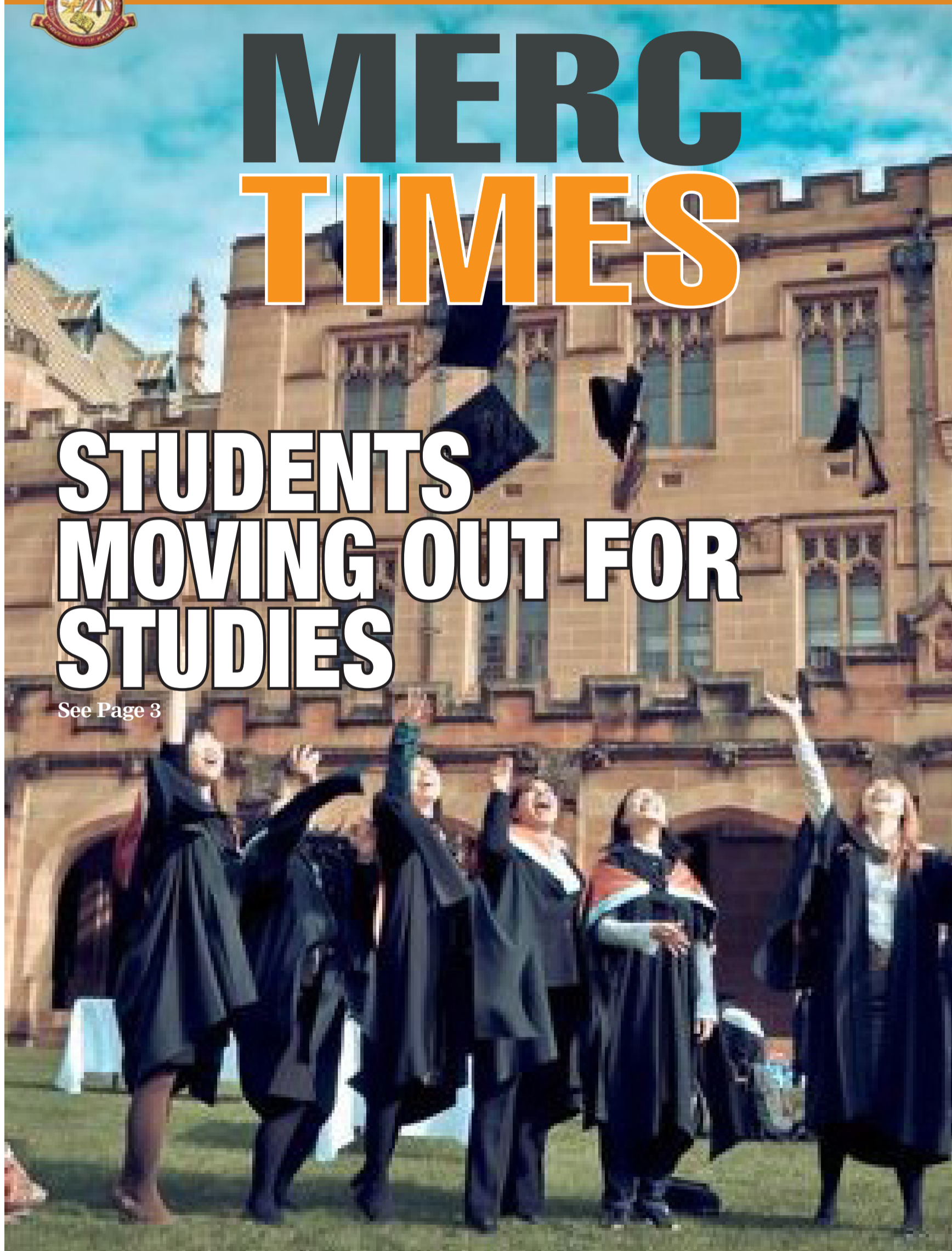




# MERC TIMES

## STUDENTS MOVING OUT FOR STUDIES

See Page 3



## 'God can hear us without Loudspeakers'

●Marouf Gazi

The use of loudspeakers by the mosques is becoming a nuisance for the common people. Even in the month of Ramadan when Muslims seek inner peace, careless use of loudspeakers destroys the purpose of this holy month.

