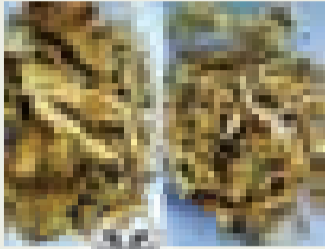


# MERC TIMES



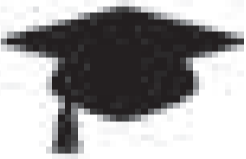
"OUR BUSINESS PROSPERS IN WINTER SEASON. OUR HARRISA SHOP IS JAM-PACKED WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE FOND OF THE RECIPE. IT IS VERY PLEASING TO SEE PEOPLE STILL LIKING THE HARRISA AT A TIME WHEN JUNK AND PACKED FOODS ARE EASILY AVAILABLE,"

→ See page 8

Lab newspaper of  
Media Education Research Centre, KU

Vol: 6 | No.: 13 | NOVEMBER 30, 2013

## MEET THE FIRST PAKISTANI WOMAN TO GET Ph.D FROM KU



"I BECAME INTERESTED TO STUDY IN KASHMIR FROM SCHOOL AND COLLEGE DAYS AND WANTED TO STUDY KASHMIR BECAUSE WE LACK THE BOOKS RELATED TO KASHMIR'S MEDIEVAL PERIOD BACK HOME." PAGE → 6



'DRUG ADDICTION  
ON RISE IN ANANTNAG,  
BARAMULLA'

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SOLINA SCHOOL:  
A HOPE FOR DISABLED

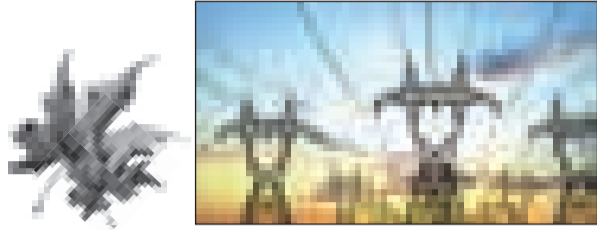
P3



PARAMEDICAL  
STAFF OF NRHM  
ALLEGE GOVT  
INDIFFERENCE

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SENIOR PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY LEADER AND MLA BANDIPORA NIZAM U DIN BHAT SAID THE LONGER POWER CUTS CONVEY THE FAILURE OF THE GOVERNMENT.



# POWER CUTS HIT LIFE IN KASHMIR

*Sheema Farooq*

The State Power Development department PDD recently came up with the revised curtailment schedule for both the metered and non metered areas of the valley. The power schedule has 57 hour cut in a week for non metered areas and around 17 hour cut in metered areas.

In view of the winter season, people have reacted strongly to the PDD move.

"The government does not care about the problems faced by people due to harsh power curtailment," said a group of the students of the Kashmir University. "The civil secretariat moves to the winter capital and people of the valley are left at the mercy of harsh winter," they added.

The business community of the valley has expressed resentment against the decision of the government. Javeed Ahmad a business man said, "The revised curtailment schedule issued by the government badly affects our business."

Shakeel Qalander, the former president of Federation Chambers of Industries- Kashmir (FCIK) said, "The government is talking about promoting the business in the valley but at the same time they take such decisions which are detrimental for the

industrial growth."

"The government is taking people

THE GOVERNMENT IS TALKING ABOUT PROMOTING THE BUSINESS IN THE VALLEY BUT AT THE SAME TIME THEY TAKE SUCH DECISIONS WHICH ARE DETRIMENTAL FOR THE INDUSTRIAL GROWTH

of Kashmir for a ride. They promised uninterrupted electricity in metered

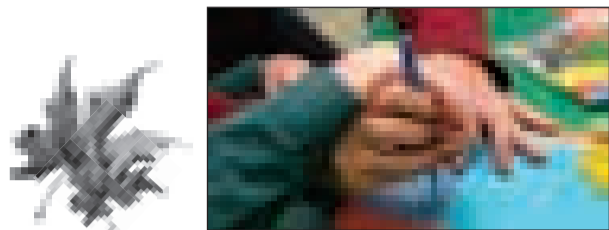
areas but fail to deliver on ground. The government has sold the power outside the state and has also failed to reclaim power projects from National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC)."

