

MERC TIMES

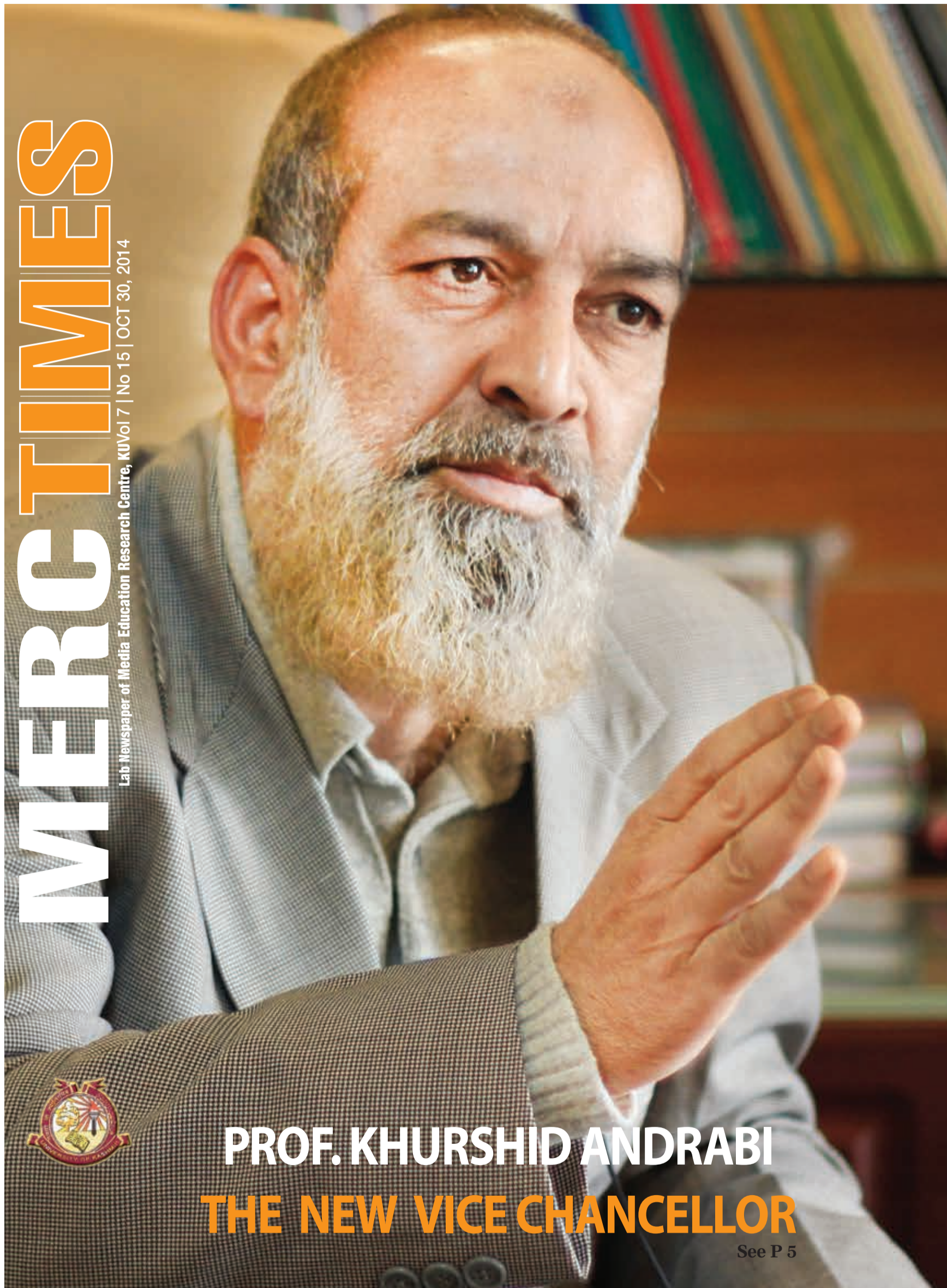
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PROF. KHURSHID ANDRABI THE NEW VICE CHANCELLOR

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KARGIL CELEBRATES APRICOT FESTIVAL

● Murtaza Fazili

Apricot festival was organised in collaboration with department of agriculture under the supervision of Ladakh Autonomus Hill Development Council (LAHDC). The event was held in Indore stadium Kargil.

