

# MERC TIMES



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# POOR FACILITIES PLAGUE CITY LIBRARY

❖ Zafar Aafaq

Srinagar: The 'City Library Srinagar', run by the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), at Karan Nagar, sans basic facilities.

Library visitors held that lack of internet facility has become a major cause of concern at the library, which functions from SMC Headquarters' building in Karan Nagar.

"The library does not see significant number of readers due to its conventional setup" Nayeem Ahmad, a civil service aspirant said.

"Though a water filter has been installed there, it gets out of order every month. Besides, the girls are facing problems due to the dilapi-

dated condition of the library toilets. The furniture, including chairs and study tables, are also in bad shape" he said.

The lack of "seriousness" to improve the infrastructure of the library has triggered ire among students, especially those preparing for various competitive exams.

"Due to the absence of proper air ventilation, it is getting tough to concentrate on studies during summer" says Suhail Shah, a student.

The students also demand that an e-library should be started. Computers with Internet connection, online journals and other study materials should be made available at the library.

Further, students are demanding immediate purchase of new guidebooks for competitive exams.

While talking to MERC TIMES, Assistant Librarian' City Library, said, "Last year, we sent a proposal to the Ministry of Information and Technology, stating need for improvement of the library infrastructure, While we were awaiting response from the concerned ministry, the September floods and assembly elections delayed the official response."

In reply to a question rejuvenation of Library, he said "We will communicate with the concerned ministry again to get the proposal approved."

## BRARI NAMBAL REDUCED TO CESSPOOL

Social apathy continues

❖ Khalid Bashir

Srinagar: Brari Nambal lagoon in Babademb area of Srinagar's old city is heading towards oblivion. Piles of garbage, slum colonies and commercial structures have flourished around the lake.

With summer heat starting to build up, the stench emanating from this water-body is unbearable. The nearby residents and commuters are irked because of the nuisance.

"It is an ordeal for us to live with this continuous stink from the polluted water," Abid Nazir, a local resident told MERC Times. "Instead of spending lavishly on City Gate they should have first cleaned the lagoon," he added while referring to the city gate being constructed from many years on one end.

"The authorities are planning to build a fence around the lagoon, it would have been better had the authorities contained the huge influx of sewage continuously making its way into lagoon," says Gh Rasool, a local shopkeeper in Babademb.

While discussing the issue with Tufail Matoo, Commissioner Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC), he said, "We had taken up the cleanliness project earlier but due to shortage of funds had to stop it. The

project is under consideration of Rural and Urban Development department. We are sure to resume work on it as soon as the funds are approved."

Tufail however added both government as well as the society is responsible for the current state of the lake and its revival is a challenge.

The land towards periphery areas of lake has been put under use for commercial purposes. Scores of slums have been raised to shelter non-local rag-pickers.

"We asked Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LAWDA) to compensate us according to market prices, but instead we are being offered small amount for our valuable lands. This has compelled us to rent-out our lands to non-locals for the sake of survival," says Ghulam Hasssan, 45, a local who has rented out his land.

As MERC Times discussed the issue with the local MLA Ali Mohammad Sagar, he said, "The project of dredging, cleaning and expansion of lagoon was halted due to the protest by locals. The government allotted them 40 lakhs per kanal but the residents demand way higher than the official budget".

"Government is committed to restore the lagoon and will soon look into the matter" he added.

## DEFUNCT TRAFFIC LIGHTS ANOTHER ADMINISTRATIVE FAILURE

Rs 2.8 cr go down the drain

❖ Umar Shafi

Srinagar: Majority of the traffic lights installed on Srinagar roads do not work as the traffic department has failed to repair them.

It was in 2012 when these signals were installed in Kashmir at the cost of 2.8 crore rupees to make the traffic movement smooth.

However these traffic signals instead of making traffic regulation smooth made the situation worse because most of the times they remain out of order thus causing chaos on city roads.

Even the traffic lights which were installed in 1960's by the then Prime Minister Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad survived for few years before getting defunct.

At some of the busiest places in Srinagar these traffic lights function as if they have been set on blinking mode due to which traffic jams have become a daily show on the streets of Lal chowk with commuters sometimes violating the traffic norms.

