



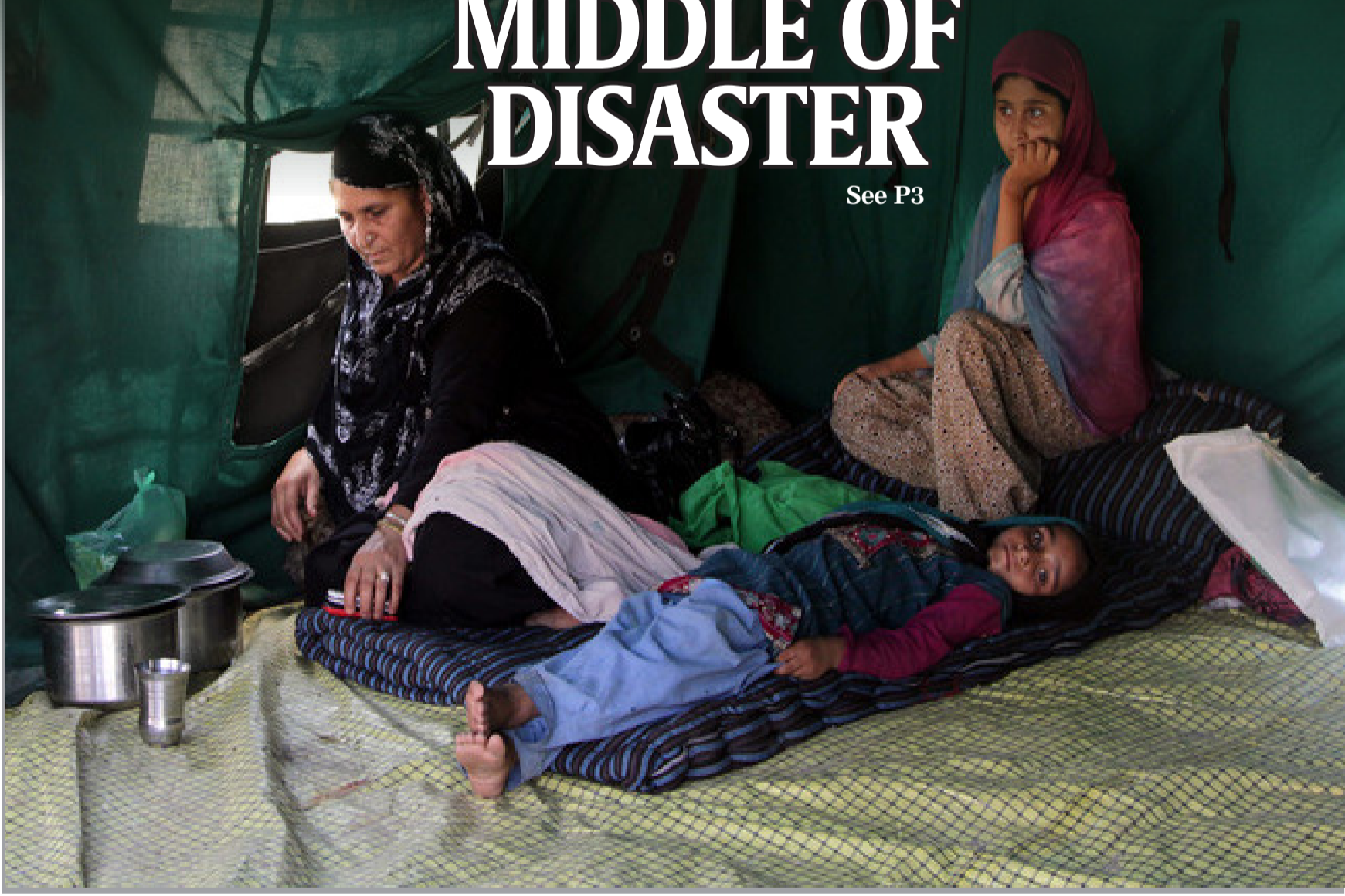
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MERC TIMES

DOWNTOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF DISASTER

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KASHMIRI SCIENTIST DISCOVERS STEM CELLS TO KILL BRAIN CANCER

● **Showkat Lateef**

Born in Kashmir, Dr Shah recently delivered a lecture on stem cells at University of Kashmir. For many years, he and a team of scientists had been researching a stem-cell-based therapy for cancer, which would kill only tumour cells and no others.

A Kashmir-born US scientist has created a flutter in the field of cancer research by successfully using stem cells as killing machines to fight brain cancer.

Although the experiments have been limited to mice, the stem cells that were genetically engineered to produce and secrete toxins which kill brain tumours, without killing normal cells or themselves, are expected to pave way for a breakthrough in the fight against cancer.

Dr Khalid Shah, lead author and director of the molecular neurotherapy and imaging lab at Massachusetts

General Hospital and Harvard Medical School, said that the results were very positive.