“The main objective of this exhibition cum festival was to create awareness among the farmers and locals of Kargil.

“We invited farmers from various villages of Kargil to display their products in this exhibition,” Chief Horticulture Officer, Kargil said.

“Apricots are grown on a large scale in Kargil district as the soil is suitable for its cultivation. Further we are trying to lift the ban imposed on the export of apricot due to the effect of cordoning moth. It wasted 70% of apricot and we are coming with a full proof plan to save this sector before gets extinct on a mass scale”, said Asgar Karbalai.

Advocate Mohamad Amir said, “The government is with the local farmers and we will provide all financial support to flourish their farming”.

Forty different varieties of apricot products were displayed during the exhibition like apricot jam, apricot soap, apricot nuts. On this occasion several tourists were also present and they were delighted to see the variety of apricots under one roof.

According to department of horticulture, the apricot sector is blooming at a very fast pace. The areas in which apricot is being cultivated are Hardass, Karkit-choo, Shilikchay, Minjey, Batalik, Chulichan, Akchamal and Hanu.

Cash prize were given to the farmers on the concluding day of the exhibition.

Chief Executive Councillor, LAHDC Kargil Haji Asgar Ali Karbalai, Executive Councillor for Agriculture Advocate Mohammad Amir and Chief Agriculture Officer Kargil were present on this occasion.

BANDIPORA VILLAGE GETS ELECTRICITY AFTER 22 YEARS

● Waseem Nasir

Bandipora (Athwato): the ecstatic inhabitants of this village have finally seen the illuminating lamps in their houses as Power Development Department (PDD) installs electric poles after 22 years.

According to the locals, the village barely 17 kilometres away from Bandipora town, Athwato village was in darkness for two decades.

“Due to lack of official coordination the hope of getting electricity came in 1999, when few electricity poles were erected and a transformer was installed,” The locals said.

They said that in 2009, the village was taken up by PDD for centrally-sponsored rural electrification scheme, Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana. However, the work couldn't progress till 2013 when department installed electric poles upto the village. And now they got the electricity finally after two decades.

“We are feeling alive after we got electricity,” said Mohammad Anwar, a Panchayat member.

Rafiq Ahmad a resident, looking at her house, recalled the woes he faced in absence of electricity. “I was in 12th standard in 2005 and used to study under kerosene lamp. It was horrible year for me because I was unable to qualify, but we hope things will be better now,” he added

“I am very happy today. It is great day for us,” said Naseema Banoo, another resident, adding, “Now, I can study at night without worrying about the dim light of kerosene lamp.”

KUPWARA DISTRICT LIBRARY IN SHAMBLES

Altaf Hussain

The district library in this north Kashmir district is in a dilapidated condition due to authorities' negligence. Established in 1984, the library is critically short of the infrastructure, lacking space as well as manpower. The top floor of its two-storey building has its ceiling crumbled as a result of which the rooms have become unfit for use.

“Due to its damaged ceiling, birds find an easy access into the second floor,” the former senior librarian Ghulam Qadir, who assists the library staff, told Merc Times.

During Qadir's tenure, JKPC constructed the new building of the library and handed it over to the Library and Research Department in 2003-04.

“The building, however, started to degrade soon after it was handed over by JKPC. Later, numerous letters were sent (to JKPC) on behalf of Libraries and Research Department, but they didn't reply,” Qadir said.

The library has around 4,419 registered borrowers of which about 2,000 are the active members. It has 26,000 books on a range of subjects, and it receives copies of almost all dailies and magazines published within or outside the state.

However, the library doesn't have enough racks for the books.

“Most of our books are lying on the floor, as we don't have racks to keep them. We don't have funds to buy more racks,” Qadir, who served the library till 2011, said.

The users alleged that most books in the library are “outdated”



KU STUDENTS PERFORM ROAD SHOW TO CLEAN SRINAGAR

● **Mohmad Yonus**

Hanar, a self help student group from University of Kashmir, conducted a road show in Srinagar for social awareness about environment.

In line with the "Swachh Bharat" movement initiated by the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi recently, a group of students carried out a sanitation programme 'wake up Srinagar' motivated by the objective of making people aware about the menace of environmental pollution and ways to get rid of it.

