

MERCTIMES



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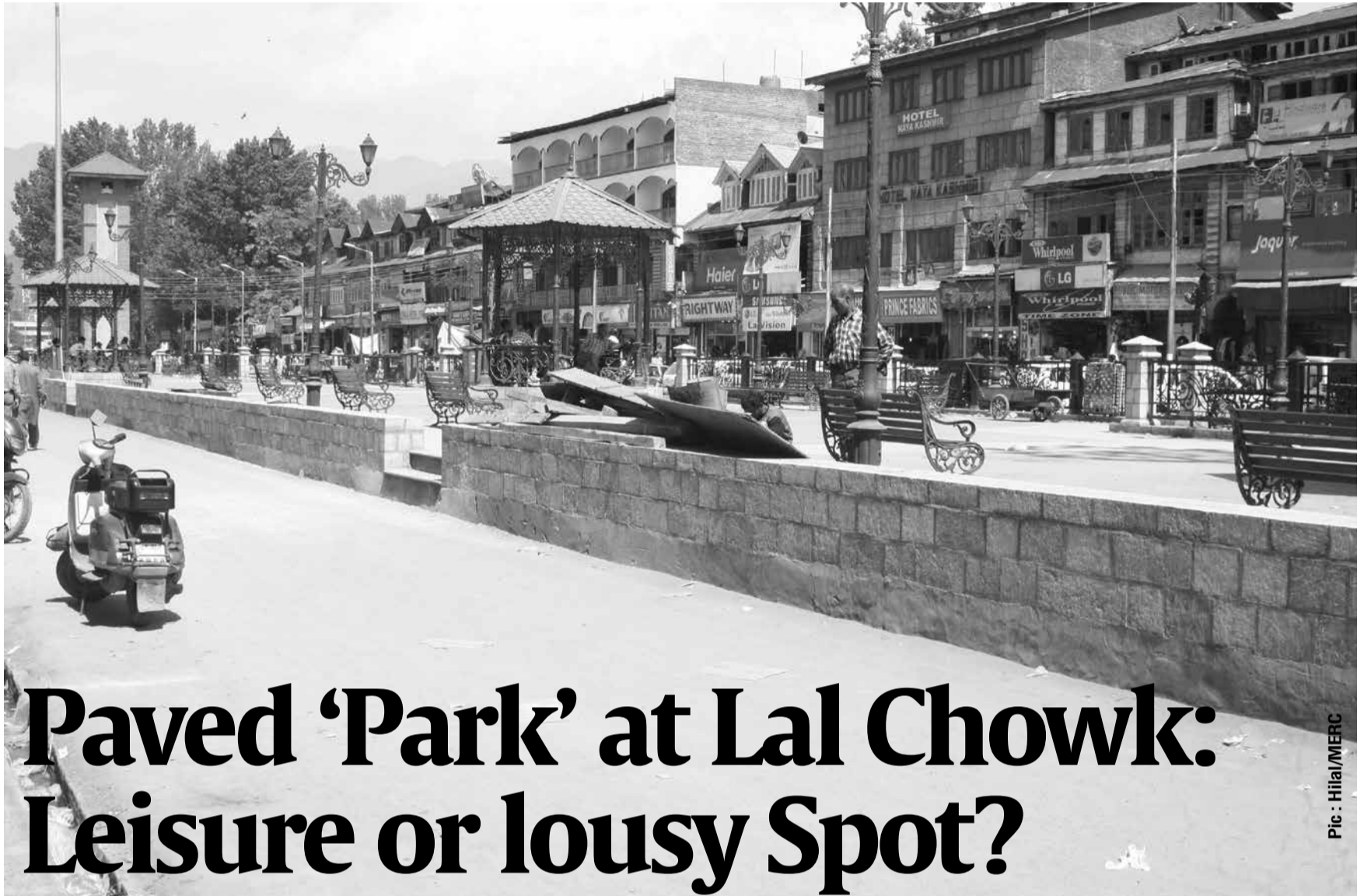
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**LEPERS:
long forgotten,
long neglected**

Shafat Mir, Saleem Khan
**saunter down the
woeful colony of lepers
situated on the outskirts of
Srinagar city**

(See page 3)



Paved 'Park' at Lal Chowk: Leisure or lousy Spot?

Pic: Hilal/MERC

Hilal Ahmad

Despite hefty amount spent on the project, it seems the paved Public place adjacent to clock tower in Lal Chowk, did not serve the purpose.