“After doing all of the molecular analysis and imaging to track the inhibition of protein synthesis within brain tumours, we do see the toxins kill the cancer cells. Cancer-killing toxins have been used with great success in a variety of blood cancers, but they don’t work as well in solid tumours because the cancers aren’t as accessible and the toxins have a short half-life. But genetically engineering stem cells has changed all that,” he said.

“Now, we have toxin-resistant stem cells that can make and release cancer-killing drugs.” They said the next stage was to test the procedure in humans.

Dr Shah said he will test the technique using a number of different therapies on mice with glioblastoma, the most common brain tumour in human adults.

7TH 7-A-SIDE STATE RUGBY CHAMPIONSHIP CONCLUDES

● **Anayat Sultan**

The 7th state 7’s rugby championship concluded on 10th November at Kashmir University Ground. The event which started on 8th November saw participation of 40 teams from 10 districts.

In boys category Srinagar defeated Bandipora and in girls category Bluemonte rugby club Srinagar clinched the title defeating green valley educational institute.

Professor Bashir Ahmed, Director Physical education, Kashmir University was Chief Guest on the occasion and distributed prizes among the winners.

Speaking on the occasion Prof Bashir said that “sports play an important role in the overall development of a person and university would provide every kind of support to promote sports activities in the state”. He further announced that “Kashmir University would soon organise an inter college rugby championship with

the help of J&K Rugby Association”.

Talking to MERCTIMES Irfan Aziz, General Secretary J&K Rugby Association said that the rugby association is thankful to the University for providing every possible help for the smooth conduct of this event. “Kashmir University per se does not have a team of their own but they went out of their way to provide infrastructural support to this event and we are in the process of establishing a university team”.

The participating teams were all praised for the organisers of this event. Moeed Ahmad representing green valley educational institute said “the organising of these events would go a long way in promoting this sport which is gaining popularity among the youngsters of the valley”. “The organisers have done a wonderful job to take this game to the grass root level and making people aware of the sport”, he added.

The event was organised by J&K Rugby Association under the overall patronage of J&K sports organisation.

UNABATED STONE QUARRYING IN NORTH KASHMIR RIVERS

● **Shahid Andrabi**

Unabated stone quarrying and mining affected the valley’s rivers and water bodies. The extraction by locals from rivers continues in North Kashmir’s Baramulla, Bandipora and Kupwara districts. People living near these rivers claim that, the extraction results in the widening of the riverbeds.

“We appealed the Deputy Commissioner Kupwara several times to ban the extraction from the river which locates 100 meters away from my home but the concerned authorities never looked serious to our grievances,” Riyaz Ahmad, a resident of Lolab said.

Similar reports are from the Nallah Kalaroos, Khumriyal, Kahmil, Warnow and Nallah Mawar.

A couple of weeks back, Deputy Commissioner Kupwara, asked officially every police station falling under his jurisdiction to “prevent any kind of extraction from rivers” and ordered “necessary legal action against the violators.”

However, the residents of the area claimed the police of being “hand-in-glove” with the diggers. “These people work right under the nose of police and they let them work freely for their self-interests,” locals said.

The Geology and Mining as well as the Irrigation and Flood control Department, have the task to prevent any excavation from rivers. The field employees of the concerned departments blame local politicians for their “interferences”, which restricts them from carrying their job.

An employee of the department said that the sand diggers “attacked him and his colleagues several times when they went to stop the work.” They questioned that such an act is not possible “without the support of the police”.

Experts from the Geology and Mining Department, said that large-scale extraction from rivers and riverbeds can “led to the breach in the river which will divert the water to populated areas”.

DOWNTOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF DISASTER

● **Irfan Mehraj**

When torrential rain ploughed Kashmir, people in the capital city of Srinagar by and large saw it as relief from the insipid heat of the last few weeks. Five days later, two-thirds of the Srinagar city was flooded, as the river Jhelum crisscrossing the city breached embankments at five out of the seven main bridges. The massive flood is the worst that has hit Kashmir valley in last six decades. Almost all of Srinagar was under water and the devastation caused is enormous, as entire localities remain submerged in flood water with no exact figure emerging about the loss of life and property.

Newspaper reports on September 7 quoted government toll of death due to the flash floods and rain at 107 lives, a figure which was highly underestimated. The loss of lives in Srinagar is feared to be much more than that. The breakdown of communication on Sunday has given rein to word of mouth accounts of survivors or those who were involved in rescue operations in the worst hit areas of Srinagar like Rajbagh, Natipora and Bemina. According to those accounts, hundreds of bodies had been fished out of the flood waters of Bemina, Rajbagh and others areas of Srinagar putting the toll of death much higher than anticipated.

On Sunday September 7, the entire communication system of the valley was shut down which included cell phone and internet, the valley had remained cut off from the rest of the world ever since. The breakdown of cell phone services had particularly created a fear psychosis among the people as thousands of families were unable to reach to their relatives and friends who were also caught in the flood.

