

DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE
ON RISE IN
KASHMIR

SEE PAGE 5



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STAY COOL WITH WATER MELONS THIS SUMMER

Fida Hussain

With the rise in temperature in the valley, the sale of natural thirst quencher, watermelons has picked up. People could be seen making beeline for roadside watermelon vendors to quench their thirst. With sale soaring water melons can be seen stocked up beside every street vendor.

“There is a huge rush throughout the day. The sale has picked up due to rise in temperature. I remain busy almost all day to attend the customers. People young and old come here to quench their thirst,” says Gulam Qadir, a fruit vendor.

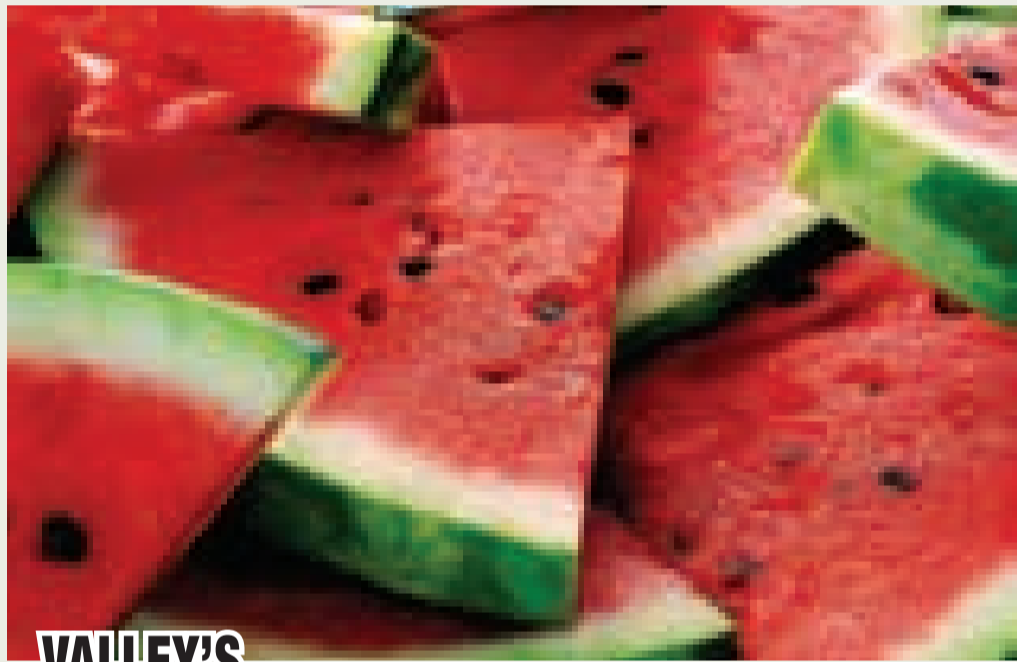
“We charge Rs. 10 per plate and many people prefer it this rather than the costly juices or ice creams,” he adds.

Watermelon, the refreshing summer fruit with lots of water content has zero fattening elements and is ideal fruit to keep the body cool in summers. People thronging fruit vendors for purchasing watermelons is a common sight in the valley.

“I would prefer to eat slice of water melon as it is natural and contains lot of water content which is essential to keep body hydrated in summer heat,” says Mushtaq Ahmad, a student while relishing the slices.

“There is nothing like a juicy slice of watermelon on a hot summer day. Not only is the fruit highly refreshing, it is also rich in

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VALLEY'S PRISTINE WATER BODIES LOSING CHARM

Shabir Ahmad

Unabated pollution and encroachment on banks of rivers has led to the depletion of water

resources in Kashmir. The water bodies are depleting fast which has been a major concern for people Jammu and Kashmir.

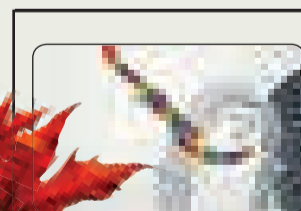
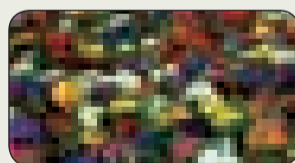
Kashmir valley gifted with large pristine lakes and wetlands. River Jhelum and its tributaries add to the scenic beauty of valley. Asia's largest fresh water-lake Wullar and Dal Lake are main tourists attractions.

The livelihood of thousands of people in fisheries and agriculture sector depends on these water bodies. These are also major sources of water for drinking,

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FLORICULTURE BUSINESS
BLOSSOMS IN
VALLEY

P7



SUICIDAL TENDENCIES ON
RISE AMONG WOMEN:
EXPERT

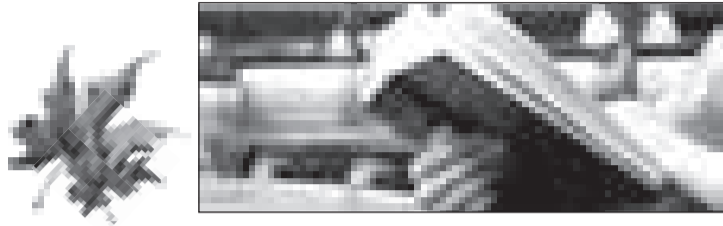
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TOURISTS
LOVE KASHMIRI
LANGUAGE

P2





WE HAD THREE READING ROOMS WHERE APPROXIMATELY 50-60 PEOPLE WOULD COME DAILY TO READ BOOKS IN THE PAST. BUT THE NUMBER HAS DECREASED TO A MERE FIVE OR SIX PEOPLE: ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN, CENTRAL LIBRARY

TOURISTS LOVE KASHMIRI LANGUAGE

Mudabbir Ahmad

With a huge number of tourists visiting Kashmir this year, it is not only the economy of the valley that is getting a boost but the heavy rush of tourists is also proving beneficial for the Kashmiri language as the tourists are falling in love with it.

