

Rethinking development at Galiyat

There are scores of visible signs of improvement and order in the beautiful and blessed valleys of Galiyat. The roads are broader, cleaner and well painted. Truants have given way to well-dressed children who attend schools even when it involves walking over long distances. Teachers and doctors are present at their places of duty even in remote rural areas. The police appears alert, helpful and professional. The pipeline track from Doongagali to Ayubia, a stunningly scenic mountain-hugging trail, is cleaner and better maintained than it ever was. In short, something right has begun to happen among the management of the Galiyat Development Authority (GDA). Optimism and appreciation would therefore not be altogether out of place.



Well dressed school children walk many miles from their village to attend classes in a school at Nathiagali.



The Galiyat roads are broader, cleaner and better painted than ever before.

There are however a number of compelling reasons to ask the GDA to pause for a moment and reconsider its course of development. Cementing of natural trails, unending construction of palatial homes for the rich and the powerful, allowing smoke-emitting obscene vehicles to engage in endless motoring up and down the winding slopes, focusing on building food streets, hotels and homes emitting raw sewage down the slopes and dumping of garbage on the sides to keep them out of sight of the vehicular elite are not the best ways of building or preserving natural forests and hill stations.

Narrow, winding 'katcha' trails, naturally developed over hundreds of years, laden with fallen leaves, forage and roots, were always a great attraction for walkers and hikers to come up to the Galiyat forests. Many of these have now been needlessly paved for miles at length, with concrete tiles that have destroyed their natural beauty, feel, flora and fauna. The only beneficiaries are the contractors, the contract-makers and the tile manufacturers. Our pristine forests are being ruined and urbanized with sand and cement. This practice ought to be stopped on urgent basis. Every single brick amounts to taking away a small piece of the forest.



The unnecessary cementing and tiling of natural trails continues at a rapid pace.

Why is the prime land at Nathiagali, Doongagali and other Galiyat being constantly allotted (read gifted) to the rich and the powerful elite. This land belongs to Pakistan and its future generations. The state has no right to sell it to the rich and the influential, nor does this pampered community have any right to steal it from the common citizens for all times to come. Working with gusto and speed, (as if in competition with the Bahria Town), the pristine forests are being rapidly transformed into palatial homes so that the elite can entertain itself for a few days every year. This ought to stop and the land already allotted along with the houses already built must be bought back by the government for use by public at large. . It is indeed criminal for the GDA and the KPK government to allow our common heritage to be permanently plundered.



Yet another annex to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa House – a villa built with the tax payers' money for the recreation of government itself. Tiles are the new name of what was once called a forest.