Abdul Majid Pandit, a resident of Rainawari had not heard from his brother Zahoor Ahmad Pandit since Sunday, the day when cell phone services in the valley were shut down. Zahoor Ahmad Pandit lives in Natipora area of Srinagar, an area worse hit by the flash floods and which remained entirely submerged in water. The last frantic call he made to his brother

in Rainawari was one of utter helplessness and fear. "He sounded alarmed as the flood water had reached up to the first floor of his house. The last thing he said was pleading us to save his family's life," said a distraught Abdul Majid.

Zahoor Ahmad Pandit was stuck in his house in Natipora with his wife and two little daughters. The breakdown of communication meant that no one heard from him since Sunday. On September 10, when the flood water had started to recede from many areas of Srinagar, Zahoor's nephew Farhan managed to reach Natipora, but found the area where his uncle lived unreachable, as 'flood water had not receded from that place, it's a low lying area.' Till now, nothing is known of Zahoor Ahmad Pandit and his family. There are thousand other families in Srinagar whose kith and kin were missing, with no news whether they had been rescued or were still stuck in their submerged houses.

"The breakdown of cell phone services had heightened the fear as no news came from our loved ones who were stuck. We were unable to do anything," said a visibly agitated Abdul Majid.

The desperate need for information was palpable. The communication link between the government and people was broken down with no news coming from the authorities and in that situation people in downtown Srinagar had taken it upon themselves to organize rescue operations and set up relief camps for the affected families flocking the city. Hundreds of relief camps were put up in Rainawari, Nowhatta, Hawal, Gojwara, Rajouri Kadal and the adjoining areas which remained unaffected by floods.

The massive flood which resulted in Jhelum rising above record 23 feet in Srinagar left thousands of people displaced. Truck loads of people were flocking the safer areas of Srinagar for safety. A war like situation prevailed in the city, with most of it under water and the rest hoarded by people escaping from the flood.

On September 8, the premises of Islamia School in Gojwara area of downtown Srinagar was swarmed by several hundred displaced people who in haste to save their lives couldn't relocate to their relatives place and found themselves here. A relief camp set up by the Awami Action Committee provided food to the affected people. Scores of women fled their flood hit homes

alright. This was a terrible time for us," she says ruefully.

A young man and his mother set up a tent on the left end side of the school premises. Irshad Ahmad fled his home in Noor Bagh area of Srinagar a few hours ago, when the Jhelum water had breached the Bund lying adjacent to his house. "We grabbed whatever we could and were brought here by the rescue team." In the haste to evacuate, the family has forgotten to take important documents and other valuable essentials like gold with them, leaving all of it in their flooded house. Irshad Ahmad says that it didn't occur to them to grab valuable documents as "saving our lives seemed more urgent and important."

Within a few days, Islamia School in downtown Srinagar was swarmed with people from many affected areas of Srinagar, fleeing their inundated homes. Thousands of people found shelter there. A couple of men maintaining records of the people who are sheltered inside the school say that the number is rising. "More than 3000 people, comprising 507 families were sheltered. The situation was overwhelming. Most families were from Qamarwari and Noor Bagh areas of Srinagar."

The intervening night of September 6 and 7 was one of terror for thousands of people living around Chattabal and Qamarwari areas of Srinagar, as the waterway flowing through these parts known as Chattabal veer was dangerously close to being flooded. Thousands of people had gathered outside their homes in Chattabal and were praying for the veer water to recede. However the water was only rising, as it stopped raining and Jhelum was flowing with great force from south Kashmir, from where the river emerged.

"It was the most terrible and longest night of my life. We were hoping that the veer will not flood as rain had stopped falling. We knew if water breached the veer, entire Chattabal and Qamarwari will be flooded," said Altaf Bashir, a resident of Chattabal locality of Srinagar.

As the night moved towards a fearful morning, the water kept rising ferociously in the veer. By noon, the veer was flooded and it took just a few hours for the rushing water, which was flowing at a ferocious speed to submerge the entire Chattabal and Qamarwari.

The challenge people living in these areas were facing was urgent and demanded utmost courage. "In no time water was in our homes. We could only manage to save a few things and ran upstairs," Altaf Bashir says. Altaf has lost all his precious belongings in the floods, which included books, laptop, papers and other documents.

"I watched my books swept away in flood waters. It was painful but I couldn't do anything," he says.

The danger in downtown Srinagar was growing in leaps as the level of flood waters kept raising, but in the end it was due to the valiant effort of youngsters who sprung to action without wasting time and set about rescuing people stranded in their inundated homes.

"It was the youth of our area who rescued people. The government had vanished from the scene. It was because of the effort of these men that there were no deaths in downtown so far," says Altaf.



were in process of cleaning the rooms of the school so that more and more people could find a place to stay there. A bunch of non-local migrants were also stuck up here.

"We went there on Sunday, September 7 as our place in Dalgate was flooded. The locals helped us in evacuating the place and brought us here," says Usman, a non-local labourer from Uttar Pradesh.