At the time of installation authorities claimed that these traffic signals have the power back up of eight hours. That means even if there is no electricity these gadgets will continue to work for at least eight hours.

However, nothing like that has happened in most of the cases.

In fact, most of the traffic signals fail to function properly even when there is electricity.

While talking to MERC Times, SSP Traffic Srinagar Haseeb Ur Rehman said that there is some problem in the Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) of these traffic signals and it would take us three to four days to get them repaired.

On being asked whether these defunct lights affect the work of traffic cops Rehman said, "Obviously it has affected our work and that is why there is chaos seen on the roads. Actually with time people had adapted with these electronic gadgets but, since most of them are not functional due to poor electricity and damaged UPS our traffic cops have to handle the huge traffic rush themselves."

"We have deployed all our men in the field to regulate traffic and within few days we will get extra manpower as Durbar Move is arriving", he added.

Pertinent to mention, the contract for repairing these traffic signals was given to Onnyx Electronics few years back for the time period of two years which might have already expired.

Even after many attempts SMC Commissioner Tufail Matoo did not respond to our phone calls.



# MERC OBSERVES WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

❖ Nisar Dharma

Srinagar: Media Education Research Centre (MERC) University of Kashmir on May 7 observed World Press Freedom Day in collaboration with Jammu and Kashmir Press Association (JKPA). The event was based on UNESCO theme for the year "Let Journalism Thrive".

The session started with opening remarks by the Coordinator, MERC Faruq Masudi who, after welcoming the guests, presented an Islamic perspective on freedom of expression.

"My special interest is in Islam where we have the tradition to tell the stories of truth. And we should always stick to the truth, even if it goes against our own interests," he said

President JKPA and co-host for the event, Ghulam Hassan Kaloo emphasised the steps to preserve the genuine interests of the journalistic fraternity across the state.

"The scope of press association has widened as media in Jammu have also joined hand with us. This is a positive development," he observed.

Nasir Mirza, Senior Faculty member MERC highlighted the role his department played during the last 30 years to shape the career of new crop of media persons in the valley in his paper 'Kashmir Press: Current Concerns'.

"Munir ul Islam is one among the stars produced by the department", he remarked while welcoming Director Information. Mirza also complemented Kashmir Press for what he described as "even handed reporting".

"They perform the difficult and delicate tasks everyday and try to accommodate all points of view while covering a situation. However, their growing reliance on government advertisement is a matter of concern. The corporate houses in and outside the state should fulfil their responsibilities towards the local media,"

Mirza suggested.

Maya Mirchandani, Senior Editor NDTV was the chief guest on the occasion. In her keynote address, Maya delineated over wide spectrum of issues related to freedom of expression.

"The conditions of a working journalist may not be ideal in India but things are not as bad as in some other countries. I have not faced any problem covering conflict zones in the country while as I often get scared in countries like Sri Lanka and Burma," Maya said.

She impressed upon the students at MERC to be balanced while reporting and never consider themselves bigger than the story.

"We are there to cover the story on behalf of common man in the country", she said.

While talking about the freedom of press, Maya said that audiences also have a role to choose the type of media they would like to encourage. She further called upon journalist community to introspect and find out if they come up to the expectations of the people regarding information needs.

Registrar KU, Zaffar Reshi, in his remarks raised certain questions about the relationship between world and media. Quoting Amartya Sen, he said, "There would not have been many famines consuming millions of lives, had there been media in those days. That is why the rulers remained uninformed about the plight of their subjects in absence of media".

Prof Ashraf Wani, Dean Academic Affairs, presented his views on role of media viza viz good governance. "Free Press is essential for good governance", he observed.

The Vice Chancellor, Kashmir University, Prof. Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi complemented the department for organising the programme and asked the media fraternity to play their role in a more responsible manner. Refer-

## MAYA'S MAY 7 AT MERC

❖ Irshad Ashraf

**Srinagar:** As MERC observed World Press Freedom Day, the students, faculty and guests were enthralled hearing in person from Maya Mirchandani, Senior Editor and Foreign Affairs specialist at NDTV, India's premier news broadcast channel.

