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MERC TIMES

TRADE FAIR AT SANGARMAL

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PATTAN OBSERVES ALARMING INCREASE IN DOG POPULATION

● **Sami Khan**

HounMoud of Pattan area in district Baramulla got its name from the huge population of dogs that have inflicted the area.

It has become a meeting place for the dogs of the whole area. It seems to be the only place in District where dogs can be seen in such a huge number. The reason being the locals leave their dead animals to rot in this area.



Every morning scores of dogs can be seen on the roads. Ali Mohammad, who has been driving bus on this route for more than 12 years, said that it becomes difficult for him to drive his bus in that area. "Many times we have met with accidents while trying to save a dog", he said.

"My bus passes through this route at 8 AM, it takes more than 10 minutes to disperse the dogs. Sometimes drivers come out of the vehicle to disperse them", said Ali Mohammad.

Every morning scores of dogs can be

seen on the roads. Locals of the area said that there have been several incidents when the dogs have attacked two wheelers or commuters and injured them severely.

"Many times I was attacked by dogs at this place. At times it becomes a difficult for a person to go through the area," said Mudasir, a sumo driver.

The Local butcher is the only person who is not attacked by the dogs as he feeds the left over to them. He said the population of the dogs is growing in the

area and has doubled in a year.

The locals too find it difficult to move in the area in late hours owing to the presence of stray dogs.

"A person can't move out of the house in the late hours as the dogs keep on roaming in the area", said Javed Ahmad, a resident of the area.

Municipal committee admitted that the population of dogs has increased in the area. "Basically, the butchers are disposing the left over at this junction due to which it has become a favourite spot for the dogs", said an official.

CHIKTAN-RAZI-KHAR NEEDS RENOVATION



● **Murtaza Fazily**

Chiktan Khar, the masterpiece of medieval architecture in Kargil is left in shambles.

It is situated in the village of Chiktan, 50 kms away from Kargil Town. Khar means castle in Kargili. This very Khar or castle was being constructed in the medieval 15th century by rulers of Purig. The castle is unique in the area and was known as Chiktan Khar.

It was constructed by the renowned architect of Baltistan, Shingkhan Chandan. The building was so elegant that the King of Chiktan planned to cut off both hands of the architect with a view that no such caste exist anywhere else. But the King failed because of the high sense of alacrity exhibited by the wife of the architect.

The Khar is in a very bad shape these days. Mohammad Ghulam, a resident of Chiktan, while talking to MERC Times said, "The Khar is the symbol of culture and heritage of Kargil and it needs to be preserved. The wood and the bricks of the castle were being taken away by the villagers and were used for construction purposes."

Mohammad Ali, a local Kargili, said, "Chiktan-Razi-Khar has a huge potential for tourist attraction as it is a lone heritage sight in Kargil area. It can attract thousands of tourists in the peak season and thus can help in the development of the entire area."

The Khar is a masterpiece of medieval architecture in Ladakh area. Many anthropologists of Ladakh have come forward to preserve this heritage sight and there is a common notion in people that government should renovate this heritage site as soon as possible as it is a symbol of Kargili culture