The tourists are fascinated by the language. Rajeev Choudhary, a businessman from Delhi who is on a trip to the valley, says, "I am a speaker of Punjabi, and I always thought that it is the most beautiful language of all. But listening to the local people here talk in Kashmiri, I have fallen in love with your language." "The Kashmiri language is such a sweet one! I love listening to it and I am planning to learn it as well," says Aakruti, his daughter.

Ashish Chavan, a tourist from Pune, also feels the same. "Everybody loves his mother tongue, but if I get a chance to learn some other language, I would choose Kashmiri. It is such a wonderful language."

David Ames, a trekker from Canada, believes that the Kashmiri language is 'poetic'. "I don't understand one word of it, but I like listening to it. It is so soothing to the ears, it seems like music. Your language is a poetic one."

Recently a group of students from the Northern Regional Language Centre (NRLC), Patiala made a trip to Kashmir. The group, comprising 18 students, visited different areas of the valley to study the relationship between Kashmiri and other languages spoken in North India. The students were impressed by the Kashmiri language and its vast vocabulary.

"I was actually surprised by the vastness of vocabulary and the diversity of dialects of the Kashmiri language throughout the state. Your language is an old one and is one of the most beautiful and complete languages that I have come across," says Lubna from Mumbai, a student at NRLC Patiala.

According to Dr Nadeem Ahmad, who teaches linguistics at NRLC, Kashmiri language is famous outside the valley, especially in Northern India. "The reach of Kashmiri language is more than what people in Kashmir think. Thanks to the trade between businessmen of Kashmir and the tourist rush to your state, your language has become quite famous in North India. It is also an interesting language to study, as it is one of the oldest ones in the region."

With the number of tourists ever increasing, the fame of Kashmiri language outside the state is also on the rise. Looks like the future of our mother tongue is not that bleak after all.

BOOK READING ON DECLINE

Yusra Khan

Books have been an old companion of humankind. But with the advancement in technology and emergence of new media, books are finding it hard to stay in the race.

Decline of book reading is reflected in the decrease in number of library goes. According to the data provided by the Central Library of Kashmir there has been a steep decrease in the people who use libraries to gain knowledge.

"We had three reading rooms where approximately 50-60 people would come daily to read books in the past. But the number has decreased to a mere five or six people," says Assistant Librarian at the Central Library says.

New media has also affected the sale of hardcopy books. Most of the people go online and download the E-books free of cost. There is wide range of books

available online which are hard to find in the market.

"If I want to read a book, I simply download it through internet. It saves my time which otherwise I would spend on finding the books in market and are free of cost as well," said Umar Hussain, a University student.

Free access to movies has also affected book reading habit among the youth. People usually prefer to watch the flicks which last not more than 3 hours and are more 'exciting' and time saving.

"Movies end in three hours while books can take weeks and sometimes even months to finish. Besides books don't entertain as much as movies," said Shaista Nabi, a student.

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MOBILE PHONES BEHIND SURGE IN ROAD MISHAPS

Sheikh umer

Use of mobile phones while driving is apparently becoming a major fatal factor on the roads across Jammu and Kashmir. Latest government statistics reveal that more than 4,000 lives were lost in over 25,000 road accidents in State in the last four years, in which mobile phones contributed to an alarming proportion.

In a written reply to a question, Transport Minister Choudhary Mohammad Ramzan told the Legislative council in the winter session of J&K Assembly this year that 25,460 road accidents took place in the last four years in which 4,471 people were killed.

"Use of mobile phones while driving, rash and negligent driving, mechanical fault and bad road conditions are among the factors responsible for the accidents," the Minister informed the Assembly.

Abid Sultan, 19, a resident of Srinagar's Nowshera area says that using cellular phones

while driving is becoming a routine feature in Kashmir. "Apart from overtaking and lane jumping," Sultan, a Class 11th student of Srinagar's SP Higher Secondary, says, "drivers don't shy away to attend calls on their cell phones while driving and thereby, put lives of passengers and people on road in jeopardy."

Official figures reveal that 1,100 people were killed in 2009, as many as 1,073 lost their lives in 2010. In 2011, the number was 1,125, while in 2012 the figure raised to 1,173.

"Use of cell phones during driving has drastically increased the road accidents in J&K," admits an official in J&K Transport department. "The reason is that a 20-year-old driver talking on a mobile phone behaves like a person of 85 years of age. Besides, the drivers' unattentive mind is estimated to be factor in 20% to 50% of all police reported accidents."

It has been found from the study of Highway Loss Data Institute

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FILTHY WEEDS ANNOY TOURISTS

Haifaa Ahsan/Sheikh Umer

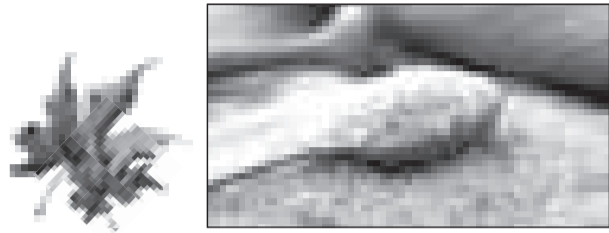
The pungent smell coming from the weeds extracted in the process of cleansing Dal Lake has started to irk tourists who visit the place to enjoy their holidays.

The tourists has been left so dejected that they are forced to vacate their houseboats and live in lodges and guest houses.

"We had come here with great expectations to enjoy every part of this beautiful lake but the weeds have forced us to stay inside the houseboats," said Amit Asthana, a tourist from Dehli. "We had heard a lot about the lake and me and my family very excited to visit this lake but seeing the weeds around the lake is disheartening," he added.

