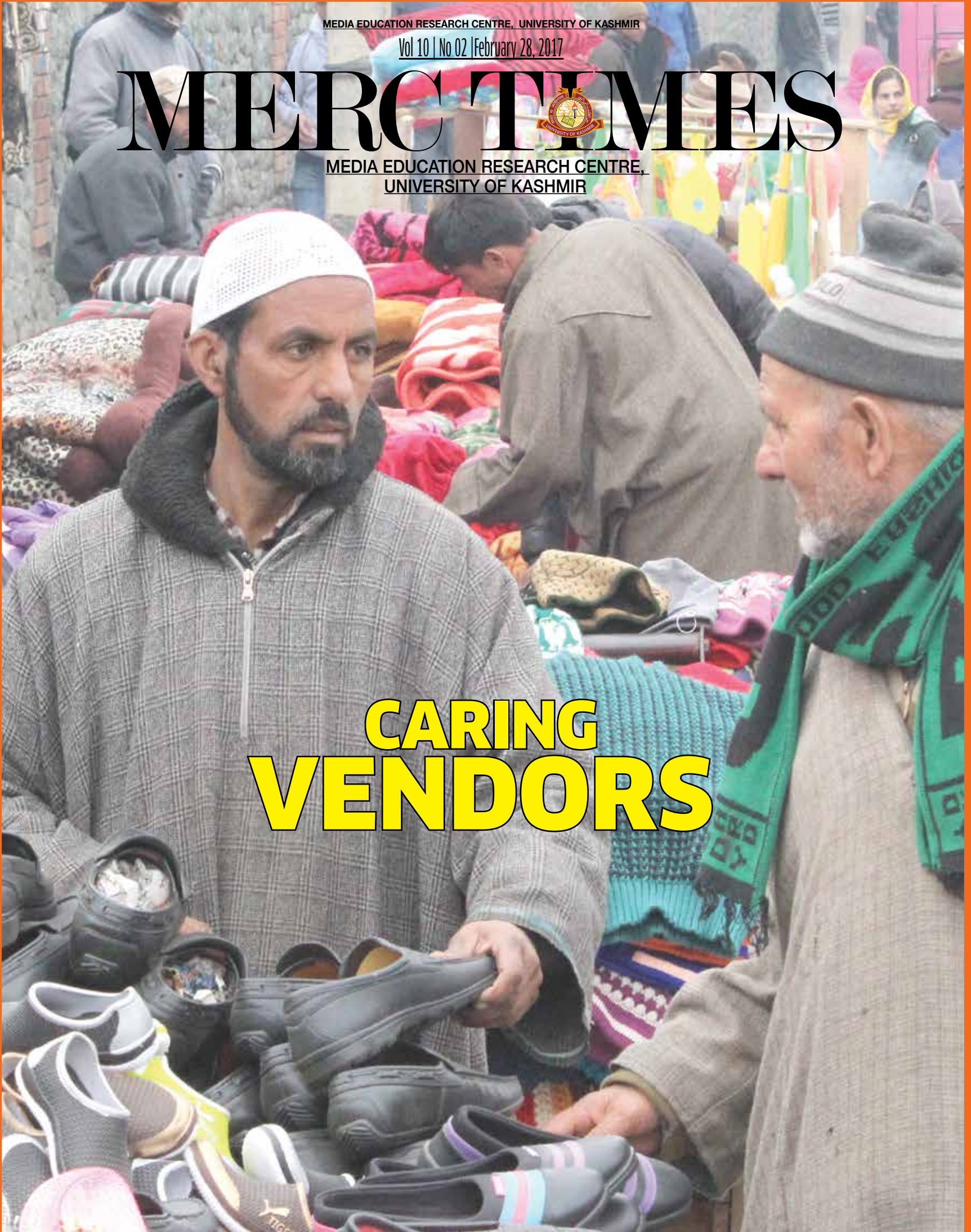


MERC TIMES



MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE,
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR

CARING VENDORS



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ASAR'S CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS GOJRI LANGUAGE

گو جری زبان

❖ Hasina Jamil

Rajouri: A seminar on life and works of veteran Gojri poet and scholar Israel Asar was held at Lamberi to commemorate his 8th death anniversary.

Organised by Jammu and Kashmir academy of art, culture and language and in collaboration with Gojri Bazam-e-Adab Kalakote, the event was inaugurated by Vice-chairman J&K advisory Board for development of Gujjar and Bakerwal's, Choudary Zaffar Khatrnak.

Noted tribal researcher Dr Javid Rahi, prominent Gojri writer Choudhary Hassina Parwaz, besides other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, Khatana said, that "Asar was a legend who contributed selflessly for promotion and propagation of Gojri language and Gujjar culture. He was a poet of tribal sensibilities and nomadic dogma whose writings would prove a significant tool to understand the tribal psyche viz a viz Gujjar mindset".

