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MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE,
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR

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ITI Zainakote awaits completion

❖ Bint Ul Huda

SRINAGAR: The construction of Industrial Training Institute (ITI), Zainakote, area of Srinagar is in completed even after six years.

The ITI which is being constructed in Zainakote area of Srinagar city outskirts, was approved in 2009 under centrally sponsored scheme to decongest Industrial Training Institute at Bagh-i-Dilawar Khan Srinagar.

The Principal, ITI Bagh-i-Dilawar Khan, Mohammad Ashraf Wani, said that the idea is to shift some of the departments of Bagh-i-Dilawar Khan campus to newly constructed ITI at Industrial Estate Zainakote to overcome the over crowdedness in the institute.

“The Industrial Training Institute (ITI) Bagh-i-Dilawar Khan is spread on just 12 kanals of Land and we are facing lot of problems here as there are 34 courses offered in this college and there is no playground in this institute as well”, he said.

Locals also complained that the ITI is under construction for several years and the authorities are not serious about its construction.

“The construction work is moving at a snail’s pace, six years have passed but the college is not completed yet,” said Ishfaq Ahmad, a local resident.

“It took them almost two years just to construct the roof of the building. They are not doing their work properly,” he added.

Meanwhile the principal ITI Srinagar claimed that delay in funds and devastating floods of 2014 which wrecked havoc across the valley are the reasons behind the incompleteness of the institute. Besides the escalation of rates by the executing agency also affected its construction. He told MERCTIMES that the ITI Zainakote was approved for Total cost of Rs.484.03 Lakh which includes a Workshop block, Hostel block, compound wall and development of land.

He further added “The construction work is almost complete except the compound wall which was damaged due to floods and filling of land”. Later he confirmed that he had written to the government to release more funds for the completion of the entire campus.

Power cut irks Kashmir

❖ Sheikh Adnan

Srinagar: The new power supply schedule by Power Development Department (PDD) is making people suffer in the winter season

The unscheduled power cuts and low voltage in valley has evoked strong resentment from the locals claiming that they are facing serious problems because of irregular power cuts.

“The unscheduled power cuts have left us distressed, especially in winter season when we need it more than anytime” said Hilal Ahmed Sheikh resident of Nowshera.

As per the new power schedule for winter, the people living in non-metered areas are subjected to have 63 hours of power cuts a week, while as metered areas would face 35 hours cut a week.

Dr Mohammad Qasim Qureshi, a resident of Sanat Nagar while rebuking the new power schedule said that the this new power schedule is against the norms as they PDD department promised to provide 24 hours round the clock supply in metered areas

“We are doing nothing of our own. We have informed the government about it and sought

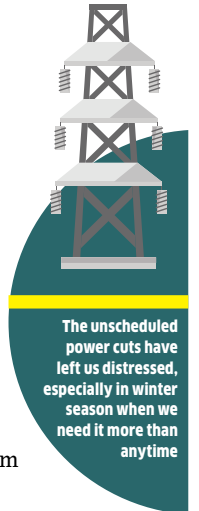
approval for its publication” said an official from PDD development remarked.

Reports pouring out from far flung areas such as Kupwara, Kalaroos, Lolab and Kanagan suggested that from last one month, the power woes have worsened in the villages leaving the consumers high and dry.

“Power is playing hide and seek with us”, said Mushtaq Ahmed Kirmani a resident of Kupwara, Kalaroos

As per the schedule the metered areas would have 1 and half hours break in power supply between 5am and 10 am, 10 to 5 pm and 5 to 11 pm every day. The consumers in non-metered areas, as per schedule would face 3 hours cuts on the same respective times

The scheduled power supply time will change after every 15 days said Bashir Ahmed Khan an official from PDD department



CM lays foundation of Engineering College

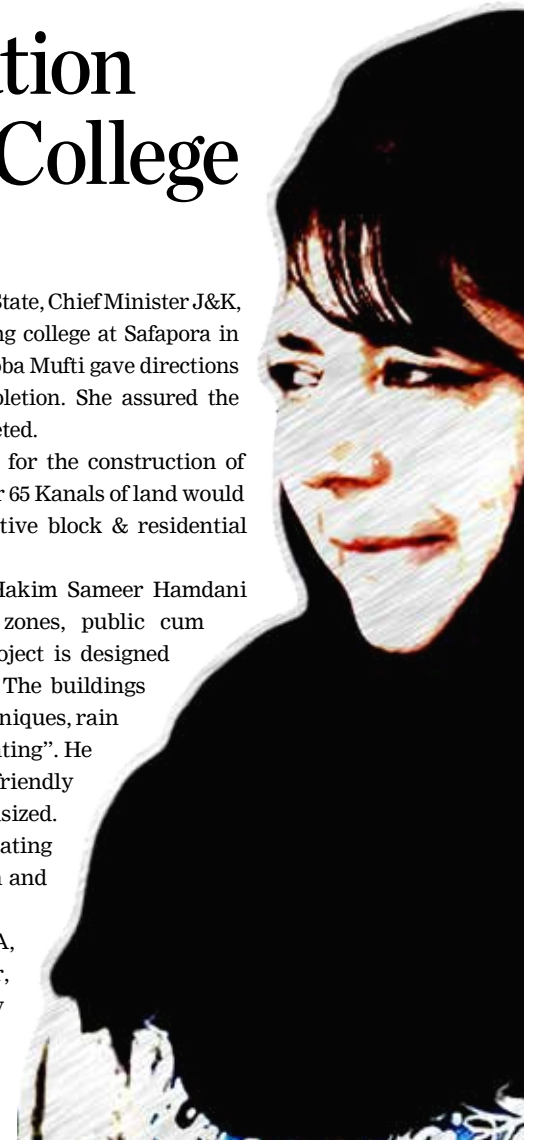
❖ Imran Ali Buth

GANDERBAL: As a step towards development of the State, Chief Minister J&K, Mehbooba Mufti laid foundation stone of engineering college at Safapora in district Ganderbal. Speaking at the occasion, Mehbooba Mufti gave directions to the concerned departments for its earliest completion. She assured the people that by March, 2018 the project shall be completed.

An amount of Rs. 26 Crore has been earmarked for the construction of engineering college. The college campus spread over 65 Kanals of land would have Academic blocks, Library block, administrative block & residential hostels.

Speaking to MERC Times, Project Consultant, Hakim Sameer Hamdani said, “The whole project is divided into two zones, public cum private zone & a private academic zone. The project is designed harmoniously respecting the contours of the site. The buildings will be intelligently incorporating passive solar techniques, rain water harvesting, waste management and solar lighting”. He further said that the college campus will also be eco-friendly and barrier free movement would be highly emphasized. The campus aims at multi usage of spaces creating various levels and terraces for public participation and removing visual obstructions.

Minister for Education, Naeem Akhtar; MLA, Mohammad Akbar Lone, Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, Baseer Ahmad Khan, Deputy Commissioner, Ganderbal, Tariq Hussain Ganaie; Managing Director, JKPC, Dileep Thusu and other senior officers were present on the occasion.



CAPD to provide consumer details online

❖ **Munawar Hussain**

SRINAGAR: In yet another move towards digitization, The state Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution (CAPD) department will have all the details of consumers and distribution online to ensure transparency.

In the month of February the department will upload all details of the ration card holders on its website for anyone to verify or enquire.

The stakeholder identity management system will be updating the list of FPS(Fair Price Shops). Besides it, the list of TSO's (Tehsil Supply Officers) will be available on the website. Details of Food grains Storage Depot or K-Oil Storage Depot will also be available online.

The consumers can also check the updated price or quantity of different rations allocated to them and, subsequently, report any possible fraud to the department.

"It will be transparent for everyone. Only the registered ration card holders will now be provided the rations," said Director CAPD, Tassaduq Jeelani. "We have received several complaints of irregularities in the distribution of rations. But now the ration card holder will be verified first at the ration depots and then only the rations will be provided to them according to their monthly quota."

