

MERC TIMES

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Village devoid of basic amenities

❖ Abid Rashid Baba

BARAMULLA: Hundred minute drive from Srinagar towards north of Kashmir takes you into a picturesque sleepy hamlet of Baramulla district. From NH-1A, you zoom inside and feel the typical pastoral smell. Cow dung scattered, animals grazing. Giggling women with wicker baskets and Samovars are heading towards paddy fields. Sun is shining overhead. Welcome to my village.

A nation is considered developed if its roads are well maintained. A bumpy 3 Km ride from National Highway may ache your back. When elections were around, our MLA had promised road widening and macadamizing but five years down the line, nothing happened. The condition of the road is such that the mini-buses refuse to fly on the route now. Once a student boards a bus, the amount of dust which billows makes him difficult to recognize in the classroom.

Some four years ago, our representative at the assembly had sanctioned a public park in my village. The belly of the hill was axed. It became a plateau. It is neither a playground, nor a park. Even a slight downpour drains muddy water towards the village which floods the households living beneath it. It creates chaos and confusion. With nearly 800 souls, my village lacks a public convenience. With 75% literacy rate, there is no public library. Most of the villagers are dependent on agriculture and livestock. No official from Agriculture, horticulture or Animal Husbandry visits my village. We are a neglected lot. We have been ignored.

Health is a key sector. We have to travel either to Sub-District Hospital Kreeri or District Hospital Baramulla. We continue to ask for a Primary Health Centre, but our pleas fell on deaf ears. We had pinned hopes on a local MLA but all hopes are dashed.

unattended garbage irks Kupwara people

❖ Shaheen Shafique

KUPWARA: Residents of baber lane bypass alleged that heaps of waste garbage are lying scattered in their area. The foul smell is ubiquitous in the areas with the surroundings becoming breeding ground for many diseases," a resident of baber lane bypass said. Many non-biodegradable garbage which includes polythene, domestic waste and medical waste are lying scattered in baber lane gali. "Sweepers are hardly visiting our localities and there are large mounds of garbage lying unattended for days together," suhail yousuf shah a resident said.

Residents have demanded that the concerned authorities should remove the huge garbage present in baber lane so that they can't suffer anymore.

When talked to Executive Officer Kupwara Municipal Committee he told that it is not the convenient place for garbage to dump and we have cleared garbage from the area several times but shopkeepers and residents shows too much irresponsibility in dumping garbage. We are going to clear the garbage from the area within few days as JCB has been sent to workshop for repairing, once it is fixed we will clear the garbage from the area. And he appealed people and shopkeepers not to dump garbage irresponsibly in the lanes rather should dump in dust bins of Municipal Committee which are in the area.

INTER-DISTRICT MARTIAL ARTS COMPETITION CONCLUDES

❖ Adil Amin

BUDGAM: The championship organised by Department of Youth Services and Sports concluded, in which players from all the districts of Kashmir province participated. In Inter-District Martial Arts competition Budgam won overall championship title.

The competition was held in different games in different weight categories: Kick-boxing in weight categories 52 kg and 48 kg, WU-SHU in weight categories 48kg and 52 weight kg, Sqay in 50 kg weight, Taekwondo in 54 kg weight, Jeet-kune-do 61 kg weight, Thang-Ta in 60 kg weight, Judo in weight 55 kg.

In Kick-boxing 52 kg weight category, Anayat Abas of Budgam bagged gold medal, Mohammad Nayam of Baramulla and Adnan Bashir of Bandipora bagged Silver and Bronze medals respectively.

Rakib of Baramulla bagged Gold medal, Mohd Faheem of Srinagar and Sameer Ahmad of Budgam bagged Silver and Bronze medals respectively in Kick-boxing 48 Kg weight category.

In Wu-Shu 48 kg weight category, Ubaidullah

Bhat of Budgam bagged Gold medal, Salman Khan of Srinagar and Hamid Mustaq of Bandipora bagged Silver and Bronze medals respectively. Under Wu-Shu 52 kg weight category, Wali Tabish of Budgam bagged Gold medal, Ali Raza of Kargil and Sayar Tariq of Pulwama bagged Silver and Bronze medals respectively.

In Sqay 50 kg weight category, Asrar Javid of Srinagar bagged Gold medal, Waseem Ahmad of Ganderbal and Umar Majeed of Budgam bagged Silver and Bronze medals respectively.

Aashiq Majeed of Budgam bagged Gold medal, Mohammad Muslim of Srinagar and Mohd Haqi of Kargil bagged Silver and Bronze medals in Taekwondo 54 kg weight category.

Mujjahid Mustaq of Srinagar bagged Gold medal, Momin Ahmad of Ganderbal and Sahil Ahmad of Shopian bagged Silver and Bronze respectively in Thang-Ta 60 kg weight category.

In Judo 55 kg category, Saleem Ahmad Bhat of Srinagar bagged Gold medal and Noor-ul-Jamal of Bandipora bagged Silver medal.

Poetry verses reverberate in Kashmir University

Ali Saifudin

SRINAGAR: "Rising buildings and rising machines, have taken away all my teens. Taken away all my fields to play, taken away all my sunny days."

Recited one of the performer named Ovais Ahmad on the occasion of Open Slam Poetry and Art installation session independently organised by students from different departments of the University of Kashmir. It took place in Naseem Bagh area near the Department of Music and Fine Arts, the place has a reputation for being a meeting point for different artists of the University. In this event many young students with a passion for poetry orated their poems under a Chinar tree while many had gathered to listen as an audience. Different poets used different styles of narration. While some stuck to classic Urdu Ghazal style of oratory, some chose Saul Williams styled more flamboyant method. Some touched the topics pertaining to their personal lives and others chose to highlight more general issues like Occupation and Resistance through their poems. Both Urdu as well as English poems were recited. Syed Zeeshan Hamdani who happens to be grandson of famous Kashmiri poet Syed Akbar Jaipuri narrated one of his original poems in which few lines went like "mera bhi haal urdu sa, ki apnay bhi paraaye hai, muje apna assar koi banata to gazab hota" which reflected the dying popularity of Urdu language in the current youth. Formal literary events which tend to promote writing, literature, arts and poetry are often held by different kinds of organisations but this kind of independent and

unceremonious events are very rare in Kashmir.

Although institutes like JNU, Delhi University, Jamia Millia are known to host such student oriented, independent and informal events of expression but for Kashmir University it is something new and out of the box. "It is interesting to see students sharing their poetry written on the back of their class notebooks" said one of the spectators who appreciated the concept behind this slam poetry event. Last year a documentary named 'In the shade of fallen chinar' was released which focussed on the art scene of students of Kashmir university. Events like these are a good example of how the students are engaging in artistic forms of expression.

Speaking on the occasion, one of the organisers Faakirah said that the primary objective behind organising such an event was to ensure that poets among other artists don't have to wait for a big event to exhibit their work and can instead showcase it in small gatherings that can be held over short intervals of time.

We, as artists, need to inculcate a habit of indulgence said Faakirah, a Law student and one of the organisers and it's also part of the reason that she wants to conduct these sort of events on a weekly basis rather than being a one-time show.

Slam poetry is a popular medium for poets to recite their original work. It is also a brilliant form of protest and a means of questioning authority. In our region it's still a new concept but a place like Kashmir which has a culture which is poetically rich but governed by unquestionable authority, slam poetry can fit in well as a strong medium of expression and dissent.

UNIQUELY, GB PANTH HOSPITAL OPERATES OPD EVEN ON SUNDAYS

Efforts appreciated, people demand attention on IPD

❖ ArifNazir

SRINAGAR: While patients are raising questions over the functioning of GB Panth hospital's In Patient Department (IPD), the Out Patient Department (OPD) is doing more than what it is meant to do.

The hospital's OPD remains open even on Sundays, and doctors on duty attend to hundreds of patients who rush to the lone child care hospital of the valley from different far flung areas of Kashmir.

With this, the hospital has become the only government hospital in the Kashmir region where the patients are provided with the services even on Sundays.

As per the Medical Superintendent (MS) of the hospital, Dr. Kanwal Jeet Singh the hospitals like SMHS and SKIMS do not operate their OPDs on Sundays.

"When I was at SMHS, I never saw such a thing even there, on Sundays only emergency block would work and not the OPD," he said.

Dr. Singh who replaced Dr. K K Pandita as MS of the hospital says that on one when he saw huge rush of people outside OPD, "I was newly

appointed here and asked my people about the rush and they informed me about the OPD on Sunday," he said.

Though questions have been raised by people that they are not getting adequate facilities at the hospital and are made to suffer, the initiative of OPD on Sundays has been appreciated by different quarters of the society.

"This is to cater to the rush that this hospital is facing on everyday basis," says MS, GB Panth Hospital.

Like the initiative of starting OPD on Sundays, lot more still needs to be done in the hospital, like addressing the complaints of the attendants about the proper attention and care of the infant patients while they are admitted in the hospital.

When this reporter visited the Hospital, four among ten persons complained about one thing or the other. Some complained about the non-availability of doctors during night, while some complained about the infrequent rounds of doctors. "The OPD thing is good, but they have to take proper care of other things as well," said Abdul Qayoom, adding that "every day infants are dying due to negligence, I think they should ponder over that as well."