Student community of the valley expressed their anger over this decision of the government. Shahnawaz Samoon a student of the Kashmir University said: "We are badly affected by extended power cuts. We have to study for long hours of the night but if there is no electricity how can we study."

Kashmir hoteliers and restaurant owners have accused the government of taking harsh decision. A restaurant owner Mohammad Amin said: "We see the huge rush of the tourists in winter season in Kashmir if electricity is provided in such a way how can we facilitate the tourists by giving heating arrangement to them."

Senior People's Democratic Party leader and MLA Bandipora Nizam U Din Bhat said the longer power cuts convey the failure of the government.

"While Darbar moves to Jammu the valley people are left helpless," he said accusing the government of discriminating against Kashmir and favouring Jammu.



"LEAVE ASIDE A LIBRARY AND OTHER EQUIPMENT, THE SCHOOL FUNCTIONS IN FIVE DARK ROOMS WHERE EDUCATION IS IMPARTED TO STUDENTS UP TO CLASS 8TH. AFTER EVERY 6 MONTHS, THE MASJID INTIZAMIYA COMMITTEE LOCKS THE BUILDING SEEKING HIKE IN RENTAL CHARGES,"

## 2 SCHOOLS PUNCTURE GOVT CLAIMS

Iqbal Kirmani

While the J&K government is boasting of having made "significant achievements" in the education sector, two schools in Srinagar are enough to puncture the claims. For the past more than two decades, two middle schools at Zampakadal Chattabal are functioning from the same dingy accommodation—that too a rented one.

Government Girls Middle School Balgarden (falling in zone Batamaloo) and Government Boys Middle School Chattabal (falling in zone Zaldagar) are functioning in a building owned by local Masjid Intizamiya since 1980.

The girls' school has five rooms, with an extremely poor lighting while the boys' school operates in 10 rooms. Of the five rooms, two are meant for official purposes

while in rest three rooms, education is imparted to girl students of nine classes.

According to teachers, the school lacks everything—from classrooms to washrooms to adequate teaching and non-teaching staff.

"Leave aside a library and other equipment, the school functions in five dark rooms where education is imparted to students up to class 8th. After every 6 months, the Masjid Intizamiya committee locks the building seeking hike in rental charges," Headmaster of the Girls Middle School Tabassum Jabeen said. "We often take classes in the office, and during lunch break, we lock the students in the classes because there is no playground for them."

The staff members said due to dilapidated condition of the school, the roll has "decreased drastically" over the years. "The condition of the school is such that the locals don't want to send their wards here. This year, the roll has decreased to

42 students," a teacher, wishing anonymity, said.

The condition of the Government Boys Middle School Chattabal, which runs in the first floor of the same building, is no different. The school faces shortage of staff.

"The building is decades old and can collapse anytime," Headmaster, Ghulam Ahmad War, said. "We have 10 rooms but none of them is worth calling a classroom. Both teachers and staff suffer due to the deplorable condition of the school."

President Intizamiya Committee Masjid Ahle Hadees Zampakadal Chattabal Manzoor Ahmad Dar said they have allowed both the schools to function in the building on "humanitarian grounds."

"The schools have been operating in the building since 1980 and there has been no increase in the rent so far. We even locked the school building on many occasions," Manzoor said.

## Can't meet household, other expenses with Rs 200 pension: Senior Citizens

Yusra Khan

At a time of the rising inflation, the beneficiaries of Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme are still surviving on monthly pension of Rs 200 it is a government of India initiative persons above the age of 60. The beneficiaries include widows, and disabled persons.

Persons above 60 years of age are paid Rs 200 while persons about 80 years are paid Rs 400 under the scheme.

