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TULIP GARDEN BLOOMS AGAIN

❖ Moosa Hayaat

Srinagar: Set in the foothills of snow capped mountains, Asia's largest Tulip garden opened this week for both tourists and locals after days of incessant rains.

The garden was inaugurated by the Chief Minister Jammu and Kashmir, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, on Monday, April 6.

The garden would showcase 10 lakh tulips this year and will remain open to visitors for one month.

The floriculture department has planted 2 million bulbs over an area of 12 hectares with eighty variety of the flowers added this year.

Although the tulips are yet to bloom fully, the authorities opened the garden in response to the consistent demand of tourists.

"We have imported 3 lakh tulips this year. There are 10 lakh tulip flowers present in the garden this

season. Tulips that have bloomed now are early variants, while the mid and late tulips will bloom later," Director Floriculture Kashmir, Sunil Misri said.

He added that 35 percent of tulips have bloomed so far and the department has used three types of tulip variants so that they last long and people could visit the garden in large numbers.

"Fifty three tulip variants have been put on display in the garden. We have procured 22 varieties in which three varieties have been introduced for the first time in Kashmir," he further added.

Denying about the delay in opening of the garden he said, the opening ceremony has not been delayed, it is always thrown open as per the season and time.

"Rains have not delayed the opening of the tulip garden and there was no impact of incessant rains on the opening. Every year it is thrown open in the first week of April," he said.

Fascinated by the beauty of this garden, a tourist,

Riya, said that this was really a good experience, as the garden was more beautiful than what she had heard.

"In my entire trip to Kashmir, after Gulmarg, this is the best place," she said.

This garden is also a venue for the upcoming spring tulip festival (12th-14th April) that will be organized by the state tourism department. Eminent Bollywood personalities will be felicitated at Tulip Garden on 12th April, where they will also interact with local media and tourism players.

Tulip garden is named after former prime minister Indira Gandhi and was previously named as Model Floriculture Centre. It is located at Sirajbagh, Cheshmashahi, Srinagar. This garden was conceived, conceptualized and created by Ghulam Nabi Azad former Chief Minister, of Jammu and Kashmir in the year 2006-07 with the aim to boost floriculture and advance tourism in Kashmir Valley.

CITY TO GET SUBMERSIBLE PUMPS

❖ Sumaiya Yousuf

Srinagar: The state government has prepared a long term project report for submersible dewatering pumps at an estimated cost of 33 crores for summer capital Srinagar which will be funded by World Bank.

Deputy Chief Minister Nirmal Singh, who also holds the charge of Minister for Housing and Urban Development, said a long term measure has been prepared for Srinagar city with a detailed project report for installation of submersible de-

watering pumps which can operate during floods or flood like situations.

Besides this, comprehensive drainage projects are being formulated for water logging and flood prone areas for funding under "extremely aided" projects, flagship programs.

He said that necessary measures were taken by the Municipal Corporation and Local bodies to make Srinagar and other towns of the valley free from water logging within their respective jurisdiction.

"SMC made 76 dewatering stations operational

round the clock and three dewatering stations of Economic Reconstruction agency (ERA), 50 diesel driven pumps were also pressed into service in and around Srinagar. A number of drainage schemes are already under execution in Srinagar but due to non availability of funds the completion of schemes are taking time," he added.

However the government is looking ahead with great hope about the new submersible dewatering pumps which will prove to be of great help in flood like situation or during water logging.

Bharat Ratna CNR Rao conferred honorary doctorate at KU

CM, Guv attend special convocation



❖ Nisar Dharma

Srinagar: The University of Kashmir on April 1 conferred the degree of Doctor of Science (honoris causa) on Chintamani Nagesa Ramachandra (CNR) Rao, National Research Professor and Linus Pauling Research Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru Centre for Advanced Scientific Research.

Governor NN Vohra, who is the Chancellor of the university, conferred the degree on Rao during a special convocation. Vohra observed that it was an honour for the university to confer the degree on Rao for his notable contribution to science, chemistry and solid state chemistry in particular.

Apart from the Governor, the special convocation was attended by many academicians, politicians and a huge gathering of researchers and students. Prominent names included Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed; Education Minister, Nayeem Akhtar; Vice Chancellor Kashmir University, Prof. Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi.