TRADE FAIR AT SANGARMAL

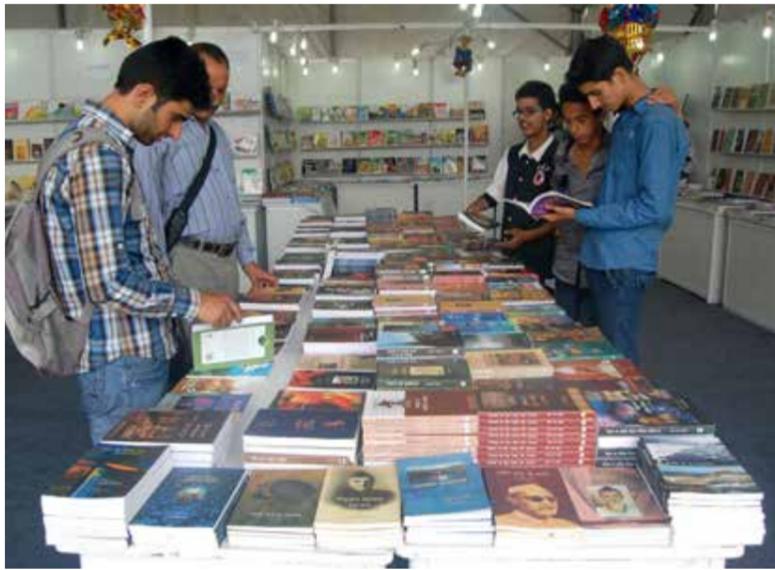
●Khalid Bashir

A large number of people visited the book stall selling books at Sangarmal Trade fair. The fair lasted 23 days, from June 6 to 29. The fair attracted huge crowds irrespective of age, gender. The locals, as well as the tourists, were enthusiastic about this 'entry free' trade fair.

Books of diverse genre, fiction and nonfiction were available including best seller novels, classic literature, history, science, and story books.

The attractive thing about the book stall in Sangarmal Trade Fair was the manner of selling. The books were sold by weight which made them more affordable for consumers.

Talking to MERC Times, a Home Science student, Mehrul Nisa, said, "It is for the first time that I have seen books being sold by weight. Various books on cooking at cheap cost



are available here and I am happy that I don't have to pay exorbitant money at shops."

Parents of a 5-year-old, said, "Books for children are good and at a cheap cost of Rs. 150 per kilo. The story books also attracted the kids and we are happy to be able to buy those

in bulk."

Deepak Jain, who organized this Trade Fair, said, "Even in the era of e-books, the trade fair turned out to be food and we are expecting more sales."

In addition to books, collection for women, household accessories, cookware and Ayurvedic Medicines were available. Moreover vases, bangles, pots, and other decorative items made of Pakistani stones also attracted huge crowd.

The crowd was mesmerized by the Kashmiri songs sung by various local bands. The 22-year old Salman Majeed, student of IUST, said, "It is good

that our youth is promoting indigenous music and culture. They are making their career in it and breaking a stereotype."

Abid from local Kashmiri Music Club said, "This trade fair provides them to showcase their talent and promote their culture."

VACATIONS EXTENDED TO AVOID POSSIBLE UNREST ?

●Nisar Dharmia

The educational institutes of the Kashmir Valley reopened on Monday after a 20 day long summer vacation. Usually, the state government declares a 10 Day summer vacation every year however if sources are to be believed, this year the extension to the vacations was closely linked to the unrest among youth, especially students, due to the ongoing Gaza massacre.

Apparently, the state government had even extended the already long vacations from July 31 to August 2 in the wake of soaring temperatures in the Valley. However it was not merely a coincidence that Aug 1 and 2 were the days when there was a high possibility of student protests over Gaza killings and the recent Kousar Nag issue.

Since the vacations are over now, it will be interesting to see what other diplomatic

measures the state government will have up its sleeve to control such 'on campus' protests by students.

Maroof Ellahi, a business man from Jawahar Nagar believes that the government itself 'instigated' the Kousar Nag issue specifically at a time when the Pro-Gaza protests were at its peak. The youth of Kashmir was in a way answering to an international Muslim solidarity call which could have turned into massive social disorder in the Valley. As the vacations were also about to finish, the Kousar Nag issue was introduced mainly to be used as a buffer to counter the Gaza protests.

