

Vol 10•No 03•Pages 16•March 15, 2017

MERC TIMES



MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE,
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR

Beauty of hijab

INSIDE
MERC
Times



Verinag ropeway project gets no response
P3



The office that floats
P12



Sport Council Conducts Physical test for Snow skiing
P14



Beauty of Hijab

❖ **Bint Ul Huda**

SRINAGAR: Five years ago, Nazma Khan a Muslim lady in New York decided to invite women to experience what life is like when you wear Hijab. She wanted to foster religious tolerance and fight stereotypes about women who choose to wear the hijab. She figured if women wore the hijab even for only one day, it might change their perspective towards Muslims.

Taking cue from the same, a Kashmir based organization Al- Mehdi foundation celebrated hijab day at central Kashmir's district Budgam. The event got its limelight when the different private institutes of the locality came forward and welcomed the Foundation for the same.

The event comprised of young girls who marched towards the district Hospital showcasing placards that read: My Hijab is my pride, a veil of women is better than the blood of a martyr; the verses of holy Quran. The slogans in favour of the oppressed people were also chanted during the event.

They also presented Gifts to the doctors for wearing the Hijab.

'It is really the inspirational step and I really appreciate this and will also try to make others acquaint about the benefits of wearing Hijab'. Medical Superintendent, District Hospital Budgam, said.

The event was followed by the lectures on wearing hijab. Students from various institutions participated in the event who spoke about the benefits of wearing Hijab.

A volunteer at the event said 'My Hijab is not only covering my body parts but it is really my pride and strength, and it encourages me to face the outside world with high dignity', when asked what hijab means to her.

The organizers of this event who were also accompanying them said, 'We have organized this event to send the message to girls as well as their parents about the benefits of wearing hijab'.

Mohammed Yaseen, vice President, Al Mehdi Foundation, said 'all we wanted to emphasize is that current generation should know the real value of Hijab.

Tune in "Gami Bayan Hindeh Khatreh"

❖ **Munawar Hussain**

SRINAGAR: While some of the citizens were busy enjoying the freedom from century long colonialism, All India Radio (AIR) pledged to change the lives of rural population. Right from the year 1947, the regional section of AIR, Radio Kashmir Srinagar (RKS) is tirelessly serving the farmer population of J&K state.

It all started with Awami Raj Programme, which was first broadcasted in the year 1947 on RKS. The Programme provided beneficial and up-to-date information about the agricultural developments in the state and center.

Initially, the Programme was broadcasted everyday from 6:15 to 7:30 pm, (75 minutes) on RKS. Now, with the change of broadcast timing, has come the new name for it. The Programme is now widely known as Gami Bayan Hind Khatreh (GBHK) and is broadcasted everyday at 6:10 pm. The show runs for 50 minutes.

Besides being an archetype of development support communication, The GBHK is a home to

farm show. Encompassing the issues related to agriculture, veterinary sciences, economical, home science and social.

The Programme has a separate section for Agricultural News, which is broadcasted every weekday at the end of show.

Uniquely, the language used in the Programme is exclusively Kashmiri. Whether they are anchors, reporters, farmers or experts, all of them converse in kashmiri dialect. That makes it more intelligible and lucid for the rural population.

The pattern of Programme ranges from studio and field based. Mostly, the content of studio show is an interview regarding the topic and an advice from the expert. While as, in field based shows, the officers from the department visit a rural area and educate the farmers about the new technological advancements in agriculture. Along with the experts, the team provides practical knowledge about any project.

Everyday, Hundreds of farmers interact with the team of GBHK. They send e-mails, text messages and also call to pay their gratitude to the department.



THE CHARM OF HARISSA

❖ **Sheikh Saman**

GANDERBAL: Ganderbal: The mouthwatering whiff of steaming spices Infuses with the chilly air, and soon overwhelms the oldest market of the area: Main Bazaar. It doesn't take long for people to gather around the steaming pot being that is being warmed by liquefied petroleum gas.

Despite the chilling cold in the morning people start coming to Harisa shops around the city. Harisa is known as one of the most traditional delicacy for the people of Kashmir.

Ghulam Rasool who owns a Harisa shop near the main market of Qamarwari chowk is serving this delicious delicacy from last few decades now. 'I have been doing this work from last 35 years in this area and people from almost every age group rush to my shop no sooner they offer Fajar Namaz

Even though there is too much cold in the early morning people still do come from various areas to fetch Harisa, he added .According to Ghulam Rasool, preparing Harisa is not an easy job to execute.

Lots of patience, good experience and ideal precision of ingredients are needed to make a tasty Harisa.

Harisa is cooked for the entire night in huge vessels (Matka) over low heat. He said selection of

right meat is most important in which (Raan)

Limb meat of sheep is mostly preferred. Variety of spices and other ingredients like cooked rice, elachi, cinnamon, cardamom, saunf are added to the broth then vigorously stirred by a long wooden ladle till the ideal soft state of Harisa is attained.

Harisa is served to the customers in a traditional way. The Harisa is served with a Kashmiri Bread which aptly complements it. Before serving a Harisa platter, a dash of hot oil is poured over it.

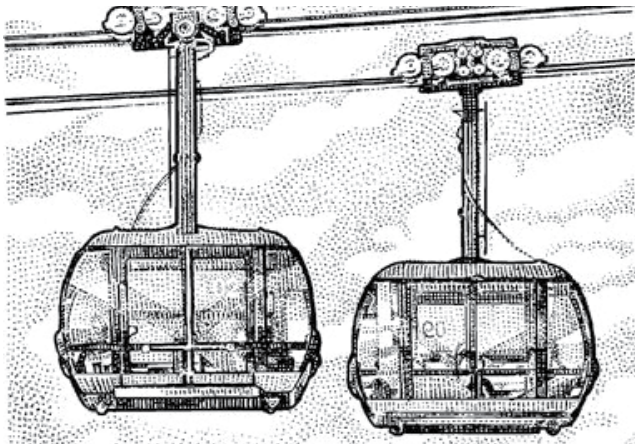
Last year the rate of Harisa was 450 rupees per kilogram but with the rising prices of meat, this year the prices have gone touched 600 rupees per kilogram. However the culinary art of Harisa making is left confined to certain people, and is losing its gleam. Ghulam Rasool said, 'i don't think that my future generation will continue this sort of profession in future and I am afraid that Harisa preparation in shops will become rare a phenomenon in the years to come'

Harisa is loved by the people of different age groups around the city.

Some of them like to have it in shop while many others prefer carrying it to their places.

A local, Shabir Mir said, 'I would usually visit this shop thrice a week in order to have a plate of Harisa, despite the cold in the morning. The taste of Harisa hasn't changed all these years'.

Verinag ropeway project gets no response



❖ Ali Pathan

SRINAGAR: Despite inviting tenders multiple times, the Verinag Ropeway project is seeing no headway, as no construction company is serious in working on the project which can prove fruitful for the tourism.

The project that was envisioned in order to provide cable car service to the visitors at South Kashmir's famed tourist destination: Verinag. However it has faced two continuous rejections from the construction companies which have halted the project to just papers.

Last year in August, the State cable car corporation invited bids from the construction agencies for the execution of laying ropeway system from Verinag Spring to Botanical garden.

'We have invited tenders twice at national level, but, there is no response from the

construction companies. We should have an adequate number of bidders before finalizing the deal. There is no headway yet and now we are discussing the other options available with us to ensure the progress over the project' an official from the State Cable car Corporation said.

The project cost was estimated as Rs.18.50 crore and the interested bidders were asked to deposit 25 lakh as the tender money with the corporation.

Prior to this, the SCCC had also invited the bids in 2014 for the construction of the passenger ropeway.

The project land that belongs to Verinag Development Authority (VDA) and was supposed to be completed through public private partnership mode.

'The project was to be completed through PPP mode. It was supposed to be maintained and run by the selected party for 30 years initially which later would have been handed over to the VDA', he said.

Meanwhile the SCCC has communicated the government to decide the further course of action in order to start any headway on the project.

'We have written to the government and hopefully some new plan of action will be formulated to construct the ropeway', the officials said.

16,000 dog bite cases in last 3 years

❖ Rahil Hussain

SINAGAR: An official data has revealed that during the past three years, 16,000 people have been bitten by stray dogs in the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir.

The data available at Anti-Rabies clinic at the SMHS hospital reveals that five thousand dog bite cases had occurred during the 2015-16.

'It is about 100 more than 2014-15, when 4917 incidents were reported at the same clinic. As many as 6014 dog bite cases were recorded during 2013-14', said an official.

The official further added that there have been incidents of stray dogs chasing, attacking and biting school children, aged persons, pedestrians, morning walkers and two-wheeler riders.

The official data reveals a decrease of dog population from 90000 to 49,000 as per 2011-census, conducted by an independent agency: The Humane Society International adopting the Lincoln index in order to assess the canine population.

The floods of September 2014, it is believed also caused a decrease in canine population by around 5,000 dogs in Srinagar.

'SMC has been working on multiple strategies to control the dog menace within the city, mainly focusing on minimizing the availability of energy rich food and garbage on the roads and by employing animal birth control program', said senior officials of SMC.

He further said that SMC has been constantly focusing on minimizing, in a scientific manner, the availability of energy-rich food and non-vegetarian garbage, which is generated from households, poultry outlets and butcher shops, weddings and restaurants.