Sayeed congratulated Prof Rao and thanked him

for accepting the Degree of Doctor of Science from the University of Kashmir. He dwelt at length on remarkable contribution made by Prof Rao as a researcher and planner in the field of chemistry and higher education within the country and abroad.

“I hope many faculty members and students would feel inspired by his unstinted commitment to science and quality of work that he carried out over the years,” Mufti said.

A day before the convocation, Prof Rao delivered a special lecture on ‘Doings of Science in India’, which was attended by a large number of students, scholars, and faculty members of Kashmir University. He said it was a reflection on the mindset of policy makers and political leaders that there is no university from India which could find a place in the top 200 varsities of the world.

“However, I wish that with young and brilliant minds making inroads in our socio-political system, new policies will emerge and in two to three years, we may find at least five universities of India among the 100 top,” Rao, who was awarded the country’s top civilian honour in 2013, said.

He emphasised that instead of discouraging the failures, an environment to give a second chance

should be given.

“Most of the scientists, researchers or even a student fails at the first attempt and in our country there is a trend that we rebuke these failures. However, this does not happen in advanced countries or in the West.

“They encourage such failures to restart their work and if we could emulate similar thinking in our society, we are sure to have some wonders in science,” he said.

Complimenting him for his varied achievements in the field of science, the Governor lauded Rao, particularly for being the driving force behind setting up institutes of science education and research and giving a clarion call to the government to support science, technology and innovation.

Vohra also lauded Rao for having repeatedly emphasised that the promotion of science not only involved an increase in financial allocation, but the moral and intellectual support of society as a whole as well.

The Governor urged the Vice-Chancellor and the faculty of the university to take all required steps to upgrade the standards of teaching and reinvigorate research endeavours in identified fields.



FIRE INCIDENTS ON RISE

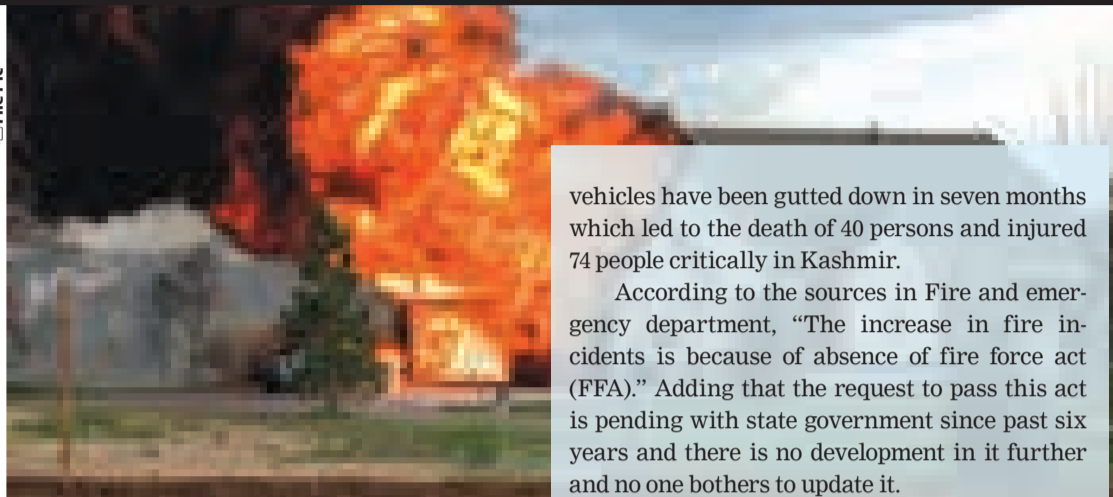
40 people die in 7 months

❖ Sibtain Haider

Srinagar: In Kashmir, the Fire and Emergency department records 1104 major fire incidents across the Valley in the past seven months killing 40 people.

According to the Fire and Emergency department data, 1325 fire incidents occurred between January, 1 2014 and June, 31 2014. The number of incidents this year so far has been alarming.

These incidents are mostly major in nature with the most common causes being LPG cylin-



File Pic

der gas leaks, short circuits in residential houses and buildings accounting to 80 percent of the fire incidents.

With the rise in commercial complexes and modernized shopping malls across summer capital Srinagar, the problem of fire incidents has proportionally increased.