Maya has been in broadcast journalism from over two decades. Before addressing as a keynote speaker at the event, she had an informal session with the students of MERC while sharing her experiences and replying to the questions posed by the trainee journalists.

"We journalists are there to make a difference, a positive one. We should always strive to do that. We are never bigger than the story," she told the students.

As the event began in Kashmir University's Media Auditorium, Maya said that she was honoured to be a part of the gathering and happy about revisiting Kashmir where from she had exhaustively reported in the past.

She spoke on the current trend and responsibilities of journalists both print and broadcast.

"In the 24\*7 news culture, we (journalists) are there to make the leaders and the administration accountable. And if some of them don't want to be held accountable, they come back with censorships and gags," Maya said.

However, she added that the situation in India was not as grim as in some other nations and the country still encouraged freedom of expres-

sion.

"The conditions of a working journalist may not be ideal in India but things are not as bad as in some other countries. I have not faced any problem covering conflict zones in the country while as I often get scared in countries like Sri Lanka and Burma," Maya opined.

She also disapproved of the sensationalism and tabloidization of print and electronic media. She warned that mainstream media should not be like the tabloid press as the page 3 journalism is already hampering the growth of true journalism in the country.

"While journalists can be activists and the audiences have the authority to choose whom to side with, let the end user use the remote control device intelligently," she added.

While referring to the NDTV one hour prime time black-out on March 8 2015, against the ban on telecast of 'India's Daughter', Maya said that her organisation though complied with the court direction and did not air the documentary, it stood by the true spirit of journalism.

"NDTV stood by the film on the ground that every angle of any story deserved as much attention as the other, and same treatment should be given to this film also, which had the angles like the victim herself, her family and the judicial process," Maya opined.



ring to recent flood like situation in the valley which was over hyped by some section of the national media, he said, "Media should not create panic in the society. Instead, it should help

in establishing and restoring calm and stability".

The session ended with a vote of thanks by Muslim Jan, Editor MERC, who co-ordinated the event.

# KU's picturesque guest houses

❖ Anayat Sultan

Srinagar: Every year large number of intellectuals visit Kashmir University to attend seminars and conferences conducted by various departments. For this purpose, the varsity has two guest houses, Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom and Zabarwan which cater to the needs of the guests.

The two guest houses have state of the art facilities which make the stay of the guests comfortable. The guest houses are situated at prime and picturesque locations. Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom guesthouse is situated amid the mighty chinars of Naseem Bagh while Zabarwan is Z-shaped and overlooks the world famous Dal Lake. Both present a picture perfect view.

Sheikh Hamza Makhdoom guest house has 36 rooms, 4 VVIP rooms, a dining hall and a lounge while Zabarwan has 17 rooms, 1 VVIP room and 5 suits.

According to the statistics provided by Riyaz Ahmed, manager of the guest houses, the guests houses have accommodated around 2011 guests in the year 2014 which include international, national and local guests.



Photo Credits|Suhaib

The guests include ambassadors of various countries, experts/examiners, university invitees, visiting faculties and guests from educational and medical institutions, and other state guests.

“There are different categories of guests and the guests are charged according to the category to which they belong”, said Riyaz.

The officials working there were of the opinion that there is a further need to augment the staff strength as the footfall of the guests is increasing. It will help in the upkeep and maintenance of the

facilities which would in turn lead to better service delivery.

Arndt, a guest from Germany, who has come along with his family while commenting on this facility of the varsity, said “The guest houses are located at perfect place. The ambience is quite nice. One feels that he is in nature's lap. The services provided are at par with any high end commercial resort”.

The University is also going ahead with its plans of expansion. The university is going to build its own guest house at Delhi. The setting up of the facility at Delhi will save lot of money and will also make the stay of the students and faculty attending various seminars and conferences in other parts of the country, comfortable and hassle free.

“The honorable vice chancellor, Dr. Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi and Registrar, Zafar Reshi are keen to expand the infrastructure of the Hospitality and Protocol Department and they have instructed us to pursue the proposal of construction of Guest house at Delhi with Resident commissioner and in the coming months the work would start on this project,” said Riyaz.