A non-Muslim (identity withheld) said, "People have right to preach and practice their religion but it should not come in the way of other religions. I am not in the habit of waking up so early in the morning.

However, I cannot help it when

turbing response.

Azaan is meant to be called out loud, but in the Masjids they use high-intensity loudspeakers which produce sound at such a high level that it pierces the ears.

Another local from the neighboring locality of Hawal, Hashim, says, "During Shab-e-Baraat or Shab-e-Qadr, we tend to compete with neighboring Masjids and localities as to who would pray louder. There are sick people, children and old people sleeping who get disturbed by the use of these loudspeakers. Such loud noise is not good for health."

Continued exposure to loud noise



there are voices at a very high pitch coming from everywhere. I doubt if it is allowed in their religion or not."

But even Muslims find the practice of calling out of Azaan so loud futile. Many Muslims fail to respond properly to Azaan as there are so many being called out simultaneously. Fearing that they would be called blasphemous, people tend not to talk much about it.

Shabir Ahmad, a local Imam in Batmaloo area says he had tried to convince people in his Masjid to lessen the use of loudspeakers but was opposed even after quoting an authentic hadith, he got a very dis-

es is extremely harmful to health. It can cause permanent hearing loss. Neither surgery nor a hearing aid can help correct it. Short term exposure to loud noise can also cause a temporary change in hearing (ears may feel stuffed up) or a ringing in your ears (tinnitus). These short-term problems may go away within a few minutes or hours after leaving the noisy area. However, repeated exposures to loud noise can lead to permanent tinnitus and/or hearing loss.

Prominent Kashmiri scholar Zareef Ahmad Zareef says, "I am not against using loudspeakers but I think it should only be used for Azaan and for Friday prayers."

## STUNTING ON BIKES A GROWING NUISANCE

●Muneer Dar

With law enforcement agencies completely failing to crackdown on youth involved in stunt biking on the Valley roads, the menace is assuming an alarming proportion with commuters complaining that these stunts were putting lives of scores of people in jeopardy on busy stretches.

Encouraged by the silence of the authorities over the issue, these youth have also created a fan page "Valley Bike Stunters Club" on the social networking site, Facebook, which till now has received 1121 likes from the account holders.

"The youth perform dangerous stunt biking along the Residency Road, Boulevard, Foreshore Road, Gupkar Road, Bar Bar Shah stretch, Rajbagh near Presentation Convent school in full public gaze and under the nose of the police personnel," the frequent commuters on these roads told Greater Kashmir adding that these youth, riding powerful bikes, also indulge in rash driving. "These youth perform various stunts in front of the cars and other vehicles plying on the road thereby putting the lives of passengers, particularly in danger," said Farooq Ahmed.

He said the stunts performed by youth include applying sudden brakes at high speed on front wheel in order to lift the back wheel of the bike in air, standing on the bike while riding it, freeing arms from handle and riding the bike.

"The people driving their cars behind these riders or coming in opposite direction have to be extra cautious. If any untoward incident takes place the onus will directly lie on the driver following him," the drivers said, adding that a mishap can occur anytime on these road stretches due to these stunts. "The pedestrians also feel threatened due to the actions performed by these youth as they are also apprehensive of being hit," the drivers added.

These youth are also involved in rash driving. "These youth drive rashly on Boulevard and cause panic among the commuters and pedestrians who try to save themselves from being hit," the commuters added.

The Facebook page "Valley Bike Stunters Club" of these riders, is full of comments and praises from others who draw pleasure from these deadly stunts. "Fight on and fly on to the last drop of blood and the last drop of fuel to the last beat of the heart," is the status message posted by "Valley Bike Stunters Club" along with photographs of stunts done by youth on bikes. "Its All About Passionate Stunnerz Here in Kashmir Valley..." is the slogan of the Club.

The youth have even created albums of youth indulging in stunt biking. Hospital sources said that several youth, who had suffered grievous injuries while performing the stunts, had been brought to hospital for treatment. "It is purely an adrenaline rush," the medicos told Greater Kashmir adding the number of youth suffering wounds in bike mishaps had increased manifold.