He said the digital format is hassle-free, and it will interconnect all sections of the department for a smooth flow smooth of information.

The department, he said, has already updated its existing list of ration card holders while

the unregistered consumers have been asked to register at Deputy Commissioner Offices as early as possible.

The department, as per the Director, is also going cashless by encouraging digital transactions at all levels.

Initially, digital transactions would be limited to ration depots and the department, he said.

"Later on, the consumers too will have to pay digitally. They need to have a bank account and Aadhar Card for Aadhar-enabled mode of payments," he said, adding that a meeting was held in Jammu recently to discuss the future possibilities.

It will be transparent for everyone. Only the registered ration card holders will now be provided the rations



Encroachment of Sopore bus stand leaves people fuming

❖ **Sheikh Saman**

SOPORE: Encroachment at the bus stand Sopore by the roadside vendors is causing inconvenience to the commuter as bus stand witnesses a complete traffic mess through out the day.

While talking to MERC TIMES, Secretary Mini Bus owners Union Sopore Farooq Ahmad Mir said, that everyday the bus station Sopore is turning into a complete cart vendors market.

"The bus stand is creating chaos and confusion among the passengers. The shopkeepers have extended their goods about 20 feet outwards, resulting in shrinking of pedestrian and parking space in the bus stand", he added.

The drivers of the bus stand alleged that the municipality authorities have authorized the street vendors to continue their business at the bus station by issuing receipts of ten rupees as 'User Charge Fee'.

However while talking to MERC TIMES, Ghulam Rasool Shah Executive Officer Municipality Council, Sopore, refuted all allegations and said, the receipts issued to the street vendors is the sanitation fee and it does not allow them to operate their business in the bus station premises'.

"I assure the driver fraternity of starting the anti street cart drives inside the bus station in coming days", he added.

The shopkeepers have extended their goods about 20 feet outwards, resulting in shrinking of pedestrian and parking space in the bus stand

Kashmiri Students Receive Gold Medals at MANUU Convocation

❖ **Asim Raja**

Srinagar : Nine Kashmiri students were awarded gold medals and three other students received Doctoral (Ph.D.) degrees at the Sixth Convocation of Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU), Hyderabad.

Zafar Sareshwala, Chancellor, MANUU presided over the convocation and distributed gold medals among students. The gold medal recipients include Fowzia Afaq, Zahoor Hussain Bhat, Ulfat Ara, Zahoor Ahmad Sofi from Mass Communication and Journalism Department, Raheel Ahmad Trag from English Department, Arif Ahmad Bhat from Mathematics Department, Barkat Hussain Para from

Education Department, Akhter Hussain Shah from Persian Department and Khalil Ahmad from Political Science Department.

It is pertinent to mention here that Zahoor Hussain Bhat is a Journalist at UNI-Urdu Service while Ulfat Ara works for the ETV-Urdu as a Copy Editor. Well-known educators Syed Zahoor Ahmad Geelani, Mudasir Manzoor Kirmani and Zaffer Abdullah Wani also received Phd degrees in the convocation. Kashmiri students who were felicitated in the convocation said that the parental support, love and prayers is the ultimate secret of their success.

They said, "we are proud to tell that despite limited sources of income, parents in Kashmir show

a lot of interest in the education of their children." Meanwhile, UNI, Srinagar Centre, staffers have congratulated their fellow staffer (Zahoor Hussain) for receiving gold medal at the MANUU Convocation.



We are proud to tell that despite limited sources of income, parents in Kashmir show a lot of interest in the education of their children

Sumbal bridge construction in limbo



❖ **Kaisar Majeed**

SUMBAL: The construction work of foot bridge in North Kashmir's, Sumbal area has once again come to halt which has again added to the woes of common people.

The local villagers have accused that the authorities are deliberately ignoring the matter and the delay in construction of the bridge has annoyed the inhabitants of several local villages.

"The construction of this foot bridge is going on since past 4 years and the work has not yet reached its end", said a locale.

The local villagers said, that the old

bridge was dismantled in 2013 and locals were assured that the re-construction of new foot bridge within six months.

"The careless approach of the authorities in this regard and the delay in the completion of this foot bridge is becoming troublesome for us. We have to walk extra 3 kilometres to reach the main market via another bridge", said Mushtaq Ahmed.

The authorities are in deep slumber and nobody is listening to our grievances", alleges Mushtaq.

AEE, Sumbal division, told MERC TIMES, that the department has no sufficient funds to complete the project.

CM starts super 50 winter tutorial for emerging students

❖ **Wajahat Shabir**

SRINAGAR: What could prove a breakthrough for the students of the valley, the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Mehbooba Mufti started a Super-50 Free Winter Tutorial initiative for pupil as well as medical and engineering aspirants of Jammu and Kashmir.

Super 50 classes were started by Minister for Education, Naeem Akhtar. The initiative is a comprehensive free tuition program for 10th and 12th class students of Jammu and Kashmir who will be tutored by top faculty drawn from the State Government's Education Department, an official statement said this evening.

The Education Department provide free coaching for state-level medical and engineering entrance examinations like JK CET, AIIMS, AMU and IIT main through an entrance exam.

Shah Faesal, Director, School Education, Kashmir said, "Guest lectures will be delivered by higher education department, medicos, professionals and IITians".

Imtiyaz Ahmed, higher secondary student, said, "it is a good initiative by state government for students like us as we can't afford to move outside state for better tuitions. I am looking forward the exams and I have my fingers crossed as there will be a good competition among students".

"Students have to pay for heating arrangements and they will get study material free of cost and will be educated by good brains", said Education Minister, Naeem Akhtar while starting the initiative.

Ganderbal await construction of Bridge



❖ **Mu'azzam Bhat**

GANDERBAL: Residents of central Kashmir's Ganderbal district demand construction of two lane Concrete bridge over Nallah Sind at wayil in place of a makeshift bridge. The bridge is very vital as it connects Srinagar-Leh National highway (NH 1D) at Wayil village , 8 KM from Ganderbal town.

Locals say that make shift Bridge

was constructed in 1993 after floods washed away the 40 year old wooden bridge.

Sharif-u-Din, Sarpanch of Wayil village said, "We have many times approached to ministers and officers for construction of Concrete Bridge but nothing was done. All most all the vehicular movement which leads to Sonmarg, Ladakh and to other northern places of district passes

through the bridge."

"There is huge rush of tourists and pilgrims during summers especially during Amarnath Yatara, throughout that time commuters suffer badly as the bridge is only one way which causes traffic jams for long hours." Towseef Ahmad a commuter said.

When we contacted, Executive Engineer R&B Ganderbal , Showket Ahmad. He said, "we have sent a proposal to R&B ministry of 15 crore Central Road Fund(CRF) for construction of two lane concrete bridge. We are very hopeful that the bridge will be constructed this year." Residents of Ganderbal allege that successive government have failed to construct the bridge so far.

There is huge rush of tourists and pilgrims during summers especially during Amarnath Yatara, throughout that time commuters suffer badly as bridge is one way which causes traffic jams for hours

Commuters suffer due to one way traffic on make shift bridge





Div. Com reviews developmental scenario in Anantnag, Kulgam

❖ Ali Pathan

ANANTNAG: Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Baseer Ahmad Khan, today chaired a meeting to review the developmental projects and winter preparations of Anantnag and Kulgam districts.

During the meeting, the Divisional Commissioner directed the Chief Engineer PDD to ensure availability of power supply as per schedule. He asked the district administration of Anantnag and Kulgam to coordinate with the PDD to keep a check on power theft.

It was given out that in Anantnag, 130 MW power is being supplied while in Kulgam, 82 MW of power is provided to the consumers. While reviewing works under R&B sector, the meeting was informed that in Anantnag, 42 bridges are in different stages of execution, out of which 18 bridges shall be completed by March, 2017. While in Kulgam, out of 7 damaged bridges, 3 have been restored and work on the rest of bridges is going on under SDRF permanent restoration programme.