It turns out to be huge inconvenience for the locals as well as the tourists but the Lakes and Waterways Development Authority

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IT WILL TAKE UP THE MATTER WITH GOVERNMENT OF INDIA TO RESEASE RATION QUOTA AS PER LATEST CENSUS: CHAUDARY RAMZAN

PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM 'DEFUNCT' IN VALLEY

Sheikh Mujeeb

People of the Valley are up in arms against authorities over the non-availability of essential commodities which are being distributed by Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution Department (CAPD) through Public Distribution System.

"CAPD doesn't provide adequate supply to the common masses. As essential commodities like rice, wheat, and sugar is never available on time, we have to get them from market at higher prices," says Kaiser Ahmad, a local resident.

"Earlier 50kg of rice was provided against each ration card but nowadays we get only 25 kg per ration card. It becomes impossible to feed a large family on this meagre quantity," he adds.

Experts believe if the system of distribution is not streamlined there be serious consequences.

People here are totally dependent on rice. The valley has witnessed increase in demand of rice with the increase in population. Also constructions on agriculture land in Kashmir has lead to more

EARLIER 50KG OF RICE WAS PROVIDED AGAINST EACH RATION CARD BUT NOWADAYS WE GET ONLY 25 KG PER RATION CARD. IT BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE TO FEED A LARGE FAMILY ON THIS MEAGRE QUANTITY.

demand for rice imported from other states.

Jammu and Kashmir State is receiving food grains every month as per the projected population as on 01-March-2000.

The population of the State as per the 2001 Census was 101.44 lakh i.e. about one lakh more than the population estimated as on 1.3.2000. The food grains allocated to the State are therefore, not even adequate to meet the requirement of the 2001 census population of the State. As per the provisional figures of 2011 Census the population of the State is estimated to be 125.49 lakh (about 22.73 lakh families). If the entire current population is to be fed through PDS, the State is short of rations by about 16488 MTs every month. For APL (above poverty line) population of 12.23 lakh as per 2001 census the State requires about 42805 MTs of food grains every month but we are being allocated only 37,310 MTs of food grains. There

is thus a monthly shortfall of about 5500 MTs for the APL category.

"It is very hectic to collect rice from ration depots these days. Often people argue with each other in order to collect the rice first. Many people leave empty handed," says Nazir Ahmad, a ration card holder.

Recently Minister of Consumer Affairs, Chaudary Ramzan said that their department is receiving ration quota as per the 2001 Census. From 2001 there is a sweeping/tremendous increase in population. And it is not possible to distribute the same to existing population.

"I will take the matter with the FCI (Food Corporation of India) and Govt of India to release ration quota as per latest census," he had said.

People allege that rice is being sold in the black market with the help of employees of CAPD it gives rise to black-marketing, hoarding and profiteering.

Recent report has warned that rate of food grain deficit is likely to touch 60% in the coming decade if the current rate of converting paddy land into orchard and industrial area continues.

Dog terror in Kashmir

Sheema Farooq

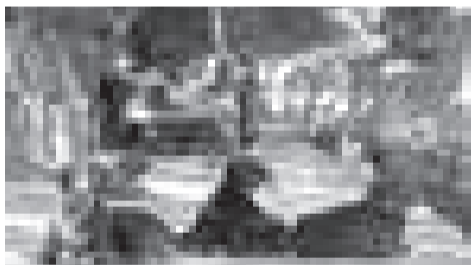
Scores of people in Eid Gah, Safa Kadal, Karan Nagar and Pir Bagh have become times of dog bites in the past few days. Children and women are among the worst victims.

Witnesses said over a dozen people mostly non-local laborers were bitten by dogs feared rabid in Pir Bagh area while the locals alleged that the dogs have been transported to the area from elsewhere.

"Our children are yet to come back from school so we have to be on roads at the time of their return," said Abdul Kareem, a parent in Pir Bagh locality while holding a stick in his hand to keep the dogs away.

Residents of Karan Nagar on the other hand accused Srinagar Municipal Corporation(SMC) of sleeping over the issue. "The government needs to decide what its priority is. We humans or the rabid dogs?" they questioned.

In the heart of city, Nowhata locals said the stray packs have unleashed terror in the area even as they threatened to kill the dogs should the SMC fail to act.



Amid this growing dog scare, a group of "dog rights activists" has started approaching authorities saying that the "stray packs are being ill treated by people in Srinagar." Sources said the activists have been working at the behest of "prominent stray dog lover" who allegedly eyes to bag the canine sterilization contract worth millions. The man is understood to have hired a group of locals promising them fortune if they succeed in pretending that the dogs are being ill treated in Srinagar.

When officials of the SMC were contacted they revealed a shocking graph of dog bites in the valley. "Number of dog bites have rapidly increased in the city and there have been several deaths due to dog bites. We are taking measures to curb the dog menace," said the SMC official.

KIDNEY DISEASES ON RISE IN KASHMIR

Sheikh Mujeeb

Given to poor food habits and use of fast foods at a large Kidney diseases in valley have alarmingly seen a sharp rise in the past decade.

Doctors in the premier Shere Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS) are worried with the rate at which patients with kidney diseases come for medical aid.

Hypertension and obesity being the main reason of the renal failures and associated ailments, doctors believe that a change in the eating habits and life style can help to keep a check on the.

"In the past twenty years we have seen an alarming increase in the renal problems in the valley and hundreds of patients are being treated for different kinds of Kidney diseases at SKIMS," says Dr. Mohammad Ashraf Bhat, Additional Professor of Nephrology at SKIMS.

"With the change in economic standard, people in the valley have changed their life style giving birth to different kinds of fatal ailments, which people in this Himalayan state were not acquainted with in the past," he adds.

"Poor eating habits and lack of physical exercise are an alternate cause of renal problems in Kashmir as these result in hypertension and obesity," says Prof. Saleem Najar, HOD Nephrology at SKIMS.

"In order to get rid of this fatal ailment people have to be educated and life style and eating habits of people have to be changed," he adds.