When contacted, DIG (Traffic), Shafqat Wattali said the Police would come down heavily on these youth indulging in these activities. "This is a grave issue and we will launch a campaign to nab the youth involved in illegal acts," the DIG said.

He also advised the parents to keep their children under scanner and bar them from performing these acts.

# STUDENTS MOVING OUT FOR STUDIES



● **MOHMAD YONUS**

**I**n Kashmir, both at the secondary and bachelor's level, a huge section of students have gone to outside Kashmir to pursue their education, giving the reasons of lack of quality

education here.

Javid Ahmad, who had done MBA from Aryans Business College Chandigarh said, "though I burned my midnight oil to grab a seat in Kashmir University but was not able to acquire as the seats were much limited, so I had no option but to study outside."

"I could have waited for the 2nd year to test my fate but least placement opportunities in the university forced me to go," he added.

Kashmir University, the highest seat of learning in the valley, received 36105 applications for Post Graduate courses, this year while its intake capacity was only 3000 students.

Scholarship schemes were launched by New Delhi for the poor section of populace in the valley to bridge a illiteracy divide.

The reputation of institution is measured by the number of successful candidates produced by it. This reputation and relative credibility of Kashmir University with some top reputed universities of India is immeasurable. So one has to take these points into consideration while joining the rolls of any university especially when you think of going outside the state for further studies.

Talking to Prof Ashraf wani, Dean Academic Affairs regarding the issue. he said, "There are certain centers of excellence in India and such universities have better infrastructure and we are trying to keep pace with such universities also, nevertheless we try do our best."

# AUTHORITIES IGNORE TRAFFIC MESS

● **Nazir Gillo**

**I**t seems that traffic jams have become a part of our life now. The condition of roads in Kashmir, particularly in Srinagar city continues to be pathetic with government and its agencies taking no measures to improve their quality and condition despite repeated demands by the locals. Deformed roads with ample number of potholes and manholes render smooth commutation to near impossible.

"It takes me two hours from Budgam in snail paced traffic to reach Kashmir University, a distance of 25 kms which otherwise should have taken only an hour" said Shahid Iqbal, a student of Kashmir University, while expressing his apathy.

The government seems to be sleeping in deep slumber while failing to create a mechanism to avoid traffic mess. The number of vehicles is surprisingly increasing and there seems no end to this ever increasing traffic mess.

It may be stated that the authorities have taken cognizance of the issue and started the vast flyover project from Jahangir Chowk to Rambagh, which will ensure some relief to the uptown areas, especially to the Srinagar Airport road. But the traffic jams will not end with the construction of flyover and government needs to look beyond civil lines.



The students of various schools and colleges are the worst sufferers who despite leaving on time reach late to their schools/colleges. "We are facing immense hardships and tough time to reach our destinations. The downtown area is still confined to 50 years old narrow roads with heavy traffic plying on them, resulting in us reaching late to our offices or business establishments"

In reply to our question regarding the traffic jams, a traffic police officer said, "We are doing our best to ensure smooth and hassle-free regulation of traffic, but people are not cooperating with us. They take wrong lanes for driving and park their vehicles anywhere".

"The authorities have to take bold steps for creating a proper mechanism so that people are spared the mess they are in", he added.

# HEAT WAVE IN INDIA BOOSTS JK TOURISM



●Rafia Rahim

As the temperature continues to rise in India more and more people are turning towards valley to enjoy the summer vacations. Scenic destinations like Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Sonamarg are turning out the favorite destinations for these people.

Mohan Lal, 36, a Delhi based businessman says, "It is too hot in Delhi this year. I wanted to escape that heat. The first destination which came in my mind was Kashmir is a cold and a beautiful region."

In the absence of monsoon showers temperature in India days is touching new heights. The crucial summer rainfalls are late and below average, triggering fears of a drought and forcing more and more people to visit colder Himalayan regions.

Ali Mohammad, a hotel owner says, "As compared to previous years this year number of tourists is much more than expected and the number is increasing day after day. It is no doubt due to very high temperatures witnessed in India."