It is apparent that indeed the Kousar Nag issue has significantly quelled the Gaza Protests. During the last few days, there has been a major paradigm shift from Palestine to the Kousar Nag issue which the local government seems to be handling quite diplomatically. There were mass pro-

tests and a single day strike call by separatists posing environmental concern as a reason of stopping the Yatra. As a result, the state government immediately halted the first batch of Pandits which was supposed to take the Yatra from the Aharbal route in south Kashmir's Kulgam district. The decision ensured that this local issue does not evoke a significant interest and also inculcate a sense of calmness as far as the Gaza protests were concerned. Interestingly, the Yatra is still on from the Reasi Route and around 200 Pandits have already been scheduled to visit Kousar Nag which makes the whole idea of 'environmental concern' meaningless.

With exams round the corner and a scorching wave of heat, it is highly unlikely that this month would bring students on roads. Since Hamas and Israel have accepted to a 72 hour ceasefire, it further substantiates the possibility of a peaceful near future in the valley.

MARRIAGE SEASON AT ITS PEAK IN VALLEY



● **Wasim Nasir**

The marriage season in Kashmir is at peak in this month of August as every day hundreds of weddings are taking place across the valley.

With the arrival of August, the marriage season in Kashmir, all marriage halls and catering firms are booked in advance.

“Here the marriage hall remains abuzz with marriage ceremonies and the situation is such that people now install tents on the link roads for wedding ceremonies,” said Ghulam Nabi a local from Rainawari.

The demand for cooks and other marriage related items like catering equipments has increased manifold and is likely to persist till the end of October.

“The demand is increasing and we have formed a team of cooks comprising of a head cook and few amateurs,” said Ali Muhammad, a local cook.

In the past, marriages in the valley were held in late autumn after the harvest season. The soothing autumn temperatures ensured not only that the food did not go stale, but also suited the Wazas who have to work long hours. But from the last few years, the marriages are being scheduled soon after the month of Ramadan.

Truck load of mutton reaches valley everyday as it is the main ingredient in Wazwaan dishes. The people also claim that the mutton rates keep on changing as per the need.

ARE WE BECOMING NETIZENS FROM CITIZENS?

● **Omer Malik**

It's cool we are in 21st century and ruling the world with a small gadget in our pocket, blatantly bragging and self aggrandizing itself. It tells me that it has a smart phone body and has soul made of Internet. It bewildered me a bit, as I am a bit naïve in this regard but later I figured it out.

Don't we consider food as necessity in life. Of course guys. But keep over eating (irrespective of nutritional value) and you become over weight and obese. Eat unhealthy, fatty foods and you get high cholesterol, high blood pressure and other nasty illness and diseases.

The internet can be compared to our relationship with food. It is a great tool that provides us innumerable benefits. It is indeed a blessing. But if we over indulge or keep ingesting unwholesome pieces and quantities, it can ruin our physical, spiritual and mental health.

With the plethora of content in cyberspace, it's difficult to manoeuvre without feeling overwhelmed and virtually claustrophobic. It is a challenge to be selective in what to read, who to talk to and what activities to engage in. It is a struggle to even turn off our electric gadgets that constantly beep, flash and vibrate with new emails, updates and instant messages.

The internet gladly consumes our thoughts and time, if we let it. Our unhealthy online habits can detract from nourishing our real life interactions, from excelling at work or in school, from reading beneficial books and publications and from spending quality time with friends and family.

We can develop a horizontal approach, broadening our exposure to numerous people and information while developing little to no depth in any of our relationships

or knowledge of certain subjects.

Our incessant pursuance through other people's pictures, videos and blogs can make us aimless consumers and distract us from leaving our meaningful footprint in cyberspace.

Worse, online sins can develop into addictions that violate into our moral code, eat away our soul, translate virtual into real life sins and severe our relationships with spouses and loved ones. Haven't you been through this horror or anyone around you?

So ladies and gentleman it's cool to be Netizens but we have to be citizens too.

We condemn the tagged picture of any dead person and express our lament but next door we should remember we have a neighbour who needs you. Don't he?

So what is the way to get out of this mess. There you go!