The road show kick started from Amar Singh College Gogji Bagh at 9 am and passed

through the main market Lal Chowk with the participants holding placards advocating protection of environment.

Started with a theme song and road skits, the student group took brooms to clean up the dirt-covered city. The group passed through Lala Ded Hospital, Foot Bridge Lal Mandi, Ghanta Ghar and reached Sher-e-Kashmir Park. Students from various institutions joined hands to make the programme a success.

The programme was held in collaboration with Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC). Lauding the job of the corporation, the coordinator of the group Uzair Ashraf said, "We wanted to send a wakeup message to the citizens of the valley. Taking this initia-

tive for our society is our duty. It is not only the duty of the authorities to clean our city we as citizens should volunteer for the same."

Jute bags were also distributed among the shopkeepers of the city on the sidelines of the programme. "We distributed about 10000 jute bags among the shopkeepers, a little initiative to get rid of polythene bags," said Uzair.

About the finances required to carry out such initiatives, he said, "Members of the organization themselves contribute money to let the organization work independently." The team leader Uzair negated the possibility of any organization sponsoring the amount. "We don't want our group to depend on sponsors", he said.

COLD CREATES DEMAND FOR HEATING ARRANGEMENTS AT KU

● **Tasir Khan**

As the winter has gripped the valley the need for heating system is, increasing in the Kashmir University.

The students of University of Kashmir (KU) while talking to MERC Times said that the biting cold is unbearable for them without heating arrangements in the University. They said that authorities should arrange heaters in class rooms for students.

"They do not think about the students, we cannot concentrate on the lectures because of the chilling cold," one of the students of KU Aamir Ali said.

According to the in-charge of Estates Section KU Showkat Asmi, the authorities have made heating arrangements in all de-



partments especially in examination halls. "We have almost placed heating system in all the departments, centers, offices especially

where exams are being conducted. We are providing both coal as well as gas furnace to teaching and non-teaching staff, so that they shall not face any inconvenience while delivering their services," he said

"Yes, they provided heating equipments but not for students. They provided them for teachers only," a student from KU said.

Meanwhile, KU officials maintain that they have enough coal stock available. "There would be no shortage of coal, during this winter session", Showkat said.

While many students of KU are of the opinion that the university should now upgrade to new technology for heating as well, because the coal heating system leads to many diseases.

ELECTION CAMPAIGNING CAUSES CHAOS; LOCALS SUFFER

● **Rafia Rahim**

As Kashmir valley is set for Assembly elections 2014, political parties campaigning for the first phase are causing problems for public. Due to 'unnecessary' diversions and halts, local people are facing many problems.

"I used to leave my home at 9am for office but now I have to leave at 8 am just because of the fear of traffic diversions and regular traffic jams due to political parties' rallies," Mohammad Akram Mir a government employee from Batamalo said.

Syed Tajamul, a student of Biscoe school, said, "I am not able to reach my school on time. This is a daily problem I am facing. It is affecting our studies in a way".

"You will not find any space to walk. These rallies



occupy the roads and not only cause hindrance in smooth movement of vehicles, but also create nuisance for public," Said Wasim Wani, a teacher from Kothibagh Higher Secondary School.

He added that it was 'really sad', that the concerned authorities have failed to handle these rallies.

"Due to this 'liberal approach' adopted by political parties, a number of street vendors in Srinagar city is also increasing and causing traffic diversions and chaos.

FEMALE HOMICIDE CASES ON RISE IN KASHMIR



● **Nelofar Jan**

The Valley's Shri Maharaja Hari Singh (SMHS) hospital has recorded a steep rise in the cases of female homicide. The burn cases are on the top of list while the hospital said its sees upward trend of "violent mode of committing suicides".

Dr Shabir Iqbal, a professor of Plastic Surgery department at SMHS hospital while speaking to 'MERC TIMES' that the hospital is receiving burn and suicide cases on a daily-basis.

"In the past six months, most cases received the Burns Unit of the hospital reflected a growing new trend of homicide. These cases remain unreported with little police intervention to bring the culprits to the book," said Dr Iqbal.

He claimed Kashmir too has started witnessing "bride-burning, wife-burning and daughter-in-law burning cases", adding that such incidents go unreported.

"Two decades ago, the Burns Unit would mainly register accidental and suicide cases. But there is phenomenal increase in burn cases, which apparently look homicidal given the injuries," he added.