KU's Law Society holds Legal Quiz Competition



❖ Peer Furqan

SRINAGAR : Kashmir University's Department of Law under the banner of its Law Society on Thursday held second Shah-I-Hamdann Legal Quiz Competition-2017.

The team from Vitasta College of Law and Humanities won the competition while teams from University of Kashmir and Kashmir Law College bagged the second and third positions respectively.

The team from Vitasta College comprised Adil Rashid and Shazia Bashir while Mohammad Khalid Shah and Deeba Javaid represented KU's Department of Law. Hashir Shafi Khan and Rahil Habib of Kashmir Law College were adjudged as third prize winners. The consolation prize was won by team from KU's Law Department comprising Irfan Hussain and Waseem Shamas.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi distributed cash prizes and certificates among the winners and other participants. He appreciated the role played by the Law Society, saying:

"It is doing a very good job and happens to be on the forefront of organizing competitions and programs and creating awareness about legal rights amongst citizens in far-flung areas of the state."

Dean and Head Faculty of Law Prof Mohammad Hussain delineated the role and activities of the Law Society in spreading legal literacy over the last five years in various corners of the state.

Dr Fareed Rafeeqi conducted proceedings of the valedictory-cum-prize distribution function

Lacking academic infrastructure, ITI Shopian train students in hostel



❖ Ayad ullah Dar

SRINAGAR: Industrial Training Institute (ITI) Shopian, founded in 1979, has yet to get an academics building; the students at the institute receive trainings in the hostel building.

A new building for academic trainings was inaugurated in 2006. Eleven years after construction was taken up by Jammu and Kashmir Projects Construction Corporation (JKPCC), the building is still incomplete. The corporation left the construction incomplete claiming that the Department of Technical Education has not paid them the dues.

Officials from technical education told MERC TIMES that corporation didn't follow the approved costs and guidelines set by the department. This leaves the institute with no classrooms, except for the institution's hostel building. The new building, JKPCC officials said, would have provided 12 big halls, two staff rooms and washrooms.

Sahil Rasheed Bhat, Superintendent if the industrial technical education in Shopian, told MERC TIMES that the institution is failing to meet the demand for courses in stenography, horticulture and other sectors because of lack of infrastructure

Officials in technical education department also voice their concerns about the land area available for the institute. There ITI, they say, has nine kanals of land while the minimum requirement was 20 kanals. "We have adjusted student numbers to the available space in the hostel building and workshops," he said.

Students allege that corrupt official practices were responsible for the delay in the construction. A group of students from the institute told MERC TIMES that the Shopian ITI did not have even has as good infrastructure as that of other districts.

Bhat, however, claims that the institute was functioning above optimum capacity only to ensure that more and more students are trained. "We started extra training batches at much higher roll as compared to the infrastructure available. We have funds in department for the construction of buildings and installing machinery, but the institute has no new more land to raise new buildings and the incomplete building prevents installation of machines."

The superintendent added that he raised the issue of the delay in completion of the new building with concerned authorities, but no steps were taken to ensure completion of the building.

But an official of technical education, contradicted JKPCC's claim, saying that the corporation had not seen the approved cost and work details till the completion of new building.

Deputy Commissioner Shopian, Muhammad Aijaz said that the JKPCC and technical education department had issues regarding payments, which needed to be sorted. "I have intervned in this regard; I am going to call a meeting in my office as well in this regard very soon. I will also take up this issue to higher authorities in civil secretariat," he said.

"I have ordered explanations from both the departments on delay of construction and fund issues," he said, adding that he hopes that the building is opened for operations soon.

J&K milk producers, suppliers stand ignored by Govt

❖ Hasina Jamiel

JAMMU: J&K milk Producers and Suppliers Association expressed resentment over government's decision to ignore their stand on Goods and Services Tax(GST).

The Association said that in spite of various schemes, programs and subsidies provided by Govt., no progress was seen at root level. The living standard of our poor dairy farmers in rural areas is still traditional. The subsidies provided by govt. were not seen in the families of rural area which is contributing 90% of milk

production in J&K. The dairy farming is the main contributor of states GDP but the per capita income of our farmers could not improved.

One of the dairy farming members said," we demand for improving the living standard of dairy farmers in rural areas. The govt. favors the corporate sector and neglected the basic milk producers."

The state is importing quintals milk from other states but neglecting our pure milk producers which are very sad. So govt. should take this sector seriously and help the poor dairy farmers at root level.

Wanton loot of green gold goes unchecked

❖ Peer Viqar

SRINAGAR: The unbridled felling of trees in alleged connivance with field forest staff has been depleting the dense forest at various places across Kashmir and the authorities are yet to crack the timber smuggling rackets.

Forest are facing unabated wanton loot as timber smugglers are chopping standing trees, and later slicing them to ferry to other parts of Kashmir.

The work of thriving forest mafia

is very much visible and smugglers are chopping green standing trees in broad daylight without any fear. The chopping of trees witnessed increase after road construction as smugglers are now using vehicles instead of horses.

Huge buildings and tourism infrastructure are being set up at the cost of the green cover.

Most of chopped trees are sold to private builders in the lower area who later on transport them to other parts of the Valley without any hesitation.

Meet Shaiqa Mohi, a known Sculpture artist from Kashmir

❖ Hirra Azmat

SRINAGAR: She would sit cross-legged in a wind-swept attic of the SPS Museum with a paintbrush and drawing paper. Every time she got stuck in the painting, she would look out the window. The mighty Chinars lining the Jhelum bund and the sparkling waters of the river filled her with awe.

She would take in the view and get back to her painting, invigorated. Be it the colour of the Chinar leaves, changing from green to russet to scarlet to golden, or the turquoise water or the violet mountains, she was obsessed with capturing all these hues in her drawings and show it to her teacher. That's the artist in her.

Shaiqa Mohi has since earned a name as a sculptor, participating in national and international art exhibitions like the Indian Contemporary Art Exhibition in the USSR in 1978, AIFACS (All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society) Golden Jubilee International Contemporary Art

Exhibition in 1977, National Art Exhibition organised by Lalit Kala

Academy, New Delhi in 1976 to 1983, 1986 and 1988.

Her collections are displayed in the National Gallery of Modern Art, Delhi, Lalit Kala Academy and AIFACS (All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society) Fine Arts and Crafts, New Delhi.

After completing her schooling from DAV school, Jawahar Nagar in 1971, she went to Govt Secondary School, Amira Kadal, where she continued her quest for art.

"Those days, the cultural academy often held art competitions. After the classes got over, I would go on foot in the scorching heat to participate in them. The artist in me never let me rest. I was always mad about art." Her parents extended their full support. She then joined the Institute of Music and Fine Arts, located then at Jawahar Nagar. Thus began her journey to becoming a full-time artist.

There, she was inspired by Gayoor Hassan, her teacher, mentor and guide. He taught her the nuances of sculpture art and helped her recognise her forte. "I am greatly inspired by Gayoor Sahab. He was an amazing sculpture artist. From him, I learnt sculpture art. He would spend hours teaching me the techniques involved. He would never tire of explaining the same thing over and over again."

Shaika specialised in sculpture art at the institute, where she went on to become a teacher and eventually the principal. "For me, art transcends the boundaries of decoration. To me a stone or any other solid material contains unfavourable artistic elements, which, in the words of Michelangelo, have just to be brought out with delicate strokes of chisels." She can't imagine her world without art and rues that there is no "art scene" in Kashmir. If there was one, it would provide a viable career option to the youngsters. Moreover, it could help create safe spaces in the conflict zone.

Rising Heat waves across Kashmir

Mujeeb UI Feroz

SRINAGAR: As the heat meter across Kashmir valley has started to rise this summer, the sale of electronic appliances like Ceiling Fans, Air conditioners (ACs), Refrigerators and Air Coolers has increased, though less than previous year's demand due to late arrival of summer season. With the implementation of GST (Goods and Services Tax) in Jammu and Kashmir, the rate of household electronic appliances has been put under 28% tax slab which will increase tax burden to consumers by 2-3% under this new tax regime.

The heat wave has accelerated the demand of cooling appliances in valley but the introduction of GST has created a conflict between buyers and sellers. "With the arrival of summer season, we were expecting rise in sales and that happened

too but due to new tax rules, we have to pay 2-3% more tax than previous percentage. This has developed mistrust between us and consumers because eventually they have to pay final price," Said Ajaz Ahmad, Owner of Cute Electronics.

Moreover, the distributors and retailers have to apply for new GST number so that they will get goods supplied from companies. "The GST regime has created problems for us as we are not aware of its process and implication. Also we are told to apply for new GST number to get our new stock but we don't have any information how to apply for that. This has affected our demand and supply process," Says Umer Shah, Distributor of home appliances.

The new tax rule has also affected buyers as they find variation in the prices of different electronic appliances. "I wanted to buy some Ceiling fans for home but there is lot of variation in prices. Some retailers

sell their goods according to new tax rule while others are running out of stock due to lack in supply and some of them selling with their own new prices," said one of the buyers. "The increase in rate of small things like ceiling fans has made difficulty for us. This has also made impossible for people like us to buy high price appliances like AC's, Coolers, Refrigerators because they will be sold on more high prices. Also due to scorching heat, it has created much more problems for us to not buy AC's or coolers as their prices would be much higher," Said another buyer.

With the demand of Cooling appliances on rise, the consumers are not able to buy any product as there is lot of misinformation among buyers as they are being cheated by the sellers with high prices. Also there is a demand for transparency regarding new GST rule as people are unaware of the new tax regime.