"THE LOCAL RESIDENTS ARE ACCUSING WAQF BOARD FOR NOT PAYING PROPER ATTENTION TO THE SHRINE. AUTHORITIES ARE MAKING ONLY FALSE PROMISES. THEY ARE WORKING ON SNAIL'S PACE"

Delay in repair work irks devotees

Maroof Hussain

For last few years the dome of Hazratbal shrine has been undergoing repair work. The delay in the restoration work is a matter of concern for the devotees visiting the shrine.

"The local residents are accusing Waqf board for not paying proper attention to the shrine. Authorities are making only false promises. They are working on snail's pace," said Imran Fayaz, a local resident. The bamboo stick scaffolding is there from past one year."

A street vendor, Fayaz Wani told MERC Times, "Marbles which were taken off from the dome had copper hooks attached which

were illegally sold by some of the workers."

On special occasions authorities visit shrine and offer prayers. "They just make vague promises about completion of work, but so far nothing has changed," says one of the workers wishing anonymity.

When contacted, Ms Nusrat Andrabi Senior Member Of Wakf Board said.

"The dome is round in shape that is the reason why marbles do not get settled on it, we have contacted national experts, they told us that until the dome gets settled properly then only we can work on it."

She also added that a contract has been signed with the experts "and sooner dome of the shrine will get a new shape soon."

ILLEGAL SAND EXTRACTION TAKES TOLL ON TROUT IN BANDIPORA

Aijaz-ul-haq Bhat

Illegal sand extraction and mining is taking a heavy toll on aquatic life especially endangered rainbow brown trout in major stretch of Arin Papchan stream around Gamora, Shokhbaba and Gundbal areas. This stream is a habitat of trout fish.

"Craters caused by illegal sand extraction are affecting the spawning area along the river course leading to a decline in trout population," said a fisheries expert Dr Rather Mansoor.

Locals said in absence of any monitoring by the authorities, the illegal miners operate even during the breeding season of the trout.

"Tractor loads of sand are extracted illegally in many places, including Gamoorra,

Gundbal, Arin, Shokhbaba, and Papchan. The activity continues unabated even in broad day light" said Nazir Ahmed, a local resident.

The breeding season of endangered trout starts from early May which continues till July. "It appears that there is a nexus between unscrupulous miners and Fisheries department," locals said.

Arin-Papchan streams are famous for rainbow trout in the state.

"There are about 50,000 trout fish presently in the Arin Papchan streams and the department has spawned about 35000 fingerlings this year," said District Fisheries Officer Muhammad Shafi.

"We have not visited the affected areas so far. However, I will soon send a team to these areas to make on the spot assessment," he added.

THERE ARE ABOUT 50,000 TROUT FISH PRESENTLY IN THE ARIN PAPCHAN STREAMS AND THE DEPARTMENT HAS SPAWNED ABOUT 35000 FINGERLINGS THIS YEAR

11 YEARS ON, BARAMULLA JETTY BRIDGE STILL INCOMPLETE

Haijfaa Abrar

The residents of north Kashmir's Baramulla district are up in arms against the government for failing to complete the construction of the jetty bridge, work on which was started 15 years ago. The bridge, when completed, will connect Baramulla with other parts of north Kashmir.

The construction work on the bridge started in March 2002 but was stopped after a year. Residents of Baramulla blame the executing agency Jammu Kashmir Project Construction Corporation (JKPCC) for the delay in its completion.

"We went many times to JKPCC officials but they showed no interest in this bridge. They always make excuses," said Riyaz Ahmad, a local resident. "They started work on this bridge many times but left it after some time".

Pertinently, Unit 8 of JKPCC Baramulla, is headless for past several years affecting scores of projects in the twin districts of Baramulla and Bandipora.

According to sources, the JKPCC unit is without Deputy General Manager (DGM) for past four years. The Deputy General Manager, Kupwara, unit 10, is manning the post in his additional charge.

"Absence of full-fledged Deputy General Manager for Unit 8 is badly affecting the overall functioning of the corporation," said a contractor pleading anonymity. When contacted, General Manager, JKPCC, Kashmir, Muhammad Sultan said that five Deputy General Managers had been inducted in the corporation. "We hope the post of DGM for unit 8 will be filled soon," he said.

Meanwhile, officials in JKPCC blamed Rural and Buildings (R&B) department for the incompletion of the bridge. "They never provide us adequate funds for this bridge. We are just executing agency and when we will get money work will be started," said an official of JKPCC on the basis of anonymity.

Jetty bridge connects Baramulla

town with many areas of North Kashmir which including Kupwara, Handwara, Rafiabad and Qaziabad.

Residents of the area said they had put forth the demand of 325-metre of bridge some years back in order to reduce the traffic pressure on main chowk Baramulla.

"This bridge was particularly constructed to divert Army convoy heading towards many areas of northern Kashmir," residents said, adding that, "These convoys always halted normal traffic in town. The jetty bridge can play important role in reducing traffic mess in the main chowk".

Students who are studying in different educational institutions in town are also eagerly waiting for completion of the Jetty Bridge.

"We have to face many problems during wee hours because of frequent traffic jams", said a group of students of Government Boys Degree College Baramulla.



"IT IS HIGH TIME THAT WE HAVE HELP LINES IN THE VALLEY NOT ONLY FROM NGO'S BUT ALSO FROM SOCIAL SECTOR"

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON RISE IN KASHMIR

Liya Farhat

The trend of domestic violence in Kashmir has seen a steep rise. Women generally are harassed by their in-laws on different accounts.

Sabreena Akther (name changed) alleges that her husband, Showkat Ahmad (name changed) harasses her and doesn't care about her and their child.

"He often says he will go for second marriage. This hurts and harasses

me," says Sabreena.

Many women approach recently established mediation centers to find solutions to their problems.