# YOUTH PARLIAMENT HELD IN KU AFTER DECADES

Budding parliamentarians provide a model of an ideal parliament: Edu Min

❖ Sami Ullah

Srinagar: Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs in association with Department of students Welfare, University of Kashmir organised first ever Kashmir University Youth Parliament competition at varsity's Media Auditorium on May 12.

55 students from various departments and affiliated colleges were trained in a two-month long workshop by Shahid Ali Khan, cultural officers of Kashmir University and coordinator of the event.

Nayeem Akhtar, Minister of Education, J&K was the chief guest and judge for the competition. In his remarks, Akhtar said that the performance of the students was excellent and that it should be the role model for the contemporary parliamentarians

“These participants represent the future of parliamentarians and law makers,” he added.

Speaking on the occasion Vice Chancellor, Kashmir University Prof. Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi said, “I am amazed to see the enthusiastic performance of the participants.

Prof. Andrabi specifically addressed the foreign delegation of the parliament and wished the whole team success in the next level.

Prof. Mehraj Uddin Mir, Vice chancellor, Central University of Kashmir who was one of the Judges for the Youth Parliament termed the proceedings as “superlative degrees of ethics displayed during the parliamentary proceedings”. He further said that, this parliament sends a message of innovative approach for the contemporary parliamentarians.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Harshad Bho-



sale from Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and group coordinator north zone praised the oratory skills and display of arguments of the participants. He termed the performance of Kashmir University as best compared with other universities he had judged so far. Earlier, Dean Students Welfare, Prof Nilofer Khan welcomed the guests and participants.

Dean Academic Affairs Prof. M A Wani, Registrar, Prof. Zaffar A Reshi were also present on the

occasion besides other officers and faculty members of the University.

The event was coordinated by Shahid Ali Khan, Cultural officer of the University of Kashmir. Speaking on the occasion, he said the winners of the group level competition will be invited by the ministry of parliamentary Affairs, Government of India to National level Youth Parliament competition being held in the near future.

❖ MERC News Desk

## YOUTH PARLIAMENT, FUTURE IN MAKING

Srinagar: The idea of familiarizing youth with parliamentary proceedings was initiated in India in 1964 under the aegis of Parliamentary Affairs department. It was then called 'Mock Parliament' and was restricted to certain metropolitan states. It was only in the year 1990 when the renewed concept of 'Youth Parliament' was introduced in J&K.

However due to the turbulent political scenario, the state was unable to represent

itself and this year history was recreated in KU by virtue of organizing the first ever youth parliament of J&K.

“As the law makers of future, this is a golden opportunity for us to learn and experience the practical aspects of legislative functions,” says Hanan Mousin, a law student and one of the participants.

“Let the legislators of present times be aware that the future of our state is in safe hands,” opined another participant, Hilal Manzoor.

## GIRL SCHOOL STRUGGLES FOR PROPER INFRASTRUCTURE

❖ Afshan Rashid

Ganderbal: A school specifically meant for poor and underprivileged girls belonging to minority and backward classes in a village in Ganderbal district lacks basic infrastructure.

The students of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Gutlibagh (KGVB) located in Gutlibagh, Ganderbal face massive hardships due to shortage of basic facilities.

The school established in 2008 under a centrally sponsored scheme and financed by the Ministry of the Human Resource Development (HRD), enrolls students from class 6th to 8th standard and is meant specifically for girls belonging predominantly to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe, Other Backward Classes and minority communities.



The school is being run in the first floor of a rented house comprising of three small rooms, a washroom and a class cum staff room. Due to the non-availability of proper washroom and drinking water facilities, 50 female students and staff face immense problems.

According to the locals, the government in 2008 identified a portion of land for the construction of the school building. This was followed by the beginning of the construction on the school building. But due to unknown reasons, the work was stopped just after few months. Since then, no initiatives have been undertaken to restart the work.

Students come from the far flung places to the school. They have to travel many kilometers daily; thus consuming their time and money. Parents admitted their children in this school only because they were assured of the facilities.

According to the official norms, a child has to be provided with all the required facilities by the government like free admission, books, uniform, hostel facilities, pocket money of Rs 50 per month, free hygiene equipments like tooth brush, hair shampoo, hair oil and the like. The staff is trying to provide all these facilities but it is hard for them to execute all this in the given limited space.