❖ Auqib Salam

Allama Iqbal Library holds a hidden house of knowledge

Sriinagar : Not many students are familiar with the International Resource Cell (IRC) of the Allama Iqbal library. Established by the British High Commission, IRC provides resources on Gender Studies, International relations, Economics, Politics, Conflict Management, Sociology etc. It is a vibrant center where activities like book reviews, video conferencing, film screening, face-to-face discussions with eminent personalities and workshops are held regularly, besides giving access to indispensable sources of information - both in print and electronic form. IRC was set up as a project given by British High Commission through British Council for the State of Jammu & Kashmir under which an IRC center each was established in the University of Jammu and University of Kashmir. IRC remained the hub of activities for two years during its functional period conducting average two activities per month, sometimes 3-4 activities were held in the form of panel discussions, workshops, guest lectures and book reviews. All the funding

for these activities and the overall working of IRC was provided by British High Commission through British Council.

Mrs. Somaira Nabi, who has supervised the project since its beginning said, 'IRC has been an activity hub since its launch in 2006 and it has been very instrumental in bringing the entire Iqbal library into lime light'. When asked what the current state of IRC is since its MOU has expired, she replied that IRC still stands a part of Library and is open to students of Kashmir University; she further said that students can make good use of the unique collection of literature that is available at IRC.

IRC has also been providing free online access to databases like EBSCOhost. It has been very proactive in providing fellowships to meritorious students including some social fellowships for deprived students. While talking about the future of IRC, Mrs. Nabi said, 'We tried to reach out to the British High Commission to make IRC fully functional again, however it could happen due to some reasons'.

'I am very optimistic that IRC will continue to be of great importance to the University', she added.

Lack of transport facility for KU students

❖ **Musaib Mehraj**

SUMBAL: Students of Kashmir University hailing from far-flung (KU) are complaining about the lack of direct transport service for them especially in the winter season when there is less transport available on the roads.

A delegation of students told MERC TIMES that they are facing a lot of inconvenience because of the non-availability of transport on the route.

'We usually miss our first class because of lack of the transport. In evening we have to wait for hours to board a bus', said Rahil Hussain, a student of university.

According to the students, Kashmir University is currently taking winter classes and it is getting difficult for them to reach University campus on time as the buses move at snail's pace. The students are facing the same problem in the evening as well as they reach their homes quite late in the evening thus making it difficult for them to study afterwards.

Students said that though they have many a times met the varsity officials in this regard but nobody paid any heed to it.

'It would be better for us if we could get the transport facility from the Kashmir University', they said.

Regional transport Officer Srinagar,



Farooq Rather said, 'There must be university buses which can fetch the students to and fro and it is not our concern'.

The concerned officials of the transport wing of KU said, 'There are buses in the University but there is no vacancy in them'.

"It would be better for us if we could get the transport facility from the Kashmir University"

Traffic chaos, a never ending problem at Rambagh Bridge

❖ **Bisma**

SRINAGAR: Closure of Mehjoor Nagar Bridge has severely affected the vehicular movement on Rambagh-Jawahar Nagar leading to massive traffic jams round the clock.

Authorities closed the Mehjoor Nagar Bridge on Tuesday for vehicular movement after one of its pillars had collapsed.

The commuters are aghast as the authorities have failed to make alternative arrangements before closing the bridge. The sudden closure forced commuters to use Rambagh-Jawahar Nagar route, resulting in massive traffic jams.

'It is unfortunate that our officers have no broader vision. Their decisions are limited to their own perspectives that lack the public interest', said angry locals of affected South City areas.

After the closure of bridge, the traffic jams in morning and evening terrible. Commuters have to tread through traffic jams on Rambagh-Jawahar Nagar route', they complained.

Muhammad Yasin, a resident of Padshahi Bagh said that the vehicles coming from South City areas earlier used Mehjoor Nagar Bridge to reach city centre. But

the closure of the bridge has put additional load on the Rambagh-Jawahar Nagar route particularly during peak hours', the aggrieved commuters said.

One of the cops posted at Jawahar Nagar said 'we have been facing a tough ever since the bridge was closed. This route already had heavy vehicular movement. Now closure of the bridge has increased traffic flow manifold'.

The gridlock in late evening at Jawahar Nagar is causing immense hardships to the commuters.

'Due to the ongoing construction work on Jahangir-Chowk fly over, authorities had closed both lanes of Jahangir Chowk-Solina route. This bridge has been closed for even light motor vehicles. It seems as if authorities are interested in closing all major routes than opening new roads and bridges to decongest roads', said an agitated commuter who was stranded in traffic jam at Rambagh.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Traffic, Srinagar, Fayaz Ahmad, admitted that the closure of Mehjoor Nagar bridge has put additional traffic rush on Rambagh-Jawahar Nagar route.

Traffic jam creates mess

❖ **Danish Pathan**

GANDERBAL: With number of vehicles increasing every day, the traffic management is becoming a daunting task for the authorities in South Kashmir's Anantnag district, especially in the main town. The mismanagement of the traffic and callous attitude of drivers and commuters has left the town in disarray, often causing inconvenience to the people.

'I had to unlight from the ambulance, while my wife was struggling with pain inside the vehicle. Some unfeeling people had parked their vehicles in the middle of road. We remained stuck for forty minutes, due to traffic congestion', said Mohammed ALL, a resident of Aishmuqam.

The same scenes are witnessed at other vital spots in the town including Mehandi Kadal, Mattan Chowk, JanglatMandi, K P Road and Khanabal main



point. Couple of policemen can be seen in the early morning clearing main road and chowks, but as the day advances they vanish in thin air.

'On my way to office, barely six kilometers from

my home, I am usually stuck for more than an hour every day. The sumo and travera drivers park their vehicles just outside the general bus stand on KP Road which leads to the traffic jam, Aqib Ashraf, a bank executive said.

'There is nobody to discipline these drivers. The administration considers the natives of this place as herds of sheep. Nobody bothers to check the violations by the public transporter operators', Ashraf added.

Deputy Commissioner Anantnag Syed Abid Shah said that the administration has devised a traffic plan for the town. 'We have devised a plan for the smooth movement of traffic. We are taking advice

from the citizens of Anantnag also. We have decided to take suggestions from the civil society and the press fraternity during a meeting on at Dak Bungalow Anantnagi, Shah said.

Renowned scientist delivers lecture at KU

❖ **Saher Iqbal**

ANANTNAG: Renowned scientist Dr Chandaram Sivaji on Saturday delivered a lecture at the University of Kashmir on opportunities for international research collaborations and fellowships.

Dr Sivaji, Scientist-F, is presently Director, International Cooperation (Bilateral) at the Department of Science and Technology (DST) that works under the aegis of Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India.

In his lecture, Dr Chandaram talked at length on the role of DST in promoting scientific research collaborations and fellowships.

Referring to opportunities available to budding researchers

and scholars through fellowships and research programs at the international level, Dr Chandaram said: 'India is a rising powerhouse in science and is participating in international mega science projects. The feedback we have received over the last few years shows that our international partners are highly impressed with the talent of students and scholars'

Maintaining that the recent initiatives by the DST have reversed the trend of brain-drain, Dr Chandaram said: 'India has built its own mega science facilities and we welcome international participation, it is these initiatives that have reversed brain drain and started 'brain-gain' in the country'.



KU observes National Science day

❖ **Mohammed Nadeem**

ANANTNAG: A day long program on National Science was observed at Kashmir University, speaking on the occasion Vice-Chancellor of University of Kashmir Prof Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi said the cause of specially-abled persons is very dear to the University and efforts are on to address their concerns on priority.

Addressing the seminar, Prof Andrabi said: 'The cause of specially-abled persons is very dear to us and we, in our own little capacity, have started taking certain initiatives in this direction, including designing and establishment of specially-abled friendly buildings in campuses of the University'.

Prof Andrabi said, 'I believe it is through these efforts we can make future generations more sensitive

about the needs of the specially-abled people'.

The seminar was organized by University's Department of Students Welfare (DSW).

Highlighting the contribution of science and technology in lives of common people, the V-C said: 'The inputs of science and modern technological advances and latest gadgets can make things easier for specially-abled people after careful designing and application'

In his address, Director of Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), Dr AG Ahangar said 'ability or disability of a person should not stop him from achieving his dreams. He referred to some famous scientists, doctors and sports-persons that, despite certain limitations, made huge contributions in various fields of life'.

K.U organizes International Conference on Silk Route

❖ **Moazzam Bhat**

SRINAGAR: A two-day conference under the theme 'Silk Route as a Factor in Asian Integration' was organized by the University of Kashmir's Centre of Central Asian Studies (CCAS) in collaboration with MMAJ Academy of International Relations, Jamia Millia Islamia New Delhi and Bedil International Foundation, New Delhi.

Vice-Chancellor of the varsity Prof. Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi presided over the inaugural session of the conference.

In his presidential address, Prof Andrabi highlighted the significance of the Silk Route and its importance in contemporary times.

The chief guest of the occasion, Prof Saif-ud-din Soz, former Union Cabinet delivered the inaugural address.

Former Ambassador of India to Sweden, Latvia and Kazakhstan, Mr. Ashok Sajjanhar presented the keynote address,

highlighting the contemporary significance of Silk Route and India's contribution in its revival.