According to the fresh figures compiled by the state fire and Emergency department, at least 1104 structures including electric transformers and

vehicles have been gutted down in seven months which led to the death of 40 persons and injured 74 people critically in Kashmir.

According to the sources in Fire and emergency department, "The increase in fire incidents is because of absence of fire force act (FFA)." Adding that the request to pass this act is pending with state government since past six years and there is no development in it further and no one bothers to update it.

Moreover, there are many areas in Srinagar city like Soura, Downtown, and Hazratbal that have no or less fire gap among the residential houses where a fire brigade could hardly enter. Majority of hospitals, malls, cafes, schools do not have fire extinguishers.

The city has witnessed many major fire incidents in the last few years of which 32 houses were gutted at Hazratbal, the shrine of Peer Dastageer Sahab, Maharaja Bazaar inferno, Abi-Guzar inferno.



300 HUMAN LIVES, 90000 CATTLE LOST TO 2014-DELUGE

❖ Ishan Fazili

Srinagar: The state government recently revealed that besides 300 persons who lost their lives, 92635 cattle were also killed in Sep 7 floods last year in J&K.

Sharing details, the officials in Relief and Rehabilitation department J&K said that JK faced huge loss of cattle during the floods. Similarly, the officials informed that the total number of Pacca and Kacha houses damaged fully in the deluge were 10092 and 1045 respectively.

Regarding the relief package, they said that the assistance provided under terms of SDRF and NDRF norms together with relief sanctioned under PMNRF is "not sufficient."

"It is an admitted fact that the relief provided under terms of SDRF and NDRF norms together with relief sanctioned under PMNRF is not sufficient to compensate the losses suffered by people due to September 7 floods," they said.

They added that the state government has accordingly formulated a package for providing adequate relief for rehabilitation of the affected people.

"The same has been submitted to government of India for funding," the officials said.

Moreover, state government has already paid the total sum of 94.53 crore to 19977 fully damaged houses out of SDRF and 118.9 crore has been paid directly into the accounts of 16199 flood victims for fully damaged houses

under PMNRF.

The sum of Rs 75000 per fully damaged pacca house, 17600 per fully damaged kacha houses out of SDRF and Rs 1 lac for fully damaged pacca houses and Rs 50,000 for per fully damaged Kacha house out of PMNRF has been and is being paid to the affected families.

However, the PMO has also agreed to pay relief out of PMNRF at the rate of 50000 each for severely damaged, 25000 each for partially damaged, 10000 each for severely kacha house and 5000 each for partially damaged kacha house.

"The rehabilitation process is still going on and will be completed in next few months," the officials said.

ZAHIDA: A LIFE DEDICATED TO SOCIAL WORK

❖ Afshan Rashid

Srinagar : Zahida Rashid, a 34 year old social worker has extensively worked across all fields ranging from health, education, child labour, child abuse, disability to women empowerment from the past five years.

She was the first women from the state to be appointed as a District Project Manager (DPM) in National Rural livelihoods Mission (NRLM).

Currently, she is working as a DPM under NRLM initiative Umeed. The program focuses on poor and vulnerable women by organizing them into self help groups (SHG) and providing them with sustainable livelihood options.

“Serving people and particularly women has always been my area of interest. I always wanted to work for the society and do some good for it, so I chose my career accord-

tance of earthquake victims in Uri,” says Zahida.

In Uri, she worked with Tata Institute of Social sciences, Action Aid international and Department of social work and sociology. The program aimed at providing damage and need Assessment to families and households hit by 8th October 2005 earthquake.

“That was the most emotional phase for me as a social worker, I saw people shelter less and they were dependent on other for every small thing, I was witness to that calamity”, she adds.

Apart from Kashmir region she has worked in Delhi from 2006-2009 with Nirmana Delhi, Hazards Centre Delhi and Hazrat Inayat Khan Memorial Trust Delhi. After her return to valley she joined NACO and NRHM to work for AIDS/HIV awareness and counseling.

She further adds, “I had almost worked in all the vulnerable fields and I found that



Photo Credits|Afshan

ingly,” said Zahida.

After completing her Masters in Social Work from University of Kashmir, Zahida started her social work in the Valley focusing on child abuse, drug addiction and disabilities.