Dialysis programme of state in limbo

❖ **Ikhtlaq**

SRINAGAR: As scores of people die every year of chronic kidney diseases (CKD) in Jammu and Kashmir, the priority of the state government in the health sector is lying somewhere else, thalassaemia – a hereditary disease caused by faulty haemoglobin synthesis.

Despite the implementation of the Prime Minister's Dialysis Programme in 27 states of the country, the J&K Government failed to submit its proposal to the Union Health Ministry to procure dialysis machines for running the programme. The delay has been attributed by National Health Mission (NHM) officials to the failure of Health Department in prioritising the kidney diseases.

"Prevention and cure of kidney diseases were never a priority with the Health Department despite several hundred kidney patients dying every year," said an NHM official.

The government in 2013 prioritised thalassaemia as a special category disease for getting funding from the Centre under the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) – a child health screening programme under the NHM. At least 178 thalassaemia patients are registered with the Health Department, with 30 in Kashmir.

Last year, the government provided

Rs 15,57,500 as financial assistance to thalassaemia patients of the state, with Rs 8,750 per patient. On contrary, nearly 4,000 kidney patients are being admitted to the SK Institute of Medical Science (SKIMS) annually, with a majority of them suffering from the CKD. "Nearly 20-30 per cent CKD patients die every year due to lack of treatment or infection in Kashmir," Associate Professor, Nephrology, SKIMS, Dr Muzaffar Wani said. On an average, a person with advanced CKD had to shell out Rs 30,000-40,000 per month for dialysis and medication, Dr Wani said.

Given the burden of the CKD in the country, the Prime Minister during last year's Budget speech announced the programme for providing dialysis free of cost to the BPL patients, with each district hospital having one dialysis unit.

The Central government will provide dialysis machines, while state governments have to provide space for establishing the unit under the PPP mode. "In a couple of days tenders will be invited for selecting the service provider," the Mission Director, NHM, Dr Mohan Singh, said. Dr Mohan Singh has asked the Chief Medical Officers of the districts to identify the space in district hospitals before procuring the machines for establishing dialysis units there.

Over 100 undertake trekking to Tulain, Sourse lakes in Pahalgam

Syed Shehriyar

SRINAGAR: The Department of Tourism and Jammu & Kashmir Mountaineering and Hiking Club (JKMHC) Sunday organized a trek to Sourse Lake at Pahalgam.

Some 40 JKMHMC members trekked to the Lake lying at an altitude 3750 meters above the sea level.

The trek to Sourse Lake follows a trek to Tulain Lake, lying at an altitude of 3684 meters above sea level, here on previous Sunday in which some 60 JKMHMC members took part.

Pertinently, the Department of Tourism Kashmir conducts Sunday treks to inculcate the spirit of mountaineering and hiking among the local youth and bring about awareness about mountain trails and high-altitude lakes.

Speaking on the occasion, Director Tourism Kashmir, Mahmood A Shah, said the exercise is part of the Department's commitment to promote adventure tourism in Kashmir as well as help the local youth in adventure activities.

"Kashmir has many trekking trails for which hikers from across the world visit this place. However, those trekkers need local guides and we are training our youth through such treks on regular basis," he said.

The Directors also said Kashmir has famous high-altitude lakes which also need to be promoted and that the Department is targeting locals to explore the same, adding the latter will help them earn a decent livelihood by guiding non-local especially foreign trekkers. He said the Department has all the necessary equipment and gear for trekking expeditions.

RISE AND FALL OF KASHMIRI SILK

❖ **Syed Humaira**

SRINAGAR: Silk has always been considered as a symbol of splendor and Kashmiri silk is one of the best varieties produced in India.

According to ancient Sanskrit literature there is a mention of Kashmir being the original home to silk. Mirza Mohammad Haider refers in his "Tarikhi Rashide" to mulberry trees as among wonders of Kashmir and their abundance everywhere but according to present statistics of the department of Sericulture, Kashmir only has 5.25 lakh mulberry trees. According to historical records in the year 1855, Kashmir was in a position to supply 25000 oz of silkworm seeds to Europe. During Maharaja Ranbir Singh's rule this sector saw enormous growth and came under the direct control of the state. Hundreds of rearing houses were built across Kashmir and scientific methods were employed to improve silk production.

"Department of Sericulture in the state of J&K is dedicated to boost this industry but the sector in recent years has shown a decline of more than 70%," says Abdul Aziz a cocoon rearer from Baramullah.

Dr Baqal a senior scientist working at the Mirgund seed station, said "we have almost

25000 rearers associated with silk cocoon rearing. The cost of production of these cocoons is very less as compared to the price one gets in the market from their sale. A profit of 15000 can be made depending on the quality of the cocoon. The process of seed rearing is a very cumbersome one, where a lot of care is taken to maintain the temperature, humidity and cleanliness. We need to feed the worms carefully according to their larval stage of growth till they complete their 5 stage life cycle. The eggs are stored and later transferred to district headquarters. The government has even given subsidy for building of shed for cocoon rearing, hatching trays, health insurance for farmers, compensation in case of loss of produce but still there are no takers and the glamorous silken merchandise has almost vanished from the scene."

"Government is trying to modernize the silk production unit at Raj Bagh, and crores are being spent on the project," says an employee at the Raj bagh factory. "Hopes are high that the project will benefit cocoon growers and people associated with silk trade and we have kept our fingers crossed," adds Abdul Aziz

IQRA RASOOL: Budding cricketer from Baramullah

Zakir Hussain

SRINAGAR: In a conservative social setup like Kashmir where Women making career in sports is seen as a taboo. A teen from North Kashmir's Rafiabab fringes is breaking barriers and creating her own niche. Iqra Rasool recorded her name among the budding blooms of cricket from Kashmir. A film based on her life "The Cricket Girl" was screened in various schools in North Kashmir. Talking about the film Iqra said, "I can't describe it in words. I think watching a film on my own life is an achievement in itself. I am elated and want to thank everyone around me as without their love and support it was not possible".

Cricket is always seen as sport of boys and Iqra being a Girl managed to play cricket and pursued her dream. "I used to play volley ball. Later on I was selected for District level cricket tournament in inter-school games held at Prof. Showkat Ali Stadium Baramulla, a total of 25 students participated. Finally,

I was among the final 16. I also played at Maulana Azad Women's College and got selected for National event. Our first match was held in Jammu against Telangana in 2013 and we won that match", she said.

Talking to the respondent about her experience as a girl in cricket she said, "Being a girl I always felt this difference. Since my birth I was told to remain away from cricket as it is boy's game. But I couldn't stop myself from playing cricket. It was something in my blood. And today after playing various matches I really feel that we should not discriminate on the basis of gender".

Pertinent to mention that Iqra Rasool is a 10th-grade student, was born on 5th August 2000 in a middle-class family. Her father Ghulam Rasool Lone works at a local bakery. Iqra has big dreams – she wants to lead the Indian National Women's Team. But to achieve this goal, she needs the Jammu & Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) to support the cricketers from Kashmir and hone their talents.

JK health Department is ailing : CAG report

❖ Irfan Tramboo

SRINAGAR: No matter the Government is, day in and day out, calling for measures to make state's Health Care system effective and transparent, recent CAG Audit report of the Health Department and the influx of complaints against the same is compelling, raising serious questions over its functioning and is highlighting the failure of the government in bringing positive changes in the department, which has confined the working of the department only to official meetings.

CAG report-2016 has deliberated upon various serious dimensions of the department, such as Testing of Drugs, supply of sub standard drugs to patient, suspected fraud in various tendering processes, or for that matter, expired rate contracts being used for the procurement of drugs. With patient buying at least 47 percent of medicines from the market, it has also questioned the administration for not maintaining the end user record.

After CAG, the Chief Minister's Grievance Cell has been a witness to the poor functioning of the department. The number of complaints received by the cell also depicts the inefficiency of the Department.

The data provided by the cell says that there have been total 1106 complaints received against the Department that were received, pertaining to the non-availability of doctors, equipments and medicines.

The non-availability of medicines at the major hospitals



is being seen a big issue these days. With the formation of Medical Corporation, sources are saying that the procurement of medicines has been made tough, and at times what happens is that there are drug available with the Corporation, but aren't being allocated to the concerned hospitals, for reasons better known to them.

Wednesday, State's Health Minister Asiea Naqash in meeting with other concerned officials of the department, according to the official statement, "stressed upon maintaining proper hygiene in the hospitals, the Minister directed the concerned authorities to ensure better sanitation measure in and around the health institutes," adding that the washrooms should be renovated in all the hospitals and should be cleaned

on regular basis, however she seems to have missed the much larger and worrying scenario of the department, by focusing much on the sanitation, rather than other issues.

An official, on the condition of anonymity said that even after depositing funds in the Medical Corporation, the drugs/ medicines have not been issued to them, thus, compelling the patients to buy drugs from the market, which was, as per CAG report, 45 per cent, and is expected to be high currently.

During the meeting of Health Minister with other officials, according to the official statement, "procurement and availability of drugs, basic facilities in hospitals, fire fighting mechanism and availability of funds under different schemes were also discussed in detail during the meeting," however, there seems to be no relief on ground, as hospitals are still struggling to procure the basic medicines.