Dr Iqbal said: "Unfortunately in the past two decades the entire focus has been on blast, bullet and pellet injuries, ignoring violence against women. Many such cases are labelled as suicide."

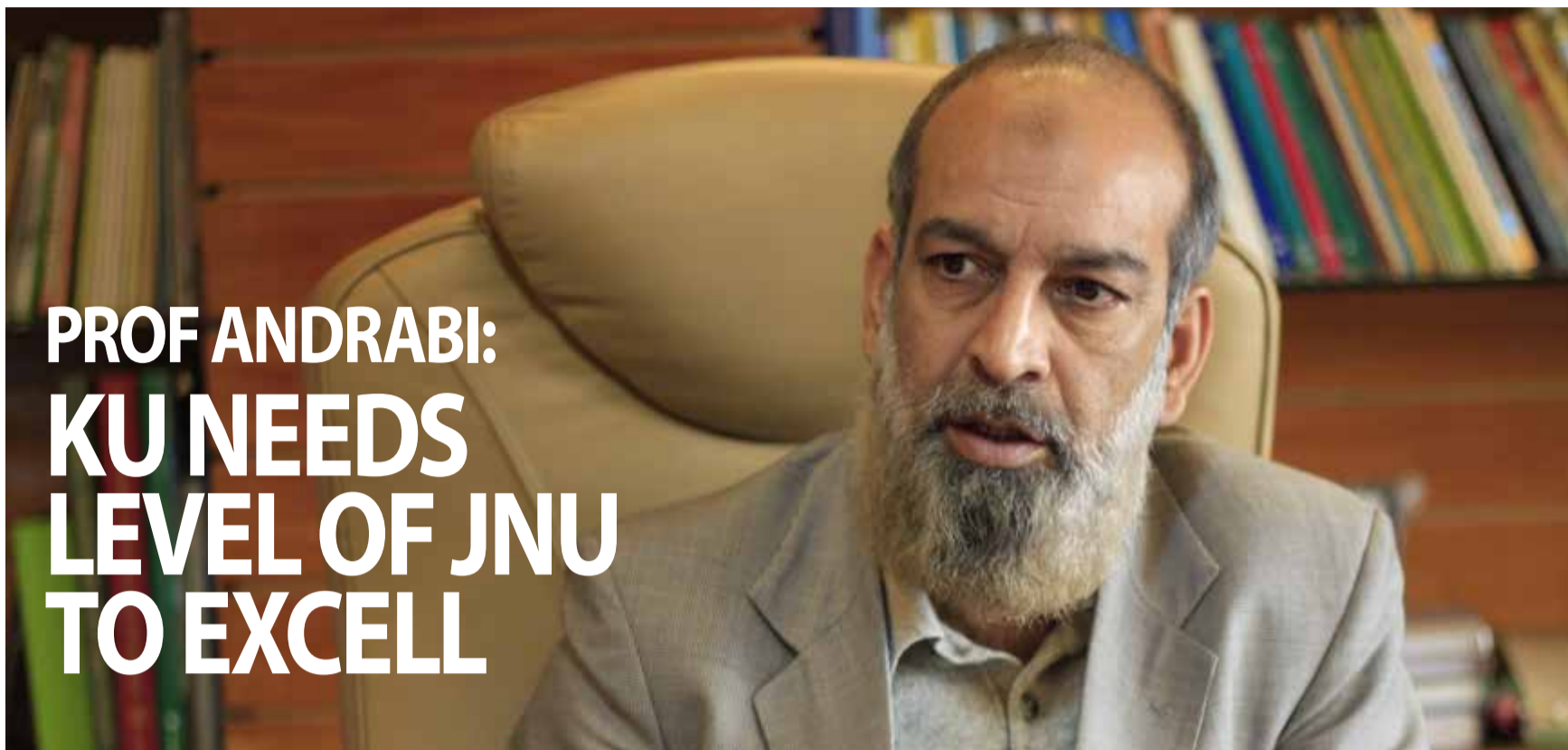
Noted psychiatrist Dr Arshad Hussain advocated involvement of Masjids to counter the trend. "Unlike the West, we may not be able to set up counselors at school, society and hospital levels. But as Masjids are traditional institutions in Kashmir, the priests can act as mass counselor on issues like suicide and female homicide," said Dr Hussain.