Advocate Mubasher Mufti, Law Officer Jammu and Kashmir bank and Assistant Vice President of the bank says domestic violence as portrayed is "little bit unwarranted."

"There is no domestic violence in valley. We may be cruel to our wives, but we don't beat them," he says.

Shazia, a university gold medalist, was allegedly a victim of prolonged domestic violence. Her

relationship with her husband

had been tumultuous and she had only returned to her paternal home.

"A day before her death, she went to live with her husband after a legal notice was sent to her to return," said her father Majeed Bazaz.

According to a study based on a sample of 200 interviews of women by the valley's prominent sociologist Prof BA Dabla, around 31% respondents claimed physical harassment/beatings at the hands of their husbands and in-laws. While a majority of such women (75%) experienced physical harassment only once, yet for some (07.00%) it was a regular feature of

domestic life.

39.49% respondents faced dowry demand by in-laws and another 9% respondents were asked by their husbands for gifts.

Dr. Mehbooba Ahangar suggested establishing women counselling cells in the Kashmir valley where traumatized women can seek advice and speak out about their agonies before the situation worsens.

"It is high time that we have help lines in the valley not only from NGO's but also from social sector," Ahangar said.

SUICIDAL TENDENCIES ON RISE AMONG WOMEN: EXPERT

Aaqib Makhdoomi/Adil Kanday



In Kashmir valley suicidal rates are on rise among women. News about suicides from every nook and corner of the valley finds space in the daily newspapers. Most of the women who commit suicide are married and face domestic problems.

Experts say that 70 to 80 percent of women suffer from psychiatric disorders which adds to the rise in suicidal tendencies.

"Basic reason of suicides among the women is stress related disorders. They cannot handle the pressure, thus attempt suicides," says Dr. Majid, Consultant, Department of Psychiatry SKIMS Medial College.

But experts say that suicides among the females are not only prevalent in valley but it is a global issue now. "Women suicides is increasing not only in valley but today it is found in every part of world," says Dr. Majid.

"It has been found that mainly those women commit suicides whose family member in the past have attempted suicide."

"Women of valley are not deaf and dumb. The effect of the environment is directly on their brains and when they get disappointed with the situation around them, they go for suicides," experts say.

"Regular tussles at homes also lead to suicides among the females. When they are fed-up with regular confrontations with family members, they think that they are wrong and end their lives by committing suicides," Dr. Majid says.

He said that love affairs between boys and girls are now common in valley. "Any unfortunate thing that happens in a relation sometimes leads to suicide. When a boy breaks up with a girl during a relationship, the girl being emotionally weak many a times attempts suicide", Dr. Majid said.

Blaming parents for the rise of suicides among the female students, he says "Parents force their daughters to opt for those subjects in which they are not interested and when they (wards) fail to come up to the expectations of their parents, they commit suicide."

"If girls fail to crack any competitive entrance test, their parents press them to appear for more exams. Often they are not interested and when they feel things going beyond their control, they end their lives," he adds.

Majid says that instead of harassing them, parents should encourage and support to their children particularly daughters as they are emotionally weak.

SMC to promote cycling in Srinagar

Fozia Majeed

Valley is going to see a new change in transportation. A two wheel cycle lighter in weight, cheap and easy to use is going to hit on the roads of Kashmir. SMC (Srinagar Municipal Corporation) is promoting cycles in Srinagar as a mode of transport.

"It's our first step towards the promotion of cycles and initially we are promoting cycles in various departments and for our ward officers and other employees of administrative departments," said Masarat Yousuf, Publicity Officer SMC.

SMC make them available on various conditions like on subsidy. For employees, if they are not able to pay one time amount to buy a cycle they can go for a loan basis and the amount can be deducted from their monthly salary. Also other people can avail this facility of loan and subsidy.

"It's amazing news for youngsters especially for girls. If I have my own cycle I can go to school on my cycle," says Aaliya, student of higher secondary school Chanapora.

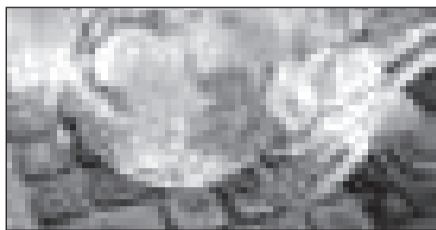
SMC will also make available cycles on hire basis if a person wants to go from one place to another nearby place he can hire it from the cycle terminal which SMC will soon construct in major areas of city, "We are planning to construct cycle terminals for cycle parking in major parts of city it will take some time but hopefully it will be done soon," Masarat added.

SMC also have plans of cycle promotion for tourists.

"If a tourist or local wants to hire a cycle to go from one place to another can hire it from one terminal by paying some amount and can drop the cycle on another terminal where we have placed some employees already" Masarat says.

Cycles do not produce any kind of pollution and with this positive point valley will be safe from pollution to some extent.

"It a good initiative taken by SMC. It will help to cope up with the problem of traffic jams also," says Mushtaq, a student.



"ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT BE POSSIBLE TO COVER THE ENTIRE CURRICULUM IN TWO MONTHS, WE AIMED AT SETTING A PLATFORM FOR IIT ASPIRANTS OF THE VALLEY FROM WHERE THEY CAN LEARN NEW THINGS AND TAKE THE COURSE FORWARD.

WITH SIMMERING MERCURY

in nutrition and water," says Sajad Ahmad while purchasing watermelons.

Experts believe that watermelons are the best source to keep body hydrated in hot summers and also essential food to be healthy.

"Watermelons contain 92 percent water by weight, the highest percentage for any fruit. Being properly hydrated during the scorching summer months is vital and a diet high in water content can contribute to daily fluid requirements and watermelon is ideal fruit to keep the body hydrated," says Dr. Ishfaq Ahmad, a senior Physician.