Fire fighting mechanism, as per the statement was also discussed. GB Panth Hospital—valley's lone Childcare Hospital—has been craving for setting up fire fighting mechanism in the hospital, interestingly, the hospital, since its inception has been functioning without any mechanism to deal with fire like situation.

The Government, over the years has not been able to relocate the shops that the Cantonment Board has built just outside the entrance of the hospital, which as per the administration, was meant to be a spot where the fire tenders would be stationed. Sources are saying that the Govt has not been able to fix a deal with the Cantonment Board, thus jeopardizing the lives of patients and attendants.

'Water sports creates awareness about water bodies'

❖ QULSOOMA AKHTER

SRINAGAR: Minister for Horticulture, Syed Basharat Bukhari today said that events like water sports create awareness among the younger generation about the importance of water bodies, besides enhancing individual's physical and mental fitness.

The Minister was speaking at a flag-off ceremony of annual Dal swim mega event organized by a private school Tyndale Biscoe here.

The Minister appreciated the school management for organizing the event and said conducting extra-curricular activities is helpful in exploring the talent, besides creating awareness about the significance of State's natural resources and water bodies particularly Dal Lake.

Mr. Bukhari said that other than physical and mental development, sports activities also help an individual to gain self-confidence, key to excel in any field of life. He said sports also help to grooming youth and inculcates qualities required to become global leaders who tomorrow can play a positive role in making a better society.

Wishing the participants good luck, Mr. Bukhari said the State has an abundance of raw talent in various fields of sports which with right mentoring and exposure at national and international level could help them to earn great laurels.

He also appreciated the school administration for making special arrangements to ensure safety of the participants. School administration informed the Minister that the event



is organized every year after imparting proper training to the participants.

Students from both junior and senior wings of Tyndale Biscoe participated in the event. The participants covered 5.5-kilometres cross and 11 kilometers re-cross distance by swimming from Nehru Park to Nishat.

The participants were cheered up by number of people including parents. Since early morning the enthused students lined up at Nehru Park to participate in the mega event keeping up with old tradition of the school.

Principal of the School Parvez Samuel Koul, parents of the participants and school administration staff was also presents on the occasion

FM Drabu flags off Real Kashmir FC to Scotland

Shahjhan Mughal

SRINAGAR: Minister for Finance, Dr Haseeb Drabu today flagged off a 25-member football team from Kashmir's premier Football Club, Real Kashmir FC, who will play with professional football clubs in Scotland.

Wishing them good luck, Dr Drabu said Jammu and Kashmir has a large pool of talent in various fields of sports that needs exposure in national and international arenas. "This visit will mark a major shift in the field of sports in J&K and I am sure you will do your best to bring laurels for your state. This is just a beginning and more such tours will be organized in coming days," he said. The team left for New Delhi on Monday where from they will fly out to Scotland on Wednesday. The team was flagged-off by Dr. Drabu in presence of President, J&K Football Association, Zameer Ahmad Thakur, along with several other key members of the Association.

The team has been invited by Stenhousemuir Football Club to play a pre-season friendly match in Larbert on July 8. With this, Real Kashmir FC will be the first club team from the valley to play on a foreign soil. "The team is excited about the prospect of getting an opportunity to play against a quality side which will help them improve their game," an official of the RKFC said.

'USE EASY URDU IN LAND RECORDS'



❖ **Ubeer Naqushbandi**

SRINAGAR: Revenue officials in the state are of the opinion that 90 per cent public grievances will be addressed if land records are written in simple Urdu.

They suggested the government to issue a circular for making the language in land records easy to read and also pushed for digitisation of records to streamline the functioning of the department. "If the revenue records are written in neat and clean Urdu by patwaris, 90 per cent of public grievances will get addressed automatically in the Revenue Department," said a Sub-District Magistrate of south Kashmir during a first-ever conference of revenue officers here that was attended by deputy commissioners. He said the difficult language used in land records had become a stumbling block in their digitisation. The government informed that out of 6.66 crore revenue documents, at least 78 lakh had already been scanned as part of the National Land Records Modernisation Programme (NLRMP).

Officials said 715 jamabandis had been prepared in the past four years in the state, while 3,266 were pending.

Abdul Rehman Dar, tehsildar, said the government should reform the decade-old revenue laws to make them effective and empower revenue officials. "For encroachment of land, a violator has to pay Rs 500 as fine under the revenue laws. This is a small amount," Dar said. Other revenue officials pitched for having an independent district collector and internal vigilance cell to contain corruption in the department. "In the last 27 years of conflict, no revenue official has been killed. Had they been corrupt, things would have been different," said Abdul Hamid Mir, Assistant Commissioner, Revenue, Srinagar, who criticised the state vigilance organisation for "creating a perception" that revenue officials were corrupt. The Revenue Minister said the government was mulling to bring in land conversion Bill to stop the use of agriculture land for construction purposes. However, he said the state needed both land conversion Bill and a housing policy to address the needs of growing population.

GST hiked prices rue commoners

❖ **Shaheena Rahim**

SRINAGAR: With the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) in the J&K state, the rates of daily use commodities and services have soared giving a tough time to the commoners.

After the GST the rate of some goods and services will be hiked from 5% to 28%. Earlier, the rate of a cigarette pack brand 'Four Square' cost consumer Rs 50 and another commodity 'Good Day' biscuit of Britannia used to cost Rs 20. Now after the implementation of GST, the rate of the same brand of cigarette will be Rs 55 and the rate of the same biscuit will be Rs 24.

Apart from edible items, the prices of hair oil have also been hiked by 18%. Earlier 'Dabur Alma' hair oil's 250 ml bottle would cost Rs 65 now with GST it would be available with the hike of 18% to the rate that used to be earlier.

A cup of coffee and tea are also going to be costlier for the common man. "Taking sips and enjoying cup of tea and coffee is becoming costly for us, this GST has made all those commodities costlier for a common man," a shopkeeper at Lal chowk, Abdul Karim

"Already the rates of commodities are very high and with the implementation of GST here, it would become very tough for a common man," he added. A group of pedestrian

while expressing concern over GST told Kashmir Vision that in the garb of GST, government is looting "common people." "Instead of making it easy for people like us to live a simple life and addressing the problems of common man, government is making it tougher."

Pertinently, On 7 July J&K Assembly passed the GST bill. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is a uniform

indirect tax levied on goods and services across the country. The GST regime came in force from July 1, in all the states of Indian except J&K State.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir tabled the resolution on GST in the State Legislative Assembly for the discussion during the special session that was called after the opposition and the trade bodies alleged that the extension of GST

will be a dent to the special status of the state and will lead to the erosion of Article 370.

GST, as an umbrella tax, will replace central taxes such as central excise duty, Service Tax, Additional Duties of Excise & Customs, Special Additional Duty of Customs, and cesses and surcharges on supply of goods and services. It will also replace State taxes like VAT, Central Sales Tax, Purchase Tax, Entry Tax, and Entertainment Tax, taxes on advertisements, lotteries, betting and gambling, and state cesses and surcharges.



CAG says state has no policy for testing drugs

Drug issued for supply to patients before testing

❖ **Sharoz Khushal**

SRINAGAR This may be a shock, but the reality is that the state's Health Department has not any set policy in place for testing of drugs/ medicines that are administered to the patients at various hospitals in the state.

The testing includes making sure the medicines in the warehouse are yet fit for consumption, and to check the quality of medicines that are procured from different companies. As per CAG Audit report such a kind mechanism is non-existent in the state's health department, thus risking the lives on a larger scale.

"Audit noticed (November 2014) that no policy guidelines were put in place for testing of drugs before these are administered to patients," the report said, adding that though the Rate Contracts finalized by various Purchase Committees for procurement of drugs provide for furnishing of the Analytical Reports by the suppliers, however, audit observed that there was no mechanism in place for referral of samples by the health institutions for testing to the Drug Controller or to third party accredited laboratories.

What is shocking is that the Audit has come across instances where large scale drugs procured by the

Department had been issued for supply to patients before they were lifted for testing by Drug and Food Control Organisation (DFO) and declared as Not of Standard Quality.'

The Director Finance, in December 2014 stated that the role of the DFO was purely regulatory in nature and was restricted to lifting of samples on random basis by means of regular surveillance and of late, steps had been taken to enhance the testing capacity by roping labs in the Public sector.

The Director Finance, according to the report, further stated in September 2015 that the Controller, DFO had been made vibrant and proactive to ensure optimal testing of drugs/ medicines to the best of its capacity.

The Audit said that the reply was not convincing "as lack of policy guidelines for ensuring third party testing of drugs/ medicines procured was an area of concern which had resulted in issuance of sub-standard drugs/ medicines for supply to patients."

Health institutions procure drugs/ medicines in bulk through approved Rate Contracts and from the local market. A policy mechanism of testing is required to be put in place to ensure quality of the supplies before these are administered to patients, the report observed.

PAC discusses CAG's Audit Paras related to SWD

❖ Yawar Shafi

SRINAGAR: The Public Accounts (PAC) of Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly met here today under the Chairmanship of MLA Mohammad Akbar Lone and discussed CAGs Audit Paras pertaining to the Social Welfare and Tribal Affairs Department.

The specific issues relating to the payment of scholarships for un-recognized computer courses/ institutions, payment to ineligible students, direct release of payments to the computer institutions/ centres, sanctioning of scholarship on different applications etc were prominently discussed.