Heavy bookings are also witnessed for Gulmarg Gandola riding from Gulmarg to Kongdori. "The rush is so heavy that we fall short of tickets at times. Online booking is also witnessing huge rush this year," Said Mushtaq Ahmad, in-charge Gulmarg Gandola.

Sonam Dorjay, assistant director, Jammu and Kashmir Tourism says, "The allover business of JK Tourism Industry has been fantastic this year. Although the department has not yet framed the final total of tourists who visited valley this year but the overall trend is definitely wonderful. We have made several commercials to appeal the people. These commercial have no doubt worked."

# PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED PUT TO TROUBLE; RAMPS STILL MISSING IN BUILDINGS

●Arshie Qureshi

"I am not able to keep pace with my colleagues while walking up to my classroom. I get left behind" said Gurmeet Kaur (name changed), a student at University of Kashmir who is suffering from a semi ambulatory disability. Her trouble is aggravated when she has to take a flight of stairs to reach her classroom.

Like Gurmeet, many other physically challenged people using wheelchairs or calipers face inconvenience due to lack of ramps in most of the public buildings like banks, schools, post offices and libraries. Although some buildings have been provided with walks, exterior pathways leading to or from a building, but not ramps inside the buildings.

One of the gravest consequences of lack of ramps shows up in form of physically challenged students dropping out from educational institutions. Tariq Bhat of Kangan lost his right leg in an explosion at 17 and a year later dropped out from higher secondary school because he 'didn't like to be carried by others like luggage.' "Even on my request the classroom, which was on third storey, was never shifted to the ground floor. I needed two people to carry me to the classroom. It was humiliating and antagonizing, so I stopped going to school" he said. The failure of educational institutes to construct disabled-friendly buildings can be attributed to the indecision of state in implementing RTE despite being a fundamental right under constitution of India.

Apart from missing out on educational front, the failure of authorities to provide proper infrastructural facilities

is also responsible for them not being considered for certain jobs opines Altaf Ahmad who works at Government College for women MA Road as a library door checker and is suffering from ambulatory disability. "We are not counted as productive human resource. I cannot work on 3rd or 4th floor partly because of my disability and largely because I am not provided the avenues" he said.

According to census 2011, the state has a total population of 3.51 Lakh differently

abled persons, of which 58 thousand have orthopedic disabilities. The State Ministry for Urban Development has set aside 3% of total budget for the construction of ramps in government buildings to make public buildings accessible and functional for the physically challenged. However such construction is hardly undertaken in the buildings like Government Degree College Sumbal and Government Degree College Bijnihara that are being constructed let alone the ones that have already been constructed.

"There is no lack of funds, but implementation" says Javied Ahmad Tak, founder of Humanity Welfare organization, a non-gov-

ernmental organization working for empowerment, integration and rights of people with disabilities. "However, we are making efforts to spread awareness about construction of ramps, especially in the newer buildings, to make them more inclusive." Given proper opportunities, physically challenged people can also make their mark in different fields he believes. "People like Riyaz Ahmad Beigh, District Social Welfare Officer and many others are living examples of amputees who have made it to the top despite their limitations" he added.



# SSB DELAYS INTERVIEW DESPITE COURT ORDERS

## INTERVIEW DATES POSTPONED FOUR TIMES: STUDENTS

●**Sibtain Hyder**

**O**In what may smell foul among thousands of candidates, the Service Selection Board (SSB) has not conducted the interview of general line teacher aspirants despite court orders.

The students were shortlisted 5 months back for an interview but SSB had allegedly dropped many candidates to 'absorb blue-eyed candidates' and had finalized the list of new candidates against their positions.

However, the dropped candidates approached court and got their seats back. The High court had ordered SSB to

conduct the interview of those candidates.

"The SSB being under political pressure has removed the candidates deliberately to adjust the blue eyed candidates. Now they are still not conducting the interview," sources added.

"We visited SSB and the officials sitting over there told us that they cannot help us. The only tell us to visit x,y,z officials but do not conduct our interview after receiving court directions," Aadil Ashraf one of the dropped candidates said.