Chairman Bedil International Foundation New Delhi, Mohammad Shafi Pandith delivered a special address on the occasion.

Director CCAS Prof G N Khaki, introduced the theme of the conference and formally welcomed the participants from different parts of the country and abroad. Dr. G M Shah, Seminar Coordinator, MMAJ Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, gave an outline of the themes to be discussed during the two-day deliberations. Dr Tariq A Rather presented the vote of thanks.

A student of the institution, on the occasion, said that the conference was the need of the hour and that conferences, debates and seminars on the same lines should be organized in the future also as they enlighten the students about matters of historical significance.

National seminar begins at KU

Digital libraries important for researchers, say experts

❖ **Muneem**

Srinagar: Digital libraries can go a long way in fulfilling the growing needs of academicians, researchers and students, experts said at the inaugural function of a 2-day national-level seminar Emerging Frontiers of Digital Libraries at the University of Kashmir. The seminar has been organized by the University's Department of Library & Information Science (DLIS) and sponsored by the UGC.

KU's Dean of Research Prof Sheikh Javid Ahmad said digital libraries are 'important for helping researchers to get access to quality literature and use the benefits of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Libraries have now embraced the ICT to serve their users better'.

In his keynote address, Dr Gayas Makhdumi, Librarian and Head of Library & Information Science Department at Jamia Millia Islamia emphasized upon

the role played by libraries in research. He highlighted various Digital Library initiatives taken in US, UK and India which have gone a long way in meeting the researchers needs more effectively.

In his welcome address, Dr Abdul Majid Baba, KU Librarian highlighted the importance of ICT and its impact on libraries. Digital libraries have facilitated the work of present researchers, he said, and mentioned the challenges posed by e-resources and digital libraries.



De-stressing Srinagar youth via creative writing

❖ Hayat Manan

SRINAGAR: Starting from January 14, the Kashmir Youth Arts Initiative (KYAI), organized a workshop on creative writing at Vishwa Bharti Higher Secondary School, Rainawari, Srinagar. The workshop, Mashq-e-zamistaan, was supervised by trainers Taha Mughal and Shahnaz Bashir, novelist and professor and was scheduled on weekends from January 14 to February 5th, 2017.

With 30 participants, "MASHQ - E ñ-ZAMISTAN -lets write, focused on honing the writing skills of young children, unmasking their personal stories and narratives, as they divulge their experiences of the 2016 summer uprising. Memories are fresh and need to be captured, the intervention of the workshop is also to provide a space for de-stress and creative therapy for young people to share their thought.

During the workshop, the participants were familiarized with the skill of writing fiction as well as personal narratives. They were familiarized with short story writing

and other genres like poetry. The participants were encouraged to express their feelings and ideas in any medium which made them more comfortable.

Taha Mughal, the trainer, said Art is the language of the soul, an expression of self and a promise of self-belonging. Today in an insanely fast driven world where money or fame are increasingly become the sole motivations for remaining alive, we increasingly are battling a severe underlying identity crisis where people just manage wading through days for a better tomorrow that obviously never comes. This creative writing workshop was designed with this underlying philosophy where the target group of the participants was teenagers who are highly vulnerable to such changes. It was tried that participants be provided with an environment to not only be themselves in their most original colours, but also to express themselves employing a creative skillset. They were made to reflect on themselves as individuals and also as social groups; and consequently use

their personal experiences to generate a creative outlet in terms of short stories, extempore, poetry and theatre. Not only were their sensitivities and perception chiselled, their imagination and literary capacities were also reinforced.

"I believe after the workshop they are now better equipped individuals with a tremendous power of objective observation and reflection, the two basic tenets of any good writer in the world. We wish them luck and will god-willingly be with them whenever need be as we have ended up becoming one great dependable family," he added.

Tanzeela, a participant, said that the way she and other participants opened up happened to be a life changing moment for her. "It was only after learning the power of words that I was able to open up to my parents regarding some crucial issues that had been bothering me for years now," said Tanzeela. She feels a change in her personality altogether.

To other participant, Unaab Sugra, the meaning of teaching and learning was revolutionized. "We were learning

and teaching at the same time," said Unaab. Apart from exposing the participants to writing techniques, they felt a change in their approach to communicating with others. They said that they discovered their hidden inclination to writing.

The workshop also included a component of medical assessment. During the workshop participants underwent a general health examination and mental health evaluation by Dr Arif Magrhibi, a mental health expert. Medicine and follow up referrals were issued when required.

The workshop concluded on Feb 5th and on the closing ceremony, certificates were distributed among the participants. From a hard ice breaking session to a teary eyed goodbye on the final day, the participants strongly bonded over the course of workshop. Mehraan Rafiq, a participant believes that the components he learnt here would remain with him all his life and that would communicate all his learning from here to his friends and family.

KU to get its fourth girls hostel

❖ Faila Khan

SRINAGAR: Apart from three existing girls hostels, Habba Khatoon, Qurat-ul-ain and Rabia Basri in the University campus, the authorities are all set to inaugurate a new hostel, Bibi Aamina in the vicinity.

The hostel consists of twelve rooms in three floors with two dormitories, and will accommodate over 180 students, said Lubna Mehraj, one of the office assistants.

It will be functional within just a week or two, and we are trying to provide students with the best, she added.

Talking to the provost of hostels, Professor G.N Khaki on the same matter, he with much excitement revealed, The new hostel apart from providing all basic facilities will be managed properly, the hostel will be well established with double bunk beds and just four students per room, and will be functional from March, 2017.

Apart from dining hall, recreational room, fitness room, reading room and library, the mess for the first time is outsourced. Students seem to be a little worried about the fee structure, but the provost claims, The fee is quite reasonable, you have to pay Rs. 23,000 as mess charge, Rs. 4200 as house rent allowance, Rs. 1200 as pelfare charges, Rs. 600 as maintenance charges, per annum and the food we are providing will be a well-balanced diet according to needs of a student.

The guests will be allowed there, like in every other university hostel, he added.

The total number of hostels in university campus is seven including four girls hostel (Qurat-ul-Ain, Habba Khatoon, Rabia Basri and Bibi Aamina) and three boys hostels (Maulana Anwar Shah Kashmiri, Mehboob-ul- Aalam and Gani Kashmiri research scholars in). Besides that there are two other boys hostels in the Zakura campus.

Kart Food, all set to deliver free food home delivery

❖ Adnan Hilal

SRINAGAR: There is good news for food lovers as Srinagar city is all ready to get its first food home delivery service by a new youth venture called "Kart Food". The service is all set to knock your door from 20th February.

Kart food, a food home delivery service has been initiated by an Entrepreneur, Furqan Shoaib Qureshi, a 22 year boy, from Habaq.

"I am very glad that I have commenced the first food home delivery service in Kashmir" said FurqanS hoab

"With the growing trend of fast food & cafe in Kashmir, I felt there was a need of adding a delivery service to cafe and restaurants so that their food services can reach out to those who don't get a time to visit these restaurants" he added

The introduction of this service has received an overwhelmed support by

the people, especially the youngsters. The Facebook page of Kart Food has received thousands of likes & shares.

"I appreciate this innovative initiative by Kart Food, with this service we now can have an easy access to our favourite food even sitting back at home" wrote a food lover on Facebook.

The delivery service will start from 20th February and it will cost Rupees 30 per order. However, the services for the first month will be available only for the areas 6km around Lal Chowk. While from 1st April 2017, the services will be available to whole Srinagar city with lesser charges.

The delivery services will be providing food services of the prominent cafe and restaurants from Srinagar such as Kathi Junction, The 14th Avenue, Books & Bricks and The other side cafe.

"We will be featuring more cafe & restaurants in the coming time" said Furqan Shoaib

'Sluggish' official machinery

Rampant violation of PSGA continues
in Govt offices

❖ B.M. Hussain

Kulgam: Majority of the government offices across Kashmir are blatantly violating the J&K Public Services Guarantee Act (PSGA) by taking longer than stipulated time in processing and issuing necessary documents to the locals.

Enacted in April 2011, J&K then took the second lead in India after Madhya Pradesh to implement PSGA which guaranteed public services to people in a time bound manner.

In Srinagar, for example, getting a reserved category certificate is an arduous process and takes months to complete even though under PSGA, it should be issued within 15 days from the date of application.

"I applied for a dependent certificate after my father passed away, it took Srinagar north Tehsil office more than 45 days to issue it and that too after I repeatedly went there to follow up on the process," says Imtiaz Ahmad, a resident of Batpora Hazratbal.

Tehsil office Srinagar has a similar story to tell

"I needed an income certificate for a university scholarship for financially weaker students, but our Tehsil office Hazratbal took over a month and eventually I could not apply for the scholarship," says Abid Wani, a resident Burzuhama batpora and an MCA student at Kashmir University.

"If you have any connections within SMC, the DOB certificate is processed within days, however for ordinary people, it just lingers on," says a source within Srinagar Municipal Corporation.

It is important to mention that more than 12 public services fall under the ambit of PSGA 2011.

An RTI activist who did not want to be named believes that the main reason behind failure of PSGA in J&K was lack of an independent commission constituted under PSGA.

Even after repeated attempts, Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, Baseer Khan and DC Srinagar Farooq Lone were unavailable for comments.