While going through the audit para regarding wasteful expenditure due to change of Executing Agency, engaged for construction of a 300 bedded hospital at Anantang resulted in wastful expenditure of Rs 21.55 lakhs incurred on drawing and conceptual plan, the Panel decided to constitute a Departmental Committee headed by Director Finance, Health and Medical Education who will go into the details and submit its report in next meeting of PAC for its scrutiny.

Legislators, Aijaz Ahmad Khan, Mohammad Yousuf Bhat, Pawan Kumar



Gupta, R.S. Pathania, Firdous Ahmed Tak and Ghulam Nabi Monga attended the meeting and gave their valuable suggestions for further improvement in the working of Social Welfare & Tribal Affairs Department.

The Committee also expressed its concern over the pending pension cases of old age, widow, handicapped and other allied categories, which are lying pending in the department and directed the Assembly Secretariat to write a letter to the Principal Secretary, Finance department to personally explain the liabilities in this regard before the committee in its next meeting.

The Committee also sought the views of the then Executive Engineer, R&B

Udhampur and the then District Social Welfare Officer, Udhampur for not adopting the proper procedure for construction of the Girls Hostel at Udhampur. The Director General Accounts & Treasuries was directed to issue instructions to the Secretary Tribal Affairs to prepare the audit report/ certificate from the period 2015 onwards.

Secretary Tribal Affairs, Salma Hamid briefed the committee about the action taken by the department on the issues raised in the CAGs audit paras. She assured that all the queries raised by the CAGs in its report would be completed at the earliest.

Accountant General, CAG, H. Abbas, Directors Social Welfare Kashmir/ Jammu also briefed the committee about the observations made by the CAG. Some paras were dropped by the Committee after convincing reasons by the concerned.

Among others, Commissioner/ Secretary Social Welfare, Sajad Ahmed Khan, Director General Accountant & Treasuries, Altaf Hussan, MD, SC/ST/ BC Development Corporation, MD, JKWDC, Director Tribal Affairs, Additional Secretary, Legislative Assembly, besides senior officers of Departments of Social Welfare, Tribal Affairs and Assembly Secretariat were present in the meeting.

Indian Professional football club based in Jammu & Kashmir

Ather Shah

SRINAGAR: Lonestar Kashmir Football Club is a professional Indian football club based in Jammu and Kashmir. They participated in their first national level competition when they competed in the 2015 I-League 2nd Division.

Lonestar Kashmir is affiliated with Jammu & Kashmir Football Association and participates in state tournaments. In 2013, LoneStar group became the primary sponsor of the group and registered it as the private company to fulfill AIFF club licensing criteria. The club namely Kashmir FC is registered with J&K Football Association and is being participating in all major tournaments of the State. In the end of the 2013 season LoneStar Group registered Kashmir FC under private companies Act as per the AIFF Club licensing criteria. The idea was to introduce a Kashmir based club in professional football map of the country. Lonestar being the owner and the sole sponsor of the Club is running its Head Office at C-Mart Bagaat Barzulla Srinagar and BO at Polo View Srinagar and Jammu as well.

As far as the Club Secretariat is concerned Mr. Iftikhar A Lone is the owner and Chairman of the Club. Mr. N A Khan, Former President, JKFA is the Executive Director, Farmaan A Lone (Director), Mr. Z A Thakur (Director) and Majid Yousuf as Sec/Gen. Man. of the Club.

Head Coach of the Team is Mr. Hilal Rasool who is AFC PRO License Coach and recently appointed Mr. Sajid Dar (renowned AIFF Coach) as Technical Director of the Club. Club has also appointed a good panel of Assistant Coaches for teams and youth development programmers.

Top 22 players from J&K State are contracted with the Club and are in full preparation for making their debut in I League. The club is also having a good combination of Foreign and outside State Players. The target is to qualify at least for the main rounds this season. "we love our players and the brand of football Kashmir has its unique and has a lot of history that defines the football once Kashmir had but now are ready to bring back what the Kashmir football has lost over the years" said Mr. Hilal Rasool.

18 year old rag picker is now SMC's brand ambassador

❖ Mudasir Majeed

SRINAGAR: Bilal Ahmad Dar a 15 year old ragpicker, hails from North Kashmiri's Bandipora district earning his livelihood from Asia's famous wular lake picking up waste plastic materials from the lake from last several years, now is Srinagar Municipal Corporations brand ambassador. From last several years Bilal a ragpicker resident of Laharwarpora of Bandipora district removing waste plastic materials from Wularlake and selling it for Rs 200 everyday which helps him to support his family. He is the lone son to his family.

Bilal Ahmad son of late Mohammad Ramzandar a former ragpicker of the wular lake died years ago by suffering a cancer. Death of a father put all the responsibilities of home and caring of mother and a sister on Bilal's young and innocent shoulders. I was in class 6th when troubles came in our courtyard, my fathers death in my young

age left no other choice for me to go out and earn to feed my mother and a sister - who is now married said Bilal Ahmad.

It was since the death of my father, I became a lone bread earner for my mother, nodoubt there were many dreams bringing up in my heart during my tough



school days but all those dreams washed up forever when all the responsibilities of my home went on my shoulders said Bilal Ahmad.

Bilal is my everything, he is an obedient and a self-reliant son who never left me

alone in my troubles and always takecares of my tears whenever they come out from my poor and wet eyes said Mughli, mother of Bilal.

Undoubtedly, Bilal - a ragpicker is one of the unsung hero of Kashmir valley who is doing less to himself and more to others.

While cleaning the wular lake from dead animals, trash and other waste materials he earns some penny for his mother but saves the life of tens and thousands of people living inside the wular lake.

However, keeping in view this courageous and condemnable work of Bilal he has been appointed as the brand ambassador of Srinagar Municipal Corporation. As many Kashmir dallies reported that SMC will provide him a special uniform of SMC and a vehicle to meet and interact different people from different areas and will educate them about his life, work in wular and will also persuade them to use a best way of garbage disposal in their respective areas.

Rangpora Elahibagh without drinking water, residents aghast

❖ Sajidah Yousuf

SRINAGAR: Residents of Rangpora area of Elahibagh in Srinagar District on Wednesday staged protest demonstration over water scarcity in the area. They blocked the Soura – Hazratbal road for quite some time. A large number of locals, especially women, raised slogans against PHE department. The inhabitants alleged the department has failed to provide water supply as per schedule since one week.

The residents of Umer Colony Ranpora in Elahibagh area of Srinagar district on Wednesday held

protests against the Public Health Engineering (PHE) department due to the shortage of drinking water in the area.

The residents said they have to travel long distances to fetch drinking water. “A water supply scheme meant for the area is unable to cater to the needs, as Umer colony is the last area to receive the water supply from the scheme. The pressure of the water is such that even a glass takes several minutes to get filled,” said Nazir Ahmad, a local resident.

“It is very unfortunate that in the present age of technology where

the people now think of higher standards, we are being deprived of the basic amenities of life,” Zahida Begum, another resident said.

The residents claimed that another water supply scheme has been set on River Jhelum, but, ironically it is for a particular colony. They claimed if it was upgraded then the problem of water could be compensated considerably. The residents appealed the local legislator to look into the matter.

When MERC TIMES Contacted Executive Engineer PHE Srinagar, He said I will look into the matter and the grievance will be redressed soon.

Kashmir’s own Social networking site



KashBook-Kashmir's First Social Networking Portal
And Yeah It Works Without A VPN!

GET IT ON Google Play
iOS App Coming Soon

<https://www.kashbookkb.com>

Query Mail Us At:
help@kashbookkb.com

Instagram: /@ka
Facebook: /Kas
Twitter: /@ka

networking, and has named it asKashBook-Kashmir’s own social network.

Zeyan, a class 10 student, initially launched the site in 2013 along with his friend Uzair Jain. Now, with the social media ban, the site has resurfaced as an app in Google Play store, attracting thousands of users to download and thus bring it into use. The ultimate win for the app is that users get an option to communicate in the Kashmiri language.

❖ Shahbaz Qutub

ANANTNAG. 16-Year-Old Boy’s Homegrown Version of Facebook Helps Kashmiris Overcome the Social Media Ban Developed by ZeyanShafiq, an Anantnag resident, the app gives local people a chance to communicate using the Kashmiri language.

The people in Kashmir lived life without Internet for several months last year since April which has been impossible and hard in this digital world. No Facebook, no Twitter and no Whatsapp. Citing the misuse of social networking sites by anti-national elements, the state government had imposed a ban on about 22 websites that included Facebook and Twitter in Kashmir. In the face of a widespread social media ban, a 16-year old boy has developed an app that would keep local people connected.

ZeyanShafiq, hailing from Anantnag, has created his own version of Social

“The government has blocked access to all the social networks and they are blocking VPNs too. So, when they’ll block the whole access to social media then how will people from valley stay connected with each other? KashBook is the answer to social media gag,” Zeyan said, as reported by TOI.

While many have resorted to using VPN connection, so they can defy the ban and access various social media websites, KashBook works without the need for such connections, making it easier for people to access and help people add other people and chat with them or post messages; just like Facebook. Zeyan has said that he hopes to use the app in promoting goods and services made in Kashmir.

“Besides, many young people can learn from this initiative and take this as a challenge and invent and develop new things which can serve as tools for betterment of Kashmir and Kashmiris,” he added.