Zahida has extensively worked with well known Non Governmental Organisations including Child Relief and You (CRY) and Jammu and Kashmir Association of Social Workers (JKASW) and worked in collaboration with Psychiatric Hospital Rainawari Srinagar for identification and rehabilitation of patients with psycho social problems.

“During my initial years as a social worker, I switched between various fields, from children with disabilities to child abuse to mental rehabilitation and assis-

many people are working on issues of children, disabilities, physiology or HIV, so now it's time to address another important issue of women empowerment, so I joined NRLM”.

Her desire to serve people does not end here, during the recent floods she took an initiative along with Rajiv Gandhi Foundation (RGF) to support flood victims. In a joint effort with district administration and RGF she got installed RO plants at many places in Sumbal district Bandipora where people did not have access to tap waters till now.

“My passion and love to serve my people will never end I want to explore all the possible ways to uplift them and want more young and professional social workers particularly females to come forward and work for women upliftment mostly in rural areas”, she adds.

ACCLAIMED RESEARCHER VISITS MERC

Photo Credits|Suhailb



❖ MERC News Desk

Srinagar: A well known researcher, Seema Kazi visited Media Education Research Centre (MERC) on April 13 and interacted with students and scholars.

Seema Kazi has a doctorate in gender studies from London School of Economics. She has worked as an independent researcher and written lot about Muslim women and human rights. She has also been a part of Women's Learning Partnership Washington D.C and Minority Rights Groups, London.

She is much known for her book ‘Gender and Militarization in Kashmir’.

Later MERC organized an open question-answer session with students asking about the challenges she faced while involved in her research.

A separate seminar to felicitate Kazi was also organized by Department of Political Science at Academic Staff College Naseem Bagh wherein she discussed her recent research on women in conflict area and governance.

The seminar was attended by various students, scholars and faculty members of several departments.

In the seminar, Kazi focused on how ill governance and conflict has affected the women. She talked about lack of faith of citizens in governance and how women activism is evolving.

Her research is not only restricted to Kashmir but spreads across north east and Pakistan. It deals with the concept of nationalism and how mindsets of people are being controlled by this phenomenon.

HIGHWAY CLOSURE TRIGGERS PRICE-RISE, CONSUMERS IRKED

❖ Zafar Aafaq

Srinagar: The weeklong closure of Jammu-Srinagar National Highway due to recent persistent rains and landslides has led to the shortage of food items thus sky-rocketing the prices of almost all essential commodities in Valley markets.

Sudden surge in prices and shortage of food items is causing a lot of trouble to the locals as they have to deal with exorbitant prices.

Haakh, a green leafy vegetable which is chiefly consumed here, is sold at a very high price (Rs 80 per kg).

"I am amazed at such overpricing, a middle-class person like me has to think twice even before buying Haakh, it is no more a poor man's staple food," says Amin Ahmad, a resident of Chanapora.

The rise in prices comes in the backdrop of September 2014 floods, a catastrophe which badly



affected the economy.

"I am repairing my flood damaged house and the price-rise has made my life miserable. I have to provide one time meal to the laborers which costs me a lot," says Mohammad Yaqub Dar of Natipora.

People feel no laws are being followed when it

comes to consumer goods. Shopkeepers, retailers, and traders are setting their own prices without any intervention from the authorities.

"The closure of national Highway is a win-win situation for vegetable and meat sellers. They pounce on the opportunity to maximize their profit," complains Abdul Rashid Par-ray of old Barzullah.

When contacted, an official of the Food and Supplies Department said that the concerned teams inspect markets regularly to check and control the illegal ways of making profit.

"We want to ensure fair and trade and business is carried out," added the official.

However people have termed these steps not good enough. They demand legal action to be taken against those found involved in unethical practices.

CITY GATE CONSTRUCTION, 4 YEARS OF LAGGARDNESS



Photo Credits|Nazir

❖ Khalid Bashir

Srinagar : The old city's entrance gate project worth 1.20 crores is yet to be completed even though four years have passed since the construction started.

The foundation of this gate was laid on May, 5 2011 and was supposed to get completed in one year. It is being constructed near Baba Dawood Khaki Bridge in BrariNambal.

Irshad Ahmed a local shopkeeper within the vicinity of the gate said he has been watching the development of work on this Gate since the inauguration which is going on at snail's pace.