Most of the age old pension holders claim that the amount of Rs 200 is too meager to meet any expenses. A pensioner Abdullah Ganie says, "The amount paid by the government is too less to fulfill any necessity at this age?"

Another old age pension holder asked: "I am paid Rs 200, how I can manage the expenses of my family?"

Javaid Ahmad Tak, a disabled activist, said the government is playing with the lives of the disabled pension



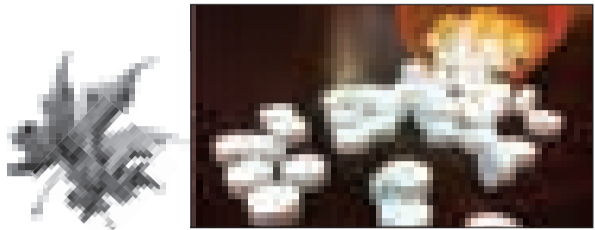
beneficiaries.

"The salaries of the ministers were hiked by 500% since 2002 but the amount of the pension still continues to be Rs 200 only." "A disabled pension beneficiary need costly medicines but when he is paid an insulting amount of Rs 200 he cannot even manage the quarter of his medical expenses," he added.

Gulam Ahmad Ganie, an 80-year-old pension holder, said, "I have eight family members. I have to buy medicines for Rs 1000 every month I humbly request the government to please think about our problems."

Union Rural Development Minister, Jairam Ramesh raised the issue of enhancing the old age pension last year but nothing has been done in this regard, said Syed Qayoom a Sociology student of Kashmir University.

According to the official data of Social Welfare Department said around 300000 persons of the valley are covered under the old age pension scheme and more than Rs 106 crore is disbursed every year among the beneficiaries.



A CONCERTED EFFORT BY THE GOVERNMENT AND LAW ENFORCING AGENCIES TO STEM THE ROT IN KASHMIR IS LARGELY MISSING. EXPERTS FEAR IT'S JUST A MATTER OF TIME FOR THE PROBLEM TO ASSUME DISASTROUS PROPORTIONS.

## 'DRUG ADDICTION ON RISE IN ANANTNAG, BARAMULLA'

David Iqbal

The number of drug addicts has increased in Anantnag and Baramulla districts especially among youths.

According to Dr Waseem Shah, "It's possible that around 8% per cent of youth population in Baramulla district consume illicit drugs. Yet official figures can be more." These 15-30 age group is susceptible to drug abuse and male drug consumers outnumber females.

Normally, women do not have direct access to the more prevalent drugs. Instead, they use substances like white fluid (commonly used in offices for erasing printed errors) and boot polish.

Dr Mohammad Kaiser Syed, a psychologist who runs a private drug de-addiction center has patients from across Kashmir. Along with his team of psychiatrists, he recently organized drug de-addiction camps in Baramulla and Anantnag. "In Anantnag, around 500 drug addicts were registered at the camp. In Baramulla, 200 patients, mainly youth, approached us for medical treatment," said Dr Syed.

The problem is grave among the youth, but due to the stigma attached to addiction, only a few people approached them for treatment.

According to some media reports quoting officials in Baramulla District Hospital, an astounding 10 per cent of the population is involved in drug abuse. Quoting the data from Blood Bank Baramulla, the reports also suggest that 20 per cent of students in higher secondary schools and 30 per cent in colleges are consuming prohibited drugs.

The study reveals that the main suppliers are military camps and hotels in the district.

"School children being a less risky

group are employed for harvesting and processing addictive crops. That makes them vulnerable to this menace," said Dr Syed. There is a direct link between drug abuse among school-going children



and an increasing dropout rate in Baramulla, said sources. In the 18 zones of the district, experts observed that the dropout rate of school children has increased. The education department is worried. It has organized community mobilization programmes involving parents, village education committee members and religious scholars to spread the message and create public awareness.