The school was filling with more and more people. Entire families found shelter there. Small children, innocent of the terrible moment were playing their little games among themselves. A half drenched woman was fearfully clutching her child to herself, not letting the little boy go to play with others. The woman was sitting alone and the lines on her face revealed her frightened spirit. The woman came from Qamarwari area of Srinagar, which was flooded the day before. She was rescued by local people as water had dangerously crept up to the first floor of their house. The last time she saw her husband was the previous night during the rescue, he had then gone to check with his sister and hadn't returned yet. "I could only hope they were

strewn with wreckage, trash and dead animals.

Hospitals were also flooded when the Jhelum River burst its banks and staff scattered around the city were unable to get to work.

Chief engineer of irrigation and flood control department, Javed Jaffar, said around 35000 cusecs of water also has to be discharged from the river during the dredging drive in order to widen and deepen it by desilting.

Meanwhile, a resident Ibrahim Junaid hailed state government's efforts, saying the drive will deepen and widen the river.

Authorities begin dredging drive in Jhelum

● **Naveem Rather**

Authorities in Kashmir have begun a dredging drive in River Jhelum, which overflowed in September and flooded the region.

The irrigation and flood control department in Jammu and Kashmir has started the drive after scores of people were killed and thousands of villages were devastated by the worst flood in decades in the Kashmir valley.

Roads in Srinagar, were transformed into stagnant canals

DESPITE HIGH COURT BAN, ENCROACHMENTS ON JHELUM CONTINUE



● **Sayyid Adil Hassan**

In violation of High Court orders, many people are carrying out illegal constructions and riverside encroachments on the banks of river Jehlum in Chattabal area of Srinagar.

Construction work is going on at full swing on the banks of river at Rampora chattabal and in many areas as well despite the Jammu and Kashmir High Court recently stayed all the constructions on the banks of river Jehlum and its tributaries. High Court had empowered all district magistrates to demolish constructions that are seen coming up on the river banks right from its source in Verinag in South Kashmir to Uri in North.

Locals said that due to encroachments and illegal constructions, Have damaged the river embankment which became the cause of recent devastating flood. "Over the years, embankment of river Jehlum was eroded by the activities of people who continue to live in sheds on the banks of river. Even after floods, illegal sheds are being constructed on the banks of river that too under the nose of authorities," said Mushtaq wani, a local. The residents alleged with the support of local MLA, and political pressure, the civil administration have turned a blind eye towards the activity, which left behind massive destruction in the area.

The inhabitants said that area was flooded because of human intervention on the banks of Jehlum. "Had there been strong embankment at the height of 3-4 feet over the Jehlum, the floods would not have caused such large scale destruction," said Abdul Ahad Kaloo, community President of Chattabal area, whose house also collapsed in September floods.

The residents appealed District Development Commissioner (DDC) Farooq Ahmed Shah and the City Police Chief Amit Kumar to look into the matter.

Pertinently, High Court had recently passed the directions after going through an expert committee report on how encroachments of river Jehlum and its tributaries caused the devastating flood that hit Kashmir in early September causing unprecedented loss of lives and property.

MIGRATORY BIRDS KEEP DATE WITH FLOOD-HIT KASHMIR

● **Yusra Khan**

Despite recent unprecedented floods damaging their winter home, over 300,000 migratory birds have kept their tryst with Kashmir. The visitors have flown into the wetland reserve in Kashmir as every year, and more are expected to drive in the coming days. "There are 300,000 migratory birds including Graylag geese, common teals, mallards, crested pilchards, gadwalls and coots in this wetland reserve this time," Imtiyaz Ahmad Lone, wildlife warden (Wetlands) Kashmir said.

Lone said the recent floods have severely damaged the eco-system of this wetland reserve and they are assessing the impact of this damage on the avian visitors this season.

Floods inundated Hokarsar and all other wetland reserves of the Valley this year. Silt and solid waste have been left behind by the flood waters in Hokarsar, Shallabugh, Hygam and Mirgund bird reserves.

"This has seriously damaged the flora and fauna in these water bodies. We are assess-

ing the effect of this damage on the migratory birds. But, thankfully, there are no reports of any sick birds like those suffering from bird flu anywhere in the Valley," the warden said.

In September, Jammu and Kashmir faced its worst floods. Despite staff crunch, Lone and his team are doing their best to ensure that the winter homes of the migratory birds are back to their old glory.

What is bothering the wildlife warden is the oily layer that was found on the water body in Hokarsar a few days back. "This is a disturbing development and we are keeping a close watch on this," he said.

Thousands of such avian visitors throng the wetland reserves of the Valley each year, coming here to ward off the extreme winter cold of their summer homes in Russian Siberia, the Philippines, Eastern Europe, China and central Asia where water bodies freeze rock solid in winter months.

Lone said other major wetland reserves like Shallabugh, Hygam and Mirgund are yet to host migratory birds because the water level is very low there due to breaches caused by the recent floods.