Unscheduled power cut irks ganderbal villagers

❖ Farhad khan:

GANDERBAL: Residents of Central Kashmir's Ganderbal district have accused the Power Development Department (PDD) of resorting to unscheduled power cuts in the area.

The areas like Wayil, Manigam, Serch, Urpush, Gutlibagh are reeling under darkness due to frequent and long power cuts.

"We do not receive proper power supply as per schedule and frequent power cuts have become a daily affair now and the electricity remains off for whole day and when it comes, the voltage is extremely low," the villagers said. "The electricity is playing hide and seek from the past two month, frequent power cuts result in unbearable hardships to us," said a local resident.

"Our area has three power projects including USHP Sumbal, USHP Kangan and Ganderbal which are generating 22MW, 11MW and 105 MWs of power respectively, but we are the worst hit as the Power Development Department is resorting to erratic power supply," he said.

"At the time when foundation stones were laid for the construction of the power house Sumbal, we were assured and promised that electricity will be provided to our area from the power house. But all the assurances proved to be a mere hoax and the people are suffering due to power supply," a delegation of locals told MERC Times.

Chief engineer PDD Kashmir, Shahnaz Goni said that the recent snowfall had damaged around 300 transformers that led to the disruption of electricity in some areas.

"Now the electricity supply has almost been restored," she said.

However, she said that breach of agreements was forcing the PDD to go for power cuts in some areas.

Govt fails to monitor order on using newspaper to wrap street food

❖ Imran Ali Buth

GANDERBAL: In an open violation of government orders, local vendors, street food kiosks, and hawkers are continuously using newspapers to wrap and serve their fast foods. Outrageously, they are violating the law under the noose of State government as the law enforcement agencies acts as mute spectators.

Especially during the festivals like Eid or Urs, street vendors install their unauthorized stalls, encroached roads leading to shrines or mosques, and sell unhygienic food items, wrap and serve on used newspapers.

According to the J&K Government Food Safety and Standards Act, the use of newspapers to wrap or serve fast foods is strictly prohibited, and whosoever violates the law, would be dealt with by severe punishing them as per the relevant provisions of the act. But despite the ban imposed by the State government, local vendors are openly using newspapers as

wrappers.

Speaking to MERC Times Rafiq Ahmad, a local, said, "The vendors always wrap and serve fast food items in newspapers". He said that the food items, they wrapped on newspapers, soak the newspaper ink which is harmful to our health. "If the government agencies imposed a ban, then they make sure of its ground implementation and constitute a regulatory body to do regular market inspections", he added. He further said, "due to the negligence of the government agencies, human health is at stake". Food contaminated by newspaper ink hoist serious health concerns. Besides chemical contaminations, presence of pathogenic microorganisms in used newspapers also poses risk to human health.

Showing seriousness over the issue, government officials told MERC Times, "we are serious to tackle this issue and are doing market inspections to make sure that nobody violates the law. Violators will deter with severe punishment accordingly".

Usage of Monosodium Glutamate in Food Items Hazardous for Health

❖ Waseem

GANDERBAL: Usage of Monosodium glutamate (MSG) in food processed items for taste enhancer is proving to be harmful for human consumption as it leads people to suffer from severe diseases.

MSG is a common and widespread additive used in food industry as a flavour enhancer that intensifies the meaty, savoury flavour of food as naturally occurring glutamate does in foods. MSG has been used for over a century as a food additive, but in the last couple of decades, anecdotal claims of illness have been linked to MSG consumption.

Outspoken president of the factionalized Doctors Association of Kashmir, Dr Nisar ul Hassan in a statement said, that "MSG is potentially harmful to human life. It has been proven excitotoxin that results in brain damage and can trigger neurological diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

In different restaurants of the valley, food items are adulterated with MSG called as tasting powder, posing serious health hazards to consumers.

"Almost every restaurant and roadside stall selling Momos or noodles uses it to impart flavour instead of knowing its harmful effects," a chef at a restaurant in Lal chowk said.

Assistant food Commissioner Srinagar,

Hilal Mir said that it is not a banned item and is permitted under food safety and standard act. According to the act it can be used under prescribed limit and under label declaration. It is not such chemical which can't be used at all.

"It can't be used randomly and in restaurant and hotels wherever it is used they have to tell the consumer that MSG is mixed before selling or serving that particular food item. They have to give a choice to consumer whether you will accept that food item or not. In such restaurants where food items are being sold openly, there they have to place a sign board in which they have to specify the food items in which they are using MSG along with the quantity of it," Hilal Mir said

As per Food safety and standards Act (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulation 2011, MSG can be added to only specific foods. MSG can be added as a seasoning for noodles, pastas, meat tenderizer, onion salt, garlic salt, seasoning mix, topping to sprinkle on rice, fermented soya bean pasta and yeast and can't be used in other foods.

According to FSSAI, at present there is no analytical method to determine if MSG is naturally present in the product or was added during the manufacturing process. The only way to do so is to check the plant physically to see if MSG is being added to the products during manufacturing.

BEMINA RESIDENTS COMPLAIN OF DRAINAGE FAILURE

❖ Shah Tawqeer

SRINAGAR: The failure of drainage system in Bemina area of the city is giving tough to the residents living there.

“The road which connects Bemina with Qumarwari mostly remains converted into cesspool in rainy days due to which the people living in the area are forced to stay at home,” locals said.

“Not only the people living in the area are facing the problems but others as well who use the route regularly for going to their offices,” they added.

Bashir Ahmad Daga, a local said that since 2014 floods the drainage system in the area has not been constructed.

“Whenever there is a rainfall (whether moderate or heavy) the road is submerged and is converted into the river. We are unable to come out from our houses. Our day to day life is badly affected he said.

“We are unable to understand why the concerned authorities don’t show any concern regarding this matter even though the area is hub of government offices,” Daga said.

He added: “We have school going children they are not able to attend their schools or tuition centers in rainy days because of the poor drainage system in the area”

The areas of the Bemina which mostly remain submerged during rains include Iqra Colony, HIG Colony, MIG Colony, S K Colony and many others.

Flood victims await compensation



❖ Sadia Mir

SRINAGAR: Even after two years since the devastating floods in early September, 2014, people are still crying for the aid. A large number of flood victims across the valley are yet to receive the rehabilitation amount, released last year under Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund (PMNRF)

“Whereas the rehabilitation package?” asked a group of flood victims at Shivpora.

We have not received a penny under PMNRF, they said.

Showkat Ahmad, a victim said, ‘the authorities have asked us to submit sixteen digits back account numbers in concerned Tehsil offices. We did it every time but not a penny was transferred to our accounts’.

“The authorities had promised to disburse the

amount to our respective bank accounts by the end of the year 2015, it has been over a year but many victims are yet to receive it’, he added.

“The assured help from union government is nowhere as flood victims continue to cry for second installment of the compensation which the authorities had promised to release by the end of July, 2016’, said Mushtaq Ahmad, another flood victim.

“We don’t take announcements by the Government seriously now, we have seen how we were assured of rehabilitation under PMNRF but are yet to receive anything’, said a flood victim from Sonwar.

Deputy Commissioner Srinagar, Farooq Ahmad Lone while speaking on the matter said, ‘the number of people who are yet to receive amount from PMNRF is few, these are the people who have failed to submit their account numbers’.



Heaps of garbage pile up in University campus

❖ Nazima Rashid

SRINAGAR: While the government is busy creating awareness of cleanliness through various cleanliness drives, the education hub of Kashmir, the University of Kashmir narrates a different tale. Though bird’s eye view of the university gives

the impression that It is very clean, but a nearer look reveals the utter untidiness of the campus.

The ground floor of humanities block has turned into dumpster, the piles of garbage lying around the buildings diminishes the ambience of university campus.

‘It is our responsibility to maintain and keep our University clean. Students and authorities are equally responsible for it’, said a student from the same block.

Officials, when contacted claimed, ‘we have placed dustbins at every corner in the whole campus, now it is student’s responsibility to use them and help

in maintaining the cleanliness of the campus’.

Besides that large tract of fellow land in the varsity is being used to dump trash, thus attracting the dogs. The garbage sites within the campus have turned into the breeding grounds for canines, which are of great inconvenience to all and sundry.

KSL a platform where man becomes gentleman

❖ Wajahat Shabir

SRINAGAR: well, if you are thinking of visiting Dubai or going for a job, make sure you are good at cricket skill else you may lost the opportunity of playing Kashmir Super league, which is in action from 2015, being played at different ground and all thanks to the support of Dubai Government.

Two years back, about 10 Kashmiri youth based in UAE, working as professionals in IT, telecom and business management sector, came together to induce Kashmir Super League (KSL), an BIG BASH cricketing atmosphere aiming to bring together the Kashmiri expat community living in the emirates.

KSL is Kashmir's first exciting international league played in foreign soil. KSL's journey began in 2015, by bunch of Kashmiri expats working in Dubai. Few

Kashmiris chit chatting about a tea stall gave birth to the inception of idea of giving birth to such a wonderful cricket league.

The league initially compromised of 8 teams in Dubai. The team names were chosen wisely named after the prominent and famous cities of Kashmir, some names were chosen upon the heritage, architectural importance and historical significance of particular town of Kashmir.

The owners say that it will help all Kashmiri's to have that international cricket experience which they all dreamed in their life.