On the occasion, the Divisional Commissioner sought a detailed list of the major projects from the DDCs which are yet to be completed owing to the non-availability of funds

The Divisional Commissioner was informed that, the adequate safe drinking water supply

is being provided to far flung areas of Anantnag and Kulgam. The Divisional Commissioner directed the PHE Department to devise daily, weekly and monthly rosters to ensure availability of regular drinking water supply to these areas.

While reviewing the winter preparations of Anantnag and Kulgam districts, the Div Com directed the officers to establish control rooms for formulating a coordinated and effective response to meet any emergency.

The Div. Com was informed that adequate snow clearance machines have been kept ready to clear roads in case of heavy snowfall in these districts.

The Divisional Commissioner asked the officers to put in extra efforts to ensure better public delivery system in their respective jurisdictions.

The meeting was attended by DDCs of Anantnag and Kulgam, Director RDD, Chief Engineers of PDD, PHE, Mechanical Engineering, Joint Director FCS&CA, ADDC Anantnag, ADC Kulgam, PO ICDS, SEs of R&B, PDD, PHE, I&FC, Principal GDC Khanabal, CEO of Development Authorities, CPOs, SDMs, officers of Education, Health, Forest, Rural Development, Tourism, Transport, Social Welfare, Horticulture, Agriculture and other concerned departments.

Demand of PoS machines increases in Kashmir post demonetization

❖ Waseem Ahmad

SRINAGAR: Most of the shopkeepers here are now accepting money via e-payments following the demonetization move by the Centre that created cash crisis in the entire country including J&K.

Due to the non-availability of money, many outlets have kept Point of Sale (PoS) machines available at their shops for the ease of customers.

“There were only 5-7 percent shops that used to have PoS machines but now the number has increased by 15 percent in different shops of valley. After demonetization majority of the shops have applied for PoS machines,” Chairman and President of Kashmir Economic Alliance, Mohammad Yaseen Khan said

After demonetization, card transactions are estimated to have increased as compared to normal cash transaction. “We are facing worst face of our business, as we are doing only up to 30 percent transactions out of which 80 percent transaction are through plastic money,” Yaseen Khan added.

PoS machines are meant to facilitate transactions not only for the payee, but also for merchants — both small and big. Small merchants and businessmen involved in the informal sector were pegged to be the worst hit.

According to Yaseen Khan, Every shopkeeper doesn't have PoS machines in their shops and every consumer didn't have credit or debit card. In such situation it is very difficult for consumer as well as for businessman to be in the market.

A businessman can acquire a PoS machine from a bank in which he or she holds an account. Banks provide a PoS terminal free of cost to their account holders, but they

charge a Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) as prescribed by the RBI.

“MDR is the big problem for us as our sales are not that much enough due to the demonetization. When we have to pay one percent from every transaction to bank what will be the profit of our sales,” Bashir Ahmad, a shopkeeper said.

He also added that this move has deeply affected the vast section of our population, carving their livelihood. Some segment of working society entirely depends on cash and is hardly linked to the banking system.

Meanwhile Ex president of Kashmir Traders and Manufacturers Federation said, “We receive such customers who have to purchase above Rs 2500 and they are asking for swipe machines, but we don't have such swipe or PoS machines. As of now, customers are more willing to spend an extra 5 minutes at the counter swiping their cards than standing in an ATM queue for 10 to 30 minutes to withdraw cash”

As per the recent study titled Indian M-wallet market by The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry in India (ASSOCHAM), the mobile payment transaction volume in India is likely to witness exponential compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 90 per cent to reach 153 billion by Financial Year (FY) 2022 as against a meager about 3 billion in FY 2016.

Mobile payment transaction value in India is also likely to register over 150 per cent CAGR and cross Rs 2,000 trillion by FY 2022 from just over Rs 8 trillion as of FY 2016.

The study also highlighted that Mobile Point of sale (MPoS) segment's share in mobile payment is likely to fall further and by FY22, share of mobile banking is likely to rise to 14 per cent in terms of volume.



First ever street photowalk held in Kashmir

❖ Hayat Manan

SRINAGAR: Srinagar's downtown got into the winter spirit with a photo walk held by a group of Kashmiri photo journalists known as Kashmir Scape. The group held a day-long photo walk in the lanes and by-lanes of old Srinagar and tried to capture heritage and art present in the area.

The team of Kashmir Scape comprises of Mir Yasir, Adil Hussain, Sharafat Ali, Zuhaib Hamza, Mubashir Hassan and Hakim Majid abbass all are internationally published and award winning Photographers.

The photowalk was open to one and all and around 66 participants participated in the event. The participants hailed from every corner of Kashmir districts like Anantnag, Budgam, Ganderbal, Handwara, Srinagar, Sopore and even Pulwama.



Not only this they had participants as far as from Mumbai and Delhi also.

The group is only working through social media platform and thrives to work for the upliftment of the Photography art here in Kashmir and make the artists of photography especially young buds at par with international standards of photography.

“Our basic motive is to pool the talent and nurture budding photographers to become the artists of international standards. We want people to get aware about different genres of photography and eliminate the negative notion of people, which they hold for photographers here in Kashmir,” said Adil Hussain, one of the members of team Kashmir Scape.

Another curator Mir Yasir said that there are internationally-reputed photojournalists in Kashmir, but not a fullfledged photography school.

“If there would've been a school, we would have easily understood the skill professionally. A school would teach us how to get good stories and how to document them correctly,” he added.

“We have learned the topography of street photography and I had some queries regarding street photography which were answered by the respected mentor; we wish them to organize such Photowalks again in future as it matures us in photographic knowledge know-how,” said Akshay Vaidya one of the participants hailing from Mumbai.

The event was concluded with distribution of participation certificates as a token of appreciation among the participants.

Apple growers in sonawari badly affected

❖ Bisma Farooq

SRINAGAR: As the recent uprising in Kashmir has inflated the entire Kashmir, sonawari has witnessed a blow in the most important cash crop among its inhabitants. With more than hundreds of hectares of apple orchards across sonawari, this fruit is life line for more than half of the population of the area.

Sonawari is predominately an agricultural dependent economy and nearly 80 percent of its population is engaged in apple production. Apple production of the area contributes nearly about Rs 200 crores income to the whole area which further involves the employee rate of 70 thousand people of the area.

Turmoil has nearly sponge down the 50 percent of this cash crop in the area and has left a devastated effect on its growers. “This year, we are not getting better price for our apples because the traders from outside did not reach to the markets on time due to unsuitable conditions,” an apple grower said.

The apples that used to hit the markets in the state as well as outside the state had dented in this year.

“We had got Kissan Credit Card (KCC) loan from banks to make a better yield of apples but it is impossible to recompense it after a huge destruction in the price of apple crop,” Apple growers said.

As the supply of fruits from sonawari is not sufficient, the apple growers are unable to earn good returns for their crop.

This year, we are not getting better price for our apples because the traders from outside did not reach to the markets on time due to unsuitable conditions



PRE-WINTER SALE OF SUN DRIED VEGETABLES PICK UP

❖ Saher Iqbal

SRINAGAR: The consumption of sun dried vegetables was known to increase in Kashmir during the winters, especially during chilai kalans forty days period of the season. But over the years, the vendors of dried vegetables have witnessed a slum in number of customers. On chilly winter morning, a group of women dressed in traditional Pheran spread their baskets laden with dried vegetables on the famous Amira Kadal Bridge to earn their living.

Fatima Begum 46 starts her day in this fashion and calls out for prospective customers. “I work hard throughout the summer to grow and dry up all the vegetables in my home and in this part of the year I come here to sell and earn my living” said Fatima who sells fresh vegetables in summer and dries some part of it in winter.

“It does not fetch me enough but I am contented.” Fatima said that the demand of the dried vegetable has gone down over the year.

Ali Mohammad, who sells dried vegetables in Maharaja Bazar market, is also in the opinion that the demand has declined. “earlier people used to buy these foods at the onset of the winter in bulk and used it throughout the season but now people seldom buy it.” He said.