"The construction material lying on roadside can be life threatening and the Gate has also blocked pavement. Where would pedestrians and commuters walk through heavy traffic," he questioned.

Junaid Ahmed a local resident said the money spent on this Gate should have been spent on cleaning the Baba Domb first.

"What is the point of welcoming tourists through Gate that has stinky water on side. In summers the water stinks more and one can't breathe. Authorities should have spent money more on beautification of this lake rather than frivolous projects," He said.

Speaking to MERC Times concerned MLA and then Minister for Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Ali Mohammad Sagar said that government has released all the funds but the concerned authority has not taken the project seriously.

When questioned about the purpose of Gate he said that the gate is an entry point to 2000 year old downtown and will also serve as a welcome sign to the tourists.

SMC Commissioner Tufail Ahmed Matoo didn't respond to the calls despite several attempts.

SCENIC FORESHORE LACKS PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Commuters forced to take lifts from unknown people

❖ Anayat Sultan

Srinagar: The lack of public transport on foreshore road is giving a tough time to commuters. People are seen waving their hands at every passing vehicle for a lift. Those living in Nishat area are the worst sufferers as they have a lot of distance to cover.

“There are only two options; either desperately wave hand at every passing vehicle or buy your own vehicle”, says Farooq Ahmad, a government employee living in Nishat.

Though there is a Sumo service but it hardly maintains any schedule. The taxi operators as the locals say “ply at their will”.

“The Sumo’s ply occasionally on this route and the Taxi operators ply at their will and they are least

bothered about the inconvenience faced by the people”, says Imtiyaz Dar, a daily traveler on this route.

Every section of the society of this area is perturbed by this issue. The student community of this area is aghast at the Government’s non serious attitude towards this grave problem. Junaid Rafiq, a student of Kashmir University says that the student community is the worst affected. “I have to wave hands at every passing vehicle for a lift otherwise it would be difficult for me to reach the varsity on time.”

“For a female commuter, taking a lift from an unknown person is not a safe option,” Junaid adds.

The patients of this area also suffer from non availability of regular transport on the said route. This problem badly affects the prospects of timely medical intervention which at times complicates the

patients’ worries.

“Whenever there is any sort of medical emergency, we have to book a taxi from Dalgate or Harwan area and what furthers the misery is that the taxi owners charge arbitrarily”, said Gh. Qadir, an inhabitant of this area. “We have been left to fend for ourselves as government is not paying any heed”, he further added.

The residents say that they have made several representations to the concerned Regional Transport Officer (RTO) but to no avail. When contacted, RTO Kashmir, Mehmood Ahmad Shah said that within few days he would send his team of inspectors on the spot to assess the situation”. “After they submit their report, the department will respond accordingly”, he added.

SOUTH KASHMIR PROTESTS AGAINST WATER LOGGING

❖ Mohmad Yonus

Srinagar: The people of south Kashmir’s Pampore and Awantipora areas lodged protests against government, accusing them of ignoring water logging issues and showing “pathetic” attitude towards them.

The highway remained inactive for hours at places like Pampore and Sail Awantipora as people thronged the road to bring into notice the plight.

At Sail Awantipora, people turned up on the road to demonstrate the “lethargic approach” of the authorities and demanded renovation of the embankments that were rendered vulnerable because of September, 7 floods last year.

“Authority has put us in risk and they haven’t paid attention to make the embankments strong that breached easily due to the pressure of water and the water easily seeped into the village.” said a local resident from the area.

He said that that the whole village is submerged under water and people don’t even have way to evacuate their belongings.

People from Pampore showed up on the road against the faulty drainage system and water logging. The clogging of drainage pipes at different places in the areas has soared up the water level after the incessant rains over the past few days. Several residential houses, shops and government buildings in Pampore are currently under water.

The highway from Kadlabal to Drangbal remained under water for many days.

The traffic was consequently diverted from interior narrow roads through Latehpora, Wuyan, Zaevan and Sempora causing horrific jams. The highway has sunk between Drangbal and Frastball and a major part of it has collapsed, triggering panic among residents of low lying areas, the locals who stand witnesses to the issue said.

People from both areas called off the protests after the minister Mohmad Ashraf Mir with the deputy commissioner Pulwama Neeraj Kumar assured to address their grievances soon.