Dr Javaid Rahi, described Israel Asar as "an icon of Gojri literature who worked tirelessly for recognition of Gujjar identity at the national level."

Gojri writer and Sud Divisional Magistrate (SDM) Kalakote Ch Khalid Wafa, said that "Asar was a movement in himself that is why he led the entire Gujjar tribe of J&K state in the field of literature."

On the occasion four research papers, covering the contribution of Israel Asar were also presented.

Is 10 rupee coin invalid?

❖ Shahina Rahim

Srinagar: The rumors about the invalidity of Rs 10 coins are doing the rounds in Srinagar with many shopkeepers and bus conductors not accepting the said currency.

Circulation of Rs 10 coins has created panic among people in the markets of Kashmir, which were already facing a brunt due to demonetization of Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 currency notes.

Reports have poured in of shopkeepers, bus conductors, Sumo drivers, other passenger vehicles, vegetable vendors.

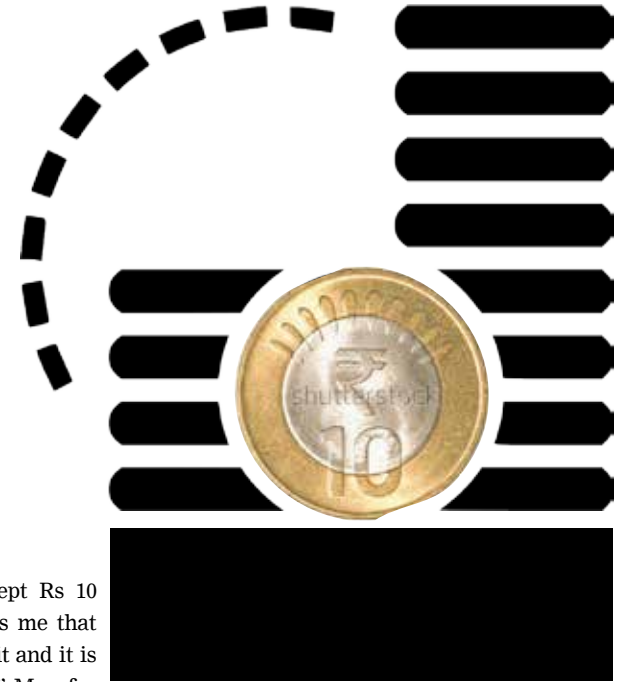
"While travelling from Bandipora to Srinagar, the sumo driver refuses to accept Rs 10 coin as a fair. He tells me that there is something in it and it is fake, I can't accept it," Muzafar Ahmad a passenger said.

Mostly the coins were refused by roadside vendors who have to accept low denomination currency, especially for food snacks. The vendors in many areas told the buyers that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has banned Rs 10 coins as there was heavy circulation of fake currency.

As per the reports in some parts of north and south Kashmir, some people are

running a mafia by offering five rupees in exchange of Rs 10 coins.

Incharge corporate communication, J&K Bank, Sajad Bazaz dispelled the rumors of fake Rs-10 coins doing the rounds. "It is all rumor, all the Rs 10 coins are valid and



transactable."

RBI have recently issued a statement in which they said, people should not give credence to such canards and continue to accept these coins as a legal tender in all their transactions.

Moreover the RBI said that anybody who are refusing to accept the coin or spreading the rumor about the invalidity of coins could face a legal action.

❖ Fasil Sidiq

Srinagar: Hundreds of passengers accused traffic police of playing foul by announcing opening of Jammu-Srinagar highway despite slippery conditions at Batote-Patnitop stretch of the 300, kilometre road link connecting the valley with the rest of the world.

The passengers said, that they had to face the tremendous hardships as there was total chaos and confusion on the stretch.

A number of passengers who were stranded for hours on the highway from Batote-Patnitop said, they have faced difficulties due to slippery roads.

"Without clearing the highway



from Srinagar to Jammu, the authorities allowed the vehicular movement from highway which resulted in chaos and confusion," a group of passengers said.

A passenger on way to Jammu with his family said, "We had to spend the whole night with little kids in our vehicle only because

the authorities allowed us to move towards Jammu, if they knew the roads were slippery why did they allow vehicles from Ramban"

When contacted with SSP national highway Sanjay Kotwaal down plyed the issue as routine matter.

NATIONAL HIGHWAY: Passengers complain of pestering

University canteen: Let students own their appetite



❖ **Ali Saifudin**

SRINAGAR: Students across India are getting umpteen benefits from scholarships to fee waivers. Most universities have allowed low budget canteens to operate in the campuses. Low budget canteen, however, seems a distant dream for the students of university of Kashmir. The students of the varsity who come from distant places of the valley with empty stomachs are famished by the time they reach the university. The university authorities have allowed the canteens that filed lowest costs of operation in the campus but the canteen owners are flaying the norms in broad day light. The canteen owner that he sells tea at seven rupees per cup which was just four rupees when the agreement between university and the contractor was done.