## WOMEN SAFER DRIVERS THAN MEN: RTO KASHMIR



❖ MERC NEWS DESK

Srinagar: According to Regional Transport Office (RTO) Srinagar, women are safer drivers than men. A lot of Kashmiri women drive cars and ride scooties (mopeds), a trend that is increasing on a daily basis.

A huge number of females apply for driving licences in the concerned Regional Transport Offices (RTO) and pass the driving test.

"For sure, women are safer drivers than men. It might be a bitter truth for men but we have observed that very few accidents occur because of female drivers. I hardly remember any case of accident where any woman was involved," Regional Transport Officer Kashmir Mehmood Ahmad Shah said.

He added that the number of applications for licenses is also increasing as more women apply for them.

Although it has been also observed in times that a woman is more likely to fail the driving tests due to fear, nevertheless women in Kashmir have been very cautious on roads.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Haseeb-ur-Rehman told MERC Times that minimum accidents have occurred due to negligence of women as compared to their counterparts.

"Women are very cautious drivers and drive with utmost carefulness while they are on roads. We also encourage women to drive more because in the past, fewer accidents have taken place and that too because the driver had less experience. Otherwise if we count on the basis of equal ratio, the result is definitely in the favour of women," he said.

"The percentage of accidents is very less in case of female drivers as compared to men," he added.

The official records suggest that 4000 two wheelers and almost 3000 four wheelers are registered under women applicants with the traffic police department.

"Last year we registered more than 4000

scooties and almost 3000 four wheelers that were driven by women in Srinagar. We do not count the number of accidents on the basis of gender so we do not have any record of number of accidents by women," Rehman said.

It has been also observed that women are less likely to overtake the vehicles rather they try to be more careful in paving way for other vehicles on roads. The officials said that women also wear seat belts, helmets and follow traffic rules more sincerely to that of men drivers.

As per the record with traffic officials, men are harsh drivers and most of the accidents usually because of male drivers.

"The accidents major or minor usually occur due to male drivers as they are the harsh drivers and care less while they are behind wheels," the officials in traffic department said.

Although, being safe on wheels and plying them carefully despite the fact that they cause almost no harm while they drive, women in Kashmir are still targeted by erring men.

While talking to MERC Times, Suraiya Jabeen, a contractual lecturer by profession said that she has to face mocking comments by erring men when she drives her car.

"I often hear abusive comments from male drivers which is very unfortunate. I try my best to avoid," she said.

A college going girl Marouf Gazi who rides scooty said that she has a bad experience of going to college on her two wheeler.

"Young boys always try to distract me while hooting or passing comments at me," she said.

# DAL DWELLER'S SORROW SEES NO END

## Rakh-e-Arth turns marshy land

❖ Sumaiya Yousuf

Srinagar: Erstwhile Dal dwellers, who were rehabilitated at the Rakh-e-Arth area in Bemina are facing hardships as more than 7000 kanals of land has turned into swampy patches after last year's September, 7 flood hit the Valley.

The residents say their houses at Rakh-e-Arth Colony were badly damaged in the floods and the government had failed to suitably rehabilitate them.

The colony was allotted to people living in the backwaters of the Dal Lake in 2009. However, the residents are now saying that Rakh-e-Arth was "no different" from the Dal Lake.

"Rakh-e-Arth is no different from the Dal Lake even though the authorities had given an assurance that the colony would be developed as Model Posh Colony. However, six years have passed, but not a single project has been

brought to a considerable finishing point be it drainage system, water and electricity supply or sanitation facilities," Mohammad Ashraf Dar of the Rakh-e-Arth colony said.

He said the condition of the colony had become all the more worse after the 2014 September floods.

"Besides floods, the main cause behind our woes is negligent planning of the Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LWWDA) as the area is a 'Nambal' water body that was used as a flood channel in case of floods. Secondly, LWWDA did earth filling to nominal level that is not sufficient for concrete constructions even of one storey," he added.

However, government is mulling to extract soil from Budgam district to fill the area and save it from turning into a marshy land.