DIP IN TEMPERATURE TAKES PEOPLE TO SUNDAY MARKET



● **Sheikh Umer**

As weather is getting cold, the Sunday market is witnessing huge rush of customers for woollen garments and winter wears. A sea of people could be seen at Lal Chowk buying stuff from large number of stalls.

Sunday market starts from TRC upto Jehangir chowk, and is well known for selling second hand garments and other products attracting customers from every nook and corner of the valley.

With winter approaching and weather getting colder with each passing day, the sale of warm clothes has increased manifold, traders said.

"I find it quite convenient to shop from the Sunday market as you can buy a variety of things at meagre rates," Mohammad Burhan, a customer said.

"It would be a harsh winter this year so I want to take some good items that will be very

useful in the chilai-kalan," said a buyer, Abid Sultan Rather

A glance at the city centre gave an impression of a fair with people in large numbers busy in buying and selling different commodities. Many customers said that they were visiting the market first time after the floods hit the valley.

While shops and business establishments in Lal Chowk remain mostly closed on Sundays, this market enjoys brisk business with huge rush of customers who come to purchase goods at cheaper rates.

EXPERTS CALL FOR PRESERVATION OF SRINAGAR'S SPS MUSEUM

● **Sheikh Uzair**

Eminent personalities from the world of art, culture and literature have issued a clarion call for full-scale efforts to save the historic SPS Museum located in Srinagar city, which was ravaged in the recent unprecedented floods seriously affecting most of its collection of artifacts.

Speaking at a meeting organised jointly by Press Club of India and SAHMAT, Salim Beg, member National Commission for Monuments, suggested that a broader platform should be created to arrange expertise from both national and international levels to save and properly conserve the large segment of the Museum's history along with its physical assets.

"Local capacity needs to be built within the museum not only for conservation and emergency response but also for professional handling of the objects for which state government must arrange adequate manpower," he suggested.

Jayati Roy, conservation specialist from National Museum, said that emergency rescue entails protecting the objects from sun exposure. Referring to media reports, she said that it was unfortunate to see pictures published in the media where historic textiles were shown exposed to sun which has further damaged them.

She further said that most important rescue operation involved separating the objects like manuscripts and shawls and putting them into refrigerators. She also referred to a similar disaster in



Rome where meat trucks and other air-conditioned vehicles were hired by the museum authorities as an emergency measure to store the objects.

President, Press Club of India, Anand Sahay said that during his recent tour to Kashmir he had found that there was hardly any concern for cultural property. They expressed concern on the damage caused to the most significant objects like manuscripts, paintings, shawls and historic textiles, papier mache and wood carvings. The most prized possession of the museum, the 6th testimony to the Buddhist classic knowledge of those times is also reportedly lost.

At the end of the meeting, a statement jointly signed by 30 top personalities from

the world of art and culture was released. They appealed to "all concerned" experts, cultural activists, Central Government institutions like Culture Ministry to pool in their resources and raise their voice in saving the civilization assets representing the 2000 years of rich cultural heritage of Kashmir.

The signatories included Romilla Thaper, renowned historian; Mallika Sarabhai, Judge Khurshid Drabu, UK High Court; Riaz Punjabi, Sanjay Dhar, conservation specialist; Saleem Beg, Veer Munshi, M K Raina, Jyotsna Singh, founder Dara Shikho Fund; B K Goswami, former advisor and chief secretary of J&K; noted theatre personality Irfan Habib and Dinesh Abrol, scientist.

MENTAL HEALTH AFFECTED BY FLOODS

● **SHEEMA FAROOQ**

The devastating flood that hit Kashmir in the early week of September was the worst in a century. It not only claimed hundreds of lives, but destroyed everything that came in its way including schools, colleges, hospitals, residential houses, paddy fields, government buildings and businesses. Also it has rendered hundreds of people homeless and jobless. The destruction has traumatized entire society and left a deep scare on the minds of Kashmiri people.

The devastating flood has triggered a spate of post-traumatic stress disorder cases

in flood hit people or those who carried out the rescue and relief.

Bilal Ahmad, 25, is suffering from acute depression. Hailing from Qamarwari area of Srinagar, which was one of the worst hit during the floods, Bilal lost his wife.

"She died while giving birth to a child at LD hospital. It was devastating. On one hand our home was flooded and on the other my wife died. I still cannot make sense of what I have lost," says Bilal. Lal Ded Hospital is the lone maternity hospital of the valley and was flooded on September 7.

Bilal now lives in a shed on the bank of river Jehlum.

"I am not able to sleep now," said Bilal. "After my wife died, I am in great tension.

She was in perfect health but died suddenly. It cannot escape my mind what this flood brought upon us," he adds.

Mental health camps are being set up in Kashmir for people showing symptoms of headache, loss of memory and the desire to be left alone. Volunteers say their job will be done only when those devastated by the floods heal completely.