The traders say that “it is not so distant past the demand for dried vegetable would go up considerably during winter. “People would enjoy the dried vegetable and dried fish in cold winter. But now with the availability of fresh vegetable in the market, their demand has declined”, they said.

Ghulam Mohammad has been selling dried vegetables and dried fishes on his hand craft for last twenty years. But he is planning to switch over to some other business or job.

“It is not profitable at all. Earlier people used to purchase dried vegetables ahead of winter and store it as there used to be shortage of vegetables in winter due to cold weather and closure of highway”, he said.

With better connectivity, valley gets supply of fresh vegetables throughout the year.

Changing lifestyle and food habits of people has also resulted in decline of dried vegetables.

Experts are of the opinion that these foods are safe provided they are hygienically prepared and stored.

“These foods are advisable in permissible limits and if stored well in special air-tight containers. If air goes in these bags it can induce growth of white coloured fungus”, remarked an expert.

Despite availability of fresh vegetables, some people prefer to eat dried vegetables in winter season and relish its taste.

CM visits Kulgam, reviews developmental projects



❖ Danish Pathan

Kulgam: Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti visited Kulgam and inspected the developmental projects in the district.

The Chief Minister inaugurated a Degree College at Kilam Kulgam. She reviewed details of the course curriculum and intake capacity.

On the occasion, Mehbooba Mufti announced that apart from all arts subjects both medical and non-medical streams would be taught at the college.

The Chief Minister also inaugurated a branch of the J&K Bank and ATM facility at Kilam which was an impending demand of the people of the area.

“It was a pending demand of the area to have a J&K Bank Branch and ATM. I am happy that the bank has fulfilled it” said a local

Later, the Chief Minister laid the foundation stone of Maternal & Children block of the District Hospital, Kulgam. Comprising 50 beds, the block would be completed within two years. The addition of this block would give a big relief to the children of the area who have to be shifted to Srinagar or Anantnag in the event of any ailment or medical complication.

Mehbooba Mufti sought strict adherence to the time schedule of the projects from the engineers adding that no scope should be left to extend the completion deadline. She also directed early repairs of the lift system at the District Hospital.

The Chief Minister also inaugurated General Nursing & Mid-Wifery School at Kandipora. Built over a cost of Rs 5 crore, the school would have facilities of lecture halls, labs and other facilities. She also laid foundation stone of a nearby residential complex for officers which would be built over a cost of Rs 68 lakhs and would comprise of 40 apartments.

Minister for Health & Medical Education, Bali Bhagat; Minister for Education, Naeem Akhtar; MP, Nazir Ahmad Laway; MLA, Abdul Majeed Paddar; Chairman, J&K Bank, Parvez Ahmad; Commissioner-Secretary, Higher Education, Dr Asghar Samoon; Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, Baseer Ahmad Khan; Mohammad Sartaj Madni; Deputy Commissioner Kulgam, Showkat Aijaz; and other senior officers accompanied the Chief Minister during the visit.

En-route the Chief Minister interacted with several deputations, many of them comprising women, who sought redress of their day to day grievances. Mehbooba Mufti listened to their demands patiently and assured them of appropriate and time-bound action.

Sports Council Fails To Maintain Ganderbal play field

❖ Showkat wani

GANDERBAL: Madra-e- Meharban stadium Ganderbal located at the heart of Ganderbal town is in shambles due to lack of maintenance by J&K State Sports Councils .

A group of local Sports players said the stadium been has put on back burner by authorities. They go through lot of problems while playing in the stadium. The stadium in it self presents a pathetic picture as litter is seen to be lying every where which makes the. surface of field uneven, and it becomes very difficult to play on such a feeble field.

“Water logging is common in the ground, every time a little rain leads to water logging. Many tournaments have been post phoned due to deteriorated condition of the ground.” Afaq Ahmad a local sports lover said.

Sports council has only employed one person as a watch man to manage the stadium as there is no technical staff for the proper maintenance of the stadium.

Mohd Rafiq a footballer who comes very day to practice in the stadium said, “I am very disappointed as infrastructure in the stadium is very poor. Many footballers have left practicing in the ground because of poor quality of the field.”

District Development Board Ganderbal have many times recommended shifting of the stadium from sports council to youth services

and sports Ganderbal (YSS) because of poor performance of the sports council in managing the stadium and this year too during board meeting it was once again reiterated to handover the stadium to YSS Ganderbal.

Firdous Ahmad in charge sports activities, YSS Ganderbal said, “Most of our sports activates take place in the stadium .The condition of the ground is not good which badly affects the sports activities. Sports council has many times assured upgrading of pavilion and construction of changing room of the stadium on modern lines but nothing has happened so for.”

He further said DC Ganderbal has also sent representation to the sports council to hand over the stadium to YSS Ganderbal. YSS is very able to improve infrastructure of stadium because almost all activates off YSS are organized there and we need stadium in good condition.

When contacted Jawaid Shah, secretary sports, JKSSC he said. “I don’t have authority of shifting the management of stadium but we will address the development issues of stadium and the field .we have recently brought some advance equipments which include some innovative grass cutters and rollers. In Future there will be no such problems.”

Sports players of Ganderbal have appealed to minister for sports, Imran Raza Ansari to look into to the matter for prompt upgrading and maintenance of the stadium.

NATIONAL CONSUMER DAY CELEBRATED

❖ Sabeeha Shaheen

GANDERBAL: To make consumer aware about their rights, a day long functions was held to celebrate National Consumer Day in Ganderbal and Bandipora district respectively.

Speaking on the occasion, the Deputy Commissioner, Tariq Hussain highlighted the role of National Consumer Protection Act, Consumer Forums and other statutory bodies constituted for the redressal of grievances of the consumers.

He said, people must adopt these rights as they are for their welfare which include (i) Right to Protection. (ii) Right of Information. (iii) Right of Choice. (iv) Right of Hearing. (v) Right of Redressal. (vi) Right of Education.

He also urged people to be aware about their rights as consumers and raise voice against unethical trade related issues.

“For a commoner like me who aren't much



aware about such rights are delighted by this step of government. They are making us aware of our rights and we are looking forward to utilise these rights”, said a local resident, khurshid ahmed.

Kashmiri boy makes it in ‘Top 40’ in Indian Idol

❖ Muneem Farooq

SRINAGAR: A 23-year-old youth from Poonch in Kashmir has made an emotional debut on reality music show Indian Idol

Ehsan Asgar is one of the Selected Contestant of Indian Idol 2016-2017 Singing reality show. Ehsaan a resident of border Palera village in Mandi tehsil, Ahsan had auditioned for the show on September 17 at MIER College in Jammu.

His debut performance in round first was a tribute to the soldiers. His Performance of Auditions and motto touched the Heart of the Indian Idol 2016-2017 Judges.

While talking on phone Ahsaan said “ I am thankful to Indian idol for giving me such a great opportunity”

“My parents were against singing because they thought it has no bright opportunity in Kashmir but they endorse it now” Ehsaan added

Ahsan has a bachelor’s degree in physical education and has

been participating in various talent hunt shows, including ‘Choona Hai Aasmaan’, organised by the Jammu and Kashmir Police.

His Audition video has become viral & has received millions of views on social networking sites.



My parents were against singing because they thought it has no bright opportunity in Kashmir but they endorse it now

Ehsaan's father, Mohammad Aasghar said “ My son worked very hard for the audition level and eventually yielded it's sincere fruits as the judges & the whole nation stood up for his performance”

“He is pride of our village” said Tufail Ahmed a native of his village Poonch.

Kashmir to get its first ever metro

❖ Tajamul Islam

SRINAGAR: A proposal has been brought before the State Government by SDA to introduce a mini metro system in Kashmir. The proposal is yet to go through state cabinet for its approval.