"Unlike juices and soft drinks that contain harmful chemicals which can be dangerous for health, melons are natural source to regulate the water content in summers. The best part of the melons is that they contain zero fat and anybody can take it," he adds.

VALLEY'S PRISTINE WATER

fishing and power generation purposes.

The wide spread pollution of Dal lake is a classic example of our ecological ignorance. This famous lake, visited in all seasons, presents a pathetic sight. The encroachments in the lake are in the form of floating gardens is phenomenal.

"Dal is constantly shrinking due to pollution and encroachments. We are losing a priceless asset to authority's callousness. All of us have a social responsibility to preserve and protect the lake," said Mushtaq Ahmed, an employee of Kashmir University.

He said that only de-weeding or drugging will not save the precious lake from deterioration, appropriate steps are needed to be taken, so that its lost beauty can

be restore.

"The lake's environmental deterioration can be recognized rightly to human settlements within and near the lake," says Shafiq-ur-Rehman, a professor at the agriculture university and an expert on the lake.

Apart from Dal, other lakes including Wullar, Mansbal, Anchar and Nigeen lakes also deteriorated. According to central government reports, Wullar has shrunk from 190 sq.kms to 72 sq. kms and Dal area has shrunk from the original 75 sq. km to around 12 sq km and other lakes have met the same fate, said a botanist of Kashmir University.

Youth of our society can exhibit great power to bring revolutions if they think so. They play a pivotal role in preservation of the water bodies of valley. "Youth should not wait for authorities to act and must come forward to save water bodies from further deterioration," said Anees Iqbal, a youngster.

The pollution in these water bodies is self-evident. Although the tests of lake waters conducted by the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) have shown presence of high levels of lead, arsenic, iron and cadmium that accumulate in fish which are then consumed by humans, posing serious health risks a government report said.

MOBILE PHONES BEHIND

(A nonprofit research organization that publishes insurance loss statistics on most automobile, SUV, pickup truck, and motorcycle models on U.S. highways) that when young motorists use mobile phones while driving, their reaction time increases manifold. "The reason is attention blindness where motorists gaze at the conditions on the road ahead, but do not really see them because they are distracted or preoccupied," the study noted.

The study also throws light that during driving, the use of cell phones not only endangers ones' life but also trouble others. "Mobile phone use while driving kills thousands each year," the study revealed, "and it is very chronic problem in our society and is becoming a fashion nowadays particularly among teenagers."

The situation is even worse in case of two wheelers, though the bikers have taken the trick of wedging the phone between shoulders and the ears to the level of fine art. But the 'crashing danger' still looms large.

"Most of us are guilty of either talking on our cell phones or texting while driving," says Shabir Hussain, a Srinagar based marketing executive. "Yes, the practice needs to be checked for the larger good of the society."

FILTHY WEEDS ANNOY

(LAWDA) have turned a blind eye towards cleansing of the same.

Although the authorities say have seen a huge rush of tourist from both the country as well as foreign, but LAWDA has failed to come up with a possible solution to this mess.

Locals maintain that if the problem is not dealt immediately, it can prove harmful to the Dal inhabitants." Machines worth hundreds of crores are spend on removal of weeds from the Dal but nothing is done to remove the same from the banks" says Mansoor Ali, a shikara owner. He further added, "The lake is one of the famous lakes in Asia and it is of great importance in attracting tourist from all over the world but foul smell emanating from the weeds have changed perceptions about the lake".

When contacted a senior official of LAWDA assured that he will look into the matter, "If it is causing problems to the tourist I myself will take action in this regard"

CANNABIS CULTIVATION GOES UNABATED IN SOUTH KASHMIR

Administration watches as mute spectator

Sheikh Tajamul

Despite a strict ban on the cultivation of Cannabis and other narcotics cannabis has been cultivated on a vast area of agricultural land in south Kashmir's pulwama district.

The villages like, litter, melhoora, wachi, tulkhanoo, dogripora in pulwama district enroute to sringar-Banihal rail link are emerging as a hot bed for the illegal cultivation and trade of Charas, opium and the other narcotics.

This illegal trade has increased manifold during the last few years with even women stepping into this dirty business. Police in the recent years has arrested many of them on charges of peddling the charas and opium.

Given to the demand and high market price of the charas and opium a large chunk of the population in these areas have turned to the cultivation of Cannabis and poppy.

The matter of the worry is that even non locals who work as labourers in the area have stepped in and they are being used to smuggle these narcotics to other states of India with police and other security agencies hardly doubting them.

During the last week of Agust the locals in these villages start deriving charas from Cannabis leaves and shortly after the process of smuggling it to different parts of India starts.

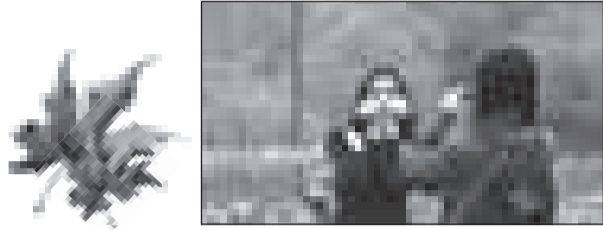
"After we derive charas from Cannabis, the process of smuggling it to different parts of India especially Punjab begins", a local on the condition of anonymity told this reporter.

"Biharis are a safe career for these narcotics as police and other security agencies seldom doubt them", he said.

"Police and other law enforcing agencies hardly matter as we settle the scores with them in advance. Policemen cherish to be posted in this area for want of money they get as bribe", he added.

SP Pulwama Javed Hassan Bhat did not bother to pick up the phone when this reporter of MERC Times ang him for quotes.