Approximately 21,000 sq feet park, was constructed at a cost of more than Rs. 3.1 crore. This beautification drive carried out by Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Department in collaboration with different government departments like R&B, UEED, PDD with the intention that it could add modern ambience to this business hub, has not been received well by people. The public criticism continues to hover it.

"It is an utter wastage of money and land as well. What is the fun when there is already a spacious Pratap Park in the vicinity? Had this amount been utilized on further beautification of Pratap Park, the overall look of this hub could have been different," said Mohammad Altaf, a bank employee.

Commuters find nothing extraordinary in the project and prefer to remain away from this resting place.

"Lal chowk is not only a commercial area, but it also serves as an important roadway for buses and other vehicles. I don't think that a genuine step has been taken by the authorities. No civilized person will take a leisure here amidst noisy traffic converges and full public view", said Owais, a college student.

It is an utter wastage of money and land as well. What is the fun when there is already a spacious Pratap Park in the vicinity?

Besides pedestrians and drivers, the Shopkeeper fraternity is aghast over the project since most of the purposive area has been occupied by this place.

"It is unfortunate that we are bearing

the brunt. Our business got severely affected by this so-called sophisticated 'park'. It has brought decline in our sales as no sufficient parking place has been allotted to one of the shop lines on this side of the road. During early phase of its construction, we made several pleas to authorities to relocate the 'park' properly, but of no avail", said Tasaduq, a local shopkeeper.

Talking with MERC Times, Deputy Director Maintenance and Work (M&W), Tourism Department, Bashir Ahmad Rather said, "The sole purpose of this paved structure was to make Lal Chowk beautiful".

"This is our face and reflects Srinagar. Our aim is to provide relaxation spot to tourists while they shop. Otherwise, there is nothing such in Lal Chowk for a visitor to see".

He further added, "Commercial Hub does not mean to park and shop at the same place. People ought to change their attitude of parking their vehicle right in front of the shop where they go in for shopping. There are many parking places at their disposal within the Lal Chowk limits".

Prior its construction, the place used to be filled with cow-dung and garbage. As such, the officials feel that the park has served the purpose as expected.

Nonetheless, the much-hyped 'relaxation point' has raised many eyebrows. The public utility of the place remains a debate amongst the concerned.

MERC

Lepers: *Long forgotten, long neglected*

Shafat Mir, Sameem Khan

Walking many a mile through the labyrinthine alleys, taking every other man for a signpost, the two of us finally stopped in front of a cluster of huts. As we walked along, to our right, we saw decrepit old faces sitting in a line next to each other. Their gaze reflected curiosity. At once, they stood up and surrounded us. Weary faces gave a longing look as if something was long overdue. The wrinkles displayed a new hope, a new fire. Perhaps, lit by our visit. We wondered as to how many people before had seen their hapless faces.

The eyes. There was something subservient about them. They exhibited meekness emerging out from pangs of poverty and ostracism. They welcomed us as if we were their last hope. Their Saviours!

This colony started as a hospital during the English reign in around 1892 for lepers. They say some Miss Mary is believed to have been behind its establishment. During those days, a team used to go from place to place in search of patients and would admit them to the hospital. Years passed. Even after getting cured, the lepers never went back to their native places. Generations after, they continue living in the colony.

The colony is home to 85 patients (now cured) from across the state and their families. The lepers live in 14 huts built during the British reign. The huts are in a dilapidated condition. The outer walls are muddy and defaced with perceptible cracks. We see pigeons perched on the chimney stacks. The huts seem home more to pigeons than humans! Every hut has three to five rooms with each family getting one. We enter into a squalid room whose walls seem closing in. Inside, you can't literally sprawl. A lot of things have been shoehorned inside: utensils, clothes, stove, bedding...The walls are drab and blank. A few wooden pegs protruding out of the walls, with carry bags and clothes dangling down them. A worn out tattered rug covers the floor. The bolsters are grubby and of irregular shape.

"It is very difficult to adjust in such a small space and that too, when you are a large family," said Dilawar Khan who lives crumpled beneath a staircase. "The place is not enough.



Pic: Shafat/MERC



Pic: Shafat/MERC

We have to cook and sleep in the same room", he added.

We see some construction work going on. We go to the place where the Municipality Corporation of Srinagar is constructing bathrooms expected to be ready by the end of June this year. However, mere bathrooms they don't need. They want to know when they would get to live in the new huts. A project initiated by the

Municipal Corporation some four years back. And ever since, they have been adding years to it! The construction has been erratic lasting for a few months at a stretch in a year. Surprisingly, it's yet to start this year! The President of the LPA (Lepers Patients Association) Muhammad Lateef, says that a total of 4.5crores were sanctioned for the construction of 150 huts.