The valley registered 17,000 suicide cases, involving mainly women, in the last two decades. At present, the SMHS claims to register two to three suicide cases every day.

"Time has come for people to educate youngsters about failures rather than pushing them into the mad race for successes. Religion has to be used as a tool to belief in the life hereafter," said Dr Hussain.

Social Activist Zareef Ahmad Zareef while talking to MERC TIMES stressed on parents to impart moral education to their children,

"Parents shall give basic values and teachings, too their children according to the Islamic teachings", he said.



PROF ANDRABI: KU NEEDS LEVEL OF JNU TO EXCELL

● **Sumaiya Bhat**

While emphasizing on development and growth of University of Kashmir, the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor of KU, Prof Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi, said that KU needs to come to the level of Jawhar Lal Nehru University.

“I have always held this view that we need to grown to a point where our voice would be accepted as much as is from the university that has well established academic credentials. Atleast we have to come to the level of JNU and then only our voices will be heard,” Prof Andrabi said.

He added that the institution has to reach a point where it would not have to necessarily seek permission for freedom of expression and create an impact.

“We are not grown up to that level at all. We have ignored the university’s stature and we are basically advocating for freedom of expression, speech and other things at the cost of university’s development and growth. First priority has to be building of this institution to a point where other things follow automatically,” he added.

Talking about his priorities, Prof Andrabi said that he will try to reform the academic environment and change the prevailing mindset among the staff. He said there is also a need to introduce new work culture in the university.

He said, he wants to make KU a better institution by changing the work culture.

Prof Andrabi took over as VC KU in October this year.

He has a doctorate from PGI Chandigarh, a post doctoral training from Tufts University Medical School Boston, MA from Harvard Medical School Boston, and MA from Cleveland Clinic Foundation Ohio, USA.

He has been the first Dean Research of the University—the office which is a single window platform for research-related services of the university.

He has been the Chairman and Professor, Department of Biotechnology KU for more than nine years. He has a number of international publications and around 1200 citations to his credit.

FLOODAFTERMATH

DESTRUCTION OF HOSPITAL EQUIPMENT MAKES PATIENTS SUFFER

● **YASEER GAFFAR**

The destruction of hospital equipments in the September floods has impaired the health care system in the Kashmir valley.

The main hospitals of Kashmir including SMHS hospital, Lal Ded hospital, Bone and Joint hospital, GB Pant hospital and JVC in Srinagar city were submerged during September, floods. They are not able to continue their routine work.

Although they made some makeshifts arrangements, but lack of equipment is a major concern for authorities.

“The only hope left for the patients is the refer to Multi-Specialist hospital SKIMS, which was the lone hospital in

Srinagar not effected by the recent floods. We are in a dire need of equipments,” the authorities said.

They said that the flow of patients at SKIMS remains so huge that the hospital administration had to create additional wards in order to provide emergency medical care to people mostly coming from the flood hit areas.

“In order to cater to patient rush, we utilized the additional wards. We started the SKIMS sarai as mini hospital , which has been running for emergency and critically ill patients, flow of which has increased manifold due to recent floods”, official at SKIMS said.

One of the flood victims Mohammad Ayoob told MERC TIMES that it was really hard for them to cope with the situation “as the hospitals are not able to do

medical tests and examinations that require high technology equipments”.

“When I took my ailing mother for a test that was to be conducted at SMHS, the authorities were not in a position to conduct the test as flood has destroyed the equipments of the hospital,” he said.

He added, the flow of patients at the pediatric ward, was so huge that three patients had to manage on a single bed. The staff and the patients of SKIMS medical College were also shifted to this institute, said by the Fouzia majeed, a staff nurse at SKIMS hospital.

The newly constructed block with capacity for about 22 patients is also being utilized for patients. And more than 140 additional beds have been created in main hospital, so that patients may not suffer any inconvenience.



DELHI BASED KASHMIRI YOUTH INITIATIVE TO COLLECT RELIEF FOR VALLEY

● **UMAR SHAFI**

The young boys of Kashmir who study in various states outside the valley have started campaigning under the banner of 'Pray for Kashmir' to help flood victims of Kashmir.

The boys, particularly of IET (Institute of Engineering and Technology) Delhi, started the campaign and managed to collect a good amount of money which was later on sent to various flood affected families.