AFTER WE DERIVE CHARAS FROM CANNABIS, THE PROCESS OF SMUGGLING IT TO DIFFERENT PARTS OF INDIA ESPECIALLY PUNJAB BEGINS



"I OFTEN WALK ALONG THE DAL LAKE DURING MID-NIGHT BUT NEVER GOT THREATENED BY ANYONE"

KASHMIR: A SAFE PLACE FOR FEMALE TOURISTS

Tashaji Nazir

The tourist inflow in Kashmir valley is constantly increasing from past few years. Keeping its old customs of safeguarding the interests of tourists intact, tourists feel safe in visiting Kashmir rather than other parts of the state.

Unlike other cities of India, where there have been many cases of abduction and rape, Kashmir presents

a 'rare ray of hope'. Besides its armed conflict, political turmoil and lack of facilities, Kashmir carries a positive image when it comes to safety of female tourists.

"I often walk along the Dal Lake during mid-night but never got threatened by anyone," said a tourist from England who often comes to Kashmir along with her friends and family.

"There is no fear theft unlike other states of India particularly New Delhi," she added.

Kashmir has witnessed a relative calm from the past few years and as a result many foreign countries have lifted the travel advisory or revised it. Besides the controversies and issues, tourism never got scared due to threatening situation in the valley.

Manzoor Ahmad, owner of the Luxury House Boats on Dal Lake is of the view that female tourists have no threat in Kashmir. "I receive many guests throughout the season including women but nobody has even

complained or accused Kashmiris for any sort of harassment.

"Guests are well treated and one cannot even think to harm them," says Manzoor.

Meanwhile, Tourism Minister G.A. Mir is positive about the tourist inflow in the coming years. He says that special areas have been earmarked for the development of infrastructure and other facilities so that the valley is fully explored by the tourists in the near future.

FLORICULTURE BUSINESS BLOSSOMS IN VALLEY

Shafiq Shah

With red roses getting wrapped in a transparent sheet, Seerat Khan waits to see how her bouquet will look like. "I wanted to gift it to my husband, for his birthday."

The 30-year-old is thinking out of box for in Kashmir, flower culture is still in its infancy.

But Zahoor Ahmed, a florist who has been in this says the demand is increasing".

Be it marriage ceremonies, birthdays, inaugurations, table arrangements and pandals, Ahmed takes order for everything. "The concept of ornamentation has arrived here" Ahmed adds.

Fayez Ahmed Mir also thinks the same "3-4 years back there wasn't much concept of flowers among people, now they are buying these flowers for different purposes," Mir is a grower and has a farm in Harvan. From Gladiolus, roses, Gerebera, Carnations, Orchids and Tulips Mir grows them all and exports his produce outside Kashmir - Delhi, and Mumbai, "Kashmiri flowers are in demand outside, especially tulip".

The general secretary of floriculture department got the knowledge about flowers from Delhi where he spent five years, and did a thorough survey about this business. "When I saw commercial floriculture doing good there, I thought why not to try it out in Kashmir as well. And it did well," Mir says "For a month I earn upto rupees 50 lakh".

Mir has given the traits of his job to his nephew - Adil Mir also, who takes care of his shop at Jawahar Nagar. "My uncle knows the name of every flower by heart, and listening to him, I also learnt," Adil says. Despite being a risky job, because of the early death of fresh flowers, Adil thinks of it as a 'profitable venture' "Previously I didn't have experience how much flowers to buy, but now I buy according to shelf life."

In summers these florists earn '20000-25000 rupees',

but in winter it's not the same, because of fewer marriages and other functions, but they get off by making cut flower arrangements for hotels, restaurants, banks and other public places.

A Floriculture expert Khurshid Ahmed Qasba says that Kashmir has a good climate for flowers like tulip and juniper, and they have a good demand outside He feels that Kashmiri flowers have a huge market in U.A.E, for the export charges will be low if they will get it from India than buying from Holland, which they usually do.

Director Floriculture, Sunil Misri sees a huge potential in this field. "This is the fastest growing source of income, and around 1500 people are registered with us. About 400 hectares of land is being utilized by florists in Kashmir. These qualified unemployed youth are taking up commercial floriculture as career, and are giving employment to other people as well," Misri said.

And one amongst the employment provider is Rashid Ahmed Kawoos. His business is not limited to local or national market, he has international customers also. "I export my product to France also" Kawoos believes in value addition and produces essential oils. The Retired police officer deals only with Lavender, which has a huge market, as its used world wide for making perfumes and soaps and he also grows Rosemary - a mood booster and skin toner.

Kawoos is happy with this business, and suggest people to do the same "I tell people to grow lavender and rosemary, and if it won't work, I will be your buyer". Kawoos says, who describes the uses of lavender as an insomniac curer to a customer. Kawoos's is the only person who sells these essential oils in small bottles "A foreigner friend gave me an idea of bottle packing" he says.

8 years back when Kawoos started his business, he had no land to grow lavender, which his friend gave him, but then he brought 8 acres of land at Budgam and did an experiment, which gave him fruit after 3 years, because of the nature of the plant "I was patient, for I knew the reward I am going to get," Kawoos says.

3 IITians TO TRAIN KASHMIRI STUDENTS

Tauheed Ahmad

Aiming to increase the presence of Kashmiri students in the IIT's of country three students took up the mission to train aspirants from valley how to crack IIT's exams. The project was named 'Teach for Kashmir'.

Three students of Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur, Saood Nazir, Imbesat Ahmad and Saif Khan provided training free of cost to 90 IIT aspirants from the Valley this summer.

Saood, who hails from south Kashmir's Shopian district and is pursuing MSc Physics (integrated) course at IIT, Kharagpur, has been able to rope in Imbesat and Saif, who are from Patna and have taken up MSc physics (integrated) and MSc chemistry (integrated) at the same institution. These three IITians hope to provide intensive two-month coaching to Class XI, Class XII and those appearing in IIT-JEE examinations from May 20 onwards. Each batch comprised of 30 students.