Doctors say that hospitals and medical camps in Srinagar have been receiving around 50 stress-related cases daily.

Help has also come in from NGOs like Medicine Sans Frontiers (MSF) which has started counseling centers across the Valley for people suffering from post-flood stress disorder.

HAIDER IMPRESSES KASHMIR AUDIENCE

● **Muzamil Bashir**

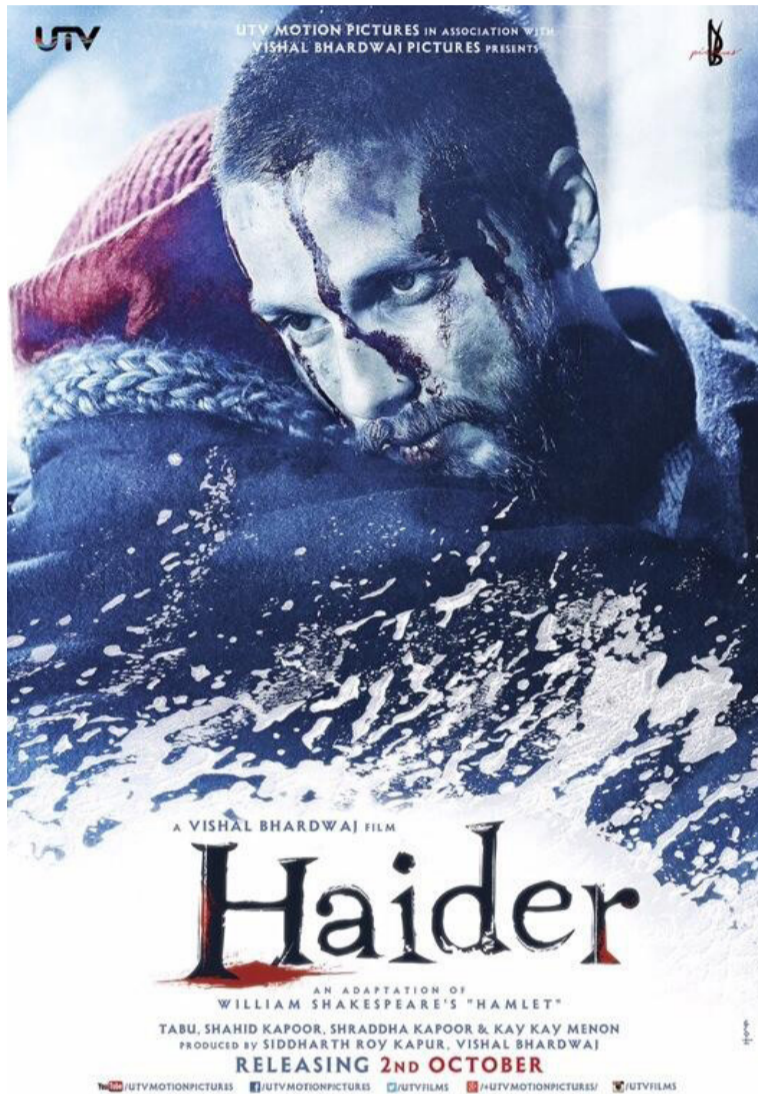
After its release on Two October, everyone was eagerly waiting for the movie Haider, which was entirely shot in Kashmir. Haider is an adaptation of Hamlet-Shakespeare's play.

HAIDER is a good attempt by filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj to tell the people the ground reality of Kashmir. There have been number of Bollywood films shot in Kashmir, but Haider has been the first movie which has worked on real issues of Kashmir. The viewer gets absorbed in every frame of the film. Each scene in the movie portrays the unending pain, torture and sufferings of the people.

"Every bit of this movie is a fact and has been happening here since 1990, this movie is an eye opener for the general population of India, thus it emphasis on the birth right of every human being-Freedom" says a student wishing not to be named from Baramulla.

The movie is a beginning to show and represent the human rights violation, detentions, torture, and loss, repression that made them to demand their rights.

"Watching Haider reminds me of those horrific years when crackdown was a nightmare for every Kashmiri. Frisking, interrogating used to be the chief agenda for this unwanted gathering which would often last till evening. Carrying Identity cards in hands and praying for the printing mistake in the name does not catch eye



of any one in the uniform," says Zubair kuttay, a local from Anantnag.

He further said "this is for the first time in Bollywood that an unbiased script was so well

documented. Vishal Baradwaj did a terrific job by maintaining a balanced approach in portraying the pain inflicted upon Kashmiri's"

The story starts with the Haider, protagonist of the film played by Shahid Kapoor who returns from college in Aligarh, falls into extreme grief and misery because of his Father's disappearance and mother's hastily second marriage with his uncle Khurram Mir (kk Menon).