He further said that more than 100 candidates visited the SSB and were told that they should wait for few months more.

The SSB has put the career of thousands of aspiring teacher candidates at stake by mitigating that "The result compiled by the authority earlier was a little Mistake."

Chairperson SSB Shagufta Parveen had earlier said that the students who were shortlisted in the previous list published by SSRB was faulty. "There was a little mistake in previous list so we had to revise the list for second time," she said.

However, she had also agreed that the students shortlisted earlier were dropped by SSB.

The SSB had dropped at least 5000 aspiring teacher candidates across the valley by keeping their

recommendation withheld for the unknown reasons shown against their names in the newly published list of candidates.

"It is a mass massacre done by SSB; we won't let our career go waste like this. For God's sake ask them why to conduct out interview," the candidates asked.

"The interview dates have been postponed more than four times, we fail to understand what is wrong with SSB," a group of students from many districts said.

Meanwhile, the SSB issued a revised teacher list on March 12 leaving out thousands of candidates who featured in the short list issued on January 30.

# IIIM ORGANIZED KASHMIR LAVENDER FESTIVAL- 2014



●**Suhaib Mansur**

**A**For the first time in Jammu & Kashmir, Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine (IIIM) organized a six-day Kashmir Lavender Festival-2014 from June 24 to June 29. The idea was to show-

case and highlight the indigenous rich biodiversity of medicinal and aromatic plant.

"Lavender cultivation is done in Kashmir from the last ten to twenty years but not to a scale so that it becomes an enterprise. But with the efforts of IIIM, we are trying to start it as a ven-

ture so that youth will take it as a business opportunity and will start their own business units", said Dr. Shakir Sultan, incharge of the festival.

He said that Lavender is not the only aromatic crop which they are focusing, rather they are focusing on other major aro-

matic crops as well like Rose, Rosemary etc. However "Lavender awareness is our top priority as it is very easy to cultivate, very easy to manage, and cost of returns are very high", he added.

Dr. Qazi Parvaez, a scientist in the bio-technology department of IIIM said, "For any beginner who wants to start the cultivation of aromatic crops the main concern is guidance and IIIM is ready to help them in the marketing of this oil."

Director CSIR-IIIM, Dr. Ram Vishwakarma said, "this event will help us in bringing together entrepreneurs, farmers, general public, tourists, students and industrialists.

Lavender extract is used as a flavoring agent in many biscuits, ice creams and many other cuisines and from the aromatic side; it is used in soaps, cosmetics, air fresheners, car fresheners and aroma therapy. Its oil also acts as an anti-depressant and as a mood relaxant and helps in overcoming insomnia and depression.

YOUTH CORNER

## SOCIAL NETWORKING: REDEFINING RELATIONS

●AFSHAN RASHID

“Social Networking has brought people together cutting across the boundaries of nation, culture, region, language, religion and has re-defined the relations among people in this globalized world; it has also raised serious questions relating to its alleged negative impact on the ‘real’ and traditional ‘face to face’ social relations”.

Social Networking has spread over the internet like “wild fire” and reduced the world to four

walls. A phenomenal rise has been witnessed in social networking sites. Social networking is the way in which the people of present “global era” communicate, making friends, interacting with them, get to know there culture, traditions and more so while sitting at the other far end. These sites have played vital role in

spreading knowledge and information across the globe with minimum cost, the most popular among them are; The Face Book, Twitter, MySpace and so on. For the “socially networked” people, today relations are no more the same, physical distance is no more a factor that matters and similarly nation, religion, region and ethnicity are no longer a hindrance in making new friends over the net. Social networking has truly integrated the world into a borderless world of Global Village.

“The networking sites have transformed the world audience into global audience and provided a platform where we have exposure to world views, develop relations, revive and re-engage relations

with old friends and interact. These sites have reduced the need of physical interactions. It provides a podium through which we come to know about the thinking and ideology of younger generation and I believe the inclination to these sites is temporary phase and particularly among teenagers, a teen age syndrome,” said Z.G.MALIK columnist in Greater Kashmir.

