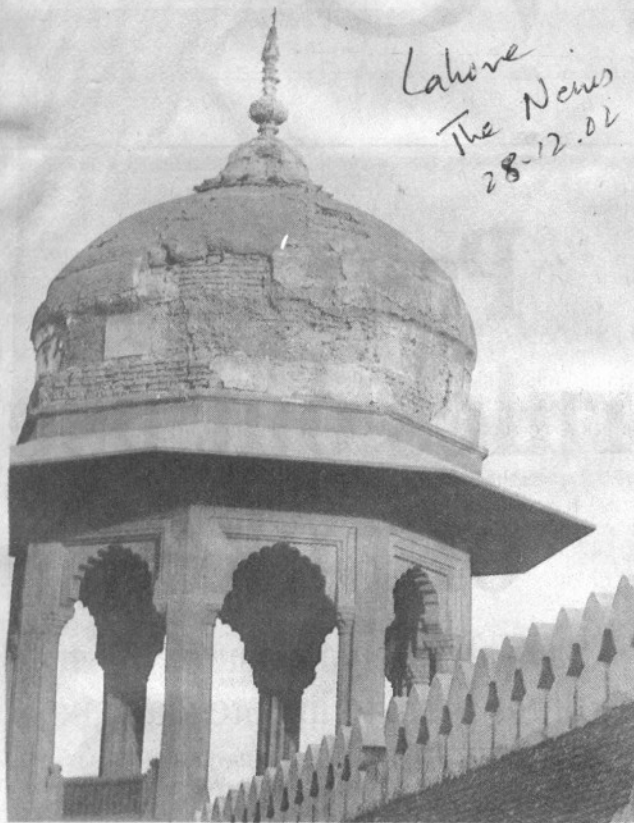


Govt's apathy adds to decay of



The plaster of gardens' minaret is eroding. —photo by Iqbal Ch

By Amer Malik

THE federal government's lackluster response in undoing the time-effect on Shalamar Garden has triggered the early decay of the aging monument for the Unesco has also started weighing chances of sustainability despite hefty stipulations for its conservation.

Years of neglect coupled with the blockade of Rs 0.5 million by the federal government in the fiscal year 2001-02, allocated to the Archaeology Department for the uplift of the garden, has exposed the monument to the risk of losing foreign patronage by Unesco.

In 1981, the Shalamar Garden was given the status of World Heritage Monument by the Unesco. But, in its meeting in Paris last year, the Unesco declared the garden as "World Heritage Monument in danger", said Qasim Ali

Qasim, director Archaeology Department (Northern Circle) Pakistan, while expressing his fear that the Unesco might exclude the Garden from the list of World Heritage Monuments in view of its decaying conditions.

According to international rules, even the attacking forces are not entitled to hit the World Heritage Monuments, he added.

In all, there are 26 monuments in Punjab which Unesco declared as World Heritage Monuments including Shalamar Garden, Lahore Fort, Rohtas Fort Jhelum and 23 monuments in Taxila Valley.

During the 12-year period from 1990 to 2001, the Shalamar Garden was left to decay because no significant conservation work was undertaken due to the disinterest of the government, as only little more than Rs 5 million were spent on its restoration during the period. Under the Army

ment Project, the government allocated Rs 1 million for the year 2001-2002 (from total allocation for Shalamar Garden) to be released in quarterly installments to the Archaeology Department for lifting the face of the historical garden. But, the Archaeology Department has not received any funds despite the elapse of two quarters in the current financial year, therefore, there has not been done any uplift work on the garden during the current financial year.

The government approved a master plan for conservation and restoration of Shalamar Garden amounting to the total allocation of Rs 74.18 million in 1973-74. The Archaeology Department spent Rs 15.6 million on the conservation of the monument till 1989-90, while the total cost on its uplift was little more than Rs 20.6 million.

The garden's conservation project is to be completed till the financial year 2002-2003, said the director, The Archaeology Department receives meagre regular budget amounting to Rs 1.3 million annually for repairs of all monuments. There are 149 monuments only in Punjab.