Unplug, log off and disconnect these gadgets. Give your eyes and ears a break. Go to park or watch a sunset. Enjoy the solitude. Listen to chirping birds, rustling leaves and the streaming rivers and creeks. Praise God for the beauty in His creation. Bond with your spouse, children or hangout with your buddies

When you are back online, try to be as selective as possible. Choose quality over quantity. Remember to leave room for breathing, space and digestion.

Remember from all the online struggles, addiction to viewing pornography can become a clinical problem. It is complicated by changes in brain chemistry, which are quite arduous to reverse.

So what are you up to now guys! Pick your eyes up from the screen and locate and place them where whole body feels blessed. Experience the incredible beauty of Kashmir. It is not far away from the pictures or videos you surf on any website.

GOVT FAILS TO IMPLEMENT SLUM SCHEMES

● **Sibtain Haider**

Thousands in the state's summer and winter capital suffer in difficult and unpleasant conditions. A survey conducted by M/S IPE, a global private company reveals that more than 25,000 families live in slums or despicable areas which are unclean and detrimental to health. The survey also exposes to view that 9 percent of constructions have been done in an unpleasant manner resulting in the growth of slums.

Rubina Kounsar, Director Land Management, Srinagar Development Authority(SDA) said, "Development of these areas is done under two different schemes by the Government, Basic services to Urban poor and Integrated Housing And Slum Development. More than 50 projects have been sanctioned under these two schemes. If only 5 percent of these projects are executed successfully, the situation will improve substantially."

Municipal Corporation of Srinagar also conducted a survey in 2013 which exposes an unfortunate story. The areas identified as slums have archaic facilities. The drinking water and sanitary conditions are calamitous contrary to the Govt claims to improve living conditions in these areas.

As per SDA vice-chairman Shafat Noor, improper spacing and haphazard constructions are the main problem. "There is not much space left to raise new houses. Many people live in hutches. Slums have increased because of lack of urban infrastructure", he said.

Having a clear relevance to the matter, dozens of slums have come into being in

lives in Bemina's boat colony said, "I have no idea as to what is happening here. If the government can't dislodge slums from this area, the least it can do is improve their condition. It's a scientific fact that impure vicinity will infect you and your family. The authorities are doing nothing to keep our environment clean".

If the neighbouring areas of slums are affected to a great extent, the people living in slums itself show worry about their condition.

Mohammad Iqbal Dar who hails from Wahabpura, Budgam about the implementation of improvement schemes in his slum area in Chattabal said, "The place where I belong is remote and doesn't have appropriate installation of education services. Moreover our living conditions in that area were primitive with no proper facilities. I believed Srinagar was a better place for my business and my son but its opposite of what I had believed. Nothing is done by the authorities. From sanitation to water facilities,

it's severe."

It is the convergence of factors that makes life for some in Kashmir miserable. While its tourist destinations have attracted millions worldwide, on the other hand fringe spaces and graceless developments have made matters worse.



Srinagar city, particularly in Makhdoom Sahib vicinity, Bemina and Aali Kadal. Adding to the miseries, the last decade saw inhabitants from outside who have managed to live and transform government land into permanent dwelling place.

MushtaqKantroo, a Physician who

● **Sumaiya Yousuf**

HARASSMENT OF WOMEN IN BUSES ON RISE

With the city facing shortage of passenger vehicles, over loading in local buses has become a major cause of 'harassment' for women, mostly students.

According to the locals, many women tolerate harassment rather than reporting it "During peak hours, buses are so crowded that miscreants find it easy to harass women. They make use of salacious comments, and obscene gestures towards the women passenger."

Another women student from Kashmir University said, "Everyone can't afford private transport or rickshaw. After waiting for an hour at the bus stop, we have to travel in overcrowded buses. We cannot raise our voice against such issue as we fear that we may get stigma-

tized. We just bear it silently."

"The problem has worsened as most of the time the buses are either overloaded or the operators do not adhere to the reserved seats quota for women in buses", said a female commuter. There should be separate buses for women to check the menace.