The canteens have heavy rush during the day hours as most of the students in the university take refreshment as well as luncheons at the canteen; but are fleeced by the contractor running the canteen in the campus. "The waiters in the canteen show no professionalism and even misbehave with students particularly the female ones." said a university student. The hygiene of the canteen has totally been neglected.

Despite the availability of dustbins; biscuit covers, disposable material and even the leftover food items could be seen in and around the canteen. The seating in the canteen is no different from the motor mechanics workshop with torn seats. added another student.

The university authorities too seem to have forgotten the inspection of canteen after the agreement was signed. Hardly any university official visits the canteen except the low rank employees of the university who in Orwellian terms are mere sheep bleating only when their companion is picked up from the sheep pen. The student voice has still remained unheard by the authorities of the university. Many a times students have complained about food poisoning and have altogether left to take their afternoon meals at university.

The issue needs to be settled by involving students when the bids are filed. The members of a student committee need to monitor the functioning of the canteen as they are regular visitors. They can talk about what they see and according address the problems of students. The university authorities need to regularly inspect the canteen so that the health of students in the campus could not be put on stake.

PG-level semester assessment replaced at KU

❖ **Ikhtlaq-UI-Rehman**

SRINAGAR: Kashmir University is likely to do away with semester examinations at the Post-graduation level for all the courses taught at the varsity; instead the students would be evaluated on 'Continuous Assessment Test' (CAT) monthly on unit basis.

As per the officials at Kashmir University, the new evaluation system has been introduced to improve evaluation system, minimise the costs of labour and monetary resources, and to avoid the 'wastage' of time which goes into preparing for the exams.

Controller Examinations, A S Bhat told MERC Times that it was need of the time to switch over to new evaluation system.

"Switching over to new evaluation system has been a global demand now, which apart from minimizing the time and monetary expenses will also make education academic oriented rather than examination oriented," Bhat said.

The new system, according to Bhat, is in its final stage and is likely to be implemented from the current session of 2016-17.

"The students and teachers would be free to decide whenever they want to have (evaluation) test. At the end of the semester each student will be awarded the marks based on his/her overall performance in the particular subject in a semester.

At the undergraduate level, the controller said that the semester question paper format has also been changed to minimise the 'subjective discretion' by dividing the paper into descriptive and objective questions with equal share of mark to each.

Bhat said, the new format will include 40 objective type questions and four descriptive type questions.

Vice-Chancellor, Kashmir University, K I Andrabi, said the proposal for changing evaluation system here has been discussed since he took over the Vice-Chancellorship.

"The main motive behind all this is to improve the evaluation system at the varsity," Andrabi said.

Drug addiction: a growing concern

❖ **Ather shah**

SRINAGAR: The word "addiction" brings to mind different images for different people. It can be difficult for someone suffering with an addiction or potential addiction to identify with the term "addict." And it can be especially trying for a young person. Teens commonly associate addiction with movie images, or people they've seen at the absolute lowest, worst point of their addiction. Many have ideas about what an addict looks like: desperate, homeless, suicidal, criminal. With these ideas in mind, it's hard for them to understand how their drug or alcohol use is a problem — after all, their consequences seem less extreme.

It's true; the external effects of someone using at age 16 are often much less severe or obvious. They might get in trouble at school, get grounded by their parents, fight with their friends or lose relationships. And they'll often write off these consequences as other people's problems, not seeing how their own behavior is a direct result of their substance use. They often say things such as: "My parents are freaking out. If they would just chill out, everything would be fine," "Everyone else is doing the same thing; I just got caught," "I haven't been using for that long," or "I can stop whenever I want." Combine false assumptions about addiction and placing blame on parents and other adults — and they have a ready-made excuse to distract them from taking an honest look at themselves and how their substance use is affecting their lives.

Just as teens do, parents have their own images of what someone with a drug problem

looks like, and it can be as extreme as the child's view. These preconceived notions help parents stay in denial of a potential problem. Plus, they lead to false measurement tools. Parents think, "If my kid had a problem, she'd be getting bad grades" or "Clean-cut polite kids don't use drugs." Parents can easily fall victim to the false belief that if their child is not behaving in a way the parent associates with addiction, then there is not a problem.

With parents, kids and others sharing this stigma about addiction, many drug problems slip through the cracks, and that allows for worst-case scenario circumstances to develop when the warning signs might have been there years earlier.