The spread of HIV also looms large among drug users sharing needles. And worse, these needles find their way into

hospitals through fraudulent means. Mental health expert Rashid Hameed said, "There is plenty of evidence about the injections being unsafe. To our utter disappointment, nobody has come forward to learn the techniques of safe injections."

This social evil threatening the lives of thousands of young people across Kashmir is patronized by a flourishing nexus of illicit drug dealers, small scale narcotics producers and market networks. The fact that such a ruinous industry is allowed to flourish points to the lack of political will. A concerted effort by the government and law enforcing agencies to stem the rot in Kashmir is largely missing. Experts fear it's just a matter of time for the problem to assume disastrous proportions.

"THERE IS PLENTY OF EVIDENCE ABOUT THE INJECTIONS BEING UNSAFE. TO OUR UTTER DISAPPOINTMENT, NOBODY HAS COME FORWARD TO LEARN THE TECHNIQUES OF SAFE INJECTIONS."



"DOGS AND PEOPLE HERE USE THE SAME TAP. THE HOSPITAL AUTHORITIES DO NOT CARE ABOUT HEALTHCARE OF PATIENTS"

# DOG SCARE AT SMHS

## SMC to launch dog sterilization programme very soon: SMC Commissioner

*Younus Ahmad*

**T**he SMHS, hospital authorities have failed to disturbing stop howling of dogs that is giving sleepless nights patients and attendants.

Security in charge Habibullah Mir expressed helplessness over the issue. "When we start to chase these dogs out of the hospital, they disperse in different directions and it becomes difficult to find them," Mir said.

Mir said they cannot chase the dogs through the night dogs often give them slip and remain hidden at remote places in the hospital.

Attendants at the hospital said that dogs who roam freely in the hospital premises in the late hours frequently howl at them in their way and try to snatch food items brought from the market for patients.

"Sometimes it becomes very difficult to move out in the late hours. Dogs keep howling that gives sleepless nights to patients.

Sometimes, dogs also chase us in the night increasing the risk of getting injured," Security guards present outside the hospital do not keep tight vigil on the movement of dogs. The howling of dogs during the night also adds to fear," they said.

Rafiqo Bano, who has spent a week besides her ailing son in the hospital said, "The people who visit

the hospital or go out in late hours live in the fear of getting bitten as the dog's growl at them."

SMHS, Medical Superintendent, Nazir Ahmad Chowdry said Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) has not been able to check the dog movement in Srinagar city.

"You question the SMC authorities as to why have they not succeeded in checking the movement of dogs in Srinagar City at their will. Dogs are present everywhere. They have failed to curb the movement of dogs, the result is they in-

A night watch man said approximately 200 dogs could be seen howling during the night.

"I think, there are approximately 200 dogs that are howling during the night," he said "Dogs who regularly howl in the late hours force people to remain inside the hospital," the watchman, requesting anonymity said.

"Dogs and people here use the same Tap. The hospital authorities do not care about healthcare of patients," he added while pointing to a tap.

Commissioner, SMC, Dr. GN Qasba urged the hospital authorities to maintain good hygienic conditions inside the hospital premises.

"I request the hospital authorities to maintain good hygienic conditions in the premises. The attendants who visit the hospital throw food particles, crumbs of bread outside the hospital invited the dogs," Qasba said.

"We request the attendants to use dustbins in the hospital.

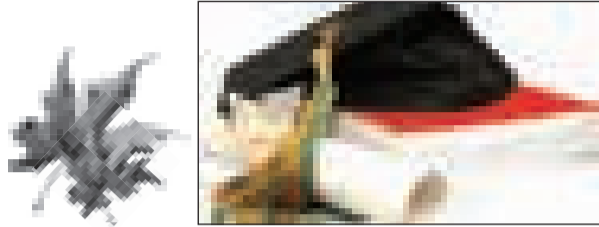
"The hospital authorities should also cooperate in disposing the dustbins at tight time," Qasba said, adding that, "We will launch dog sterilization programme very soon".



vade the hospitals and people face consequences," Nazir Chowdry said.