Traffic Police Department has received complaints of overloading and harassment, but no strict action has been taken to curb such incidents. Though the traffic department in the city has introduced the eight seat reservation for women in buses two years ago, despite several awareness campaigns, nothing has been done to ensure its implementation.

To ensure safety for women, the concerned department needs to take these points seriously and be accountable about the role they ought to play.

GOVT FAILS TO CONTROL SPURIOUS DRUGS

● **Tasir Khan**

The infamous spurious drug scam that rocked the state last year, which were followed by series of revelations made by probe panel headed by then commissioner secretary, Rural development, Farooq Ahmad Pir, constituted by the government through the cabinet order. The panel had found twenty five officials guilty of having facilitated the purchase of sub-standard drugs for the government-run hospitals.

The report was thrown into the dustbin and no one was charged. The sad part of the story is that despite public outrage against supply of spurious drugs, administration has been sluggish in awarding punishment to guilty.

The purchase of fake and spurious drugs cannot be taken as a routine practice of corruption but tantamount to culpable homicide, opines some drug store owners.

“The malice of fake drugs

has not only afflicted the government run hospitals, but entire drug market in the state is in its dragnet”, paramedical students said.

The state drug department is claiming to have sealed scores of establishments which were found selling spurious drugs, but one fails to understand why they haven’t disclosed the names of those vendors which were violating

the rules, and irony is that so far no action has been taken against them.

The state government has now decided to initiate disciplinary action against the officials of different government departments involved in this spurious drug scam. People see it as a welcome step.

“It is a welcome and bold step taken by the

state government, because those found guilty, if punished would serve as a deterrent”, Faheem Gulzar, a teacher by profession, said.

“It is now high time for the government to act against unscrupulous officials. At the same time a separate Drug Authority needs to be set up which would review the issuance of licenses for manufacture and sale of drugs” demand the locals. Majority of the people feel that, strengthening of existing and creation of new drug testing laboratories is essential to ensure the quality of drugs being produced within or outside the state.



INADEQUATE TRANSPORT CAUSES INCONVENIENCE TO KU STUDENTS

● **Umar Shafi**

Students from various parts of Kashmir study in Kashmir University and many take Qamarwari route to reach university. Everyday from early in the morning, a huge number of minibuses start their journey towards Kashmir University. Most passengers who travel in these buses are students out of which maximum are from Kashmir University. These minibuses are always overloaded with passengers. The female students are most affected as they have to face a lot of inconvenience while travelling in these overloaded and suffocated minibuses.

“There should either be some separate, government-run transport which would carry only students or there should be a non-stop bus service after every 15 minutes that would save the crucial time of students who otherwise lose a lot of time in trav-



elling by these local buses”, said Umar, a student of Kashmir University and commutes through Qamarwari route.

“I am always worried about my daughter as she has to travel in overloaded buses to reach University”, said Gulzar Ahmad, who is father of a university student. He further added, “Sometimes the space between the two adjacent passengers is so small that even air cannot pass between them. In such situations, the female students in particular face a lot of inconvenience.

Anayat, another student from Kashmir University said, “I come from Sopore and it takes me not more than 50 minutes to cover a huge distance of 45 kms from Sopore to Qamarwari. But from Qamarwari to Hazratbal which is not more than 10kms, it takes me more than one hour to reach university, it is totally disgusting”. He further said that minibuses which are the only source of transport from Qamarwari to Universi-

ty are always overloaded and often move at snail’s pace due to which students often reach late to university and miss crucial lectures.

GUREZ THE HIDDEN PARADISE

● **Wassim Nasir**

The beautiful valley of Gurez is yet to be developed as a tourist destination because of its harsh climate and proximity to Line of Control. Gurez valley, located in Bandipora District, is surrounded by lofty mountains. It is situated near Line of control (LoC), about 150 kms from Srinagar. Kishan Ganga River flows through Gurez and average altitude of valley is about 8000 feet. This unique valley remains cutoff from the rest of world for more than six months every winter as the only road connecting it to the rest of the state remains closed.