However RITES an infrastructure development agency has been hired to analyse the traffic patterns of Kashmir. The proposed project is estimated to cost about 24000 Crores. As per the plan the metro will be having two corridors, the first corridor C1 will run from Galander in Pulwama to Budgam. Another corridor will expand from existing Nowgam Railway station to Ganderbal through the heart of Srinagar city.

The project is aimed to curb the ever increasing traffic congestion in the city.

It has been five years since train service was introduced in the valley ,which remained much successful project, train service is being used extensively and overwhelmingly by a large section of people in Kashmir. It has proven to be a success in saving both money and time for the commuters. People are hopeful that the initiative to introduce metro will not only bring convenience to the people of valley but will also boost the economy of the state.



KU holds awareness campaign on road safety

❖ Saba khan

SRINAGAR: Kashmir University’s Department of Students Welfare (DSW) in association with J&K Traffic Police Department organized a day-day awareness campaign on road safety in the campus on Tuesday.

The ‘Basit Memorial Road Safety Campaign’ titled ‘Alert Today, Alive Tomorrow’ was organized in memory of a teenager who died in a tragic road accident in Srinagar in November this year. Following his death, his friends initiated this campaign on road safety.

Dean and Head, Faculty of Law Prof Mohammad Hussain laid stress on the importance of having special road engineers in J&K “who can play a crucial role in overall designing of roads in bid to help minimizing road

accidents.”

Presiding over the inaugural session, Vice-Chancellor Prof Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi prayed for peace to the departed soul. He also underlined the importance of road safety and adherence to norms governing driving.

He said more such campaigns should be organized to spread awareness about road safety. “I am not averse to the idea of making it mandatory for people entering the campus with their bikes or vehicles to wear crash helmets and seat-belts,” he said, asserting that University is in the process of having dedicated parking slots for students and staff in place to “lessen inflow of vehicles to the campus.”

“This shall only be done with the sole intent of safety of our students

and people visiting the University,” he said.

In his address, Dean of Students Welfare, Prof Fayaz Ahmad said: “For safety purposes we have to get educated about various road safety measures which we must follow to help save precious lives.”

DSP Traffic Police, Nasir Khan also spoke on the occasion and highlighted the measures taken by department vis-a-vis road safety.

Besides students, scholars and faculty members from various departments of Kashmir University, Chief Proctor Prof Naseer Iqbal, Public Relations Officer Faheem Aslam, Liaison Officer Ozair Nissar and Cultural Officer Shahid Ali Khan Cultural Officer were also present on the occasion.



Newly constructed community hall at Natipora inaugurated

❖ **Musaib Mehraj**

SRINAGAR: The newly inaugurated Marriage Hall has come with a major relief to the Natipora residents and people of the said area are expressing their happiness over

kanal of land, the state-of-the art double-storey community hall has a capacity to accommodate over 1000 persons. The locals will be able to organize social gatherings (marriage functions) in the community hall. This development

the area to maintain the facility,” On an average atleast half a dozen marriages are being hoisted at the Marriage hall. While speaking to MERC TIMES Mohammad Shafi a local of the area said “we had to face lots of accomodation problems

Government is committed to create better living and basic facilities for the people. It is the responsibility of every citizen of the area to maintain the facility



the newly developed community hall. The only thing that catches the eye in the area that has suffered because of traffic mess due to flyover construction and resulting pollution is the inaugural of the Marriage hall.

It is one of the biggest halls of the entire area. Spread over a

has already witnessed many benefits since the time it has been thrown open. Minister for R&B Syed Muhammad Altaf Bukhari said “Government is committed to create better living and basic facilities for the people. It is the responsibility of every citizen of

during marriage ceremonies earlier on and now we are quite satisfied with the construction of this marriage hall”. He further said that they see it as an advancement and they hope that every household will benefit from the construction of this community hall.

Civil Society appeals government for attention



❖ **Shah Tawqeer**

KUPWARA: Not with standing tall claims of health department to provide best health care facility to public, District Hospital Kupwara is functioning without enough doctors and other basic facilities. There is only one general physician and one gynaecologist for this District Hospital catering to entire Kupwara district.

Talking to MERC TIMES, Block Medical Officer Kupwara Dr. Fareed Khan said that, the hospital is in a dilapidated condition and it was becoming difficult for the management to run it. “Without proper staff, we are not able to cope with the patient rush. We have over 1200 OPD’s daily,” Dr Khan said.

He further said that, “In the Out-Patient Departments (OPDs) of hospital, there are no specialized doctors available. As a result, patients coming from far flung areas don’t get proper treatment.”

Despite the huge flow of patients, only six wards in the hospital are functional while rest are either not functional or locked. “Two patients on each bed is a routine here. Some patients can be seen even lying

on the floor;” said convener Civil Society Kupwara, Showkat Masoodi.

One of the doctors on duty told MERC TIMES that the hospital doesn’t even have life saving drugs. “We don’t have facilities to treat heart attack or blood pressure patients. Patients have to buy medicines on their own,” he said.

One of the senior doctors, who wished not to be named claimed that though adequate funds were released for the overall development of the hospital, but the same were not utilized properly.

When contacted, the Chief Medical officer Kupwara, Dr Zakir Ahmad admitted that they are short of doctors and other facilities, but turned down allegations of misuse of funds. He said that they have taken work of renovation and the problem will be redressed soon. “Yes we lack staff and other facilities, but that is a problem with every hospital in Kashmir. There is proper vigil on hospital development funds and nobody can misuse it,” CMO Kupwara told MERC TIMES.

He assured that the hospital building was going under renovation and people would see a marked difference in the near future.

Kashmiri boys make it to Spanish Football Club

❖ **Sadia Mir**

SRINAGAR: Basit Ahmed and Mohammed Asrar Rehbar, both aged 18, will play with Sociedad Deportiva Lenense Proinastur - a third division professional club from the La Liga for the next six months. This comes after the huge success stories of Tajamul Islam, who won gold in kickboxing in Italy and Hashim Mansoor, who won gold in Asian karate championship, The boys are all set to fly to Spain to play 3rd division Spanish ball.

Both players were chosen by a special committee formed by the CRPF, as a part of its initiative to

engage with the youth of Kashmir. These boys have taken a huge stride as this is for the first time that any Indian player will be playing for Spanish club.

All expenses of the two players will be paid by the Spanish club. As per the terms of the contract signed by the Central Reserve Police Force with them. Both Asrar and Basit have played various matches in national juniors category, with Asrar having played in Santosh and Durand tournaments were chosen after many trails carried out by selection committee in colabration with Jammu and Kashmir football club.



These boys have taken a huge stride as this is for the first time that any Indian player will be playing for Spanish club.

Teen age girl shines in athletics



❖ Mehvish Mumtaz

PAHALGAM: Sakina Akhter, 15 hailing from Gujran Batkoot, a village situated near the tourist destination Pahalgam, created a milestone after becoming the first girl in her community to secure first position in athletic event in the state. Sakina is a tenth class student of Government high school Batgund and belongs to the Gujjar community.

Already selected for Zonal level tournament from her school, which paved her way to District level, topping in both the tournaments. Later, she was selected for state tournament held in Jammu where she won 3000 meter race, and secured third position in shot-put.

"I have not received any formal training but my personal skills helped me," Sakina said. Talking about her journey, she continued, "I used to travel two Kilometers to reach school through hills and that strengthened my stamina."

The teachers are proud of her performance.

"If she receives formal training, she can be a good athlete," said Aijaz Ahmad, her Physical Education teacher. "Without receiving formal training she has stunned everyone and her achievement speaks volumes," he added.



Historical Kalai on the verge of extinction

❖ Nazima Rashid

SRINAGAR: With the failure of authorities in curbing the illegal encroachment of the monuments in Shaheer-e-khaas the historical Kalai is on the verge of extinction.

The absence of any conservation has led crumbling of wall and encroachment at several places. The wall which were 3.5 miles long and 10 metre high, has been reduced to just 2 to 5 metres at several places.