The first part of the story touches some grave issues like APDP(Association of parents of Disappeared People) and APSPA(Armed Forces Special Powers Act) in which Shahid Kapoor has stood in front of the UN office shouting "Hum Hain Ke Hum Nahin Hain". Other catchy dialogues like "Pura Kashmir Qaid Khana Hai Mere Dost" and "Kashmir Mai Uppar Khuda Hai Aur Neeche Fauj" are very well used by the filmmaker.

However the scene set in Lal Chowk, the heart of Srinagar near clock tower is so aptly performed by Shahid Kapoor where he reveals the truth of APSPA and shouts for Azadi (freedom). "Na Law Hai Aur Na Hai Order, Jis Ka Law Hai Uska Order, India Pakistan Nai Khela Humse Milkar Border Border , Ab Na Hume Chode Hindustan Ab Na Hume Chode Pakistan, Arey Koi Toe Humse Bhe Poonche, Hum Kya Chahte Azadi, Is Paar Bhi Lengay Azadi,Us Paar Bhi Lengay Azadi" touches the heart of the every viewer.

DESPITE BAN, SMOKING CONTINUES IN KU

● **Arshie Qureshi**

Although the KU has adopted a no-smoking policy, it has not managed to effectively ban the smoking in campus. The policy gets overlooked by many of the students and faculty members.

Students can be found smoking in university lawns and some discrete areas inside the campus. While most of the smokers knowingly overlook the rule, some fresher's reasoned the lack of proper information for their doing.

"I was never told about this no smoking rule in explicit terms. I've read the posters here but I see boys smoking on public sidewalk or in lawns," Mir Mehraan, a student of Btech first semester, said.

The Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003, prohibits smoking in public places. The ministry of health had in 2004 banned sale of tobacco products in and around

the educational institutions. Following this, the campus adopted the concept of 'smoke free campus.

"The success of any initiative from our side depends solely on the cooperation from students. The key to ensuring the policy will be respected is proper awareness and that is what we have been working on primarily. We are observing an upwards rate of compliance," Naseer Iqbal, Chief Proctor said.

Staff members have also been fined from time to time for breaking the rules, he said.

However, the fine amount is too less to act as a deterrent. "Our duty is not to obtain money from smokers but to ask them to leave and make them morally conscious about the harm they are doing themselves. We collect their names and student IDs. If they don't leave, at that point they are required to pay fine. In case of repetition, we might even call their parents," he said.

"We even made teachers breaking the rule pay the fine," he added.

Wajid Maqbool, a student, said he believes that the campus has designated smoking zones, though the policy does not corroborate this assumption. Technically, there are no approved smoking areas on campus. He, a non-smoker, said that the policy is unfair to those who are conscious of how their smoking affects them. He has no issue with students being allowed to smoke outdoors in designated smoking areas.

"Some people are really dependent on them and if it helps them get through their day ... it's not bothering me that much. If they had a place to go, it'd just make it easier for everyone," he said.

Many students feel conflicted about smoking bans in campus. They suggest the ban is not useful and serves no purpose. "Smokers will still find a way to smoke no matter what," Adil Nabi, a student said.

BRAVEHEART DIES WHILE RESCUING FLOOD BOUND PEOPLE

● **Aaqib Makhdoomi**

During the devastating floods that hit Kashmir in the first week of September, Kashmiri youth showed courage in carrying out rescue missions on their own, oftentimes putting their own lives at stake. Among these courageous young men was Adil Ahmad Chopan, 20 who died while he was rescuing people in the worst hit area of Rajbagh.

Adil drowned while giving water to the people who were submerged in the area of Rajbagh.

As floods hit Kashmir in early September, Adil and his friends sprung to action. Hailing from Pahloo Brane area of Srinagar, Adil and his clique of friends carried out rescue operations in many submerged areas of the city.

Adil was the lone earning head in the family and his death has come as shock to his poor family.

Recalling that fateful day of September 10, Shameema, mother of Adil says, "I would berate him for going out in flood to save people. I told him it was not

his job." But Adil ignored all pleas of his mother and continued to go out and rescue flood bound people.

"He would often say that if I was caught in floods, would he not come to save me. He said that there were mothers like me caught in the floods. I had no answers to that," says Shameema.

On September 10, Adil promised her mother that he will be back by evening and they will have dinner together. But in the evening his friends brought his death body to his home. "I begged him not to go in those raging waters but he didn't listen to me. Nobody can understand what I have lost in my life," she said.

Adil's father Ghulam Qadir Chopan, who is visually impaired said, his son was working as a plumber and was working very hard to provide education to his younger brothers.

"He sacrificed his own education for the sake of his brothers and to marry his sister off. He achieved this by working tirelessly day and night without ever complaining. His death is a huge loss to us," says Adil's grief stricken father.

Ghulam Qadir says that he never thought of himself as a visually impaired person, as his son had taken the burden of shouldering the responsibilities of the family.

"Its now that I feel I have lost my entire eye sight," says Ghulam Qadir.

Ruksana, the eldest sister of Adil, while recalling the memories of his brother begins to sob inconsolably. Her voice is barely audible in her grieving sobs. The mother and daughter console each other and sit for hours in Adil's room.