What does this all add up to? Addiction or not, drug or alcohol abuse is worthy of scrutiny by both the person using and his or her family. Worst-case scenarios are often avoidable by looking past preconceived ideas of addiction and looking honestly at the effects of substance abuse on the user's life. If you or a loved one has been abusing drugs or alcohol, there is no need to wait until you are absolutely positive there is an addiction present to seek help or to stop using. Addicts are not the only people who benefit when they quit using drugs or drinking.

Recovery programs for young people offer the chance for teens to identify with others who have similar experiences and stories. And thanks to these programs, many young people who have not crossed the line into addiction have stopped using and found happier, more fulfilling lives without experiencing the severity of long-term addiction.

New book jackets of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

❖ Adil Amin

SRINAGAR: Following the release of Harry Potter and the Cursed Child last year, Potter heads have yet another reason to rejoice with Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone coming back in brand new covers as the book completes 20 long years.

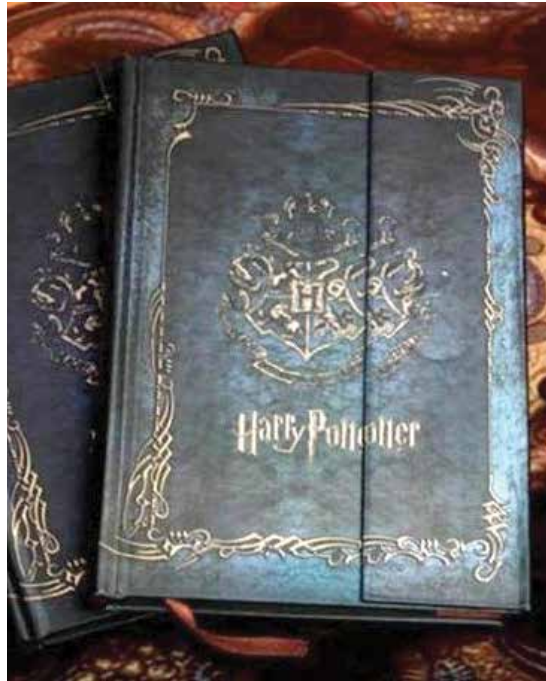
The new books, published by Bloomsbury Publishing, are being brought out to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the first book in the Potter series by J K Rowling in 1997.

"Publishing in celebration of the 20th anniversary, 26th June 2017, there are complementary hardback and paperback jackets of Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone. The hardbacks will be black with the house crest in a house colour and striped sprayed edges." Bloomsbury said in a statement.

Using the 'coat of arms' tradition that has historically been used to represent small towns, families, countries narrating their story through images, Pinfold has scripted an interesting tale about each house's legacy, with each crest adorned with individual nuances.

Slytherin's "glory and honour" is symbolised with a crescent in the house's crest, and the green colour speaks for its members' endurance.

The red coloured Gryffindor crest is meant to signify military strength, complemented by a



unicorn to symbolise purity and courage, and the antlers are for strength and agility.

The Ravenclaw crest gets a parchment scroll to symbolise academic achievement, an owl for wisdom, a spearhead for sharpness of wit and a book for knowledge.

The editions, that hit stands in June this year, will also contain fascinating facts about the houses of Hogwarts.

With an initial hardback print run of 500 copies, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone has now sold over 90 million copies worldwide.

G.D Goenka School functioning amid stinky environment

❖ Shaheen Shafique

SRINAGAR: The Srinagar Municipal Corporation has failed to lift the garbage dumped outside G.D Goenka school, Lal Bazar causing immense trouble to the students. The waste material dumped outside the school has drawn strong resentment from the students. The spot has become safe haven for stray dogs endangering the life of students.

"We are not able to concentrate on our studies due to the pungent smell emanating from the garbage dump", said a group of students. "Tons of garbage of adjoining areas is dumped outside the school forcing us to keep the windows of the classrooms closed, to avoid foul smell but it doesn't make any difference", said a teacher. "we have appraised the S.M.C officials several times, but no action has been taken so far. said a group of locals. Adding S.M.C officials of using dilly-dally tactics to address their grievances.

Deputy commissioner Srinagar, Farooq Ahmad Lone who has additional charge of S.M.C, said that he will look into the matter.



Rugby becoming popular among valley girls

❖ Sajidah Yousuf

SRINAGAR: Breaking all the shackles, young rugby girls have taken to rugby in Kashmir, which was previously a male dominated sport. Hundreds of females among 120 schools and 26 colleges have added this sport to their list of extracurricular activities and are playing it with full dedication and determination.

Many Kashmiri girls are getting attracted to rugby and wish to make it their full fledged career. Earlier the girls took this particular game as a hobby. Nowadays, we can see a good number of girls toning up their grit, patience, athletic capabilities and performing well in this rough and tough game. "My love for rugby is due to the 'mental and physical fitness' involved in this sport. This game does not consume



much time and moreover its rules are crystal clear", said sajidah Yousuf, Post graduate student of Kashmir University. She was also the coach of J&K rugby girls who won a Silver medal in U-14 All India Touch Rugby Tournament held in Gujarat.