Inhabitants of Indira Nagar locality in Sonawar area also expressed resentment over failure of authorities to undertake dewatering there.

VARSIY WATERLOGGED FOR WEEKS



Photo Credits: Suhaib

❖ Umar Shafi

Srinagar, April 15: Due to incessant rainfall from the past two weeks, Kashmir University is heavily water-logged and thus causes inconvenience to students and faculty equally.

Although the university remained functional during rains, the management in the varsity failed to avert water-logging since no one bothered to dewater the campus at the right time.

“It is a hassle for us to wade through waters in order to attend our classes. Till now the water was only in lawns and grounds of university but now it has submerged many roads as well forcing us to take longer routes to our departments,” said Shabir Ahmad, an M.Ed student of the varsity.

A university staffer wishing anonymity said that a major reason of water-logging were the drainage pipes set

directly into the campus by some of the neighbouring residents.

While talking to MERC Times, KU Chief Proctor Prof Naseer Iqbal said that the water-logging was not an isolated incident as the whole city was suffering from it adding that “The residential area surrounding Kashmir University has developed drainage blockade problem, due to which some water from there also enters the university campus.”

“We have already started the process of dewatering with the help of some motor pumps and it would take us about three days to completely dewater the campus,” added Naseer.

When asked if university will take any action about the faulty drainage pipes, Naseer said, “We will look into the matter”.

Meanwhile students of the university have appealed to the concerned authority for expediting the process of dewatering in university campus.

INCLEMENT WEATHER ANNULS EXAMS IN GUREZ



Photo Credits|Waseem Nasir

❖ Waseem Nasir

Srinagar: The closure of Gurez-Bandipora road has taken a toll on the academic schedule in Gurez. The torrid weather conditions that prevailed over the state for the last many weeks resulted in the non delivery of higher secondary annual examination papers and other stationary thus forcing authorities to annul the examination.

The students of Gurez are in a fix as they feel that their whole academic season may be jeopardised. The examination of the entire Kashmir region except Gurez has been conducted successfully.

“We are unable to understand why JK Board of School Education (JK-

BOSE) failed to deliver the stationery to the concerned authorities of the said area. The students are in mental agony as they don't know when their examination of the remaining papers will be held,” said Aqib Mir, a student of 12th class.

When contacted JK-BOSE in-charge sub office Gurez, Illyas Ahmad, said, “The separate date sheet will be issued within week for the students of the Gurez. The concerned students need not to worry as we are in constant touch with the higher authorities at our main office in Srinagar.”

It is pertinent to mention that last year's deluge also delayed the exams by a long stretch of over six months.

NABARD ORGANISES CLEANLINESS CAMPAIGN

❖ Altaf Hussain

BUDGAM: In a bid to spread awareness among masses and to promote cleanliness, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) started their camps to aware people about different schemes and projects for overall development in rural areas.

The camp aims to create awareness about poverty, economic bankruptcy and unhygienic environmental condition.

NABARD in collaboration with J&K bank held an awareness camp in Paller village of district Budgam.

The awareness camp was with reference to varied sponsored schemes and services provided by J&K bank and NABARD campaign on Swatch Bharat mission for the upliftment of rural areas economically, socially and environmentally.

A good number of people including men, women and school children assembled on the occasion to be acquainted with bank offering schemes.

Speakers from RSETI, Bank Branch, FLCC coordinator and DDM NABARD Zubair Asraf Wasil were present on the occasion.

Stressing upon the participants to keep the surrounding and nearby locality clean,

the speakers urged youth to avoid using polybags.

In detailed information, District Development Manager NABARD, Zubair wasil apprised of the programme of NABARD under swatch Bharat Abahyan.

“NABARD had launched the cleanliness drive all across India. The campaign intends to create a spirit among people that they should keep their localities clean along with their houses,” he said.

He emphasized upon putting every effort to make villages clean and green.

“There is a scope of planting trees in every village under various schemes”, he further added.

He also stressed upon the various facilities available by the Bank and NABARD for interests of public.

In order to aware every section of population including farmers, unemployed youth, women and children regarding diverse income generating schemes, FSCL coordinator A.H Rafiq spoke about the services and schemes for people.

He urged upon the people to avail benefits of schemes. He also apprised people of seed capital fund scheme and education loans with low interest rate for educated unemployed youth.