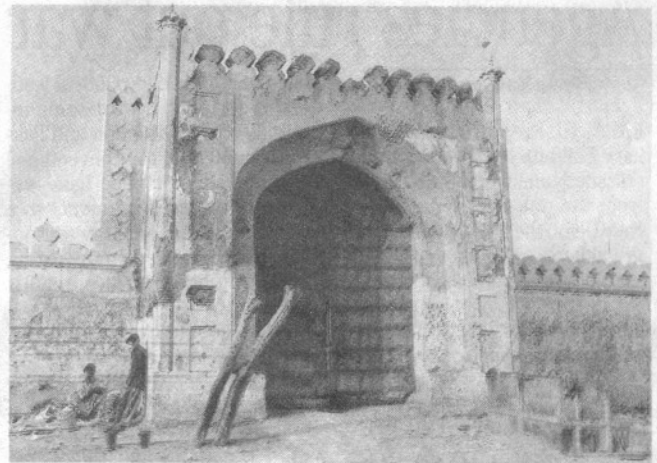
Talking about international aids for the preservation of Shalamar Garden, he said that Unesco had sanctioned \$ 53,000 for emergency repair, but the amount had not been released. Even if the

amount is released, he said, only \$ 2,500 would be spent on the project and rest of the sum (\$ 50,500) would be consumed as expenditures on the eight missions of technical experts.

In 1997, Norwegian government offered to undertake conservation of Shalamar Garden with an amount of \$ 100,000, but it withdrew its offer after the nuclear tests conducted by the Nawaz Sharif's government, he said. However, he said, the Norwegian government had again asked the Pakistan government to send proposals for conservation of the garden. We have sent a comprehensive conservation project to the federal government, he said adding that the Norwegian government had yet not informed about its programme.

French Centre Director Olivier Litvine has also agreed to do the documentation of Shalamar Garden after the DCO Lahore Shahid Najam and NCA students approached him for sponsorships, he said adding that since then the reply was awaited.

Talking about the dilapidated condition of the garden, the director said it might even become beyond repair because the drain water was eroding the perimeter wall structure of the monument. He said the plan to lay drainage system around the monument would be evolved in coordination with the district government,



Gardens' main gate: The picture of neglect. —photo by Iqbal Ch

the Shalamar Gardens



Human vandalism has ruined the beauty of the rear gate of the Shalamar Gardens and it has been reduced to a garbage dumping place. —photo by Iqbal Chaudhry

adding that preventive measures would be taken to restore the already affected structure and fencing would be erected around its boundary walls. We want to acquire the land encircling the the garden for its proper conservation and Rs 1.43 million have been allocated for acquisition of land from the total allocated amount for the monument, he said. The legal owners of the land will be paid and alter the shops and encroachments around the garden will be demolished. If there arises any resistance, he said, the federal government's law permits to make 'compulsory acquisition' of the land. He said the garden's hydraulic system (water system for irrigation and fountains) was bulldozed to widen the road during Shahbaz Sharif's tenure as chief minister. The hydraulic system has been revived in its original shape to some extent, but the electronic input has to be given to get the water, he added. However, he said the government did

not possess power and the police was under district government, so the people were not afraid of ruining the monument.

He said the entrance gate as well as the offices from Begum's Khawab Gah would be shifted towards Naqqar Khana to keep its front structure intact.

A children park will be developed in the garden and swings and slides will be installed, the director said adding that the bargaining was being done with some parties in Sialkot to implement the project from the 1st week of January 2002. The children park will be operative from June 2002, he added. The Naqqar Khana and lawns will be restored to their original shape, he said adding that new standardised toilets would also be constructed for the convenience of the public.

He further said that clean drinking water would be facilitated and descriptive board about the garden would also be displayed while the brochures and

booklets would be published for public information and awareness. All these things will be completed in the current year, he added while specially pointing out that every thing would be done by applying modern techniques but the Mughal style would remain intact. He said there was also a plan to open the the garden for public at night time and the companies were being consulted for proper illumination. However, these monuments should not be used for holding public functions with a view to protecting its original character and it should be taken as the national historical monument. We have been asking the government for recruiting technical staff besides allocating more funds for the conservation project of the garden, he said. About the future plans of the Archaeology Department, he said that besides the documentation of architectural and botanical sides thorough conservation of the Shalamar Garden would be undertaken.