Despite of gaining enormous popularity in the state, there are no rugby grounds in place. According to Irfan Aziz, secretary J&K rugby association, Rugby is played in 14 districts in the state. However, there is no permanent playground for the association to conduct major tournaments." The popularity of rugby has grown by leaps and bounds ever since our association was formed in 2014." "We have produced 17 international players, including a girl as well. We are badly in need of a dedicated rugby ground", Aziz further added.

LOOT OF AGRILANDS

❖ **Furqan Khurshid**

SRINAGAR: Agricultural land in districts of Kashmir is fast falling to the illegal constructions. The constructions are being carried out under the nose of the authorities. The land is being continuously used for commercial and residential purposes during the last several years.

Agricultural land has been used for illegal constructions and over years mainly illegal colonies have come up on agricultural land. This is an alarming trend that can result to having no land for agricultural purpose in future.

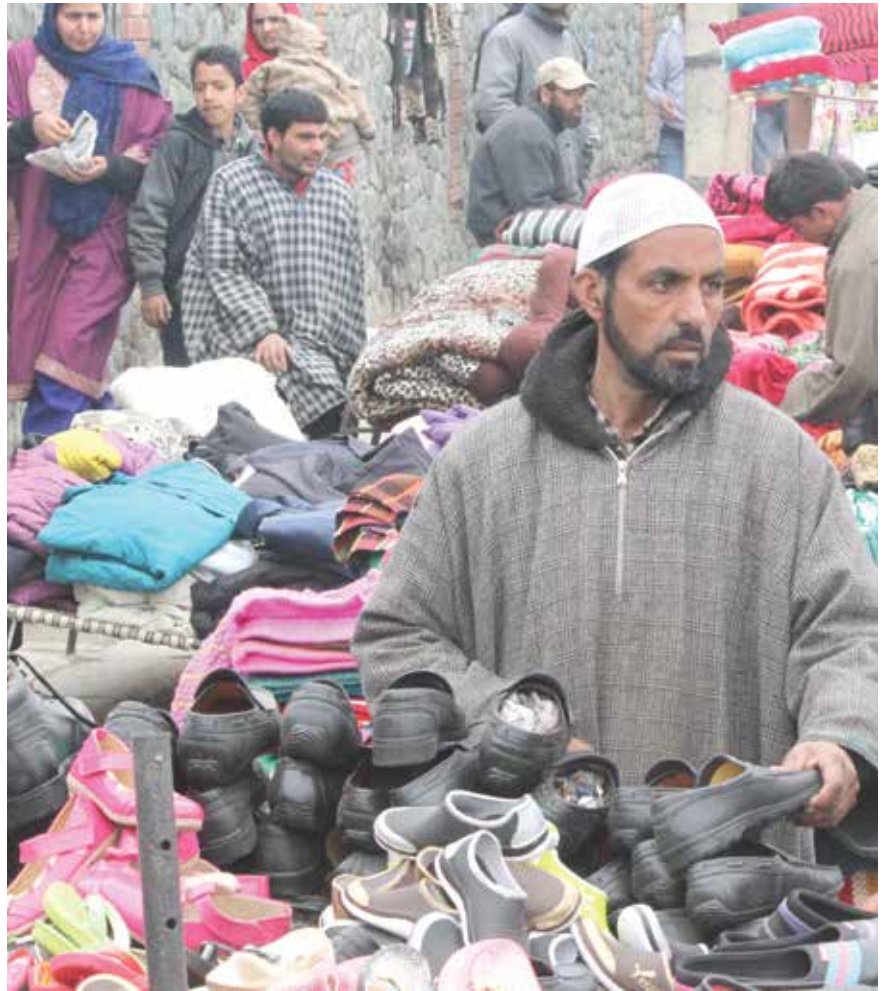
A number of regions in Kashmir are agriculture dependent and nearly 75% to 80% of population is engaged in agriculture and allied occupations. What is

more worrying is the pace of illegal constructions along with the increasing selling prices of agricultural land for the commercial purpose; which is making farmers to start their own business instead of farming.

The situation is really alarming; on one hand the price of food items is many times higher than what it is currently and on the other hand farmers are losing their land. "Labours of Kashmir are losing their work or demand" said a local.

"In recent years, out of total newly sown area of 3.50 lac hectares, an area of about 2.10 lac hectares is irrigated. The per capital available area for crop cultivation, that is average holding size is 0.53 hectares, which is unfortunately decreasing, said an official wishing not to disclose his name.