"At least 1400 residential houses have been built under the walls of Kalai, which has become the threat to the monument," said Bashir Ahmed, a local

shopkeeper in Badamwari. He further continued, "This illegal encroachment is leading to crumbling of the walls of Kalai, and has become cause of concern for the residents."

Kalai has also been promoted by the tourism department, but with official apathy in maintaining it, the spot has seen huge decline in tourist rush.

"In 2012, the tourist department started the renovation of the monument, but no concrete work was done on ground, it was only waste of money," said a delegation of locals.

According to historians, the construction of the wall was called

as Faseel-e-Akbari, started in 1597 by the orders of Mughal Emperor Akbar. It was completed in 1620, during the reign of Shahjahan. This was the fortification of a city called Nagar Nagar which housed courtiers, officials and soldiers of the kingdom.

Kalai has three different entry points- Kathi, Sangeen and Bachi Darwaza, which already have been encroached by vendors and remains jam packed creating a lot of inconvenience for the pedestrians.

Locals claimed that they raised the issue many times with the authorities, but no action was taken against the encroachers.

❖ Syed Jesarat

HAZRATBAL: This is an initiative I took and spoke to few local vendors of Hazratbal, and discussed what development means to them.

Hazratbal, a place in Dargah, on the left bank of Dal Lake, is considered holy among masses. The hustle and bustle in the streets,

development mean to them?"

I got different answers but with some sort of similarity in between them.

I asked one young man, sweets and parantha selling vendor, his instant

sector, more tourists mean more work for us."

Concluding my days work, an old vendor who owned a shop of home essentials said, "development is a broad term, we don't need

development in Hazratbal only, but in whole Kashmir, development for me is when there will be no killings in Kashmir." All in all, I got responses which are worth pondering over. Since, Kashmir is a conflict torn



response was, "for me it would be when I would be given a shop here and there will be no more strikes."

Another vendor, who sold copper things said, "Development is boost in our tourism

territory, and every Kashmiri reflects it, and Hazratbal vendors are no exception to it. It was a great experience talking to few vendors in the heart of Hazratbal and knowing them a little more was a delight.

LET US TALK, DEVELOPMENT

keeps the place busy and noisy.

Near the Hazratbal Shrine, are many enthusiasts Vendors, doing their daily job, selling.

I went and spoke to different vendors, each of whom sells different things and asked them a simple question, "What does

Power crises in Kashmir

❖ Asif Iqbal

SRINAGAR: Kashmir valley is reeling under worst power crisis of the season at a time when temperatures are -0 across the valley and Power Development Department (PDD) is resorting to distress power cuts. The power consumption at this time of the year is almost double than what is generated from the state's power generation sources, besides having very low generation from different power plants due to low discharge.

However the PDD officials said that state is importing power from northern grid to meet the power needs of Kashmir valley at this time of the year. As per the power curtailment schedule, the people living in urban areas, where the curtailment is usually very low, the people hardly manage their day to day activities as they get drastically affected by the power shortage.



However, residents from different areas said that there are more distress power cuts

in Kashmir valley and therefore people shiver in sub-zero temperatures. "We are facing distress cuts in Lal Chowk which is heart of Anantnag town. What will be the fate of the villages and remote areas?" says Younis Ahmed of Lal Chowk as the majority of its population dwells in rural areas. Due to scarcity of electricity the life of people in rural areas almost becomes hell.

However the PDD officials blamed people for the power crisis saying that the people resort to power thefts that leads to power crisis. He said that as per demand we have sufficient power supply for this time of the year but power thefts leads to crisis. Meanwhile

while we tried to convey the issue to the higher authorities, we found out the share negligence on their part

LAWDA fails to take effective measures on Dal Lake

❖ Rahil Hussain

SRINAGAR: Lakes and Waterways Development Authority has failed to undertake effective continued de-weeding operations in Dal Lake thus threatening its aquatic life.

Weeds and red algal bloom have engulfed the larger portion of lake. The stretch from Hazratbal to Boulevard is the worst affected. It has defaced the lake.

"No men or machine have been pressed this year for de-weeding. The unattended weeds are resulting in their multiplication," said a Shikara wala at Brien.

Owner of a Shikara at Ghat number 24, Bashir Ahmad Dar, 55, said that LAWDA authorities are taking their job lightly.

"The introduction of machines for weeding has failed to yield any desired results. These machines cut the upper portions of weeds, leaving roots untouched. Within few days, the weeds regrow," he said adding that the depth of lake ranges from eight feet to thirty feet.

"The length of cutter of the machine is four to

five feet only. It is not able to go down to the root of weed".

Dar argues that the manual de-weeding is better and effective. "The men used to manually uproot the weeds. While doing so, they also took care that seeds of these weeds don't spread," he said.

LAWDA Secretary, Bashir Ahmad Malik said that process of de-weeding is going on.

"De-weeding doesn't mean uprooting. It simply means cutting them," he said adding that red bloom is because of the weeds. "It comes out from the roots of weeds in high temperature and because of the pollutants in lake. We are exploring options to clear it".

However, Malik said that he was not sure about the depth of lake. "I think it is nine and a half feet at most. But I am not sure as hydraulic officials can provide correct details about it," he added.

On April 16, the Chief Secretary BR Sharma had assured the Jammu and Kashmir High Court that a permanent mechanism would be put in place for preserving and protecting the lake.

Msc.IT scrapped by Central University of Kashmir

❖ Auqib Salam

SRINAGAR: In a set back to the aspirants of Computer Science, the Central University of Kashmir has scrapped its foundation course with effect from academic year 2016. As per the admission notification of varsity, they have not mentioned Msc.IT which was the foundation course of the University when it was established in 2009 along with 12 other central universities across India. The university is instead planning to float in B.Tech and M.tech courses only.

A faculty member while talking to MERC Times said that it is a positive development that University is going to start B.Tech and M.tech courses but they should have continued the Msc.IT course as there are numerous computer graduates passing out from various colleges of Kashmir who are looking forward to get an admission in such courses. He added by saying that there are very less colleges which provide B.Tech courses and the intake capacity is also low which makes UG Computer Science more saturated as compared to B.Tech or B.E and therefore, university should have run both the schools, the school of Computer Science and the proposed school of B.Tech and M.Tech.

Few students while expressing their views on varsity's plan expressed their concern, "What if any student will fail in any subject? Where will they go since the University has closed down the course?", said Tanzeela a student of Msc.IT. "We were hoping to get job opportunities in the campus itself but since university is closing down the program of Msc.IT, we see no such thing happening in the near future." she added.

Nayeem Ahmad, another student of Msc.IT said that there are many Bsc.IT graduates who were waiting to get an admission in Central University of Kashmir because of the relevance of Bsc.IT with Msc.IT, now since varsity has stopped the program, students have no chance but to try outside the valley. Some aspirants of Msc.IT while talking to newspaper said that the fee structure of Msc.IT at Central University Kashmir was very affordable as compared to other varsities of the valley and therefore the decision by Central University to scrap Msc.IT has come out as a bad news for students who come from humble background.

The University is further planning to utilize all the Msc.IT faculty in B.Tech and M.Tech as all the faculty members come from M.Tech background. The University has already been widely criticized for not having the permanent campus, it is functioning from rented buildings despite being set up eight years ago, and now the varsity's decision of scrapping its foundation course has raised many eyebrows.

WHAT IF ANY STUDENT WILL FAIL IN ANY SUBJECT? WHERE WILL THEY GO SINCE THE UNIVERSITY HAS CLOSED DOWN THE COURSE?

The extreme frailty of mental health care in Kashmir



According to a 2006 study, 15.9 percent population in the valley suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, often associated with conflict

❖ Rafiya Manzoor

SRINAGA: Rizwan Dar (name changed) of Kupwara district of North Kashmir, suffering from depression and mental disorder, has been visiting the Institute of Mental Health and Neuroscience, Kashmir for the last four years for treatment.