Coordinator LAWDA GR Wani said that initially DC Budgam did not allow soil extrac-

tion of Budgam to fill such a huge area. However, the matter has been intervened by Divisional Commissioner and he has directed DC budgam to allow the extraction of soil.

"Now it will take around two years to fill the area, it is a very difficult task to do but we have to do this otherwise Dal dwellers will lose another home. We will try our best to complete their rehabilitation at earliest," he added.

The Jammu and Kashmir Housing department had acquired 7,526 kanal of land for the rehabilitation of people from the world-famous Dal lake in 2007. As many as 300 families were supposed to be shifted to the new site from the Dal area.

The housing department had sought 10,000 kanals for the rehabilitation of all Dal dwellers. However, the department had allotted 7,526 kanals of Rakh land for the rehabilitation of Dal dwellers which also lies in shambles.

# NETIZENS HOOKED ON TO WEB IN VALLEY

❖ Sibtain Hyder

Srinagar: 75 percent of youth in Srinagar access internet to remain 'updated', says reports from various cellular companies in the valley. Clearly, a huge chunk of the population devotes a substantial amount of their time to stumble over the 'web' and eventually get caught in it.

People of different fields relate to information technology especially internet as a 'necessary evil' influencing our day to day lives. Most of the Netizens consciously get sucked deeper into the World Wide Web (WWW). The bottom line remains that WWW never leaves its users. Even when they are not browsing, chatting, reading or updating profiles on different websites, the psychological anchor always fastens them to the 'web'.

"Internet is my companion. I am always online mostly on social networking sites including Facebook and Twitter. It kind of gives my own space in the world," says Yasir Nabi, a student of class 12.

Like Yasir, scores of other students echo the same. When asked at what time he wakes up, Basit, another student said, "I have more than 100 friends on Facebook. I chat regularly and update my status almost twice daily. Even at 1am, most of my friends are online. I sleep late and ultimately wake up around 9 in the morning."

Talking about developing an ill life style, a

principal of a private school here in RajBagh says, "The entire issue hangs around identification, of being someone among everyone. It attracts these Netizens to set online profiles and update them almost real time. Hours go by without them disconnecting from the 'web' and it happens on a daily



basis thereby adversely affecting the schedules and also wasting a lot of time."

Not only students but professionals too talk of 'internet addiction'; "I as a teacher use internet for many hours at a stretch. I use it to prepare my notes and be up to date with the information. However, lately I have been feeling that all my creativity and skills are hardly used," says Zahoor Ahmad, a teacher in a high school in Srinagar.

What Zahoor referred to as creativity has a lot to do with the functioning of the human brain. Surveys reveal that out of the millions who use 'Wikipedia', only 0.01-0.02 percent are contributors, rest everyone is like a leech thriving on whatever information is available. The human cognitive function

called the 'Replication Creation (RC)' is tremendously used because of the ease of access to internet. Our 'Skilled Creation (SC)' cognitive function hardly gets a chance these days. RC simply means copying and creating while as SC refers to developing something new altogether.

Experts believe that judicious use of Information Technology is highly attractive and should be judiciously used.

A Senior faculty at the Media School while commenting about this situation said, "Time Management and use of information technology should go side by side. It is ironical that youth are rabidly attached to internet without any ethical censoring. Academia and soci-

ety at a large has to encourage a disciplined use of technology. Proper media education should be a part of the curriculum right from primary schooling."

As per various surveys, the world Internet users surged to 2.92 billion last year. India bettered its number from 213 million in 2013 to 302 million in 2014. That is a 32 percent rise in Internet users in just a year.

# WEATHER AFFECTS AGRICULTURE PRODUCTION

❖ Mohmad Yonus

Srinagar: A year's agricultural production, which includes both the Kharif and Rabi crops virtually, turned nil this season because of the drastic weather conditions in the valley.

The Kharif crops, which mainly include paddy, were destroyed last year because of the floods. Now farmers were looking for the Rabi crops, which mainly include mustard and wheat to compensate their loss to some extent, but the lately incessant rains didn't spare the Rabi crops even and shattered their hopes.

"The paddy was already destroyed because of the September floods 2014, now, all the eyes were on the mustard and wheat. But because of the incessant rains the fields remained submerged for a longer time which hampered the growth of the crop and it spawned eventually



naught", says a farmer from the south Kashmir.