SMK

Ailing Health Care



✍️ Kaiser Ali

Since last 20 years of turmoil in the valley, people suffered in various ways. The major casualty due to this uncertainty is that various diseases, which were rare before this turmoil, have found their way to Kashmir. The number of patients has increased in the valley at an alarming speed. In fact, people in every family are suffering from one or the other disease. The hospitals at local and district levels are unable to handle the increasing patient inflow with each passing day. Major hospitals of the valley have no proper infrastructure to meet the needs and overcome the problem. Moreover, the least number of doctors and specialists in these hospitals has become a big problem.

All these factors have given rise to new trends in the valley. The mushrooming of private clinics is one such phenomenon. The drawbacks of these private clinics cannot be ignored. It is a commonly accepted fact that doctors of a nation ought to offer a great service to their people. Nonetheless,

the trend of private clinics and private practice of doctors seems to have decreased the value of this great profession.

According to Dr. M.Shafi, working as dental surgeon at sub district hospital (SDH) Shangus, "There are many reasons behind this. The infrastructure in government hospitals is very poor as compared to private ones. In private hospitals, more thrust is given over hygiene which takes a backseat in government hospitals."

No gainsaying that private clinics and hospitals are providing the quality services to the people. However, only a small portion of our society who are well-off and can afford to pay high charges, get benefited. The increasing number of patients at government hospitals has led to messy atmosphere as every patient is accompanied with more than one attendant. Subsequently, one patient's bed is used by two or three persons at a time, which in turn gives rise to many problems in the hospital he maintained.

Thousands of patients from remote areas of valley are seen waiting in queues for

their turn at major hospitals like SMHS, SKIMS and other hospitals. The sole children's tertiary care center, GB Pant hospital at Sonwar faces huge rush on daily basis. The recent high infant mortality at this hospital is a grim indicator of poor health care system in the State.

When asked about the increasing number of patients, Dr. Shafi said, "Government hospitals are quite sluggish in providing good treatment; while in private hospitals doctors remain available round the clock."

"Life has become too fast. No one has time to wait in queues to get himself treated. Doctors pay more attention in private hospitals because we the patients pay handsome amount of hard earned money, and in return get good treatment," said Parvaiz, a middle-aged businessman.

A physiotherapist, Dr Athisam, observes that a common man can bear his family starvation but not the illness of his child. "So they prefer private hospitals. Moreover, there is lack of technical people who work in different labs of government hospitals", says Dr. Athisam.

'RANCHOR' OF KASHMIR

A 28-YEAR-OLD ENGINEER AND ASSTT. PROFESSOR ROUF ALAM BHAT IS AN INNOVATOR WHO LIKES TO EXPERIMENT AND EXPLORE. GOING BEYOND THE FRONTIERS OF CONVENTIONAL KNOWLEDGE, ROUF HAS SET AN EXAMPLE BY TAKING SCIENCE OUT FROM THE TEXTBOOKS. IN CONVERSATION WITH Safeena Wani, HE SHARES HIS SCIENTIFIC PASSION AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS.



Q: Please introduce yourself.

I hail from Habak, Naseem Bagh Srinagar. I did my schooling from Radiant Public (RP) School and 10+2 from Iqbal Memorial Institute (IMI) Bemina. I did my B.Tech from SSM in Computer Sciences and M.Tech from NIT in Communication and Information Technology. Presently, I am working as Assistant Professor in Electronics and Instrumental Technology Department, University of Kashmir.

Q: Why Engineering stream?

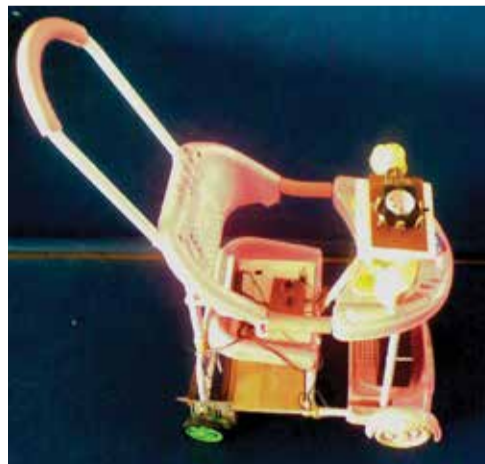
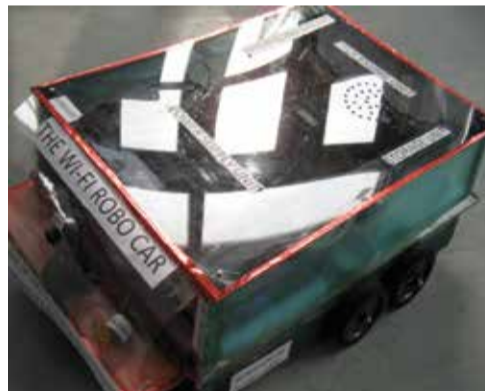
Actually I had been working on machines since childhood. I was just 12-year old when I invented Hydraulic break for bicycle and in class 9th, I decided to pursue engineering as my career.