"We are very poor and it is very difficult for us to visit the hospital on a regular basis. There is a huge rush of patients outside the OPD every day. We spend the nights in hotels when visiting the hospital as it becomes difficult to return back in a day," said Rizwan's parents.

Mental health care in Kashmir is limited only to Srinagar. There are many patients suffering from mental illness, distress and depression, all across Kashmir, especially the rural areas, who are still living without any care and help.

Kashmir, with a population of over 69 lakh, still only has a single Government Hospital for mental health care - the Institute of Mental Health and Neuroscience, with just 100 beds.

Official documents reveal that from 1700 patients in 1990s per year, today 51,000 patients on an average visit the out patients department (OPD) of the psychiatric hospital, Srinagar, with an increase in the number of patients, each year.

According to official statistics, over 5 lakh patients - most of them suffering from depression and anxiety disorders, have been treated since 2008 at district level hospitals across Kashmir.

Experts cite conflict as a major contributor in rise of psychiatric illnesses in Kashmir. According to a 2006 study, 15.9 percent population in the valley suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, often associated with conflict.

J&K women cricket team creates history

❖ Useeba Bashir

SRINAGAR: Creating history in the field of sports, J&K women cricket team, for the first time, won a match in Senior Women T20 League against Chhattisgarh by 8 wickets. The match was conducted by BCCI and was held at Cricket Association Ground in Jaipur. According to the officials linked with the department, they said this kind of match has not taken place till date.

"It is first time that JK has won the match and created history," said an official.

Chhattisgarh scored 112 runs in 20 overs, with Yashi Pandey being the highest scorer from Chhattisgarh. In reply, the J&K team completed the target in 17.4 overs with loss of just

2 wickets, Anju Devi scored 67 while as Sarla Devi scored 35.

The women behind the success of JK team include Anju Devi and Sarla Devi, from Jammu and Bushra Ashraf, from Kashmir. Bushra Ashraf was the most successful bowler who did a wonderful job by taking 2 wickets while Sarla Devi and Sandhya Sayal claimed 1 wicket each.

While talking to MERC TIMES, Bushra Ashraf, one of the faces behind the success of the team said that they will continue to play with same determination. "Being a Kashmiri, we want our Kashmir to outshine in every sector, so we too are giving best to bring Kashmir first as it is the job of every Kashmiri to work for the betterment of the motherland." Bushra said.

"Further the team will work hard and try to lift the title next time," she added.

Being a Kashmiri, we want our Kashmir to outshine in every sector, so we too are giving best to bring Kashmir first as it is the job of every Kashmiri to work for the betterment of the motherland



❖ Iqra Akhoun

Anantnag Ashram, in a dwelling hub of peace

ANANTNAG: When rest of Kashmir was boiling, an Ashram in Achabal, Anantnag, which was proving a dwelling place of peace and harmony for local residents.

Shri Ramakrishna Mahasamellan Ashram in Achabal, Anantnag district became a live example of tranquility,

brotherhood and a firth to needy and poor people.

"During 2016 turmoil, people from different communities who visited the Asharam, for food and other necessary things were provided the necessary commodities, said Veena, a Kashmiri Pandit, who lives in a nearby house.

We did this work for our inner peace and whosoever comes will

not feel the scarcity of food any more", Veena added.

"Needy people come to our ashram and we offer them help and serve food, in return we receive peace" said Atul, working member of an Ashram.

Every year, yogashikha mela is held in the Ashram where hundreds of people from different states participate.

DPS, first school to implement solar energy system



❖ Sabha Gul

SRINAGAR: Delhi Public School, Srinagar has become the first of its kind institution in the whole valley to have implemented the innovative and advanced system to run entirely on electricity produced by solar energy.

The school has taken a big leap towards becoming eco-friendly system by setting an example for its students as well as other institutions by successfully establishing a grid connected solar power plant. This project was commissioned with the

help of JAKEDA (Jammu and Kashmir Energy Development Agency).

Grid connected solar PV system is a new technology under which, if a grid connect system is capable of producing more power than its consumption requirements, the surplus is fed into the main power grid. The excess power served to the grid can be consumed by common users.. The entire school including its classes, laboratories, hostel and even the swimming pool will run on electricity produced by the solar power plant of the school.

School under its 'Go Green' initiative

is taking various steps to reduce its carbon footprint in the environment and this is one big leap towards that.

DPS has always strived to make a difference in the society by taking up such innovative projects and takes pride in being the trend setter and setting bench marks in the fields of scientific innovations and development for other organizations in the valley emulate. Along with many other projects like "Save Water" "grow more plants" and garbage disposal students are also working on a project "Kashmir Garbage free".

HUMANITY CAN BE SERVED BEST BY DONATING BLOOD VOLUNTARILY TO THE NEEDY



Blood donation camp held at Bemina

❖ Junaidn manzoor

SRINAGAR: A day long blood donation camp for the social cause was organized by SAAYA an NGO. The Assistance for the camp was provided by Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, Rainawari and Red Cross Society, Jammu and Kashmir branch in collaboration with Intizamia Committee of Masjid-i-Iqra, Masjid-i-Musaib and Masjid-i-Gani.

Voluntary donors thronged the venue and registered their names for blood donation camp following announcements made by organisers through public address system of the local mosques.

"This is the joint effort of people of Bemina, to contribute in the hour of grief", said one of the donors.

During the camp, 75 points of blood were donated by the locals.

Wasiq Ali of SAAYA said, "humanity can be served best by donating blood voluntarily to the needy".

Government school turns into dumping site

❖ Fahmeeda Rashid

GANDERBAL: Schools are meant for nourishing, but that is not the case in Ganderbal district, where in a small village Wussan, lays a Government Middle School, which is in centre of attraction not for education but surely for the loads of scraps and dust waste found inside the premises of school.

There are surely many parents who can't afford to send their wards to private owned school.

Mushtaq Ahmed, a locale, complains that "women of Dar

Mohalah Wussan, collect waste and throw that waste material along with animal dung inside the school premises."

Arshid Hussain, a teacher by profession said, "children's are suffering from various infectious diseases. In summers, the conditions are worst, the bad smell of dung suffocates them and it is a matter of concern.

When MERC TIMES connected, Chief Educational Officer, Abdul Rahman, Ganderbal, he said, "I will look into the matter and hopefully the problem of the students will be addressed soon."



We are proud to tell that despite limited sources of income, parents in Kashmir show a lot of interest in the education of their children

Swachh Bharat Scheme a mere day dreamer



❖ Naveed Wani

PULWAMA: A wood depot at South Kashmir's Awantipora, is in pity and pathetic condition. The depot is closer to National Highway and police station.

We are uncomfortable over here as woods affects our health and we feel unsafe, said Joginder Singh a tea maker who is there from past 22 years.

The wood which is now useless except that of burning should now be distributed", said another person working there from past 10 years.

Meanwhile before the Kashmir Unrest, the Forest Minister, Lal Singh, had visited the area and had assured to clear the rotten logs", said one of the depot employees.

The locals demand for immediate clearance of wood, as it is creating health issues and is exposing our indifference towards our beautiful valley, he added

when contacted cheif general manager (CGM) S & M, he said ' we used to hoard wooden logs of low quality in this dpot, therefore the corporation cant suffer loses'



BONIYAR VILLAGE REMAINS CUTOFF FROM DISTT HEADQUARTERS

❖ Syed irshad

BARAMULLA: The heavy snowfall in the month of January brought many problems for the people of Banali Village, as it was cut off from its adjacent areas. Banali, a remote and mountainous village lies in Pir Panjal range and is 50 Kilometres away from District Baramulla.

Being cut off from adjacent areas led to many problems, like shortage of water, food, important essentials, road blockade and power cut offs, said a locale, Arshid Ahmed.

Mushtaq Ahmed, a shopkeeper, said, "It's very difficult to send our children for tuition as our life is restricted within our own village. Mostly food and consumer affairs are affected a lot because there is

no road connectivity which adds salt to our wounds".

