged Chitral with a different geography, language, ethnicity and language into the Malakand Division. Having made a mess of the whole matter, handed over the Division to Sufi Muhammed and allowed for a parallel constitution - *ni-zam-e-adl* - to be applied. All the while, the courts sat in silence and watched this aberration and travesty of administration and governance blatantly unfold before them. They watched in criminal silence when a girl was spreadeagled in public and whipped, when people were executed on the streets under a parallel justice system - all this while 'giving peace a chance'.

We then fought to free the people that the State had abandoned, when the State was in search for a cheap acquittal and looked for an easy way out. We wrested freedom from militancy with great loss of life, treasure and sacrifices by many, bringing normalcy and peace to the region. This progressed from agency to agency as young men fought and were willing to lay down their lives to preserve this country and protect this nation. Having cleared 48000 sq kms of combat zone from local and foreign militants and after having expelled them to Nooristan and Kunar areas of Afghanistan, we suddenly find our supra-intellectual stalwarts crawling out of the woodwork, to proffer their unsolicited logic and reasoning - 'give peace a chance'. They choose to forget how the Kohat Tunnel was closed and the Indus Highway blocked or how the international airport in Peshawar remained closed. They tend to forget there were bomb blasts every day and we lost 80,000 precious lives in this callous conflict that had no purpose and no strategy. Yet our leadership, instead of focusing on the problem, its causes and how to contain it, glorified *shahadat* and were readily available for photo shoots as they hugged and kissed the relatives of the *shaheed* with feigned sincerity and crocodile tears. Compensations were announced and a show of solidarity with the bereaved was always on full display. Hypocrisy at its best! No inquiry was

ever held to determine as to where, why and how these casualties occurred. Was it a lapse, an accident, violation of procedure, bad planning or limited leadership? We may never know. The facts will remain hidden behind the subterfuge of cheap popularity drawing political mileage from every *shahadat*. In this blessed state, no one is ever held accountable.

Instead of learning lessons from the past and reconciling with our own lack of capacity to undertake such matters, we pressed on. Our champions of freedom and democracy proceeded to merge FATA just as they had done with Swat. The FCR is an abominable law, they screamed at the public, as if the conflict in FATA was only over the FCR.

Some of us appeared at seminars, talk shows and wrote studies that they were going about it the wrong way and that there were better ways to do this and it needed time. Every argument was brushed aside by the little people in big offices, who were in a hurry and had other agendas as they went ahead anyway. The *mushers* (tribal leaders) looked on in amazement as to how matters such as that of the *qaumi zameen* (land revenue) and *niqat* (proportional compensation) would be resolved amongst many other tribal matters usually dealt with by the *jirga* law. Now we have landed ourselves in double jeopardy: the PTM and the TTP, both up against the State for wrong reasons but reasons provided by our own stupidity. Where are our sleuths, political geniuses and the champions of freedom and democracy now? Their names should be listed and they should all be bundled off to the tribal areas to resolve the mess that they are responsible for. They keep doing it again and again; it's time for some accountability, some white paper to be initiated for posterity, some investigation at least.

This was a pointless exercise, going down the dubious road to nowhere, negotiating with the Taliban and subordinating the State of Pakistan to the Afghan Government who have been elevated to the ranks of interlocutors. Now having discovered the pitfalls of such a foolish plan resulting in failure, corrective measures need to be put into place immediately. In my own limited wisdom, I tried on numerous occasions to contribute towards establishing a way-forward policy. I always felt till now that I was giving my opinion based on limited access to information and intelligence and that those who were handling the matter had a better understanding than I did. I was wrong; we were always in the hands of clueless, incompetent, ignorant people whose sole method to madness was giving power-point presentations that made them look knowledgeable.

The immediate need is to put together a planning cell that should be dealing with the matter. Its head should be independent and function under the minister of interior. He should be allowed to construct a functional team comprising civilian and military officials of his own choosing. He should report to the parliament and update them about what's happening and get approvals for the plans he may have, the budget he demands and the way forward. He should have access to all intelligence agencies, police and law enforcement. His plans must include military application paying the way for a political solution and political initiatives sustaining military successes. The plan should be sustainable, permanent and realistic. It must include a pro-active intelligence entity, border management, dealing with Afghan agencies across the border, Afghan refugee control and integrate the local leadership into all developments related to the region.

To our armchair experts, let me in-

form you that we, as a country, are not suffering from elite capture, feudal mindset, economic hitman or hybrid war or any other such fancy label. We, as a nation, are hostage to unscrupulous gangsters, land-grabbers and blackmailers. They live amongst us as we fawn and scrape before them begging for a little attention and for the little scraps thrown our way. They have invaded our drawing rooms, our parlours, our homes. You will find these grinning despots amongst friends, relatives and benefactors - they are neither elite nor feudal, just small people in high office, opportunists who wield disproportionate influence in managing our affairs. We are suffering the consequences of a total lack of merit, limited awareness, poor education system, semi-literacy, poor upbringing, nepotism and parochialism. These traits are wantonly paraded by every individual and institution time and time again, whenever given half a chance, and are further aggravated by mega-corruption, extremism and no rule of law.

I do not agree that Pakistan is primarily suffering from terrorism; it simply doesn't have the government that has the capacity to implement normal routine law and order or apply the justice system in letter and spirit. Whether it is the Chotu Gang in the Rojan Forests, or violence on the streets of Karachi, land-mafia, separatist pretensions in Baluchistan or the TTP's hypocritical demand for Sharia, our government lacks the political will and the justice system has no wherewithal to implement the law. As we sink around blaming the feudal mindset and elite capture, we are living the moment where government is firmly in the hands of foolish, stupid and ignorant people.

So if it is survival that we are in search of, then let it be understood that the government, the political system, police or the justice system will not and cannot deliver in the shape that they are in now. It lies in a technocratic government of wise people. Matters have gone beyond normal political dispensation. There is no political solution to Pakistan's problems and a carefully crafted technical plan (apolitical) needs to be structured to deal with the economic misery we are about to spin into and to restructure our routine administration towards functionality. Development and opportunity structuring needs to be undertaken on an emergency footing. The education system must be reviewed in its entirety to improve the teaching staff, facilities, syllabus and learning outcomes. The justice system must become a justice-giving system and not just another necessary process to validate crime. The police must be depoliticised and made independent and self-governing. Merit has to come to the forefront; our practice to subsidise mediocrity must stop. I know, most would ask how we can get such a government and, for that, there are answers but first we must be all reconciled that this sham of a democracy, the political structure, the justice system, the policing have all failed and can no longer deliver. I also know that a lot of people would question my resolve and feel that I have failed to mention the role of the Army in contributing towards this state of poor governance. The Army is not relevant to these reforms and if any reforms are undertaken for/by the Army, they would be done so as to improve their own efficiency, conduct, functionality and application, but that has nothing to do with the state governance.

Lt. Gen. Tariq Khan retired as head of Pakistan's Central Command and has led the Frontier Corps to victory against TTP.

Indian cricket schedule is probably the most chockablock among all the teams, from tours to home series and the IPL that lasts for months and requires continuous travel across India. Only recently, just after finishing their world cup tour to Australia, the team straightaway flew to New Zealand for a T20I and ODI series. They toured Bangladesh for another series.

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