

"Aswachh Bharat" marks Amarnath yatra

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Several photographs of pilgrims urinating and defecating on the banks of the Dal Lake have triggered outrage among local residents. Many of them questioned arrangements made by 'Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board (SASB)'. The 60-day pilgrimage to Amarnath began on June 28.

"The pictures showing a horde of Amarnath pilgrims peeing on the banks of Dal Lake reveal the truth about the outreach of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. You need to change your mindset to change your behaviour," tweeted Senior journalist Yousuf Jameel."

The fresh water stream Indian pilgrims are peeing into flows from the same ling, they worship. Indian administration that has been assertive on Amarnath Yatra should've at least built toilets for people...shame," Kaiser Majeed posted on Twitter.

Talking to the National Herald, a local activist Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat underlined the need for creating awareness among the pilgrims and recalled that all religions have laid great emphasis on sanctity of water.

Stressing on sanitation, a press note issued by Governor NN Vohra who happens to be the chairman of SASB, earlier this year had claimed that the CEO would spend nearly Rs 1.50 crore for procuring 629 new pre-fabricated latrines and bathing booths. CEO of the shrine board Umang Narula, however, didn't respond to phone calls and WhatsApp message from National Herald.

A report 'Amarnath Yatra—a militarised pilgrimage' compiled by a civil society group last year had raised concerns over the adverse impact of the pilgrimage on local ecology.

A passage on sanitation and solid waste in the report also pointed out that the toilets on the track and the camps beyond Nunwan and Baltal on yatra route are built on the river side of the ridges, and not on the mountain side (possibly except in Panchtarni). "The SASB claims that the waste from the temporary toilets in the camps in the upper reaches and en route are disposed in pits after treating them with microbes to facilitate faster decomposition of the human waste.

However, either the pits are not deep enough or the number of toilets inadequate for the lakhs of people who move on the track, since a common sight after the first week of the Yatra are human waste from tanks overflowing into the rivers...

"In Nunwan and Panchtarni since the toilets are all clustered at the rear end of the camps and as the toilets become unuseable as the days progress, often Yatris resort to open defecation in the Lidder and Sindh Nallah respectively," the reported stated.