Overloading in buses goes unabated in Kashmir

❖ Pirzada Shakir

SRINAGAR: Over Loading in buses across Kashmir has become a serious issue which poses threats to the life of passengers as well as pedestrians. Every time people complain about the overloading in buses to the authorities but no proper action is taken in this regard which has become nothing less than headache for the people. Failure of Traffic department to check overloading in the buses in Kashmir district is taking a heavy toll on the passengers.

In city story is also worse. Drivers do not ply buses unless they get over crowded. They do not care about the time and plans of the passengers. Drivers have taken rules and regulations of Traffic for ride.

“I have to leave for University early at 08:00 am as it takes me 2 hours at least to reach university. Otherwise I live only 15 kms away from university, it is because of drivers who make undue stops for making buses overloaded with passengers which waste my time” said a Kashmir University student.

“The buses don’t run till they are overcrowded. If all the seats in the buses are booked and the passengers would tell the driver to leave, he would straight away tell the passenger that ‘he cannot leave till all the spaces in the bus are filled’,” said a passenger.

“It is common people who

face problems while travelling that is why Government do not take note of the problem which we face. Our day plans breathe their last on boarding a public bus as they do not ply take time and urgency of passengers into consideration. We demand action to be taken against violaters so that people do not face problems.” Said another passenger.

Due to overloading in buses passengers are either found hanging on the footsteps of the buses or sitting on the roof tops. The overloading in buses is more of a problem for women who often face inconvenience in public buses.

When talked to SSP Traffic Srinagar SargunShukla she told that it is responsibility of RTO who is authorized to cancel license of drivers who violate traffic rules. Despite shortage of man power we have been trying our best to implement rules and regulations. But at the same time it is responsibility of people not to overload buses. Moreover, we have Traffic helpline also that is (18001807091) where passengers can complaint about violations by drivers whether it is overloading or something else.

In the past, also, the issue of overloading has been highlighted, but the drivers continue to accommodate passengers more than their carrying capacity and take the traffic rules for a toss.

Locals help Amarnath yatris, offers food, shelter

Kashmiris have extraordinary love, respect to offer

❖ **Pardeep Singh**

SRINAGAR: Kashmiris Wednesday yet again set an example of Kashmiri ethos by providing help and food to the pilgrims of Amarnath Yatra at Awantipora whose bus suddenly halted on the national highway due to some mechanical snag.

A bus carrying Amarnath Yatris started its journey towards Jammu from Baltal and at around 7 pm the bus driver suddenly stopped the bus. After few minutes, the conductor informed the passengers that the bus broke down and may need some urgent repairs without which the bus cannot move.

In the same area, on Monday

evening this week, bus carrying Amarnath Yatris was attacked by unknown gunmen, killing 7 and injuring 19 others. Interesting, the bus came to halt only three kilometres away from the said spot, thus, adding to the fear.

The memories of Monday incident were still fresh in their minds, with the result panic gripped passengers. The fear grew even stronger as it was all dark outside.

The driver was still trying to devise ways to repair the faults, when suddenly a group of locals appeared out of nowhere and offered their help to the stranded yatris.

Anil Sharma, a pilgrim hailing from

Aurangabad who was also in the bus told MERC Times' that, "When we were in the state of helplessness, locals whole heartedly came for our help."

"When we saw a group of people is moving towards us (bus), panic overpowered us. However, when they reached nearer, they (locals) politely asked our driver 'Bhaisaabkyabaat, sab thikhai, hmreliye koi hukamhai (Brother what is the matter, everything thing ok? Can we help you in anyway?)," Anil said.

Another yatri, Pooja Raina, hailing from Kanpur while praises the work of locals said Kashmiris are full loving and helpful people.

"I got puzzled to see the way local

people were offering us help and food. Also, they offered us to spend the night at their homes without any fear," she said, adding that the scene was unforgettable for her.

"I appeal people to visit Kashmir without any fear, you will never find the love and respect Kashmiris have to offer," she added.

The bus was carrying 50 passengers, including 15 females and 35 males, belonging to Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh.

Later, Jammu and Kashmir Police personnel also reached to the spot and shifted the passengers to the nearby Police station where they spend rest of the night.

SKIMS day-care ward in shambles



❖ **Madhiya Nabi**

SRINAGAR: The day-care ward of SKIMS (Sheri Kashmir institute of medical science), lacks the basic facilities for its cancer patients like clean toilets, less number of beds, proper staff.

The day care ward (IP), meant for cancer patients and to treat the registered cancer patients with chemotherapy and radiotherapy have left the patients high and dry. There are around three shifts, for giving chemotherapy to the patients. Each shift contains over sixty registered students.

"I have been waiting here with my patient, since 7 a.m and it is almost 11:30 a.m, still waiting for my turn. moreover, my brother is not able-bodied to wait for too long and withstand this untidy atmosphere he is prone to infection. The condition of washroom is worst, toilets are blocked", said an attendant, Bashir Ahmed hailing from Kupwara.

The total number of beds in the only

cancer day care ward are twenty-four. P number of cancer patients treated in a day care ward day are around 180-200. Moreover, the basic requirement for cancer patients is the healthy and clean environment, there is only one washroom in the whole cancer ward, It lacks proper sanitation and also lack of water tapes and bolts inside the loo. To serve the ailing patients there are only three staff members and it almost takes them around 25 minutes to make a drug for one cancer patient.

when contacted to Prof Sheikh Ajaz, he said "we have received a lot of complaints from the patients, staff etc. In Sha Allah, all the grievances will be addressed as patients and their health are of the prime importance to us".

"we will soon open the other day-care ward which is almost complete, which will surely put the full stop to the continuous grievances coming from our patients and attendants" said Dr. Ahanger, the director of SKIMS institute.

Historic Kalaie crumbles in Shar-e-Khaas

Firdous Azad

SRINAGAR: Kalie Ander, a historical wall in Srinagar downtown area has crumbled at various points that has resulted in its continuous deterioration on the everyday basis.

The Kalai is a protected monument. However, the wall is facing encroachments from all sides. The stretch between Hawalarea to Kathidarwaza area is in worst condition. The tourism department had taken its renovation in their hands but the condition of the wall has not improved.

"Since March 2017 this year the wall has crumbled thrice, the crumbled debris may prove deadly for the life and property. There is a risk to our lives and property as well" said Rameez, a local of the area.

"Every day we fear that its portion may fall on our houses. The wall could become a revenue earner provided it is renovated and looked after properly," said another resident Nayeem.

Due to the crumbling debris the locals have to suffer many other ordeals. According to commoners they cannot walk in the lanes around the wall as the wall could crumble at any second.

Locals alleged that the wall during renovation was reduced to 2 meters from 10 meters



"I still remember how I used to climb over the wall and watch cricket matches being played at Kashkashbagh the memories of the eastern part of Kalai are still afresh in my memory" said an elderly Muhammad Akbar Khan.

The Jammu and Kashmir government had approached centre, seeking amount worth 50 crore for developing and preserving Nagar Nagar in the Sher-e-Khas (Srinagar), however as of now the 4.7 km structure around the Hari Parbat hill continues to be encroached upon by different private structures.

"The workmanship and the grandeur of this place reveals the architectural history of Kashmir it should be government's prime concern to renovate it in order to restore its original zeal," said Abdul Ahad, a local shopkeeper.

Director Tourism Kashmir, Mehmood Shah told MERC Times that he is aware about the matter.

"We have taken up this issue with R&B department and shortly they are going to repair it," Director said.

J&K rugby team leaves for Patna



Aaqib Hyder

SRINAGAR: Rugby team of Jammu and Kashmir was flagged off from Gindun multi purpose Sports Ground Rajbagh by Joint Secretary Sports Council to participate in Rugby senior nationals in Patna.

The nationals will be held from 11th August to 13th August 2017 in Patna. The team that left for nationals include 24 senior players; 12 boys and 12 girls. Four officials including General Secretary Jammu and Kashmir Rugby Association Irfan Aziz are also part of the tour. He is also the head coach of J&K Rugby team.

Speaking on the occasion, Irfan Aziz said, "I have high hopes for my team. Competition is going to be tough. The opponents are very strong but I am sure my team will rise to the occasion and make our state proud."

Captain of the Rugby girls senior Sheikh Sajidah said, "I will try to give my best in the field as a player and as the captain also. I am very confident about all of us being highly motivated and hopefully we will make everyone proud."

Film Appreciation Course concludes at Media Department, Kashmir University

❖ MERC Desk

SRINAGAR: The five day film appreciation course conducted by Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in collaboration with Media Education Research Centre, Kashmir University concluded at Media Auditorium, Kashmir University on Friday.

During the course media students were trained in different nuances of film appreciation and cinema. Many International and National movies were screened at the Media House which included 2016 Lotus National Award winning movie "Kasav" directed by Sumitra Bhawe.

Director Sumitra Bhawe while sharing her experience said, "Films are not meant for audience and awards, but to explore our life. We can come out of depression by going deep into life as everybody wants love and compassion, but we are losing it. And, that is why we are in the present situation of dwelling mental illness".

Actress Irawati Harshe while sharing her experience said "Losing the source of connection with each other is the root cause of depression."

She further added that people in Kashmir are very loving and interactive; it was nice to be among such a beautiful group of students. I would like students to be in touch as I found them bright and fun loving.