After the last year's grand finale, the owners taking a step further more introduced few more team into the league. Now, there are 14 teams currently participating into the league with more than 200 Kashmiri players

internationally residing in United Arab Emirates.

Shah Owais, who hails from Down Town, in his mid 20s, says that atmosphere in the KSL is all together at different level. One gets to master different things every day. It is always a good battle, as other team comprises of local Kashmiri people.

I was not the part of any team last year, but, I was lucky enough to get selected and I am doing well inside and outside the field. I hope to perform well in today's match, he added, as he whipped his shirt and started walking on the field to bowl.

Currently, Soura Qalanders is leading the pointing table with 8 points, from 6 matches. And, Manasbal Mavericks are leading from the bottom. Live stream of all the matches are available at Kashmir Super League Facebook Page.

BABSIPORA, NUNAR WITHOUT PLAYGROUND

❖ ShowQat Wani

KUPWARA: Contrary to successive government's claims of providing every village a play ground, but, villages of the Ganderbal are telling different story.

Babsipora and Nunar are among those villages in kangan constituency of district Ganderbal, who are devoid of playground. They are demanding playground from the last one decade but no heed had been given to them.

Local sports players say that they play on roads as they have no other choice. Sports activities have been badly affected by lack of play grounds. They have to travel 10 KM(Kilometers) to other villages to play cricket, football or any other sports.

They further added that about 20 thousand people of the area are devoid of any kind sports infrastructure.

Sarapanch of search village Bashir Wani said "we have many time approached to ministers and our MLA but our demand was not met.

There is a government agriculture farm of hundreds of kanals in our village ,where most of land remains uncultivated .If some land of that farm will be provided for playground our problem will be solved,".

Local populaces of the area have now appealed to MLA Kangan, Mia Altaf, to provide them playgrounds.

Matadors, a public hazard



❖ Rafia Manzoor

SRINAGAR: For every 312 people in the city of Srinagar, there is only one mini-bus, which officially has the permission to carry 13 persons at a time. According to the Census 2011, Srinagar city has population of 1206419 souls, and to cater the need of public transport only 3861 registered, mini-buses ply on different routes in the city.

"You board a Mini bus (Matador) and it's like we are loaded like animals in those vehicles, overloading is common, besides drivers make dozens of unnecessary stops at their own will," complains a commuter.

Government has notified that in one mini-bus, which forms the maximum portion public transport system the capacity is only to carry 13 passengers.

"Till recent years these matadors had the capacity to carry around 20 passengers, however we have now made it necessary that only 13 seats for passengers is

made," explains senior official in RTO Srinagar.

"No doubt majority of mini-buses plying in the city are uncomfortable. But at this time much cannot be done in this regard," said Regional Transport Officer Srinagar.

"I guarantee that you won't find this type of vehicle after 2030 in Kashmir and particularly in Srinagar city. These vehicles have shelf life of 25 years. After 25 years, these vehicles are 'condemned'. We have registered matadors till 2005 in our office and little math will explain that all such uncomfortable matadors will vanish from roads in 2030. We have to wait for few more years to get rid of this problem," he added.

According to RTO, Srinagar, in 2015, 116 minibuses registered in 1995 were taken off the roads, and in 2016, 126 matadors were condemned. Likewise, 17 in 2017, 33 in 2018, 2 in 2019, in 2020, 60 matadors will be condemned while 194 will be condemned in 2021.

World Radio day celebrated

❖ saba khan

PAHALGAM: Communication technology has been making rapid strides in the present age. New and ever faster means and methods of transferring information from one point to another have made distances and time seem almost irrelevant. These developments assume more significance when we talk of the world of news.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), at its 36th General Conference in Paris in 2012, decided to observe February 13 as World Radio Day. It was on the same day in 1946 that the United Nations (UN) had established United Nations Radio.

The idea behind establishing such an event was that the “celebration of a world radio day will raise greater awareness among the public and the media of the importance of radio, and enhance networking and international cooperation among broadcasters”.

The General Conference was convinced that “this event will encourage decision makers and those who work on radio broadcasting in all its forms to establish and General provide access to information through radio, including community radio, and to diversify the content in order that all may enjoy the benefit”.

Besides calling upon the Member States of UNESCO to celebrate the Day with activities at

local and national levels, the General Conference also invited participating National Commissions, NGOs, the general public and diverse institutions like schools, universities, municipalities, professional associations, cultural organizations and so forth.

The General Conference also invited the national, regional and international broadcasting organizations and unions, as well as the media at large, to ensure the successful observance of World Radio Day by devoting it as appropriate to educational, cultural and public-awareness activities.

Radio, on the other hand, provides diversity of views and voices needed to address the challenges faced by a multitude of people. Radio is still the most dynamic, reactive and engaging medium that is uniquely positioned to bring communities together and foster dialogue for change.

The theme for World Radio Day 2017 is “Radio Is You”. This year, UNESCO is focusing on encouraging radio stations around the world, whether they be community, private or public radio stations, to have the tools to be the best radio stations that they can be.

In the words of Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, there is a need to “nurture the power of radio to foster the conversations and the listening we need for cooperation to tackle the challenges all humanity faces”.

Jammu and Kashmir losing out in the battle against cancer

❖ Mehvish Mumtaz

SRINAGAR: Cancer is emerging as a serious threat not only in the world but also in Kashmir. From past few years, Kashmir is witnessing enormous increase in cancer especially lung cancer. Cancer is a multifactorial disease, the risk factors of which, inter-alia, include ageing population, unhealthy life styles, use of tobacco products, unhealthy diet and air pollution.

As per experts, “the top ten cancers afflicting the valley are Lung cancer, Esophagus (cancer of food pipe), Stomach, Colon (large intestine cancers), Breast, Brain, Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma, Gastro Oesophageal, Junction cancer (cancer between the stomach and food pipe), Ovary and Skin cancers”.

“Situation is changing as far as the deadly disease cancer is concerned. The diseases are alarmingly on surge. There are patients hailing from every part of Kashmir including the far flung areas which are diagnosed with such a terminal disease,” said Dr. Nissar-ul-Hassan. “Expressing serious concern, experts said the cancer mortality rate among Kashmiris had increased due to some leading behavioural and dietary risks, including high body mass index, low fruit and vegetable intake, lack of physical activity, tobacco use and lack of regular check-up. They claimed the changing life style and food habits among the Valleyites had caused surge in all the cancers especially in Esophagus, Colon and Breast cancers”.

“The experts attributed the rise in cancer cases to intake of spicy food, changing dietary habits and consumption of bulk of contaminated food items available in the market. There is massive adulteration in mass consumption food items which kills people slowly. We have seen an increasing number of patients complaining of food poisoning, gastric troubles and other problems”.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIA

❖ Tajamul Islam

SRINAGAR: India is facing many environmental challenges and these challenges urgently needs to be addressed. It is also essential to make the public aware of the formidable consequences of the Environmental Degradation, if not retorted and reformative measures undertaken would result in the extinction of life. It is also essential to get the country acquainted with these challenges so that their acts may be eco-friendly. Some of these challenges are as under:

1. Growing Population:

A population of over thousands of millions is growing at 2.11 per cent every year. It puts considerable pressure on its natural resources and reduces the gains of development. Hence, the greatest challenge before us is to limit the population growth. Although population control does not automatically lead to development, yet the development leads to a decrease in population growth rates.

2. Poverty:

India has often been described a rich land with poor people. The poverty and environmental degradation have a nexus between them. The vast majority of our people are directly dependent on the nature resources of the country for their basic needs of food, fuel shelter and fodder. About 40% of our people are still below the poverty line.

Environment degradation has adversely affected the poor who depend upon the resources of their immediate surroundings. Thus, the challenge of poverty and the challenge environment degradation are two facts of the same challenge. The population growth is essentially a function of poverty. Because, to the very poor, every child is an earner and helper and global concerns have little relevance for him.

3. Agricultural Growth:

The people must be acquainted with the methods to sustain and increase agricultural growth with damaging the environment. High yielding varieties have caused soil salinity and

damage to physical structure of soil.

4. Development and Forests:

Forests serve catchments for the rivers. With increasing demand of water, plan to harness the mighty river through large irrigation projects were made. Certainly, these would submerge forests; displace local people, damage flora and fauna.

As such, forests in India have been shrinking for several centuries owing to pressures of agriculture and other uses. Vast areas that were once green, stand today as wastelands.

These areas are to be brought back under vegetative cover. The tribal communities inhabiting forests respects the trees and birds and animal that gives them sustenance. We must recognize the role of these people in restoring and conserving forests.

The modern knowledge and skills of the forest dept. should be integrated with the traditional knowledge and experience of the local communities.

5. Evil Consequences of Urbanization:

Nearly 27 per cent Indians live in urban areas. Urbanization and industrialization has given birth to a great number of environmental problems that need urgent attention. Over 30 per cent of urban Indians live in slums. Out of India’s 3,245 towns and cities, only 21 have partial or full sewerage and treatment facilities. Hence, coping with rapid urbanization is a major challenge.

6. Air and Water Pollution:

Majority of our industrial plants are using out-dated and population technologies and makeshift facilities devoid of any provision of treating their wastes. A great number of cities and industrial areas that have been identified as the worst in terms of air and water pollution.