Q: Any inventions recognized by Department of Science and Technology (DST) govt. of India?

Yes, four of my inventions have been patented. In 2009, I came up with the "globally accessible machine- the Wi-Fi Robo Car". Later in 2010, my other three inventions, a Fodder Feeding System for cattle; then Finger Gesture Based Locomotor; and a Multiple Belongings Locator were recognized.

Q: A brief about these inventions?

The Wi-Fi Robo Car can be driven from anywhere using internet connection to a distance of 3 kms. It has a live-feed network camera so that it can be driven without line of sight, and also has a horn. It can also be used to build an unmanned armored vehicle, which can be used in militarily operations like bomb detection and firing at the enemy without putting a soldier in the



line of fire. The Fodder system is a first of its kind providing remotely controlled cattle feeding mechanism. And, the idea behind Finger Gesture Based Locomotor is to provide mobility to the disabled persons without anyone's help. Multiple belongings locator (mobile-based belongings locator) is used to help locate belongings that are used invariably in our daily operations and often misplaced.

Q: Utility of these inventions for a commoner?

All my inventions are useful for a common man keeping in view the local needs. I haven't marketed my innovations in research journals since I don't want my inventions to be exploited. Further, I believe in the applied research, something which can be of practical use in the life of people.

Q: Any financial support from any quarter?

Not, at all. In fact, while inventing car-robo, it cost me around 60,000 rupees. Though Directorate of Scientific Industrial Research (DSIR) and Department of Science and Technology (DST) had agreed to fund some of my innovations, but nothing happened. In 2008, I came up with another invention Hardware Auto meter for simplifying various processes of examination system. However, I am yet to receive any response from any quarter.

Q: Your future plans?

I just want to make more and more inventions for the benefit of the local people. Currently, I have three innovations under process: Poultry Farm Automation System, Driverless Passenger Carrying System, and Multi-Zone Security system.

New way of learning: Online Quran

✍ Ashraf ul Hassan

As online learning is becoming a major trend in academics, with more people switching to internet for studies, it is also paving way for people to read and learn Quran online.

People, who find it difficult to visit the Madrasas for formal teaching of Quran, owing to their busy schedule, find it easy to log on into web to learn Quran. Different websites like equraninstitute.com and quranclasses.com are primarily used by the administrators to teach people about Quran and guide them.

While this trend is popular in the majority Non-Muslim areas of the world, it is also welcomed in the Kashmir valley, and mostly adopted by businessmen and other professionals, who otherwise are occupied with other engagements.

"Earlier, I used to recite Quran in the morning. But after getting a job, I have to

leave early and that's why I have switched to the Online Quran," said Manzoor Wani, a physician.

Apart from social networking, youth get

sons in the discipline and then visit there regularly, Online Quran has made things easier.

"One of the biggest advantages of arrangements of Online Quran recitation is that this is greatly compatible with contemporary lifestyle of majority of the people. All it takes is to visit a particular Islamic website and learn the basics of Quran, even without leaving the confines and convenience of their homes," said a local youth, Mohsin Manzoor, who is in his early twenties.

"That is why this is becoming one of the most likeable solution to people not only living in non-Muslim countries, but also for tech-savvy people living in Muslim societies," he added.

When contacted, founder of Sabeel-ul-Huda Madrasa, Mufti Aijaz-ul-Hassan Bandy said, "It is a good sign.

Our youth spends most of the time on internet and it is really heartening to know they are using the same for learning Quran and Hadith," adding, "whatever may be the means, it is getting them closer to Almighty."



benefited from these websites where they take lessons via Youtube and other video based internet sites.

Unlike previous times, when one had to search for an institution which provided les-

Digitization trends in Kashmir

✍ Baseera Rafiquee

Twenty first century came as a boost to the world with everything going digital, from banks to library to post offices. With technology getting into every sector of life, life has become easier for people.