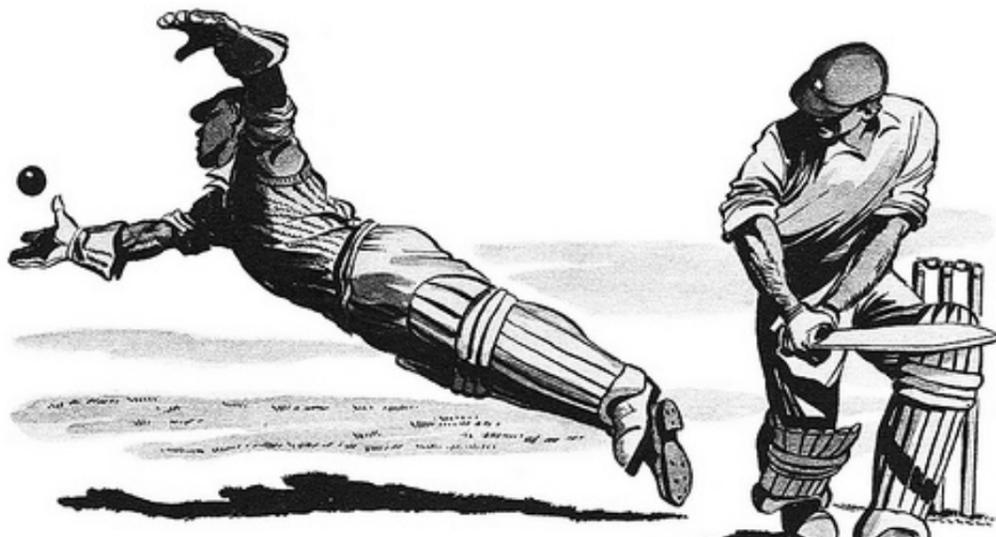
Gurez is a virgin area, which has tremendous tourist potential. Tourists will have new experience in the area. The sun set of Habba Khatoon hillock presents a breath taking view. Roaring Kishan Ganga River, birds, and herbal plants are other attractions for the tourists. The development of tourism remains main hope for the overall development of this land locked valley. The potential areas are mountaineering, trekking, trout angling, rafting which can attract bulk of tourists from within and outside India. "Developing Gurez as tourist destination is our priority as Gurez is one of the most beautiful places in Kashmir", said Ilyas Nasir, Assistant Director, Jammu and Kashmir tourism.



AGA SYED MEHDI MEMORIAL CRICKET TOURNAMENT STARTS IN BUDGAM

● **Yasir Gaffar**

Sheikh Ul Alam Sports Academy Budgam in collaboration with J&K Police organized 12th Aga Syed Mehdi Memorial cricket tournament in central Kashmir's Budgam District. The tournament starts on August 11.



Inaugural match of the tournament was played between MLA XI and Budgam Police XI. Thousands of spectators thronged the stadium on this occasion to cheer up the players of participating teams.

Inspector General of Police, A.G Mir was present as chief guest and MLA Budgam, Aga Ruhullah as guest of honour.

On this occasion, in his speech I.G Police lauded the tournament organizers for organizing such tournaments. He said, "Organizing such tournaments help the youth in developing positive attitude towards life".

"These types of tournaments are the primary platforms for the talented youth to showcase their talent and advance in sports arena", added Mir.

MLA Budgam Aga Ruhullah also spoke on this occasion. He praised both J&K Police and civil society members for organizing such tournaments. "The bondage between police and civil society strengthens".

A total of 64 teams are participating in this tournament. All the matches of the tournament are to be played in Sports Stadium Budgam. This tournament is organized every year by Sheikh-Ul-Alam Sports Academy Budgam.

MORNING BREAD



Pics by: Suhaib Mansoor

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