Acts are enforced in the country, but their implement is not so easy. The reason is their implementation needs great resources, technical expertise, political and social will. Again the people are to be made aware of these rules. Their support is indispensable to implement these rules.

Once upon a time in AMU

❖ **Sabeeha Shaheen**

SRINAGAR: Some Ninety nine weeks back, after completing my graduation, I had firmly decided that my next stop shall be AMU. I woke up early in the morning, packed my bags after a brief shower. It was an emotional adieu to my family members. I was both excited and nervous at the same time. My hammering heart was racing up. I had dreamt of home away from home. Hugs and handshakes, kisses and tears were followed by one last stare towards my home.

Finally, we drove straight to the airport where after crossing multiple barricades, I was asked to let go. I terribly started missing home as I sat down in the plane. The moment we flew, I could see tears stinging to the corner of the eyes due to homesickness.

I looked down from the windowpane and closed my eyes. Meanwhile, a sweet voice ringed in my ears, her slight tap on my shoulders woke me up. And I was in Delhi. It was a pleasant surprise. Otherwise humid, it was raining sheets in the capital city.

A smalltime village girl found herself lost in the bustling metropolis. But I found it unsafe to have a night stay at Delhi since I had read countless harrowing experiences of girls being harassed. After recharging my belly, I took a cab to AMU. One important point which I would like to mention here is that these drivers don't fleece, they don't overcharge unlike Kashmiri Autowallahs.

AMU as the name conjures up images of another age, glory, disciplined, veracity, meritorious and indelible heritage. Whatever I had studied since my childhood

about AMU an institution of credibility, I underwent a profound change in my perception and it gave me an insight into how a great institution has lost its glory.

I found AMU the contrast of what I had read, learned and imagined. I was disappointed by the functioning of this premier learning Institute. I had an opportunity to be part of this institute. But I decided the other way round. Mismanagement has marred its credibility.

Witnessing shabby walls and cow dung and even cows in the lawns of examination center was itself a terrible episode to witness. I felt hopeless and shattered simultaneously. I had pinned hopes on AMU that I would walk tread the ladder of success and the path of excellence. There is no denial that AMU failed in realizing the true dream of the founder Sir Syed but it will be an injustice to the institution to negate its contributions in totality. The only place I visited apart from examination centre was library. The library was a revelation; it has wonderful old manuscripts, including Emperor Jahangir's writings and collection of old books dating back to the 18th century.

Moulana Azad library-Asia's second largest is a treasure trove. It was amazing to feel the ambience and the freshness of books. But this cloud 9 feeling turned out to be short lived as I bid a tearful adieu to the varsity. With heavy heart, I boarded a cab back to Delhi. Recalling the days I spent at the varsity, I was almost in tears when I suddenly realized that I had reached in the dizzy locality of Delhi. To calm my nerves back home, Dad offered valuable suggestions about my future prospectus.

Dental college washroom stinks

❖ **Syed Jesarat**

SRINAGAR: The Government Dental College, Sheerin Bagh calls for some attention. The college is functioning sans separate washrooms, for males and females. The college has in use one washroom for both males and females in each department. The male washrooms are in use, while female washrooms are locked up by the authorities for self-use. The concern was shared with reporter by many students.

While talking to the reporter many students and patients complained of the issue. "Because of sharing same washroom, I have gone through many awkward situations, which were unacceptable, so I have stopped using the department washrooms, instead I prefer the hostel washroom now" said Batool, BDS final year student.

"This is something which should be a major concern, females should have separate washrooms for obvious reasons" said another BDS third year student, she further added, "It is really hard to believe to that dental college don't have separate washrooms, some washrooms here are locked and we don't know why".

While talking to the authorities, Dean/Principal of the College, Dr. Riyaz Farooq said, there is no such issue, I have on my papers separate washrooms for both males and females. Such thing can't happen,



besides that maybe some washrooms are locked up because department uses them for personal use.

"For public convenience we have washrooms, but it is public who damage the property, so I have to keep guard for washroom security" he added. He further assured that he will look into the matter.

Speaking on a phone with the reporter, the medical superintendent, Dr. Syed Qaisar Jah said, "we have kept one washroom for public and one for staff in each department, neglecting the male and female issue, the washrooms are not meant to be seated and we can't have separate washrooms".

Cinema halls in Kashmir a mere dream

❖ **Saba Gul**

SRINAGAR: Since ages, Kashmir has been the focal point of Bollywood attraction. Kashmir is known for its scenic beauty which has always allured film makers from decades. Though Bollywood has revitalized its old romance with Kashmir from films like Rock star, Jab Tak Hai Jaan, Haider, Bajrangi Bhaijaan and Fitoor, but, cinema halls in Kashmir continue to remain bolted.

Cinema halls in Kashmir had a great influence on the masses. Prior to 80s it was the only medium of entertainment. But with the advent of insurgency and political turmoil in late 80s things changed. Devastation of Cinema halls were among the catastrophic events that took place during that period.

Those cinema halls which were once a source of pleasure and entertainment are now either taken by security forces or have been converted into hotels, shopping complexes and even a hospital.

Mehraj-ud-din Siraj a shopkeeper at lalchowk retrospect's and says that "Pladdium Cinema was once a place of bliss for movie lovers. Here people stood waiting in long queues to buy tickets to watch their favorite film stars. Nowadays only ruins of Pladdium cinema guarded by security forces are left".

Neelam cinema at shaheedgunj bears the same sorry tale. Billboard is the only sign of its past prominence "I was the keen viewer of movies and often used to buy tickets in black. I along with my friends went for night shows and enjoyed late out nights chatting and smoking. My mother always scolded me for returning home at 3 am.

Such was my love for cinemas in that days. Today my children don't know what cinema halls are all about". Says Mushtaq Ahmed a resident of Shaheed Gunj

Jameela Hussain, a resident of civil line area says that "I loved to watch movies with my family and used to get fascinated when he bought movie tickets of my favorite film star."

I often get flashbacks from my past whenever same movie is being telecasted.

Today cinemas in Kashmir have a pathetic condition and present generation cannot feel the same glory of what we had in the past'.

A couple of cinema halls were reopened in late 90's and several attempts were made by government in 2005 to revive them but failed due to political instability and militant attacks. The ongoing unrest and political turmoil in Kashmir has left her people in pain and hatred.

Nowadays no one anymore mourns the cinema halls. Kashmiris are dying and revival of movie halls no longer interests us said Mansoor Kuchhay

TRAUMATIZED GUJJARS

❖ Malik Nisar

SRINAGA: The kreeri area of baramulla has become the hotspot for the gujjars of pirpanchal area. The gujjars are a unique and significant ethnic group of the state largely dependent on cattle, goat, sheep and horse keeping even as the tribe keeps wiggling between high altitudes with their herds and valley of Jammu and Kashmir.

This is the only Muslim tribe with nomadic life since its existence. It has its roots in central Asia. There is the chunk of people who don't graze but keeping vacillating from rajouri to various parts of Kashmir for better earning opportunities. They come all the way from high reaches of native villages of pir panchal range during summer season leaving behind their natural life, tribe system, traditional food and melodious folk song. They are not beggars; they do not beg for alums instead from day first they indulge themselves in earning their livelihood. They work as daily laborers in agricultural fields, gardens and various construction related works at different places of the particular area.

These gujjar people are facing enormous challenges in calendar day life. In this post modern world of 21th century, they are seen as the people who don't have any existence. The abbreviated piece of nothing. They don't posses any quality life; they are seen as aliens, as if they don't belong to this planet. if sometimes rain comes there life gets at sixes and sevens. If they want there status uplifted they have to come out of the

notion of inferiority, because history has witnessed great people come from packed down communities.

During my interaction with these people I found that youth in these communities want the desperate change, because they are fed up while working as laborers at very tender age. They have the curiosity for education, they have the dream of a living a sophisticated life, but the pool of poverty has dragged them deep into the grudge of depression.

They are also ignored by our so called puppet government, that always sings the songs of Delhi but back in Kashmir their own people have become the victims of ignorance. That compels them to become the victims of social evils like early marriage and child lab our. They are hard slog people with great deal of dedication and determination but one thing, they lack is initiative and guidance that can be only culminated when we people will support them and encourage them at every level. So that they will not feel isolated from rest of the society.

We as a human should provide space to these kind of people to keep the bound of brotherhood alive in the society. Government should also look deep into the matter and provide the amiable chance to stand up on their feet to show the world the power of their integrity. In Kashmir gujjars constitute the separate ethnic group with astute conservation in the preservation of their identity. They are truly the children of nature. They live in its lap and are totally dependent on it.

The office that floats



❖ Shahzad Ashiq

SRINAGAR: India has the largest postal network in the world with over 1, 55,015 post offices. A single post office on an average serves a population of 7,175 people. The floating post office in Dal Lake, Srinagar, was inaugurated in August 2011. Besides offering normal services, the place will also have a philately museum and a shop that will sell postage stamps and other products. This is the first such post office in India. It has been made as a tourist focus post office on a huge house boat and will provide a unique and tourist-friendly service to the people of Kashmir and to tourists from across the world.