The project of trio was being sponsored by Jammu and Kashmir Bank and the support team of the IITians in Kashmir comprising two engineering students Raja Ishfaq (studying engineering in Punjab) and Shahid Bashir (mechanical engineering student at National Institute of Technology, Srinagar).

"Although it is not possible to cover the entire curriculum in two months, we aimed at setting a platform for IIT aspirants of the Valley from where they can learn new things and take the course forward. Cracking the IIT examination is not impossible, it needs perseverance and a lot of hard work," Saood Nazir said.

He said students confided in him their fears about cracking the IIT exam during his brief interaction with them in the Valley last year.

Raja Ishfaq, the project coordinator said "Our guidance programme was free of cost except for the minimal printing charges, from the students for the study material and the tests."

At present, just 22 students from the Valley are studying at various IITs in the country.

Last year out of the 9,600 candidates, who got through various undergraduate courses at 15 IITs of the country, only four students from Kashmir could make it to these prestigious institutions.

HISTORIC KALAI' FALLING TO OFFICIAL NEGLIGENCE

Sunain Shafi

Located a few kilometers away from the state's summer capital, the historic Kalai wall is damaged at various places due to illegal encroachments and negligence of the archeological departments. The wall and one of its three doors is prone to collapse.

The Kalai wall along with one of its doors, Bachi Darwaza, is under the supervision of the state's Archeological department. The other two doors – Kathi Darwaza and Sangeen Darwaza, have been declared as monuments of national importance by Archeological Survey of India under the Ancient Monuments and Archeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASRA) 1958.

The 2010 amendment of AMASRA maintains, "The area falling within 100 meters of the limits of the protected monuments, including this monument, has been declared to be prohibited area for the purpose of construction."

But just a few steps away from the notice board located near the Kathi Darwaza on which these laws have been written for public notice, the first illegal construction can be seen on the side of the door itself.

The case is even worse with the Sangeen Darwaza which looks



like it would collapse any time soon. Rs.26,62,564 under the title 'Details of expenditure incurred under minor works (plan and non-plan) from 2007–2008 to 2011–2012', have been spent on the Sangeen Darwaza and Kathi Darwaza alone.

"We will look into the matter and notify law enforcement agencies about it if the illegal construction is going on at Kathi Darwaza," said a senior conservation assistant, Ghulam Ahmad Ganie.

He also said, "Head office of ASI is in Jammu which makes it difficult for us to work smoothly. We lack a full-fledged and upgraded office in Srinagar".

Another official at ASI Srinagar, Tahir Malik, said that the law enforcement agencies usually don't pay heed to their report. "They even

refuse to register an FIR sometimes", he added.

The encroachers have constructed concrete houses beside the wall, majority of which have only three new walls because the fourth one is the Kalai wall itself. New pathways have been made through it. People even use the material from the 'wall' for constructing new structures. Toilets have been made in the wall itself near the third door Bachi Darwaza. The sewage and waste from the colony has no proper disposal.

A well of archeological significance near the Mosque of Akhun Mulla Shah, which is at a distance of few meters from the 'wall', is used as a giant dustbin by the locals.

"We are ready to leave this place provided government gives us land somewhere else," said a local.

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DCL: OLD GAME, NEW PASSION!

Aalid Hussain Rather

Khel Wahi, Josh Naya!! The Downtown Champions League (DCL), T20 Cricket Tournament 2013 is being organized by a group of cricket enthusiasts, experienced cricketers and cricket pundits, who love this gentleman's game and intend to promote cricket in every nook and corner of the Kashmir Valley.

It has become a clichéd expression that the Valley of Kashmir has abundant talent in sports but lacks exposure. Indeed, the mountainous valley is having sports talent, especially in soccer and cricket. Cricket is well and truly followed by people of Kashmir. The story is no different in the Kashmir Valley.

The Downtown Champions League (DCL) T20 cricket tournament 2013 is an attempt to provide budding cricketers an appropriate platform to express themselves. What the DCL T20 tourney seeks to achieve is finding the future talent. The main reason behind launching this cricket tournament is to encourage youngsters to play the game and show what they are capable of doing on the ground.

"The idea is to promote new talent and give youngsters and upcoming cricketers in the Kashmir Valley a chance to showcase their skill and talent on a bigger stage. Our eagle-eyed experts will continue their hunt for new genius and aptitude", said senior journalist Gowhar Geelani, who is also the media adviser and in-charge press and publicity of the DCL. "Tapping the Talent on Track" is our slogan, he added.

"This is not a tournament where we will see the same old faces performing on the field. Experienced hands will be working behind the scene and off the field. That is why the think tank of the DCL has decided to set an age bar for this event, Cricketers above 35 years of age will not be allowed to participate in the DCL editions", Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the T20 cricket League, Nasser Bhat said. Organizers of the DCL have made it mandatory for all the possible 12 franchisees to include at least four cricketers (players) from the downtown Srinagar in their playing-XI.

All teams and players are expected to maintain discipline and professional conduct of highest order.

"Any player or official involved with the DCL franchisees or organizing body found

guilty of taking performance enhancing drugs or any banned substances will automatically be banned from participating further in the cricket league. Culpable may be banned for life from taking part in DCL seasons".

The organizers have adopted an Anti-Corruption Code with an aim to discourage all those elements intending to bring cricket, the gentleman's game, into disrepute.

The DCL T20, 2013 is run by a group of professional cricketers, cricket experts and able administrators, all of whom are fully acquainted with the art and skill of finding the new talent. "We have the people who possess an eye for talent, We want to give our state more Parvez Rasools, It is no secret that Kashmir has produced a galaxy of cricketers who have represented the state at various levels", said Nasser Ahmad, Chief Organizer of the DCL.

In its first edition of the DCL T20, a total of 12 teams, each owned by a separate franchisee, will participate in the tournament on league basis. The top four teams, the first four on the Points Table, will have to play the Qualifier 1, Eliminator and Qualifier two to decide the two finalists.