Chowdry said, he has "instructed the hospital security guards to ensure safety of the people who move out of the hospital in late hours."

**WHEN WE START TO CHASE THESE DOGS OUT OF THE HOSPITAL, THEY DISPERSE IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS AND IT BECOMES DIFFICULT TO FIND THEM"**



"I WAS ALWAYS PASSINATE ABOUT STUDING IN 'JANAT-E-BENAZIR.'"

## MEET THE FIRST PAKISTANI WOMAN TO GET Ph.D FROM KU

*Fida Hussain*

**D**r Nadia Mehrdin has become the first woman from Pakistan to complete Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) from Kashmir University.

Nadia, a resident of Kasur area of Punjab province, 40 kms from Lahore pursued her Phd from the Institute of Kashmir Studies, under the South Asia Foundation (SAF) program.

Her research topic was, "Development of Science, Technology, Arts and Language during the Sultanate Period in Kashmir." She completed her thesis under the supervision of Prof Gulshan Majeed.

Under the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the SAF and the Institute of Kashmir Studies, the students from neighboring countries pursue higher education at KU.

Nadia said she has fallen in love with Kashmir and it was memorable part of her life to pursue doctorate from Kashmir "I was always passionate to study in 'Janat-e-Benazeer.'"

I have been here for four years. I can never forget the love and affection people of Kashmir gave me all these years," she said.

Nadia has done post-graduate degree She interest to study in Kashmir in her school days where they used to celebrate Kashmir Day and was keen to explore the history of Kashmir.

"I became interested to study in Kashmir from school and college

days and wanted to study Kashmir because we lack the books related to Kashmir's medieval period back home."

"I had a passion to study the history of Kashmir," she added.

But Naida said she had to struggle for a year to get the visa. "I struggled for a year to get my visa, but I didn't give up."

She dedicates her degree to her two siblings and a cousin who encouraged her.

"Initially my family was reluctant to send me here but my brother, Shafiq Ahmad and my sister, Asiya Mehrdin supported me to persue this degree from Kashmir University," she said.

"Shafiq, Asiya who was working as lecturer in Liberty College of Lahore and my cousin sister Ambar Shairzaman supported me," she said.

Praising the rich art and culture of the valley she said, "This part of Kashmir has richer heritage and culture than Pakistan administrated Kashmir."

In 2010 when valley was hit by turmoil, Nadia said she thought of going back to Pakistan. She compliments people of Kashmir for their support and encouragement for staying back in valley.

Nadia is thankful to Governor NN Vohra, who would always appreciate and encourage her during the course.

"During interactions, he would always call me 'the brand ambassador of SAARC' and encourage me at every



step."

She also hailed the Vice Chancellor and Director Institute of Kashmir Studies.

She said more students from Pakistan should come and work here, but she was quick to add that the visa process should be eased from both the sides, "so that more and more students get the opportunity to visit and study in this beautiful part of the world."



**"MORE AND MORE STUDENTS SHOULD GET THE OPPORTUNITIES TO VISIT AND STUDY IN THIS BEAUTIFUL PART OF THE WORLD"**



"IF AN EMPLOYEE OF KUPWARA TOWN IS POSTED IN MACHIL OR TANGHDAR HE SHOULD BE AT LEAST PAID THE INCENTIVES WHEN THE DOCTORS WORKING IN FAR FLUNG AREAS ARE PAID THE SAME UNDER"

## PARAMEDICAL STAFF OF NRHM ALLEGES GOVT INDIFFERENCE

Shahid Andrabi

The state paramedical staff of the centrally sponsored health scheme National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) has alleged official indifference towards their grievances.

The scheme was started in 2005 with focus on the reproductive and child health and disease control.

President of the Paramedical Staff Union NRHM Shahnawaz Malik said paramedical staff has been facing many issues related to salary, incentives and regularization.