Director National Film Archive of India (NFAD) Prakash Magdum informed, "It is the only organization under government of India which is actively working for preserving of films in India and we have preserved 30 silent films.

He further added that we have also preserved three films from



Kashmir, which includes Kashmir's first silent film "Mainz Raat" directed by Jagjiram Pal in 1964. The other two films are Shayar-e- Kashmir Mahjoor directed by Prabhat Mukherjee in 1972 and Babaji directed by Joyti Sarup in 2001.

Coordinator MERC Faruq Masudi, while concluding the session said, "I would like to thank faculty of FTII and MERC for conducting this workshop smoothly. And, in near future FTII in collaboration with MERC will be conducting seminars for the preparation of entrance examination of FTII. The film appreciation course was beneficial to students as it provided new insights and perspective to the film as an art form".

He further said that film is a strong medium for Kashmiris to present their stories to the world and course like these by FTII will hone their talent.



Noorbagh hospital awaits completion since decade

❖ Aneesa Khan

SRINAGAR: Ten years on Gulshan area, Noorbagh, has been awaiting completion of the work on 30-bedded Habba Khatoon Maternity and Children Hospital.

The work on the building was started in 2007 and is still going on at snail's pace. Till now only more than 50 per cent of the construction has been completed. The locals of the area said the government's failure to complete the construction work within specified time has annoyed them.

"The administration has been indifferent towards our problems. The slow speed of the construction is visible, but no one is ready to accept the failure," said Haseena, a resident of Noorbagh. Abdul Rehman, a local, added: "The upgrading of this hospital is a joke. It will never be made functional. Neither

Administration nor doctors are bothered about its functionality."

He also said the administration never visited the hospital, while the doctors only follow their choices.



There are four doctors and 25 paramedics working in the incomplete hospital building.

"The delay in the completion of the hospital shows the lazy attitude of the government towards the healthcare sector. My wife is pregnant and I have to

go to different hospitals for simple check-ups. It would be better if the hospital is made functional as soon as possible," said Rafeeq Ahmad, a resident of Noorbagh.

An official, wishing anonymity, admitted that the construction is slow. "It is very difficult to say whether this hospital will be made fully functional ever. We have a lot of problems here, like there is no drainage system, unavailability of doctors, and lack of basic medical facilities."

Director Health Services Kashmir, Dr Saleem-ur-Rehman, said, "We recently sent a proposal to the government for creation of the posts. We are working on it. We have completed most of the construction work and have asked the hospital authorities to use the services so that people don't have to suffer anymore." He said the pending construction work will be completed within stipulated time.

Alooichi Bagh Residents facing water scarcity from past one year



❖ Farheen Qureshi

SRINAGAR: Lack of water facility in Alooichi Bagh, Srinagar has forced residents to come out on streets and block the road meant for the ongoing traffic.

The Alooichi Bagh residents have been facing water scarcity from past one year. Disgruntled residents took to streets on Friday and blocked the road affecting the vehicular movement for about two hours.

"We have been facing water shortage for the past one year, and are able to use water only two days a week," said Haleema, resident of Alooichi Bagh

"We have talked to the authorities regarding this matter but there is no response from their side. We have blocked the road earlier as well but to no avail," said Firdous Shah

Shah further said "We know taking to streets and blocking the road is creating a lot of mess, but authorities are responsible as they have turned deaf ears to our concerns."

Chief Engineer Public Health Engineering (PHE), G.M Bhat said "We have received the complaints before as well and we are trying to resolve this issue as soon as possible."

"We have to install a pipe there and the problem will be solved forever" added Bhat

Ishfaq Ahmad, one of the commuters said "This is a major concern as the residents have blocked the road several times. It is creating a lot of mess because this route is part of a current diversion plan thus wasting our precious time."

Skill development Programme on composite fish culture held

A free-spirited ethos exists in Ramadan with fasting, food and congregational Tarawih

SKILL DEVELOPMENT



Syed Burhan

SRINAGAR: Fish Farmers Development Agency organized a 3 day long Skill development programme on composite fish culture. The programme was held in order to make fish farmers aware about the advancements taking place in the field. The capacity building programme was sponsored by National Fish Seed Development Board Hyderabad and 50 farmers including women from 10 districts of the Valley participated.

Interacting with the farmers on the occasion, the speakers exhorted to increase the frequency and scope of such programmes. They said such programmes lead to exchange of inter-personal experience of cultural practices and

disseminations of latest methods in fish farming.

Minister for Animal, Sheep Husbandry and Fisheries Abdul Gani Kohli was also present on the occasion. He distributed a compensation cheque of Rs 1 lakh to a fisherman who had met an accident during fishing. He said that the focused attention is being given to promote fish culture in the State and in this regard various flagship programmes including Blue Revolutionary Scheme has been introduced in the State.

The Farmers put forth their demands and suggestions on the

occasion which include covering Private Fish Farmers under Fish Insurance Scheme. They also appealed the Minister to provide proper transportation facility to private farmers so that they can send their produce to markets without delay. The Minister gave them a patient hearing and assured them that their genuine demands will be looked into very soon.

The training programme included practical training demonstration lectures, field visits, debates and discussions, question and answer sessions, dissemination and distribution of fish culture material like brochures, manuals and other allied reading material. The Minister also distributed certificates of participation among the participants of the programme.

Sopore bypass bridge develops cracks



❖ **Mohammad Imran Naikoo**

SRINAGAR: The Sopore Bypass Bridge, which took 23 years to complete till 2015 when Mufti Sayeed opened it for traffic, has again developed big cracks.

Sayeed had in his speech at the inauguration of the bridge termed it the “first pillar of development” laid by the PDP-BJP coalition. However, like its construction years, the bridge is again mired in controversies as people question the safety of operating vehicles on the conduit.

“First it took 23 years to build, too long for any project. Just six months into its inauguration, the bridge was closed – from – for the conduct of a ‘road test’, which raised many doubts. The road test should have been done before the bridge was opened for traffic.

In February 2016, big cracks started developing in the middle of the bridge following which the bridge was closed for survey between February 27 to March 10. Beacon, the agency responsible for the maintenance of the bridge, had said that norms were flaunted for the bridge as pressure from higher authorities had made them open the bridge without proper safety tests.

MERC TIMES tried to contact Beacon but the agency didn’t respond to repeated calls.

Zakir Khan, 37, a businessman who travels every day on Sopore bridge told MERC TIMES that Sopore town has been ignored by every government in power, whether it was National conference, Congress or PDP because of the town’s pro-freedom reputation. “When Mufti Sayeed came into power, he thought this is the best opportunity to gain support in Sopore. In a rush to showcase its development credentials, he inaugurated the bridge without having it checked properly, risking the lives of thousands of commuters,” Khan said.

Fayaz Ahmad Malik, Ex president of Sopore fruit Mandi, said that Sopore Bypass Bridge was vital for business in Sopore, but the condition of the bridge was such that fruit trucks found the bridge unsafe.

Haji Abdul Rashid Dar, MLA Sopore, said that he failed to understand what made the coalition government throw the bridge open as it was not fit for use. He said it was like risking lives of people and asked for investigation into the case. “I will also raise this issue in the assembly, whenever I will get a chance,” he said.

Additional Deputy Commissioner of Sopore, Khursheed Ahmad Shah, said that his office was preparing a report about the damages appearing in the bridge. “I came to know about the damages today. I visited the spot, and I will immediately report this to the higher authorities. Hopefully they are going to start an investigation into this matter as soon as possible,” he said.

JAMAIT TULBA ORGANIZES INTER-COLLEGE DEBATE



❖ **Hikmatyar**

SRINAGAR: An inter-college debate competition on “Free education” was organized by “Talaba society” a students organization and sponsored by High brand electronics in degree college Kulgam on 20th July 2017. Total twelve participants spoke in favor of the topic that free

education up to the secondary level should be the fundamental right of every child. Simultaneously six contestants spoke on the motion. Many college lecturers, students and parents were there to listen to the different ideas of the students. Mohsin Altaf, a participant pleaded that “without education a man is just like a devil that can disrupt the life of a nation. It is the education

that ennobles our souls and removes darkness from our minds.” “Education is a window that opens channels to achieve the highest learning. It joins us with the master minds of other nations, whose achievements can be made use of, in the best possible way. Getting education up to secondary level should be the right of every child.” Said a second semester student Tajamul Islam. The function was a grand success. Chief Guest, the Deputy collector, exhorted the president of the Talaba society to organize such type of competitions on regular basis; as such debate opens the minds of the students and makes them a good citizen.

12 years on, Uri’s quake- hit school still functions in a shed

IDREES BUKHTIYAR

URI (BARAMULLA): Belying tall claims of the government of providing quality infrastructure and education to students, a primary school in north Kashmir’s Uri town has been functioning in a makeshift shed for more than a decade.

Government Girls Middle School Garkote is functioning in a temporary shed after the school building was damaged in the devastating earthquake of 2005.

According to students and staff, they have to face immense hardships due to lack of proper accommodation.

“In 2005 earthquake, the school building was completely damaged and since then we are teaching in a nearby makeshift shed,” said a teacher posted in the school.

With lack of proper infrastructure and insufficient space in the shed, the students are forced to often study under open sky.

“At least five classes are being conducted under open sky every day. These small children have to bear the hot and cold weather vagaries. And when it rains they have an off day,” he said.