In banking sector, the concept of e-banking is speeding up the transactions.

Branch manager J&K Bank, Hazratbal, Farhat Ahmad said e-banking has made transaction much fast and accurate. "Now money can travel long distances without much delay. It has helped the bank and the customers as well. Anyone can operate his account sitting anywhere in the world", he said.

The idea to digitalize libraries started up in West but it has worked well in the State too.

"Allama Iqbal Library has made a significant step in this regard. All the information regarding the books in the library is available online and books are issued through a



machine which scans the books," said Chief Librarian, Reyaz Rufai. He added that many books of historic importance are under process of digitization. "We have digitized 1800 books. It has helped students to go through all the books in one-go and locate the desired one within no time. A small chip can hold the in-

formation of the full library taking almost no space," he said.

"Digital libraries are the future of libraries," he added. Besides, he revealed that Allama Iqbal Library is the first digital library of India.

"The impact of digitization has only affected the personal letter services, rest the official is still carried out through paper letters", said Muhammad Muzafar kamili the manager post-office University of Kashmir. Personal messages are sent through e-mail which is instant.

Recently, the government started to digitalize the official documents as well. This process has eased up the work of administration as well as automation. The examination forms and results of various courses are available online .It has

made work easier. ATM cards, online recharge, online bill payment also comes under this.

"Records are safer now. All this lessens the burden on paper and in turn saves environment," says Huda Bhat, a University student.

Workshop on TV anchoring

Mahrukh engages MERC students

✍ Bilal Bhat

Srinagar, May 11, 2012: Media Education Research Centre (MERC) of Kashmir University organized a workshop on television news anchoring. Noted TV news anchor Mahrukh Inayet was the resource person for the workshop.

In his welcome address while highlighting the contribution of the department to media industry, Head, MERC, Prof. S. Mufeed Ahmad said, "It is a matter of satisfaction that most of our alumni are holding key position in reputed media organizations in and outside J&K."

Prof. Mufeed appreciated Mahrukh for sparing time to share her experiences with the faculty and students of MERC, and informed that the department will organize more such programmes in near future.



Mahrukh, Course Director of a TV anchoring institute "Studio Talk" in Mumbai, has earlier served as senior editor and news anchor at 'Times Now' besides working with Headlines Today and National Geographic Channel. The workshop began with AV clippings, showcasing Mahrukh's work including her reportage of Taj Hotel siege during the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, special feature on Kashmir, US president Barack Obama's India Visit besides her interviews with Benazir Bhutto, Salman Khan and Sa-

chin Tendulkar.

It was followed with a role-play exercise in which Mahrukh engaged students in editorial, production and management processes of TV news. Scholars and students of first and third semesters of MERC attended the workshop. Senior faculty member, MERC, Dr Sabeha Mufti conducted the proceedings while MERC Times editor, Muslim Jan coordinated the session. Other

ers present on the occasion included faculty members Dr Aaliya Ahmed and Malik Zahra Khalid.

In the question-answer session that followed the presentation, Mahrukh responded to the questions posed by the students. She complimented them for their keenness and enthusiasm.

"Session like this bridges the gap between class room and news room", remarked senior faculty MERC, Nasir Mirza while thanking the guest. **SMT**

MERC INHOUSE MATCH ENDS ON A TIE

✍ Souzeina Mushtaq

A friendly in house match of Media Education Research Center (MERC) students on 10th May, Thursday finished on a tie. The match which went down to the last ball was played at main cricket playfield of Kashmir University campus.

A slight drizzle delayed the start of the match between Creative Cricketers (CCs) and You Tube Downloaders (YTDs). After an inspection of the ground conditions, the players decided to go for the match which started at 11:30 am.

YTDs won the toss and decided to field first.

In the first innings of the match, YTD's Zubair Ahmad (four wickets for 20 runs) helped restrict the whole Creative Cricketers team to 157-5, despite Abid Hafiz's 39 runs from 30 balls.

Yasir rallied them with sixes but fell to Zubair Ahmed to end an amazing game.

Chasing the target, YTDs batmen seemed to be in some kind of hurry as wickets kept on falling at regular intervals.

It was Rohail Sheikh blazing innings of 57 runs in just 30 balls, which gave his team some respite from the good line opposition was maintaining.

The spectators had to hold their breath as the match went down the wire, with YTDs needing 3 runs to win in the last two balls.