"There is no medical aid facility or dispensary in village, road blockade has also made patients to suffer as many a times. We have to cross these slippery link roads", said Ashaq Geelani, a local resident.

When contacted Tehsildar Boniyar he said ' we will clear the road as soon as possible.

Meet the 15-year-old author of a new book on Kashmir

❖ Muhammad Nadeem

Zuni Chopra
tells the tale of the
state through

SRINAGAR: With two previously published poetry books to her name, Zuni Chopra—daughter of filmmaker Vidhu Vinod Chopra and film critic Anupama Chopra, and also niece to award-winning writer Vikram Chandra—has certainly carried on their literary legacy. Now, with her first work of fiction due to release this February, the 15-year-old is here to carve a novel niche for herself. Vogue finds out three things you need to know about Chopra on the eve of her enchanting debut with *The House That Spoke*.

She's dedicated her book to

Kashmir, and tells a decidedly different story in the form of a fantasy novel

Initially, her story had been set in London—because the house that inspired it was set in London—but "it wasn't a place I loved or belonged to," she says. Instead, she decided to take a different narrative route, and her tale travelled to Kashmir. "Set in Kashmir, the story had a whole new purpose and dimension. It was now a story that needed to be told, and I fell in love with it. So you see, it's not so much I set it in Kashmir as it is that it came to be set in Kashmir," Chopra adds. It is in a brave blend of magical and historical bits that the reader

meets the 14-year-old protagonist, Zoon Razdan, and her house—equal parts spellbinding, and subsumed with secrets and evil forces.

She's among the youngest on the Indian literary landscape—and she's got words of wisdom for you

"You don't need to be a prodigy to achieve your ambitions and make your dreams come true," says Chopra. And while she's grateful to Penguin for believing in her project, she's a huge supporter of self-belief: "One major tip I would give is to not be deterred by believing that you're somehow not good enough for any reason. If you believe in something enough, it will happen."

Patients visiting hospital for mental illness quite high: Dr Shafi.



❖ Qazi Tanzeela Rahat

SRINAGAR: On any given day, one can see hundreds of people lining up at the dilapidated Rainawari Psychiatric Hospital, in Kashmir Summer Capital Srinagar, for different treatments.

To offset the rush the Jammu and Kashmir Government has come up with another counseling centre at the Shri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital (SMHS), which is equally populated.

"Dr Shafi says most patients that visit the hospital suffer from depression, chronic traumatic stress, anxiety disorders, suicidal disorders and numbers are quite high. Mental health ailments have immersed as one of the most pressing public health concerns in Kashmir."

"Remote hamlets have been abiding the worst part of the brunt regional violence for years on end and many who line in the rural outback have little access to counseling", she added.

Najeeb wani, who hails from Anantnang , says the situation will only improve when the violence stops in kashmir.

Another doctor added, "the true story of those sufferings from trauma or anxiety related disorders which are complicated to understand and will become better once things starts working out normally.

Most patients that visit the hospital suffer from depression, chronic traumatic stress, anxiety disorders, suicidal disorders and numbers are quite high

White blanket surfaces over Kupwara

❖ Tahir Bhat

KUPWARA: Like other parts of Kashmir. Kashmir's Northern district Kupwara, received winter's first snowfall in the first week of January as had been predicted by the weather department ending the long dry spell. The snowfall brought jubilations to the people. Youth posted selfies on social media expressing their happiness on change in weather.

The administrations were not quick in taking action and clearing the snow on the roads on second day.

On January 05, District Commissioner Kupwara visited different areas of the district to take stock of the situation and directed the authorities concerned to be ready for any eventuality that may arise out of heavy snowfall, media reports said.

The worst affected was the power sector. To most of the villages the power supply remained cut for more than 30 hours. The lack of power led to massive crises. The electricity



dependent equipments stopped working once the backups were drained out. Most villages had to spend nights without electricity.

The power cut affected the works at government offices as most of the

DTP shops were shut down due to non-availability of electricity.

People alleged that the power development department only knows how to generate bills and not how to supply power to people.

administrations were not quick in taking action and clearing the snow on the roads on second day



Tral girl bags first position in AILDIP

❖ Faila Khan

PULWAMA: A 12-year-old girl from South Kashmir's Arigam village has bagged first position in All India Level Dharmic Prakiya scoring an incredible 298 marks out of 300.

In a telephonic interview with MERC times, an overjoyed Amanpreet kour said, "I'm really glad, I worked so hard for this exam and my hard work has finally paid off."

Daughter of a bank employee, Kour is a Grade 6 student at Hamdard Grammar School, Tral. "It was hard but I managed both my school work and exam preparations. I have been studying Punjabi and history of our religion since grade one, and been reciting Gurbani morning and

evening."

Speaking about her future prospexts, Kour said she wants to become a doctor, "I want to serve the poor."

According to records, 127340 students of different states of India had participated in All India Level Dharmic Prikhya. The exam was conducted by Sikh Missionary College Ludhiana.



Is social media responsible for teenagers self-harm?



❖ Syed Bilal

SRINAGAR: Is being blamed today for the huge increases in the number of teenagers who are self-harming. Is social media really responsible? Can it really explain sudden leap in child self-harm hospital admissions in just two years? There is almost a 14% increase in self-harm cases from 2013 to 2016 among

teenagers, being admitted in hospitals, a national society for the prevention of cruelty to children (NSPCC) has revealed. Self-harm is when you hurt yourself, normally your body, when feelings, memories or body tensions became too much. This “tearing the body apart” is a way to attack oneself, to try to gain some agency over unbearable pain, and to communicate.

Our pain is deeply indexed to the messages we receive about what is and is not acceptable. From birth, we are surrounded by ideals of successful personhood and the good life which we internalize, and compare ourselves against. Our self-respect is thus indexed to how we are seen from outside. While newspaper headlines blame the 24/7 nature of social media for the cult of competitiveness causing distress in this cohort, social media is but a symptom of the root cause.

Social media later provides a noxious mirror back to our success and failures and is the conduit of the values of any particular time. Thus is an actively used as a forum through which people who self-harm can connect with one another, to reclaim the experience and scars as meaningful and powerful. Rather than blame social media for today’s figures, we must encourage youngsters to have a relationship to social media such that it is not a constant pressure to be “on”, to sell an impossible image, but as a potential source of creating new ways to be human, and to live a good, connected life.

DARK CHOCOLATE



❖ Shahzad ashiq

SRINAGAR: You may have heard that dark chocolate is healthier than milk chocolate. If you are like many people, though, you prefer the sweeter, less bitter type. That means you’re missing out on dark chocolate’s heart benefits. But you may not have to accept this limitation much longer. Researchers have just figured out how to give milk chocolate the same nutritional punch as the dark stuff. And they did it by adding a surprising ingredient. Even better news: The process doesn’t change the treat’s flavor.

No one should eat lots of chocolate thinking that it

will make them healthier. Chocolate, after all, usually contains fat and sugar. But dark chocolate does have some chemicals that research has linked to heart health. Known as antioxidants, these chemicals show up in many fruits, vegetables and nuts. Antioxidants can stop a chemical reaction in the body known as oxidation. Too much oxidation can damage cells. Research has shown that oxidation underlies a host of illnesses, including cancer and heart disease.

All chocolate is made from cocoa beans, which contain antioxidants. To produce chocolate, the beans are broken down into cocoa solids and a type of fat called cocoa butter. Put those two parts back together

and you have unsweetened chocolate, which doesn’t taste very good. Adding sugar produces the tastier, though still somewhat bitter, dark chocolate. Milk chocolate contains cocoa solids and cocoa butter. It, however, has more sugar than dark chocolate. It also has milk or cream. This makes the candy lighter in color and smoother in taste. But gram for gram (or ounce for ounce), milk chocolate contains less cocoa than dark chocolate. That means it also has fewer antioxidants. Yet scientists can’t just add antioxidants to make milk chocolate healthier without affecting its taste, anyway. After all, these chemicals tend to taste bitter.