The devastating floods in September last year have badly hit the production of rice in Jammu and Kashmir with annual produce for 2014-15 reduced to 4548 lakh quintals in comparison to 5567 lakh quintals in the previous year, economic survey from the Centre for Science and Environment(CSE) says.

"The total cost of paddy lost was 1402 crores

and the total damage of crops was 3674.65 crores because of September floods", said A.R. Samoon, joint director of agriculture.

Samoon admitted that unexpected rains would definitely have an impact on the production. "The department of agriculture were making estimation of the loss of Rabi crops this season but because of the incessant rains the survey got hampered but within days it will come out. Definitely the rains would have affected the crops", he further added.

The overall fruit production for the year 2014-15 was estimated at 13.45 lakh metric tons as there had been some loss to the horticulture crop due to low temperature caused by unexpected rain, reads the economic survey of CSE.

Farming is the predominant occupation in the valley where 65 percent of population is engaged with it to earn their livelihood.

# VEHICLES PARKED HAYWIRE IN KU



❖ Ishan Fazili

Srinagar: Despite the roads in the Kashmir University campus being notified as a no parking zone, vehicles continue to be parked on them throughout the day.

The students and the staff of the campus are seen parking their vehicles on the roadside, creating a busy street like scene.

Though the university authorities have notified a no parking zone on the campus and designated proper parking lots within the campus which cater to two or three departments, but vehicles are usually seen parked haphazardly on the roadside.

'No Parking' signboards were erected in the varsity by the authorities to eradicate the menace of roadside parking.

The Proctors office has advised the students and the staff of the varsity to park their vehicles in the authorized parking lots to avoid being caught.

Even after the notification and the erection of the signboards, poor enforcement of the regulations by the concerned varsity authorities has resulted in blatant parking violation on the roadside.

A large number of visitors visiting the varsity park their vehicles on both sides of the road, creating a busy street like scene of the varsity.

While talking to MERC Times, Prof. Naseer Iqbal, Chief Proctor of the University held the common mans conscience accountable for the wrong parking of vehicles.

"We as humans need to introspect, issuing such warnings can only notify the people, introspection comes within", said the Chief Proctor.

# ZAINAKOTE INHABITANTS DEMAND UPGRADATION OF POWER TRANSMISSION LINES

❖ Gazanfar Afroz

Srinagar: The residents of Umar Abad are up in arms against the Power Development Department (PDD) for failing to upgrade power transmission network in the area.

A delegation from the area said the LT transmission line connecting colony transformer is half burnt.

There is every possibility that the transmission line may collide and risk lives of the residents.

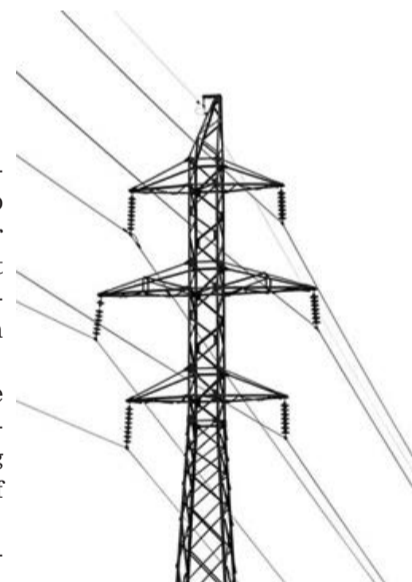
We had many times approached the concerned PDD authorities, however they did not take any action to resolve the problem," said Lateef Wani, a local resident.

When contacted the executive engineer PDD division 6th, Rouf Zaffar said he will look into matter and replace the transmission lines whenever needed.

"The transmission lines will be replaced under the Restructured-accelerated power development and reforms(R-APDRP) scheme at the earliest".

Meanwhile locals appealed minister of state for power, Muhammad ashraf Mir to look into the matter.

Meanwhile the inhabitants expressed concern over the situation and wanted the concerned department to act as soon as possible in the LT lines.