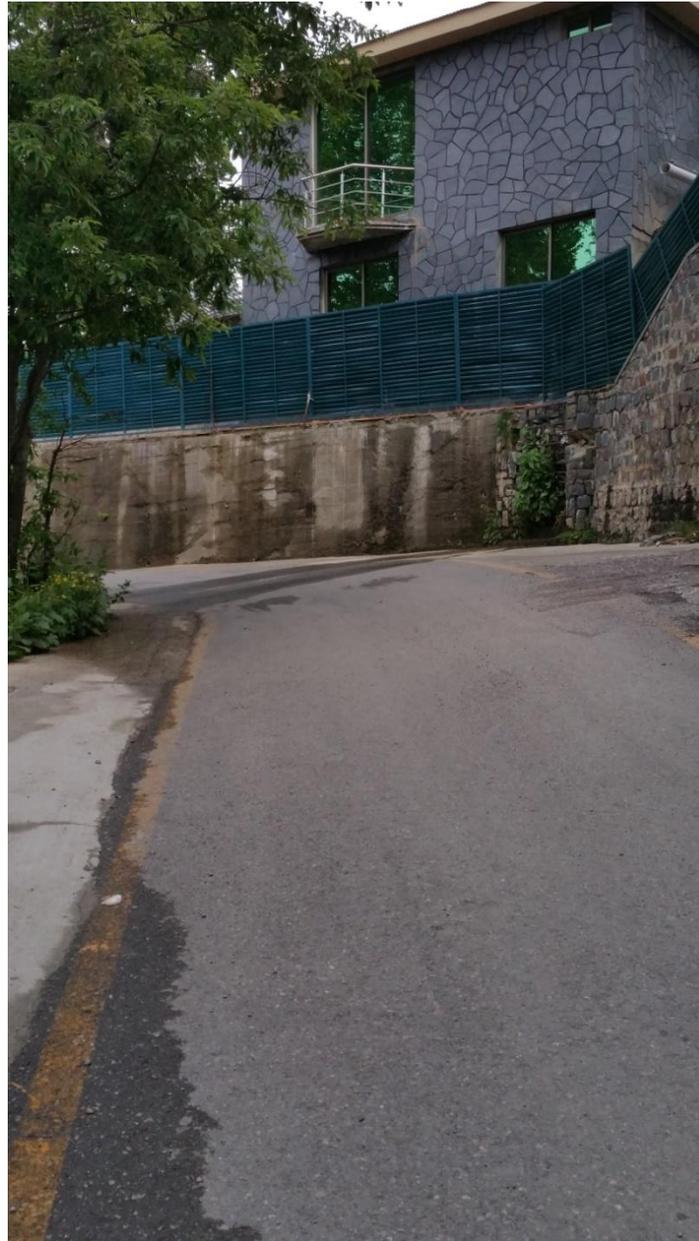


Sand, cement and stones destroy one of the finest spots in the forest for the short term recreation of the obscenely rich.



Scores of needless camp offices have been built by the government misusing tax payers' money for the luxury of a few officials , their families and friends. Another piece of forest, destroyed forever.

The GDA has made very little effort to discipline the homes and hotels that emit disease-laden raw sewage down the trails and the slopes of the mountains. Overlooked by GDA, this illegal and environmentally destructive practice has gone on for years and some of the biggest hotels are the ones making the largest mess. It is time for GDA to clamp down on every premises that does not have a standard and approved septic handling tank.



This trail of sewage comes from one of the annexes of the Chief Minister's House (The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa House)



Raw sewage of a leading hotel in Nathiagali flows down the mountain slope contaminating the path, the plantation and the people that come its way.

For its beauty and serenity, the 9400 feet high Mushkpuri peak, may well be considered a small extension of heaven on earth. But unlike heaven, the path leading upto Mushkpuri is laden with not just good intentions but also plastic bags and bottles. Sad that a country cannot maintain some of its most precious natural resorts. The absence of a garbage removal and prevention system begins to speak for itself within the first few minutes of climbing the Mushkpuri track.



There are no controls, fines or mechanisms to ensure that visitors do not leave behind plastic bags and bottles – an environmental burden for all times to come.



Yet another filth laden scene on the way to Mushkpuri – a jewel in the crown of Nathiagali peaks.

While the main roads appear cleaner than ever and sufficient garbage drums seem to be in place, the disposal of garbage by tossing it across the fence or the slope continues to remain a vibrant practice. This quick garbage disposal method has come to be accepted as a norm. The practice could be curbed by imposing and executing heavy fines on visitors, elite dwellers and mushrooming hoteliers for any solid or liquid effluent that they dump on their surroundings.



Garbage dumped on the side of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa house, blocking the narrow path routinely trekked by the locals



Another example of quick garbage disposal - tossing across the fence.

One gets an impression that most of the motorists who visit Nathiagali every day, do so only to practice for their impending road tests. They hardly ever seem to stop revving their already over-worked engines or step out of their vehicles for a walk. Emitting poisonous smoke and blurring harsh and high volume music, these shrieking 'metal containers' scare and disrupt not just the humans but also other animals, birds, butterflies and insects. How come the GDA has no clue as to how silence, serenity and nature are preserved in forests. There should be instructions that encourage people to walk. Most areas, other than the 'bazaars' situated on the main roads ought to be declared as 'no-vehicle' zones. This could however be possible only if there are sufficient car parks that operate as "Park and Walk" places, similar to "Park and Ride" locations in other countries.



A view of noisy motorists undertaking imaginary 'driving tests' in front of the church building in Nathiagali.

The desire to destroy the forests by transplanting urban appearances, culture and habits is entirely inexplicable. The garbage, gluttony, crowding, noise, smells, smoke and commercialism associated with the food streets all over the world is well known and well despised. Nathiagali may be the sole forest in the world trying to improve itself by building food streets. The organic and plastic waste generated by these foodie joints will only multiply the rate of environmental degradation. Clearly the GDA seems conceptually confused if its initials stand for "Galiyat" or "Greed" Development Authority.



A view of a natural pathway destroyed with cement and stones to create a food street at Nathiagali.

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