

DAWN

<http://DAWN.com> Vol. LVII No. 10 Islamabad, Ziqat'ad 6, 1423 Friday, January 10, 2003 28 PAGES Rs 13.00

First Pakistani selected Unesco expert

By Mobarik Virk

ISLAMABAD, Jan 9: A young Pakistani from Gilgit, Salamat Ali Tabassum, has been selected as associate expert by the Unesco at its World Heritage Centre in Paris.

He is the first Pakistani to be selected to the position but the interesting aspect is that he has not been selected to the position on Pakistan's strength but is backed by the Italian government.

As a result, he is working in the Pacific region because the position against which the Italian government funded Salamat Ali is for European candidate.

Salamat Ali, who started from Gilgit by doing his high school, travelled to Islamabad and then moved to Karachi where he did his Masters in Environmental Sciences with second position, said the Italian government took the decision to fund him against the post because it (Italian government) wanted people from this part of the world also come forward and join in these efforts to protect and preserve the endangered world heritage.

Based at the Unesco offices in Paris, Salamat spent a lot of time in the Pacific region, in the countries like New Zealand, Cook Island, French Polynesia, New Caledonia and others.

"These countries are under represented in the world heritage list and my work is to encourage them and to help them identify more sites, natural sites as well as the cultur-

al sites or both," Salamat Ali said.

"Once a site is identified and selected then I have to work and create awareness in those countries about those sites. I work on helping the governments and people to know how they can build their capacities, how they can manage their sites, how they can improve



their quality of life by using those sites in terms of tourism and other things. Once a site is listed anywhere in the world, we at the Unesco become active and the people at the World Heritage Centre start doing lobbying. They ask the relevant authorities in those countries to stop destructive activities, which may cause harm and damage to those sites and adopt measures for the protection and preservation of such sites."

He said the Unesco provided internation-

al expertise which monitor the situation. The country starts receiving funding from donors which could be around \$ 40 to 50,000, he said, adding more important was to promote the site as a tourist attraction, which kicked off a multiplying affect encouraging tourism, hotel industry, enhanced development and so many other things related to these activities.

He said some of Pakistan's sites were also adopted by Unesco and Shalamar Gardens was one of those. "But right now I am working in the Pacific region and not for Pakistan because I have been funded by the Italian government. May be at a later stage I get a chance to serve Pakistan from my position. But, I believe being in Unesco office in Paris is equally good for Pakistan because I can keep raising issues of Pakistan whenever I may get a chance," Salamat Ali said.

Initially, he worked for a while with the WWF as Environmental Education Officer in its Gilgit office but went to Boston in US when he received a scholarship for a two-year Master's programme in Sustainable International Development.

He applied for a job in the UN, which he landed and started working as an associate in the Caribbean countries. Then this position of associate expert in Unesco's World Heritage Centre came up for which he applied.