Caring Vendors



❖ **Irfan Trambo**

SHADIMARG: Right outside the Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences, Soura is a market where vendors sell a variety of items. It is the market which starts from the main the entrance of SKIMS, and ends near the gynaecology department of SKIMS, also known as Zanane Hospital.

From a packet of cigarette, one can find almost everything there. Like footwear, fruits, clothes, road side eateries selling Biryani.

There is something strange about this market that may not be happening in any of the markets in and around Srinagar city.

The vendors do not sell the same product throughout the week. There is a shift in a day or two, when people have to take onto selling something different for the next couple of days.

Muhammad Aslam, (41), sells footwear for two days and after two days he has to operate on a small outlet, selling cigarettes. "This has been decided by the small union we have here, and we work according to that plan," says Aslam.

It is a novel way of giving every person a chance of earning a modest living. Interestingly, the majority of the vendors

live in a nearby locality known as Anchar. Given the fact that they live nearby, they have occupied the space and have started their ventures.

Abdul Qayoom, (52), is on office bearer of the union that overlooks the operation of this market. He says that the idea behind this "exchange of ventures" is that "we want to let everyone earn their livelihood in a respected manner."

Fayaz Ahmad, (35), is a vendor busy with selling boiled eggs on the sidelines of the institute's main entrance. He sells boiled eggs for the first two days of the week and then he has to shift and sell cigarettes, or any other commodity that is in demand. For the days when he sells a different commodity, the another person, takes up the job of selling boiled eggs to the attendants of patients, who come from far flung areas for treatments at SKIMS.

While the novelty of market assures, everybody earns good money; on the other hand it also hampers the vehicular movement at times. "Government should take some steps to relocate this market," said Bilal Ahmad who frequently takes this route to reach his office at Lal Chowk. "In the evening the movement is very difficult," he added.

Students welcome KU's winter classes move



❖ **Hikmatyar**

SRINAGAR: University of Kashmir's move of starting the winter classes for the Post Graduation (PG) students for the session 2017 has been welcomed by them.

Students of various departments of the varsity told MERC TIMES that they were happy over the decision taken by the university authorities.

"The authorities here believe that this move will help them to boost the work culture in the University of Kashmir," said Ramees Ahmad Malik, a student of the campus.

"This move is welcomed by the student community as this will be a remedy to fulfill the losses occurred in 2016's academic session due to the unrest in Kashmir," he said.

Another student, Zubair Ahmad, of Arabic department said that this step is innovative and fruitful to raise the standard of quality education in university.

"I guess this step has taken been by the varsity for the first time and we applaud this decision," Ahmad said.

Suhail Shehjar, a student of Music department said that it will be the test for the students as well as teachers as day by day temperature is dipping and winters are becoming harsher.

"Now, it is the responsibility of varsity to provide basic facilities like transport and heating arrangement so that students, teaching and non teaching staff may not face any problem which may become a barrier to restrict the development of this innovative move," he added.

Dean Academics Affairs, Mohd Ashraf Wani told MERC Times that the aim of starting the winter classes was to stabilize the time derailed by the last year's unrest.

"But we are happy that the students have welcomed the move," the Dean said.

Years on Baghi-Mehtab – Rawalpura Bridge in Limbo



❖ **Madhiya Nabi**

SRINAGAR: The connecting Bridge between Baghi-Mehtab and Rawalpura which is located on the main canal of Doodh Ganga was damaged in 2014 Floods. Despite passing of over 2 years the construction work has not yet been completed.

Due to the deteriorating condition, the bridge has turned out to be a death trap for commuters using this particular route. In a recent incident, a Biker fell into the river and was later rescued by a Local, said a group of commuters. The movement of heavy vehicles like schools

buses and vans have further damaged the bridge.

“The work was initially started in 2014 by the concerned Department, but due to lack of funds the construction work has come to a halt.” said, Mr Abdul Bari, a Local Resident.

The authorities have not erected any Sign Board cautioning the people not to walk or drive over the Bridge, scores of people and cars cross it daily as they don't have any nearby alternative route. They further request the concerned Officials to complete the pending work of the Bridge as soon as possible, to forestall any mishap.

Sopore-Shiva road in shambles, courtesy official apathy

❖ **Firdous Azad**

SOPORE: The Project Sopore-Shiva road, that was supposed to get accomplished in 2016, is still pending as construction work has not been started yet.

Although, the tender for this project with an estimated cost of 19 crore approximately had been sanctioned by the Government in 2016.

According to locals, the concerned authorities of this project are delaying the construction work. The authorities failed to justify the reason as to why the work on this project is not initiated when other similar projects are near to their completion.

“Our MLA, Abdul Rashid Dar had promised us to get the roads macadamised. He won the elections however the roads are the same and the locals are still suffering,” they said.

Initial records of this project showed that the road has to be constructed up to seven kilometres, with width of thirty feet. However the government has reviewed the project and decided to construct it with width of 50 feet.