Joining these social networking sites helps one in establishing relations with other people and that too from all across the globe. Tracking out

old friends, creating new friends and renew long-forgotten relationships makes it more popular. These sites not only include sending or receiving messages but also uploading photos, videos and the experience that people come across in their daily life. These sites are windows to different cultures and places. The beauty of social networking sites does not end here; it enables the exchange of thoughts, ideas and inter-

ests to a large number of people. These sites can also be used to network professionally. Social networking sites have proved to be a cost effective tool in promoting business, services and products. Social networking sites can even get you out of jail! A famous American student ‘James Karl’ was covering the anti-government rally in Egypt when he was detained. James posted a single word on twitter; ‘Arrested’. People following him on twitter started to contact U.S authorities and before long, Egyptian officials released James. Socializing with millions of people of different background excites the web surfers. One can hardly do this outside the virtual world.



## SOPORE LOCKED IN VECHILE JAM

●Anayat Sultan

In the absence of proper traffic management this apple town is witnessing massive traffic jams with residents and the business community facing immense hardships.

A cursory look at the Tehsil road and Tashkent Chowk, particularly during the rush hour aptly portrays the overall traffic mismanagement in the town. “Large serpentine queues of vehicles in the main market and the random parking of vehicles in front of business establishments has become hallmark of this town,” the locals told MERC Times.

They said that commuters get late to reach out to their respective homes on Iftaar. “Mostly, the traffic remains jammed in morning and evening hours,” they added.

They appealed district administration to look into the matter and redress grievance forthwith. taken two decades and is still incomplete.

## CONSUMING UNWASHED FRUITS CAN BE FATAL



●Sarvat Nabi

An 18 year old girl was reported to have slipped in coma after consuming unwashed cherries. She has been admitted to Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of medical Sciences(SKIMS), Soura for treatment.

According to statement from SKIMS officials, they received the patient in coma and shock. Examination and investigation’s revealed that she had developed Organ Phosphorous poisoning.

The patient had been admitted on 15-06-2014, and now is recovering after the team efforts of doctors at the emergency medicine, officials reported.

Health experts at SKIMS have warned people about consuming only washed fruits. Pesticides are sprayed on fruits are harmful and can cause serious damages. So people should always wash the fruits before consuming them.

## MORE MALLS IN CITY; ATTRACT SHOPPERS

●Nelofar Jan

**J**The Kashmir Valley is witnessing an increase in the number of shopping Malls with the shoppers turning to the organised new facilities for shopping.

In the recent years, several shopping Malls have come up in the city, the prominent ones being Town Square mall at Wazir Bagh, Sangarmal Shopping Complex at Munawarabad, and Sahara City Centre at exhibition crossing.

From designer wears to jewelry, from furniture to crockery, the Malls offer variety of products to the shoppers at one place. And the

scores of people from different walks of life can be seen visiting and shopping at the Malls each day.

“I prefer to shop at the Mall as here I get to choose between different brands. Brands matter to me for I believe in quality,” Ajaz Khan, a resident of Bemina Srinagar, said.

Khan, 22, came to the mall at Lal Chowk to buy shoes and jeans.

“I was searching for a double-shaded Levis jeans and a sky-blue T shirt. I came to the Mall because here I will be able to look for the products in different shops or showrooms,” he said.

Afreen Jan of Nishat, who got herself a suit at

the mall, said: “The Malls offer us choice. Shopping at the Mall is an incredible experience.”

Besides regular offers of incentives and rebates for the routine shoppers, a variety of events are organised at the Malls to attract customers. Some Malls often celebrate fashion weeks to attract customers.

The businessmen see Malls as a “positive change” in the state, which has faced economic devastation in the recent decades.

“It is a welcome development. The Malls will help in improving the state’s economy,” Sheikh Ashiq, President of Kashmir Chairman of Commerce and Industries, said.

## TIMBER SMUGGLING A THREAT TO FORESTS

●Ishan Fazili

**H**igh above the village of Nawroz Baba, above the shrine, even above the pastures, is the forest. It stretches to the snowy peaks on the skyline.