Sehrish khan, Muneer, Adnan, Ishfaq, Sameer, Aamir Khan and Junaid sheikh are among those who worked very hard to collect donations for the people of their state who had suffered huge losses due to floods that hit the valley on September, 7.

These boys are presently pursuing the course of engineering in one of the highly reputed colleges of Delhi.

While sharing his experience, Junaid said, "It was our love for our state and affection towards our Kashmiri brothers that inspired us to go out and do something for them".

Junaid while criticizing the government for its 'indifferent attitude' said the "Kashmiri people



were completely helpless during the floods. There was no one to help them. The government left them to die".

These volunteers added some more Kashmiri

students to their group and divided this group into two.

Both the groups went to different places to collect donation. They continued their campaign for a couple of days.

According to Sehrish Khan who was the coordinator of this volunteer group, one of their group had collected some Rs 27,000 and other group was able to collect Rs 55,000 and in total it got more than Rs 80,000 approximately.

Aamir who is one of the important members of this groups said, "We wanted to do more for our people as we had seen in the televisions how people have badly suffered due to the deluge. We knew that this amount is not going to be enough, but due to a very hectic schedule in our course of study we could manage only that much of time".

Aamir further added that they had contacted some of their friends who also study engineering in some other states to start similar campaigns they too were successful in collecting a good amount of money, he said

He further added that the whole amount was handed over to few group members who personally went to the valley after the road was thrown open. The amount was distributed to the families that had suffered the most.

GOVT FAIL TO PROTECT JK'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

● **Sami ullah**

With universal language english replacing Kashmir's official language Urdu, the government time has failed to protect it.

The issue had earlier stirred up a heated debate with ruling National Conference raising the issue in assembly last year, demanding the reasons behind the neglecting of Urdu language at government level.

While it was decided to ensure its implementation at various levels and a high level committee was formed for promotion of Urdu, language is yet to be re-introduced in government officices.

Civil Society activist group Anjumn-e-Tahafuz Urdu(AeTU) accused the government for giving the National Language preference over the official

language of Kashmir.

"Urdu which is the official language, is being gradually wiped out from the state by government itself. Most of the records related to the history, culture is mentioned in Urdu language and in offices like revenue department and others, it is being replaced with Hindi language," said Dr. Javed Iqbal, a member of AeTU.

He said a conspiracy is being hatched to replace Urdu with other non local languages in the state.

"As Urdu language is being ignored in government and private offices, people here believe it as an act of conspiracy," Iqbal said.

Imdad Saqi, another member of AeTU said the government despite directing its officials at district level to ensure the implementation of Urdu language in different offices, the orders are not being implemented.

"General Administration Department in 2001 has issued a circular in which it has directed to write the names of places, parks on billboards in Urdu language and stress was given to ensure Urdu option on examination. Besides, all the district officials were directed to ensure its implementation at ground level," he said.

Further, in government schools, many books including the Mathematics, History and science were earlier published in Urdu language. The books are now published in English language.

"Earlier this language was given much preference and a person was required to be experienced in this language to apply for any kind of job. But now in many schools Hindi is being taught instead of Urdu due to which many students don't know anything about it," said a local Abdul Rashid.

PEOPLE DISTRIBUTE FOOD ITEMS ON ASHOORA

● Ubaid jeelani

On the day of Ashoora, people in Kashmir were seen distributing fried rice, Turmeric rice, milk, juice and other foods.

Ashoora is celebrated on the 10th day of Muharram in remembrance of martyrdom of Imam Hussain(AS) in the battle of Karbala in the 61AH of the Islamic calendar.

An elderly woman while distributing meals said "I usually distribute fried rice or milk among the children, neighbours and passerby in the name of the martyrs of Karbala. I usually distribute it in the wee hours of the Ashoora".

Despite restrictions in Kashmir, people carried on with the old tradition of distributing meals. In many areas, stalls to provide juice and milk to the commuters were setup by local youth.

Muhammad Aslam, an old man from Saderbal, said "Muslims fast during Muharram for first ten days. According to hadith Musa (AS) and his people obtained a victory over the Egyptian Pharaoh on the 10th day of Muharram and accordingly Prophet Muhammad(SAW) asked Muslims to fast on this day that is Ashoora and on day before and after it. By fasting on this day people seek the blessing of Allah."