“The project ‘Sopore-Shiva’



Road is very important to be constructed immediately as this road will uplift the large and small scale business of the adjacent areas. That will be helpful in controlling traffic hurdles and it will be the first step in making Sopore, a real business destination,” a local Akeel Rashid said.

When contacted, Junior Engineer R&B Department of Sopore said, “All the essential requirements for this project are ready but now it is up to higher authorities when they will start work on this project.”

Dangerpora awaits playground facility

❖ **Imran Naikoo**

BARAMULLA: Residents of Dangerpora Narwari in north Kashmir's Baramulla have expressed resentment over unavailability of playground in the area.

The residents have been fighting over the issue since last 10 years. The people of this village have to travel 20 kilometers for cricket and other games through vehicles on the Gantamulla and Janbazzpora near main town Baramulla.

“We have been moving from pillar to post since last 10 years. There is hardly any concerned office that we have not visited so far, but our demands are met with deaf ears,” said Ghulam Nabi Bhat, the village head.

He said the village youth have been demanding playground since last 10 years but no government has shown any serious approach towards our demands.

“Sports is an essential part of our life but without any facilities how can our youth participate in sports. The youth have talent but lack of facilities deters them from showcasing it,” said Bashir Naik, a resident.

Meanwhile, the residents of the area have appealed the sports minister to look into the matter.

Youth Services and Sports Officer Baramulla, Mushtaq Ahmad told MERC Times, that he will look into the matter.

“Now, I will soon visit the village and will take the stock of situation,” the officer said.

BRAIN DRAIN DEPRECIATING KASHMIR

❖ **Rashid Manzoor**

SRINAGAR: The five-month long unrest left no stone unturned in making the Students of Valley feel that this is a vulnerable place to continue with. Migration of Entrepreneurs and Startups is a huge loss to State Economy. The Students who moved out of the station for pursuing their studies are deciding to settle down there permanently.

Aqib Rashid Bhatt, a resident of Chadora said, “I want to become an Engineer but how can I, at such a place where there is not only

scarcity of Engineering Colleges but the current atmosphere of unrest is making it more difficult, and now I am moving to Chandigarh.”

“We are doing a great business here in Noida, our startup has turned out to be more functional than it did in the Valley,” said, Shakir Manzoor, a Kashmir based Entrepreneur.

The Entrepreneurs aspiring of harnessing their Money and Energy in the State; invest it outside and create jobs out there, which results in the loss of both Intellect and Wealth. Drain of wealth is coupled with Brain Drain.

Kashmiri Boy singing a Punjabi Sufi Track



❖ Pardeep Singh

SRINAGAR: Amandeep Singh (Alias AD Singh) hailing from a small Hamlet Arina of Central Kashmir's Budgam District; released his 3 minutes and 16 seconds long track on Social Media and YouTube. The song has been produced by Deeplab Production, a Delhi based Production House, in which the Music has been composed by Gagandeep Singh.

Singh, has become the first Kashmiri Boy who released his Punjabi Sufi Track, where almost all the Punjabi tracks are sung by Natives of Punjab.

"Government should give first priority to this place in terms of Development, so that the singing talent of our Youth will never be wasted here," Singh said. "There is a lot of talent here but unfortunately they don't get the Platform to express themselves," he further added

"With the support of my Parents, all the barriers on my way turned into bridges for me and I reached my destination without any trouble," he said.

When asked about the Person who supported him most in the Music Industry, Singh said, "The unconditional support of well know International Artist Dr.Zeus accelerated my Project,"

There is a lot of talent here but unfortunately they don't get the Platform to express themselves

CFC open centres to train budding entrepreneurs

❖ Sabreena Mushtaq

SRINAGAR: In order to develop the skills of budding handicraft artisans, Common Facility Centre (CFC) opened their centres here.

Common Facility Centre (CFC) is a small and captive facility centre, where there are production clusters and can be used by the Artisans, Master Craft Persons, SHG's, NGO's or other beneficiaries.

A group of Artisans said, Kashmir's art is known all over the World for its beauty and charm. Chain Stitch and Crewel Embroidery are two major crafts of the State. We need a platform to learn new techniques about handicraft.

"There is a need of launching customised capacity development programmes to teach and train new



rising Entrepreneurs to make an environment for Crafts Persons/Manufacturers and Exporters of Handicrafts towards the new concept of the Export Marketing," an artisan Shamima said .

Meanwhile , an official of CFC said that, "The traders provide them raw materials and designs

to the Artisans and take back the finished products. The Artisans face challenges related to raw material, design and marketing"

"Handicrafts comprises of the major part of our Heritage Culture. We should preserve the essence of Craft Culture in our State" He further added.