Ghulam Rasool Dar, who says he is somewhere between 60 and 70 years old but cannot be sure, remembers when the thick stands of fragrant pine reached down to the valley too.

“We are not happy about the future,” Dar, the cleric of this tiny hamlet high in the Pir Panjal mountains, says. “We are worried about our woods.”

The shepherds who live here are partly to blame, Dar admits. For decades they have cut timber to make their homes. But “only enough for our needs,” he says.

For the real problem in Kharg, and more broadly in Kashmir, is recent. The insurgency that has wracked the region for two decades is at a low ebb and an economic boom, in part fuelled by cash poured in by central government to win hearts and minds, has meant a voracious appetite for wood for new homes, hotels and other construction.

Although there is officially licensed government wood available, a huge black market of “timber smuggling” has sprung up as a result. “The problem is both substantial and widespread,” said Dr Shaqil Rumshoo, an expert at Kashmir University, Srinagar. “There are all sorts of different players.”

The smuggling industry involves corrupt bureaucrats, relatives of ministers and wealthy merchants. It is they who make the real money: tens of millions of pounds a year by some estimates.

Prime protected wood from the increasingly rare Deodar trees can fetch five times more but with much higher bribes to pay. As felling a tree takes only an hour or so, the loggers say, a few days work can bring in handsome sums.

“There’s no other work so what can we do?” asked Sheikh, 22. “We have to feed our families.”

An already weak local administration has been undermined by years of conflict and corruption. As elsewhere in India, strict laws to protect forests are rarely enforced. Many accuse the Forestry Department itself of being in league with the smugglers, a charge officials deny.

“There is a major problem of political complicity,” said Naeem Akhtar, until recently a senior bureaucrat in the Jammu and Kashmir ministry of tourism. “There is one area which was exceptionally beautiful with huge tourist potential. If you go there

wood or they go straight back to it when they get out of prison.”

Last month Fischer ran her first trek near Kharg on trails once used by militants infiltrating Kashmir from Pakistan. The aim was to research suitable itineraries and recruit 50 local men, most currently involved in timber cutting and smuggling, to be guides.

Few had seen a westerner before Fischer visited the village. “Smuggling is illegal so we would rather not do it and no one respects it as a job,” said Tahir Mushir, 18. “Being a guide would be much better, even if we make a bit less money.”

Though the trek went well, significant problems remain. An early bid to set up a similar project was blocked by local political rivalries and by powerful individuals linked to the smuggling. And though Kashmir is much calmer than it was even a few years ago, more than 150 security forces, “terrorists” and civilians have been killed this year.

Demonstrations by stone-throwing teenagers protesting at what they say is Delhi’s refusal to allow Kashmiris to decide their own political future have become a daily occurrence. Fischer and her team admit the scenes of violence could put off tourists.

“Kashmir has shifted from being dangerous to inconvenient. It’s not a war zone. You may have some problems with a curfew but nothing you can’t figure out,”

said Michael Matheke, an international ski guide and development worker who led last month’s trek.

The cutters themselves say they know the forests are thinner than they once were.

“Once there were lots of beasts and it was very dark and frightening,” said Abdul Rasheed, 30, who supports 12 people and has no other work. “Now there is much more light in the forests and much less wild animals.”



you can see a massacre of the trees right from the last village as far as the horizon.”

There are efforts under way to save the forests. One new initiative is run by Carin Fischer, a German-American consultant for the state’s tourism ministry.

“You need to give the [cutters] some other livelihood,” Fischer said. “If they are arrested they either get released by local politicians who buy the

## STATE WITNESSES SURGE IN WOMEN HARASSMENT

More than 3000 molestation, eve teasing cases registered this year

● **Sumaiya Yousuf**

Unwanted words, comments, lewd remarks, eve teasing and obscene gestures are the common practices used by rowdy teens in the valley to tease women especially tuition going girls who face harassment day in and day out in J&K.

Such practices have made it too difficult for young girls to commute more so in valley towns and summer capital Srinagar city. Around 1554 cases of molestation (1194) and eve teasing (350) have been registered under sections 354 and 294 RPC (outraging modesty) in the year 2013.