"On this day we contribute our bit as it is a source of blessing. People shall keep this tradition alive and also teach their children about the importance of this month," said a woman, while distributing milk on the roadside.

POST FLOODS CHANGE IN SCHEDULE IRKS SCHOOLS STUDENTS



● Ishan Fazili

The school students are protesting against the change in academic calendar after the September floods.

Post floods, Kashmir did witness crisis on all the fronts. The schooling is one of the worst hit. Educational institutes remained off for over a month owing to the catastrophic deluge of September. The schedule and syllabus looks like a mess now.

Now, the parents and experts are demanding early announcement of vacations to avoid health-related issues.

"We are yet to attend our school and there are news of early vacations. We missed our school badly this year," says Areeba, a seventh grade student from Srinagar.

The out-going batches of various schools look even more disheartened. "Leaving the school is always hard, but for us, it is even

worse. Peeling walls and damaged furniture is not how we wanted to end our school days," says Fahad Ahmed, a 12th class student.

The academic calendar was already reduced this year. Due to elections and extended winter vacations earlier in March. The floods of September further decreased the working days.

Though the authorities of various schools tried to pace up the restoration yet many parents have been reluctant to send their wards to the schools, fearing infections and allergies. "Each day, my son attends the school, he used to complain of body ache and fever in the evenings. I do understand that he wants to be with his friends at school, but not at the cost of his health," says Amina Asgar, mother of 16-year-old boy, who is now allergic to his flood affected school.

On one hand the parents and experts are looking forward to early vacations and on the other hand the students are already mourning their loss of school days.

VITASTA ORGANISES INTRA-COLLEGE DEBATE COMPETITION

TOP 3 TO PARTICIPATE IN PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATING TOURNEY AT KU



Irshad Khan

Vitasta School of Law and Humanities, Nowgam, a professional law college organized an intra-college debate competition on 'Employment Oriented Education'.

The college students drawn from various colleges participated in the competition.

Prof. A.M. Matta, the college Principal presided over the occasion, besides being a jury member.

Others in the jury included many college lecturers. Matta, while talking to MERC Times gave details about the competition.

"Majority of the students participating in the debate competition are freshers, currently in 1st semester, of their studies. Students from other semesters, are also participating in the competition", said Matta.

Speaking extensively on the topic, the participants made references from religious and sociological resources besides tracing the political, economic and social development of India to justify their arguments for, and against the proposition.

Zain Zahoor, student of B.A. LLB, 10th semester bagged first position, whileas Adnan Naqash of 1st semester and Navdeep Kour of 3rd semester bagged second and third positions, respectively.

In his concluding remarks, Matta said. "The top three position holders of the debate competition shall represent our college in the Parliamentary Debating Tournament that will be held at the University of Kashmir". On this occasion college also released its annual law students' magazine, 'Vyeth'.

SEPTEMBER FLOODS HIT CITY'S ONLY CRICKET STADIUM

Zafar Aafaq

The Shere Kashmir international cricket stadium located on the banks of river Jhelum was badly hit by the recent floods.

The stadium, situated in Sonwar, the first of the areas that went under water when Jhelum crossed the danger mark, remained under water for three weeks.

"Water was everywhere when we inspected the stadium for the first time after the floods", says a grounds man who has been working here for past two years.

The water was up to 2nd storey of the only concrete stand, in the stadium.

The greenery of the ground is very sparse and grass leaves have turned pale due to stagnant flood water. Half of the way from pavilion to main pitch is covered with plastic mats because there is still a lot of mud.

The floods damaged the administrative infrastructure of Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) which is located in the stadium premises.

"The floods caused a huge damage to the administrative records and equipment which included record files, furniture, sanitation system, and sports gear. The revamp work started after one month of flood and is going on", said an official of JKCA

The construction work that was going on at Sher-e-Kashmir Stadium has come to halt and is expected to be resumed after winter.

"Shere Kashmir Stadium was undergoing a revamp for the past two years to make it a fully international standard cricket stadium, but the floods stopped all the work. "

The floods also resulted in postponing of currently undergoing coaching camp.

"The camp was scheduled to be held in the first half of September, but due to floods it's being held now in November", says Jahangir Lone, a budding cricketer.

"We want to thank the association and the administration for making pitch suitable for playing," added the trainee at the camp