❖ Moosa Hayaat

Srinagar: The students and staff of Kashmir University (KU), the highest seat of learning here, can be seen smoking in isolated corners and lawns of the campus in clear violation of law and simultaneously reinforcing the recent study by Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI) that Jammu & Kashmir has 12 percent cigarette smokers.

The cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003, prohibits smoking in public places including educational institutions. Moreover, the Act clearly states that ‘Tobacco products cannot be sold to person below the age of 18 years, and in places within 100 metres radius from the outer boundary of an institution of education, which includes school colleges and institutions of higher learning established or recognized by an appropriate authority.’

Following this, KU adopted the concept of ‘smoke free campus’. However, smoking and sale of the tobacco products still continues actively in and around the varsity. The students and staff have unofficial smoking corners and hideouts.

Wajid Maqbool, a PG student and a non-smoker, believes that the campus has ‘selected’ smoking zones, though the policy does not corroborate this assumption. “Technically, there should not be any approved smoking areas on campus as it is clearly against the law,” Wajid added.

Another student, a smoker, pointed out the areas around cafes and other tea stalls as the unofficial smoking zone. “The no-smoking policy is unfair to us. We all are

mature enough to take our decisions and as such should be allowed to smoke at designated places. Some people are really dependent on cigarettes and smoking helps them to get through their day. If we have a specific smoking place, we all would go there, it’d just make it easier for everyone,” he said.

While discussing this issue with University’s Chief Proctor, he said, “The success of any initiative from our side depends solely on the cooperation from students. The key to ensuring the policy will be respected is proper awareness and that is what we have been working on primarily. We are observing an upwards rate of compliance.”

Even though Staff Members and students have been fined and admonished from time to time for breaking the rules, the fine amount is too less to act as a deterrent. “Our duty is not to obtain money from smokers but to ask them to leave smoking and make them morally conscious about the ill-effects. We collect the names and student IDs of these smokers. If they don’t leave, at that point they are required to pay fine. In case of repetition, we might even call their parents,” added the Proctor.

Many students feel conflicted about smoking bans in campus. They suggest the ban is not useful and serves no purpose. “Smokers will still find a way to smoke no matter what,” said Adil Nabi, a student.

Pertinently, J&K is the fast emerging as the ‘smoking capital’ of north India as VHAI report puts the state at 12 per cent cigarette smokers, 3.8 percent bidi smokers and 8.0 percent smokeless tobacco users in the state.

## BUDGAM GETS A CLEANUP, COURTESY SWATCH BHARAT



❖ Altaf Hussain

Budgam: With a determined attempt to take the Prime Minister Modi’s swatch Bharat mission, gathering momentum day in and day out, forward, officials in Budgam block department have unanimously got ‘fresh cleanliness drive resorting to, in this regard, traditional “Bande pather” (nagare) folk lore as a stimulus in motivating people on swatch mission.

The team had accompanied ‘bands’-a folk clownish costumed to get locals aware of key issue like sanitation by performing dance in public.

Traditionally, in Kashmir genre of this sort called ‘Nagare’ was used; a satirical comedy to scoff at humans undisciplined of social mores.

Setting the mission on initially in adjoining locality Paller, people were seen in large numbers surrounding to perceive the message of ‘bande pather’ on c-campaign. The official team got upbeat response from audience.

“Awareness camp on highlighting the “significance of cleanness” in a society is a good measure that should be appreciated amply. Since it is in that of cleanness that keeps our social milieu hygienic”, Eesar Mehdi, a political science student, said.

“To take people in cognizance of sanitation, I must say, is obligatory act done by Budgam block department”, Bashmir Ahmed Mir, a local Sarpanch of Paller Halqa Budina, lauded.

While applauding the role of BDO Budgam Peer Zahid Ahmed in launching the campaign, he said that under his supervision there has been a remarkable development in Budgam area.

“Starting from the Panchayat raj, BDO Budgam is the first one to initiate this campaign”, Farooq Ahmed, resident of N S Pora, admired.

Talking to officials in R&B department they said: The purpose of this campaign is to help people in installing functional toilets, better roads and largely to safe guard biodiversity. Further the BDO Budgam; Peer Zahid Ahmed said that the main motive of this sanitation drive is “Open defecation free village”.