"I got married very young and Adil did everything to make my marriage a beautiful occasion for me. He was a dedicated son and a loving brother," says Ruksana amid sobs.

It was my brother who would take care of me. With his loss, I don't know who to look up to now," she says.

The Chopan family has received Rs 1.5 Lakh as compensation from the government, but they complain it's not enough. "We demand the government give us complete security. We have become helpless with our son's loss," says Adil's father.

KASHMIR LACKS FOOD TESTING FACILITY

● **Junaid Bazaz**

Millions of people in Kashmir are prone to food-related diseases, due to the lack of microbiological testing facilities for food items in Kashmir.

The edible items particularly -Fish, mutton, chicken and beef- whose consumption in the valley, are consumed without undergoing the mandatory tests.

According to the Food Safety and Standards Act, presence of any harmful anti-bodies like bacteria, fungus, in the edibles must be checked before it is sold for public use. Violators, according to this Act, can be either imprisoned or fined, or both.

However, mutton and other edibles are consumed without undergoing these tests thus risking millions of lives.

Sources in the food and drug control department confirmed that, "the laboratory cannot perform tests on these items due to the lack of proper infrastructure."

Insiders said that the department is not having equipments like cutter, insulated boxes, special container for carrying sample to the lab and temperature controlled vehicle, which can lift the sample from the market to the lab for the examination.

Public analyst, Food Health Laboratories Kashmir, Hamidullah Dar accepted that the laboratory is not having the said facility.

"We have sent requisition to the government number of times but received no response till today," Hamidullah said.

Doctors in the valley have apprehension that this indifference on the part government may lead to diseases.

Noted Gastroenterologist of the Kashmir Valley, Dr. Showkat Zargar, said that if the mutton is unsafe or substandard "It may cause food poisoning or Gastroenteritis."

International award winning Gastroenterologist, Dr MS Khuroo, shared the same views however he added that food must be certified before it is sold.

"The unsafe food could give rise to various health issues," Dr. Khuroo said.

Few years back, Dr Khuroo along with other scientists found fungal growth in the rationed rice that is sold to people here and found that fungus responsible for many diseases. However, government did not take any action.

Dr. Khuroo says, "It is important to find out that untested mutton may also be responsible for it, says Dr Khuroo.

FLOOD HIT BEMINA TRADERS PROTEST AGAINST GOVT



● Shafaq Shah

Hundreds of flood-affected traders in Bemina staged a protest against the administrations, alleged failure to mitigate their sufferings from past two months.

The protesting shopkeepers, holding placards and banners, castigated the government for failing to meet their expectations.

The president of Shopkeepers Association of Firdous Colony, Boat Colony and Mansoor Colony Bemina Abdul Rahman Dandroo said that hundreds of shops in these localities were devastated in floods while not a single official from the administration visited their area.

He alleged that whenever they approach district administration, the babus refuse to meet them. They demanded that there should be immediate relief for the affected shopkeepers.

The protestors said that for last Two months, district administration has done nothing to mitigate their sufferings. "We have no other option other than to come on roads and protest," they said.

DESPITE BAN, USE OF POLYTHENE CONTINUES

● **Junaid Rafiq**

In spite of the Jammu and Kashmir government banning the use of polythene carry bags in the state, its use is going on unabated in the Srinagar City.

Polythene bags continue to be used in open market by shopkeepers, vendors, and by the general public. The authorities imposed a complete ban on the use of polythene carry bags keeping in view the damage that it was doing to soil, water bodies, drainage and landscape of Kashmir.

The use of polythene carry bags is banned in Srinagar under the J&K Non-Biodegradable

"The jute bags are costlier than the polythene bags. A polythene bag costs Rs 20-30 paise while a jute bag costs somewhere between Rs. 2-3", he said.

"Shopkeepers and vendors are freely using polythene bags and can be seen on streets and in drains leading to drains getting blocked", said Nazir Ahmad a local from Dalgate.

"When I asked a vendor to give me a paper bag, he said he cannot afford paper bags so he uses polythene bags", said Mush-taq Ahmad a Govt. employee from Nishat.

The use of Polythene bags in the city puts a big question mark over the role of Srinagar Muni-



Material (Management Handling and Disposal) Act, 2007. Further, in pursuance of SRO 122, this Act gives powers to different state authorities to punish the offenders with Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) being the enforcing authority to impose its ban in the City.

The shopkeepers say that the people have no better alternative to polythene due to several reasons. "Customers run away if they feel that we have no polythene bags," says a local vendor Shafiq Ahmad.

pal Corporation (SMC). The claim of the SMC that their officials are working hard to impose the ban on the use of polythene bags in the city seems to be confined to papers only.

"In the initial days SMC raided several places and seized tonnes of polythene bags. However, with the course of time the drive against polythene has lost sheen and it seems that the officials are least interested in imposing the ban", said Najeeb a resident of Dalgate.



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