"The doctors working under NRHM are being paid a handsome salary and there have been many hikes in their salaries but last time the salary of paramedical staff was hiked was in 2009. Since then we are working on the previous pay. If salary of doctors



is hiked every year then why is paramedical staff ignored," said an employee.

District President Kupwara NRHM Syed Muneer Andrabi said, "We have no well defined working hours. We work day and night but we are paid less and no incentives are given to us if we work for

more hours than the normal routine."

"The paramedical employees of NRHM working in the other states of the country are paid handsome salary. If an NRHM employee is given Rs 14000 in other states why the employees of Jammu and Kashmir state are paid only

Rs 10800 if NRHM is a centrally sponsored scheme," Andrabi added.

He said the basic implementation of the scheme is being made possible only by the paramedical staff.

"If an employee of Kupwara town is posted in Machil or Tanghdar he should be at least paid the incentives when the doctors working in far flung areas are paid the same under the same scheme," said Tariq Ahmad, an employee.

"We protested several times for our rights but government is sleeping on the issue. If our demands are not met in time we will resign from our posts and will go on indefinite hunger strike," said the union president of NRHM paramedical employees.

Mission Director NRHM J&K, Dr Yash Pal Sharma said, "We are going to solve the issues pertaining to the NRHM paramedical staff soon."

## PATIENTS SUFFER AT CHEST DISEASE HOSPITAL

Javid Iqbal

Patients at Government Chest Hospital Srinagar have complained that the doctors do not visit the wards for regular check up and the food served to them is very unhygienic.

The hospital is one of the oldest hospitals in the Srinagar and hundreds



of the patients from the city and from other parts of the valley come for the treatment every day.

"We are here from the last week but there is no improvement in the patient's health as doctors do not visit them regularly," one of the attendants alleged.

The patients also said they are not provided medicines in the hospital and that they have to buy them from the market. In such a situation, most patients prefer to be treated at the private clinics.

Senior officials of the hospital didn't receive repeated phone calls.

EVERY TIME



## TICKLE YOUR TASTE BUDS THIS WINTER



*Owais Gora*

**I**n the winter season when subzero temperature freeze Kashmir valley, people relish various winter specialities. Harissa, chestnuts, and other winter eatables have become favourite street foods among Kashmiris.

“Our business prospers in winter season. Our harrisa shop is jam-packed with people who are fond of the recipe. It is very pleasing to see people still liking the harissa at a time when junk and packed foods are easily available,” said Shahnawaz Lone, owner of famous Harrisa shop at Nowhatta.

Aamir Nadaf, student and regular customer of Shahnawaz Lone said, “Harrisa is one of the colours of our vibrant culture. Though modern fast foods are

becoming popular the traditional food is still matchless and pizza or Burgers can hardly replace it.”

It has even provided livelihood to numerous families including those coming from distant parts of India. Their sole source of income is to sell variety of eatables on the streets of the valley. Groundnuts, chestnuts, popcorns and other similar eatables are also attracting many customers. Streets of Srinagar city are filled with peanut and chestnut vendors. They are usually non-Kashmiris who come to earn bread and butter.

“I come from Buxar, Bihar to sell groundnuts here in the winter season as it is a profitable business,” said Chandan, a nuts vendor at Sarai Bala.

Many street pakoda stalls can also be seen in different parts of the summer capital Srinagar.

“Undoubtedly our pakoda business gains more profit in winters compared to summers. Usually we record almost 30 percent hike in our income in winters,” said Arif-ul-Rehman, a street vendor from Utarakhand.

Sun baked vegetables and dried fish are also quite popular during the chilly weather of the Valley. This trend can be traced back in the history when there was shortage of vegetables in winters, since then it has been a regular dish in the valley especially in winters.

“It has become a routine for us, like almost every household, to dry vegetables like turnips, brinjals and gourd in summers in order to preserve them for winter consumption,” said Amir Fayaz, while arranging his dried fish stall at Amira Kadal Srinagar.

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