The Dal Lake is one of the major attractions in Srinagar. Apart from being known for its enchanting natural beauty, there is one more jewel that shines out on its crown and that is India's first floating post office. We know that the beautiful land of Kashmir has end number of enchanting attractions. The Dal Lake, Road to Leh, the gulmarg ,mughal gardens ,nageen club, the Kashmir university campus ,Magnetic Hill are a few names to mention. But the floating post office? Yes located on the Dal Lake, Srinagar is the first of its kind in the entire

country The Floating Post Office. This post office actually adds to the many attractions of Kashmir. Floating Post Office in Srinagar was inaugurated in August 2011; it's quite surprising to see how our government is so prompt about giving postal services to the people of Srinagar. This post office is used by more than seven thousand people every year and it still stands strong. It offers regular postal services to the people of Srinagar and also has a philately museum and a shop which sells unique postage stamps and products. The floating post office is not the great piece of engineering it is just a post office that is fixed on a shikara (a houseboat)

One interesting feature about the floating post office is that the letters posted from here bear a very unique design with charming sceneries and scintillating landscapes which symbolizes the beauty of the Dal Lake and Srinagar. This floating post office is adding to the name and fame of the dal lake. The tourists who visit Kashmir are always keen in knowing and checking out the floating post office they even post letters for fun , just to have this floating post office in their brains when they reach back home . Whenever you visit the place don't forget to post a letter in the floating post office .

❖ Aasif Bilal

DHSK starts screening-cum-awareness program

ANANTNAG: The Directorate of Health Services Kashmir (DHSK) has started a systematic, campaign of screening of general public above 30 years of age for non-communicable diseases i.e. diabetes and hypertension under National Program for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, CVD and Stroke(NPCDCS).

DHSK said, "It has been documented that the Non Communicable diseases are on rise all over the country. More alarming and less well-known is the fact that half of the patients suffering from diabetes do not know that they are suffering from the condition. A

substantial number of patients newly diagnosed with type 2 diabetes already have evidence of micro-vascular complications like visual impairment, kidney disease and heart disease. The purpose of screening is to identify asymptomatic individuals who are likely to have diabetes/ hypertension or both so that treatment can be initiated promptly and complications are reduced. Separate diagnostic tests are required after a positive screening test to establish a definitive diagnosis."

It further said, In this regard, a total of 1,08,505 people were screened this year in Kashmir Division till date and out of these 21.7% have been found to

have hypertension and 10.42% were suspect diabetics. The subjects are screened for hypertension, raised blood sugar and history of tobacco use is also documented. Individuals with a high BP or raised blood sugar are referred to the nearest health facility where further diagnostics tests and specialist services are available. Populations across Kashmir Division were screened especially in far-flung areas.

Director Health Services, Kashmir "Dr Saleem-ur-Rehman has valued the efforts of health officer/officials who have worked with commitment to organize screening camps across the Kashmir Division."

Teenager emerging star awaiting government assistance

❖ Useeba Bashir

GANDERBAL: Danish Manzoor of North Kashmir's Baramulla district aspires to represent the country at the Olympics. He has won 15 gold medals in the past five years, but lack of professional support is proving to be a stumbling block for this 18-year old Taekwondo player.

Danish's journey to this level, however, has not been easy as he continues to struggle due to lack of coaching facilities. "I have worked very hard in the last five years and achieved these medals without any support from the government. I

didn't even have proper equipment. In fact, instead of kicking pads, I wore flip-flops in my hands to practice



kicks," says Danish.

"I want to bring laurels to my country as well as to my motherland

in Kashmir. I want to represent the country at international level but my family can't afford the international tournaments. I can make my dream of participating in the Olympics come true if I get proper sponsor in terms of training," he further added.

Danish was 13 when he took to taekwondo in 2010, but he has impressed one and all with his skills, fetching 15 gold, one silver and one bronze medal in various national and state-level competitions. He has recently received an invitation letter from Peace Taekwondo Academy for coaching.

After Parvez, Pulwama boy emerges as new cricketing sensation in J&k



❖ Junaid

SRINAGAR: After Parvez Rasool, another young cricketing sensation from J&k Umar Nazir who made his first class debut in 2013, has made a mark in domestic cricket by becoming the highest wicket taker in qualifying round of the Syed Mushtaq Ali this year. Following his spectacular performance in the qualifying round of the Syed Mushtaq Ali trophy, Umar Nazir has a long way to go with Parvez Rasool now made it to the north zone squad for Syed Mushtaq Ali t20 tournament. The north zone squad will be led by famous cricketer Harbhajan Singh. The states representing north zone include besides J&k, Delhi, Himachal, Punjab, Haryana and services. Two other young cricketers from J&k Shubham Khajuria and Manzoor Dar have also been included in the squad as stand by players.

The team was selected at a meeting of the North Zone Selection Committee held in New Delhi under the Chairmanship of Nikhil Chopra. Selectors from North Zone associations- Asherder Kaul (JKCA), Ragesh Bawa (HCA), Ashok Thakur (HPCA), Wing Commander Deepak Ahluwalia (SSCB), Sarandeep Singh (Special invitee) and Siddharath Sahib Singh (Convener) attended the meeting.

Born on November 23 1993 at Malikpora, Pulwama, Umar Nazir Mir is a right arm fast bowler playing for JKCA. At 6 feet 2 inches, Umar Nazir has come up as a gifted cricketer with an impressive track record. He has played 22 First Class, 10 T-20 and 4 List -A matches clinching 64 wickets. Minister for sports, Molvi Imran Raza Ansari and Secretary Sports Council, Waheed-ur-Rehman Parra have felicitated Umar Nazir for his splendid performance making debut North Zone team. The Minister in his congratulatory message to the team wished them success for qualifying for the knock-out stage.

Green Gold on the verge of Extinction



❖ Syed Bilal

GANDERBAL: Jammu and Kashmir has a geographic area of 101387 sq. kms. The state is divided into three geographic regions viz. Ladakh, Kashmir valley and Jammu in which higher regions are covered by Pir Panjal, Karakorum and inner Himalayan ranges. The forests are spread over three broad geo-climatic zones covering both the three regions. The recorded forest area in the state as per Ministry of Forestry records is 20230 sq. kms and the forests are largely distributed in Kashmir valley and Jammu regions.

The forests for all the three regions do play a vital and fundamental role in

economic as well as in the recreational way but unfortunately from the last five years the entire state is witnessing the alarming and unprecedented increase in the incidents of forest fires, which indirectly can prove fatal for entire state of Jammu and Kashmir.

According to the report issued in the assembly in the budget session of 2017-18 by state ministry for Forests, 1743 cases have been reported of forest fire from the year 2014 to 2016 in which 4705.941 hectares of forest land with trees got destroyed. In 2013-14, 278 cases of forest fire have been reported in which 516.938 hectares of forest land with trees got destroyed.

In 2014-15, 470 cases of forest fire

have been reported in which 972.525 hectares of forest land with trees got destroyed and simultaneously in the year 2015-16, 214 cases of forest fire have been reported that resulted in the loss of 341.483 hectares of forest land with trees. The majority of forest fire cases have been reported in the year of 2016 in which alone 781 cases of forest fire have been reported.

Commenting upon the loss of rich natural resource, the minister for forestry said that, each and every time we try our level best to prevent the fire from further spreading but the actual cause of our failure is the unavailability of latest resources and techniques.

Sport Council Conducts Physical test for Snow Skiing

❖ Kaiser Majeed

SRINAGAR: The jammu and kashmir state sports council today conducted physical tests and interview of the skiers who had registered their names for the 15 Days Snow Skiing Basic Course at Indore sports complex.

The 15 days snow skiing basic course is organised by Jammu and Kashmir state sports council for the youth of Kashmir province which is scheduled to begin from 18th of February at Gulmarg. Gulmarg being world's renowned ski resort gets a very good quality of powder snow which adds to its beauty and attracts sportsmen from other

parts of the world." keeping in view the scope and demands for the snow skiing course and in order to revive the winter sports in the state, sports council decided to organize 15 days snow skiing basic course for boys and girls at gulmarg" - jk sports council statement reads.

The basic skiing course organised by jammu Kashmir state sports council is aimed to promote skiing and other winter games in the state. Due to less snowfall last year, the winter sports activities couldn't take place. However, Gulmarg received a favorable snowfall this winter and local as well as foreign sportsmen/women are seen enjoying winter games.



RUMI WAVE IN KASHMIR

❖ NAVEED

BARAMULLA: The valley of Kashmir is nowadays seen more inclined towards the sufi patron and a famous spiritual leader Moulana Jallaliddin Rumi.

The Kashmiri youngsters in libraries and book depots are seen reading rumi literature. Moreover the social networking sites such as facebook, twitter and others are also seen filled with such quotes.

Rumi, who was one of the influential preacher and a spiritual personality of 13th century was inspired by a wanderer named shams of tabrez. Both are believed as the big contributors to Islam.

"We receive peace and feel happy while reading the teachings of rumi" said, farhat uzair, a student of Kashmir university". "As

the uncertain situations of valley from many decades, valley seems bound with violence and fear and in this turmoil one yearns peace and the teachings that of Rumi's words act as tranquilizers" said , another student. Moreover, a senior assistant professor, Mr Nasir Mirza, who also holds good on Rumi literature told MERC times that the Rumi, the celebrated preacher of 13th century was recently introduced to world by west after 9/11 took place but before that it was a famous poet Allama iqbal and some sufi saints such as Sheik nooru din noorani who by their poetry introduced him as the most prominent figure and the leading religious preacher. When asked about the recent trend of kashmiri youth towards rumi he said that he considers it as a positive step and hoped its heeling touch could help in overcoming the sufferings of kashmiri youth.