The teachers said that they have to accommodate at least 80 students in the shed.

“The makeshift shed has been divided by ply-board sheets to make students from KG to 8th class sit in six small rooms. The students jostle in the shed and feel suffocated,” said another teacher.

The temporary shed is without doors, windows and matting causing immense inconvenience to the



students. The teachers alleged that they approach the Zonal Education Officer (ZEO) Uri every year with a written application for the reconstruction of the school building.

“The ZEO always says that the school has been built on the custodial land and no help can be provided from the department,” the teachers said.

Zonal Education Officer (ZEO) Uri, Abdul Rasheed, said that, “nobody among the locals is providing them land to reconstruct the school”.

“It is our departmental procedure that if somebody would provide us the land for the school construction, we provide them with compensation but nobody has turned up so far,” the ZEO added.

Deputy Chief Education Officer Baramulla, Manzoor Ahmad Wani, told MERC Times: “I have no knowledge regarding this school but will definitely look into the matter.”

4 MONTHS ON, DALGATE FIRE VICTIMS AWAIT REHABILITATION



❖ Mahdeesa Altaf

SRINAGAR: After being rendered homeless by a devastating fire incident on 4th April this year, the government has failed to provide any kind of relief to the 26 victim families of Fisher Mohalla of Abi-nowpora area of Srinagar. The families have been left to fend for themselves for past three months.

Talking to MERC Times, Firdosa Jan, a victim said “We are now living in makeshift tents built of logs on Dal waters. There is an eminent threat to the safety of our children and my one year old daughter Shifa Jan has already fallen in the lake thrice while playing.”

The fire broke out at 12:30 pm on April 4, 2017 due to a short circuit which destroyed many houses leaving 26 families devastated.

“Today if we are alive it is only because of the Allah’s mercy. Had we waited for the fire service department, we would have probably died. They

came late and it is only through our own efforts we prevented further damage.” Firdosa added.

The affected families said there has been no help from the administration so far. Rubeena another victim said she has been living in a roofless Shikara along with her family since the incident.

“My husband Abdul Majeed who is a bus conductor and our two infant daughters are living now in this Shikara. We have to eat, sleep and do everything we have to in this Shikara only. We have nowhere to go,” says Rubeena.

Deputy Commissioner Srinagar Farooq Ahmad Lone told MERC Times that they are already working on a rehabilitation programme for these victims. Lone said that temporary residential facilities have been arranged by the district administration in the form of makeshift tents for the fire victim families.

“They will be rehabilitated soon. If anybody hasn’t received the tents, he/she can approach DC office Srinagar” he added.

Fondant cakes course concluded at IHM

❖ Musaib Hafiz

SRINAGAR Young girls were proudly rolling out their beautiful creations of fondant cakes on July 20 2017 to score maximum and earn certification from Institute of Hotel Management Srinagar.

Around 24 students had enrolled for the two week course of ‘Fondant and Icing’ in bakery which they successfully completed from May 29, 2017 to June 12, 2017.

During the course, the students were trained in baking different varieties of breads, cakes, cookies, donuts, tarts and other bakery items.

On the valedictory function today, the students created colorful cakes brightened up with innovative designs and techniques as if the master designer had put his creations on display.

The girls seem to be too clever not to miss out on promoting their cakes on popular photo-sharing application like Instagram which has fetched them orders from the fondant cake lovers.

Now baking custom-made beautifully decorated cakes for any occasion and according to your theme, colour, motif or even your favourite character is their new hobby and part-time profession.

Two sisters Sabha and Zehra from



Rambagh enrolled in the course after completing their MBA in Finance.

“Now we can bake the cakes of any design according to the orders by the party,” says Zehra who is visibly very happy to have acquired the baking skills.

Zehra made two-tier cake having vanilla sponge base and chocolate fondant. Her sister designed fondant butterflies to earn certificate.

“We already sold around 12 cakes after completing our course here. I feel happy to be able to create and design theme based cakes,” says Zehra.

Another student Sanna Imtiyaz from Baghat Barzulla aspires to be a doctor, she has already sold many cakes through her Instagram account. Sanna had created an adorable unicorn cake to show her skills on this exam day.

Another two sisters Shyma Khan and Sara Khan from Nishat have also followed the suit. Shyma has also enrolled herself in tourist facilitator course at the institute.

This is for the first time any such course has been organized in Jammu and Kashmir. Some of the successful entrepreneurs in baking had to visit Delhi

or other cities to learn such an art.

Bakery expert and faculty at IHM, Srinagar Prayag Narayan Rathore who hails from Madhya Pradesh said that he is happy to see the overwhelming response towards the art of baking and cake decoration as it will also developed and hone entrepreneur skills in the students.

Mehreen Kapra who is now known in the city for baking gorgeous cakes has been their teacher in the course.

Mehreen is happy that such a course has been started in Srinagar for the girls who wanted to try baking.

“It is for the first time that such a course has been conducted in entire J&K. The girls had to visit Delhi for such course. In the first batch we got good response from the girls,” says Mehreen Kapra.

The 2-week course is open for anyone at Rs 7500 at IHM, Srinagar. IHM plans to offer more such courses in future.

Principal IHM, Srinagar Nisheeth Srivastava said they wanted to offer such courses which can be taken up as a hobby.

“Many people learn things as a hobby. We have designed these courses who have passion for cooking. They can enjoy cooking and share sumptuous meals with their friends and family,” said the principal

Spinning pashmina wool losing its thread in valley



❖ **Nausheen Naseer**

SRINAGAR: The age old art of spinning and weaving in Kashmir may soon be a thing of the past as a growing number of women are turning away from it owing to a number of reasons.

Ashraf Nabi, a trader from Lal Bazaar, says that over the years the number of spinners has been slowly declining. "Earlier it used to be the main occupation

of women but now they are turning to other more lucrative businesses," he said. "If this continues, then this art like many other things will soon be extinct in Kashmir."

He says the lack of good wages is one of the main reasons behind the declining numbers. "They buy 10 grams of raw pashmina for Rs 70 or Rs 80, which means later when they sell the handspun yarn for Rs 130, they actually earn a

profit of only Rs 60-70," he said.

"On an average we spin 10 grams of raw pashmina in a week. Out of these 10 grams, we make around 130 knots. For every single knot we make, they earn one rupee, which means their earnings are mostly Rs 130 per week," said Amina, a spinner from Zakura.

Another problem is the use of machines for spinning. "Most of the spinners today are sitting idle because

of the increasing mechanization of the spinning process," said Rifat Ara, another spinner from Zakura.

"Pashmina wool spun in looms not only costs less but also takes lesser time to manufacture. This is why the spinners' livelihood is suffering," said Shahid Naseer, activity head, Craft Development Institute.

Further, the huge gap between the prices of the raw pashmina wool and that of the handspun yarn has also forced spinners to give up spinning. "Getting paid one rupee per knot is not much, the price should be increased to say Rs 5 or Rs 6 per knot. Then we'd be able to earn according to all the hard work we put in," said Rifat Ara.

The ban on shahtoos has also turned the next generation women away from taking up a career in spinning and weaving. "Spinning shahtoos wool was much more lucrative than spinning pashmina wool," said Ara.

When contacted, the Handlooms Department joint director, Bashir Ahmad Wani said that the department is working towards providing better facilities and loans to the spinners. "We are training them on specialized charkhas which are known to reduce stress and also offering them loans worth Rs 50,000 on 10 per cent interest subsidy," he said. "We are doing the best we can do to keep alive this dying art."

Encroachment on college land in Srinagar

❖ **Farooz Ahmed**

SRINAGAR: Land encroachment has once again sprouted on the land allotted to Government College Nawakadal at Eidgah for the construction of new college campus.

Residents of Eidgah complain that some residents of Shalimar Colony near Eidgah have clandestinely constructed certain properties and encroached the college land.

In a government order (No: Rev(s) 41 of 2007 dated 5-02-2007) government allotted 65 canals of land near Firdous Colony in Eidgah to the college, but encroachment by some residents has hampered the construction time

and again. The college is the only institution of higher education in Srinagar exclusively for female students. The college has been operating out of two buildings ever since it opened – a third one was constructed few years ago. But the management has been complaining of shortage of space and students complain that their classes are scheduled in different places every next week.

Jammu and Kashmir's revenue department said that the extra space was allotted to college to avoid shortage of space. Funds for the fencing of land were released long ago but the construction is yet to take off. The process of land filling for encroachment, however, started

some months ago and has been going at a steady pace.

"The earth filling is a continuous process. Sometimes officials come and stop the encroachers, but the process restarts after a while. Many a times you can see labourers work there," said Shazia Gani, a resident of Eidgah. Residents said that encroachers take advantage of the uncertain situation in Srinagar. "The encroachers might have greased the palms of the government officials. They keep on constructing new houses after every demolition drive," said Aziz Ahmed, another resident.

Mohammad Ayoub of Eidgah said, "One of the houses that comes in the way of college was demolished twice

and both the times people constructed it again".

"We have official documents that we own the land. Officials often come here but where would we go unless we get some compensation. We have been asking them but they don't pay heed," said Shameema, whose house has been demolished twice.

While talking to commissioner of Srinagar Municipal Corporation, Shafqat Khan said that the concerned department of government should to be approached for help. "We have not received any reports of encroachments from the concerned department. We will come into action, once we will be informed," he said.