It brought a hugely entertaining tournament to a fitting climax, with the fate of the match to be decided in the last ball. Imran Muzaffar played a dot ball and managed to

score two runs, thus, leveling the score.

In the concluding ceremony of the match, Rohail Sheikh was declared as man of the match. **SMT**

MERC observes Press Freedom Day

Journalists should try to strike a balance and be real professionals: Prof Talat

By **Rouf Bhat**

Media Education Research Centre (MERC), Kashmir University in collaboration with Jammu and Kashmir Press Association (JKPA) observed World Press Freedom Day at Media House auditorium of the university on Thursday.

Terming journalism as an important profession, Vice Chancellor, Kashmir University, Prof Talat Ahmad said journalists should try to strike a balance and be real professionals.

“They should publish things which reflect both strengths and weaknesses in the society,” he said in his presidential remarks.

Appreciating the work of journalists, Prof Talat said media at times projects some people as demi-gods but fail to cover real social issues.

“Freedom of press is not meant to publish whatever you want. The young journalists should try to project things in right perspective,” he said.

Hailing the performance of MERC, Prof Talat assured all possible help to the department.

“In near future, it will be one of the best centres providing media education in the country,” he added.

Earlier, in his welcome address, Head MERC, Prof Mufeed Ahmad highlighted the contribution of the department in the field of media.

“More than 700 post graduates have passed out from the department and at least 80 per cent of them are working in various media organizations. We have introduced bachelor courses of Mass Communication and Multimedia Production (MCMP) and Mass Communication and Video Production (MCVP). The department has also produced at least 15 MPhil and PhD scholars,” he said.

Prof Mufeed said the department is planning to start some short-term courses in media management and advertising. He sought support of the vice chancellor in this regard. Referring to the emphasis placed on freedom of expression in different religions, he stressed on the need to understand the difference as to who defines the limits of the speech and how restrictive these limits are.

Referring to this year’s press freedom day theme of UNESCO “New Voices: Media Freedom Helping to Transform Societies”, he added that there is need to examine how media freedom can help in transforming societies.

President of JKPA, Ghulam Hassan Kaloo



said journalists have suffered and continue to suffer everywhere in the world.

Presenting a paper entitled, ‘Media in Kashmir: Current concerns and future directions’, senior faculty MERC, Nasir Mirza said, “Kashmir presents a unique scenario in terms of functioning of democratic system in the context of South Asian region, there are challenges as well as opportunities for media in Kashmir.”

“Media persons just reflected the turmoil that surrounded them. Newspapers became press note gazettes carrying official hand-outs about the situation. About the contemporary media scene, a sea-change has been witnessed in content, presentation and the printing of newspapers has improved,” he said.

Senior journalist, Muhammad Syed Malik said the aim of journalist should be to search for the truth wherever it is.

“My experience is that news is actually the truth which somebody wants to hide because it is inconvenient to him and a good reporters is that reporter who finds that truth out; rest is all advertisement with no news value,” he said.

Senior journalist and editor-in-chief of Rising Kashmir, Shujaat Bukhari said, “On Press Freedom Day we should remember all the journalists who have laid down their lives while performing their professional duties.”

Talking about the mushrooming of the newspapers in the valley, Bukhari said, “I am not against mushrooming of newspapers in the valley but I always stand for quality journalism.”

Speaking on the status of press freedom in Kashmir, Riyaz Mas-

roor of BBC said, “No doubt we enjoy more freedom in Kashmir to gather news but the fundamental thing we lack is the chance of publishing the news.”

Director Information, Khwaja Farooq Renzushah talked about the responsibilities of media persons. “Some newspapers do the whistle blowing of issues for their own interests. They should work with a sense of responsibility,” he said.

Assistant Dean Students Welfare and PRO KU, Showkat Shafi presented his paper on “Growth, Development and Future of English press in the valley.”

On the occasion, Vice-Chancellor Prof Talat also released latest issue of Media Times- a bi-annual publication of MERC and a special issue of MERC Times dedicated to the prominent journalist and Bureau Chief of AFP Izhar Ahmad Wani who passed away recently after battling a dreadful illness for last two years. Both these publications are edited by senior faculty member and editor MERC Muslim Jan.

Senior Faculty Member MERC Dr Sabeha Mufti presented vote of thanks on the occasion whereas the proceedings of the event were conducted by Rashid Maqbool, lecturer MERC. Earlier, the proceedings of the day started with an AV presentation titled ‘Journalism – Freedom against Censorship’ produced by faculty member MERC, Syeda Afshana.

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