YOUNG ENTERPRENEUR REVIVES OLD CRAFT

❖ Tanzeela

SRINAGAR: Women folk in kashmir have always been subjugated in a male dominated society of ours from decades, but over the years, The clock has turned around and the talent the women have is gaining a popular support.

There have been many such stories from kashmir but the extraordinary talent shown by the young Arifa Jan who is a picture of confidence and wisdom. She is not only praiseworthy but an example for those who think women folk can just handle kitchen chores only and forced to lead sheltered lives.

She is the owner of incredible kashmir crafts through which she hopes to revive the dying crafts of Numdha rugs. She had made up her mind to start her career. "I



always wanted to be an entrepreneur when I was in high school I had made up my mind," said Arifa. She has been

in the business for the past six years and today her agribusiness has a turnover of Rs 1.5 crore. "I Think today the mindset

has changed quite a bit even the thinking of boys has changed now, I can think of becoming someone, before becoming someone's wife," Arifa says.

Now this shy diminutive girl's life has completely changed, she is now looking travelling on her own looking for new Markets and attending exhibitions.

We see kashmiri women like her have been like the rising sun, The fireballs, The cool breeze, The butterflies of beautiful valley and undoubtedly an inspiration for the youth to modify themselves towards the betterment.

"I always wanted to be an entrepreneur when i was in high school i had made up my mind"

Undone community halls as giant lump for neighbours



❖ Iqra Akhooon

SRINAGAR: Four years of stagnation a community hall in mallabagh area of srinagar turnout as an island in the middle of the area and is surrounded by murky water on its four sides.

Has become the safe dwelling for stray dogs and gamblers.

“A place where everybody has parks of there own I dont think there is any need for marriage halls” said Hamid wani a resident of mallabagh

Its not the only community hall where conditions are bad another incomplete community hall in hazratbal srinagar near the shrine turned to a medical camp on the eve of Milad UN Nabi (SAW)

Four years back a foundation was laid on a public park to meet the public demand.

As per the report locals of hazratbal demanded the marriage hall from government as they have no parks of their own to serve the guests.

it has been a long time now but its still at halt no construction work moving further.

As per reports a local who lives at the backyard of the marriage hall just a feet in between the two places has appealed a case against it and has bought the stay orders for the same.

“Public park was better than this huge lump building and still which is of no use. it has become a comfortable place for stray dogs.” Said one of the local.

When the matter was taken into notice of Deputy Commissioner Srinagar who was also holding the charge of Srinagar Municipal Corporation told that the Marriage Hall located at Dargah Hazratbal is Sub judice. Court has put stay on the construction. It is the reason that its work is halted. We are waiting for court orders after that we can resume the work if order favours us. In case of Malla Bagh I have not any such information. I will look into the matter and will do whatever suits on fastrack basis.

3 rooms for 8 classes, 5 teachers for 90 students; Govt calls it a middle school

❖ Syed irshad

KUPWARA: Despite the strongest claims of state education department to provide better facilities to government run schools, Government Middle School Nagnari, still lacks basic amenities and infrastructure.

A middle school in Naganari, a village of Tehsil Boniyar is running in three class rooms with walls cracked and unsafe to stay inside. In this unsafe building eight classes are accommodated.

The students of far-flung area of the village are facing difficulties to get one of their fundamental – Right to Education; this fundamental right is declining due to indifferent attitude of the authorities.

When contacted Headmaster of Government Middle School, Ali Mohammed said they lack proper space and had requested authorities many times but till date we received no positive response.

“we have merged 2nd, 3rd classes in one room whereas 3rd a 4th in another class room however 7th and 8th classes



are taken on verandah of the school. We lack proper space here. We had requested authorities many times but till date we received no positive response”.

Not only the unsafe school building, this school has five teachers for 90 students.

Students and teachers blame the authorities of playing with their lives. They claimed that every time there is an adverse weather, they shiver with the thought that the building might collapse.

Zonal Education Officer (Boniyar) Mohd Shafeeq Lone said education

department can not be blamed for this.

“No doubt students are suffering a lot but this is not a fault of education department because the Village education community (VEC) forced them to upgrade the school which wasn’t possible in this school. We also asked the village committee for some land for construction of new school but they are not themselves willing to provide any space.”

The matter is already on the table of Director Education. As soon as we get hold of some land, we will definitely construct a new building.

RISING STAR OF GANDERBAL

❖ SaJad Bashir

PULWAMA: A 16 year great talented budding cricketer has brought laurels to his poor family hailing from poor family Danish hilal has been the standout performer for j&k in the recent under 17 T20 national tournament held in utter Pradesh at noida stadium. Captaining the team he led from front with his stylish batting and accurate seam bowling he scored couple of fifties with strike rate more than170 and was one of the leading wicket takers. His cricketing tactics in leading his team were lauded by coach.

Danish is from the poor family from Village bakura Ganderbal.h.His father is a carpenter by profession

He fully supports his son to follow his dream of becoming a cricketer while speaking to reporter he said,. I was also interested in cricket and was a fast bowler but lack of opportunity and financial weakness shattered my dream but I will try my best to support my son to become a cricketer;; he got emotional while talking.





GIVING LIFE TO LIFELESS

❖ **Raja Asim**

SRINAGAR: “Creativity is not an accident, it’s something you earn”

It’s wonderful to see some Kashmir University students working hard to bring back life to the burnt down residential quarter of non teaching staff in the Kashmir University premises.

Some art students of Kashmir University have been working so hard to give life to the burnt

down pieces of wood. It’s not their responsibility or liability to do so but they are doing it for the society, for us, the people of Kashmir. The technical side of creating art can be frustrating at times but there are emotional factors to consider depending on the artist and the visual messages that he or she explores. Some artist open up emotional wounds like some of them had done. He is a quote that is written on a lifeless tree laying nearby this burnt down quarter, written by some

anonymous artist.

“Be selective with your battles, Sometimes peace is better than being RIGHT

I would like to quote one more, “Forget the sun that didn’t shine”

The need of the moment is to appreciate and give recognition to those artist who had done such a wonderful job. There is a desperate need for recognition because recognition is a sad reason for entering the world of art marketing, if

passion is lost in the process. It’s OK for them to desire recognition. But upholding ones passion for creating and sharing a visual message is far more desirable.

Let’s not give them a reason to toss their passion aside and appreciate them on a bigger platform.

One of student of this department, Nusrat said that it’s really tormenting for an artist if his or her art piece is left to decay by the ones who are meant to preserve it.

Relief Eludes Handwara Fire victim Families

❖ **Tahir Bhat**

SRINAGAR: More than a month after the fire victim families of Tund Mohallah in North Kashmir’s Handwara are still waiting for the compensation promised to them by the government.

Living in abject situation, the families allege only few households received the compensation while others move from pillar to post without being heard.

The fire on December 28, 2016 consumed nearly two dozen houses. Being assured by the local lawmaker of every possible help, the families did not receive compensation for their loss.

The local headman of the area, Abdul Rashid Mir told that only nine families received the compensation. “Over twenty houses were fully damaged and

3 were partially damaged in the fire but only nine families have received relief cheques so far.” This winter amid heavy snowfall and freezing cold, the victim families had a tough time to manage their survival. “We approached the administration many times to redress our grievances but they did not pay any attention,” said a local of the area.

Another villager said that tents provided by government were damaged in snow and now they live with their relatives.

The victim families demanded that they should be given compensation as promised by the government.

When I contacted DC Kupwara he said, “I will look into the matter and hopefully the grievances of the victims will be addressed soon.”

Illegal occupation of land in Ganderbal

❖ **Fehmida Rashid**

Ganderbal: Wussan, a village 12 kms away from frontier district Ganderbal which exhibits a very beautiful environment, is a very neat and clean place. A serene river nallah-e-sindh runs along one side of this area, which adds to the beauty of the area. But unfortunately the image of sindh is slowly disrupting due to illegal construction.

People of the village constructed many huts on one side of this nallah-e-sindh .The people who have constructed the illegal huts along one side of nallah-e-sindh don’t bother about how much deteriorating effect this illegal construction is going to have on nallah-e-sindh .

The water of nallah-e-sindh is a source of light for those which can’t afford to have a proper water connection. Due to the waste material which has been thrown by people into the river has polluted this fresh water body causing immense dangerous effects to those residing near it and those who used it in their day to day household chorus.

When we tried to contact one of the official of Irrigation and flood control department he said, That he will look into the matter and hopefully resolve the problem of villagers soon.



EDITORIAL TEAM

Patron: Prof. Khurshid Andrabi, Vice-Chancellor | **Chief Editor:** Faruq Masudi | **Editor:** Muslim Jan | **Graphic Artist:** Aga Shahi
Students Editorial Team: Wajahat Shabir, Munawar Hussain, Kaiser Majeed, Junaid Manzoor, Naveed Wani, Sheikh Saman, Sadia Mir, Faiqa Khan, Auqib Salam, Rahil Hussain
e-mail: editor.merc@gmail.com | **website:** www.mercs.uok.edu.in