According to 'crime against women' record available with the state police, 1669 cases of molestation (1322) and eve teasing (347) have been registered under sections 354 and 294 RPC (outraging modesty) in 2014 in whole J&K. District Srinagar is leading with 524 complaints for which cases stand registered.

After being molested and harassed by a team of young boys who were playing cricket near Polo View here, a 12th class student Farah Nabi (name Changed), born and brought up in the summer capital Srinagar, had never been afraid to walk alone on roads in a view not to miss her tuition class.

"Now I can't even think of it," she says. They were at least 8 boys playing cricket on road side near Polo View. They passed lewd marks on me as I was returning home after my tuition class and it was not the only day they harassed me but even on second day they did the same,"

She said.

As it happened to be a strike day in valley, Farah had no other option to change her route for going to home, she had tried to walk away from road but the boys had still not stopped passing comments on her.

Valley fall on this account has been sudden and shameful. A string of horrific rapes and sexual assaults, and equally shocking police apathy, have shattered people's faith in both their city and its administration.

Asra Wani, another Student from Kupwara, complained the same to MERC Times, "Fear of the Allah and law is missing. Criminals



now believe they can get away with anything. Try standing at the empty roads for the whole day and harassing young girls."

A growing number of women talk about men groping and harassing them in the buses, on

crowded streets, often in broad daylight.

According to the official data, more than 3000 cases of molestation and eve teasing have been registered with police in the year 2013-14.

"What's also deeply worrying is the attitude of the authority who has failed to put stringent laws for crime against women in Kashmir" Asra added.

Asra was returning from her aunt's home while she was harassed by the some boys standing in the street.

Moreover, the government of Jammu and Kashmir has miserably failed to implement stringent laws for the crime against women which has given rise to such crimes.

## CEMENT FACTORIES PUSHING KHREW TO DEATH

● **Umar shafi**

In a place which is known as 'the paradise on earth'. A dusty village, Khrew, is situated at some 20 km to the north-east of its summer capital Srinagar. Khrew, once known for its fresh springs and saffron production is now the home of cement factories and their poisonous substances.

To the delight of industrialists who own these factories, the state government's JK cement is a companion. Their promise to develop the Khrew village on modern lines has left the survival of inhabitants in danger.

Ghulam Mohi-ud-Din, the village head of Khrew, says, "The existing factories wreaked havoc on the demography of the village. The industrialists and the government had always made false promises of development in order to carry their evil work."

With health being the major concern for the inhabitants, many have already evacuated from the area and some are in queue. While others who are poor are left to their fate.

Local inhabitants say, "Our health gets badly affected due to the poisonous substances produced by these factories. It is a total injustice. We are being forced to flee from our place. They have turned this place into hell. Not everybody among us can afford to leave."

While state's Agricultural Department identifies Khrew as the fourth largest cultivator of saffron in country but the ground situation presents the darker identity.

Masood Ul Rahem, former Chief Agricultural Officer says, "When I was the in charge of department the annual production Saffron in Khrew was minimum 385kg. Now due to the dust, chemicals and all kinds of pollutants it has declined to 80kg.

Kashmiri saffron, the 'Golden Crop' is the world most expensive saffron which costs between 2.5 lakh to 3 lakh Rs/kg. The cultivation of saffron is the matter of livelihood to millions of people but the rise of cement factories in Khrew seems to be snatching the livelihood of common man.

Ahtisham Ul Haq, an economist, says "The rise of cement factories at the cost of saffron production in Khrew is simply a capitalistic move. It is the practice of reducing the money in at the hands of a particular class."

Khrew residents while recalling the glory of their village does not forget to mention about 333 springs which existed in the village. But currently only seven springs exist. The residents state that they are 'united to fight for the cause and secure the few of their coming generations'.

The efforts made by locals to curb the mess do not seem to bother the authorities. As the new factories continue to emerge in the village under the government approval, which when contacted declined to comment.

Khalid Mehraj, an environment expert, says "Absence of environmental activists, the sparse reportage by local media who get regular advertisements from the cement factory owners to purchase their silence and the government's apathetic approach towards the welfare of its people, Khrew is dying a silent death.



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