Excessive pollution poses threat to Lasjan residents



❖ Pirzada Shakir

BUDGAM: Where every corner of Kashmir talks of miseries due to lack of basic amenities, Lasjan, located on the outer skirts of Srinagar has a different story to tell. Due to the presence of Hot Mix Plants, brick kilns and 200

Stone crushers, there has been tremendous rise in the level of pollution which has made the life of inhabitants miserable.

In a bid to boost States economy; government has allowed the installation of above establishments which are hazardous to the environment as

well as to the lives of the people living around. As far as the health of the labourers working in these establishments is concerned, the government as well as the owners have turned a blind eye.

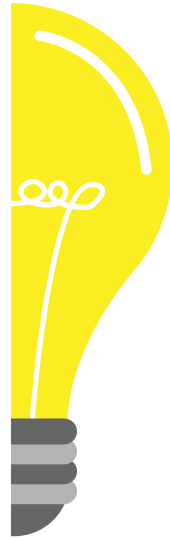
"We are miserably affected by the pollutants coming out from these establishments. The establishment owners do not have any pollution control devices as prescribed by the government. Our life has turned in to hell", said a group of locals.

"We are in constant fear of getting hit by the speedy trucks and tippers", said a local.

"Presence of dust , smoke and other pollutants can lead to short term complications like nausea, headache, irritation to eyes , nose etc. These short term complications on continuous exposure to these pollutants can lead to Asthma, Emphysema", said Dr Sarmad, a Chest specialist.

Locals requested the concerned authorities to kindly look into the matter and end their plight so that they do not suffer anymore.

Unscheduled, pesky power cuts irk city residents



❖ **Zahid Ahmad**

SRINAGAR: With the chilling winter in the valley, residents allege most parts of the Srinagar city are facing acute shortage of electricity.

They alleged that the electricity was playing hide and seek with them.

"The light remains off for most of hours thus pushing us to face chaos. We can't use electric gadgets because of unavailability of electricity," said a group of residents from Mehjoor Nagar.

"Our children who are preparing for their exams these days are not able to study without electricity," said another

group of residents from Hazratbal area.

The unscheduled power cuts has plunged the entire city into darkness, with the people believing that they are being ignored by the authorities.

"We have been ignored because we don't resort to protests against this step-motherly treatment," they claimed.

"The Power Development Department (PDD) is in deep slumber. Without electricity we have to face harsh period of winter," said Mustaq Ahmad, a resident of Lal Chowk.

Meanwhile, the residents of the city have appealed to the PDD authorities to ensure the proper electric supply in evening hours.

Eight months on, justice eludes family of Uri pregnant lady

❖ **Idrees Bukhtiyar**

URI (BARAMULLA): More than eight months have passed, the family of 35 years old pregnant lady who died last year outside Lal Ded hospital in Srinagar after she was 'operated upon by nurses' in Baramulla hospital still awaits the justice.

The deceased woman was identified as Shameema Begum, wife of Sajad Ahmad, of Halarpeerniyana in Boniyar tehsil of north Kashmir's Baramulla district.

"Despite passing of eight months, the doctors haven't informed us anything about the probe. It shows the callous approach of the doctors in investigating the case," said Sajad Ahmad, the husband of the deceased woman.

"After her death, only a single doctor from Sub-District Hospital Boniyar visited us that only to check the prescription of my wife," Sajad told MERC Times adding "We don't need any more probes into her death. The guilty responsible for her death should be booked under law"

Begum, according to her husband, was admitted at the hospital on May 2 last year after she developed labor pain. She died on the evening of May 5.

"First, we were told by the doctors that there will be a normal delivery and no surgery will be carried out. Later, the surgery was carried out by nurses on instructions of doctors," he alleged.

"When surgery was done, the nurses couldn't stitch the operated parts of the body. She was bleeding profusely, following which they got nervous and referred us to LD hospital Srinagar. As we reached outside the hospital gate, Shameema passed away"

Earlier, Medical Superintendent District Hospital Baramulla, Dr Syed Masood, said that they were probing the incident.

"Director Health Services Kashmir has constituted a team of doctors who are still investigating the case," he told MERC Times.

Directorate of Health Services Kashmir, Saleem Ur Rehman said: "The probe for the case is yet under process."

When contacted SSP Baramulla Imtiyaz Hussain over the matter, he said, "The family hasn't lodged any case with the police."

GAASH launches book donation, Child abuse awareness campaigns

❖ **Farheen Qureshi**

SRINAGAR: Two social initiatives, under the name Gaash, have been launched by a non-profit organization, Ittifaq in order to help Kashmiris from book donation drive to create awareness about child sexual abuse in the society.

The first of its kind campaign has happening as a Donation Drive, for 4 months; where children especially those of transporters who bore the brunt of the 2016 unrest are being helped.

The main objective of another campaign under the same name Gaash, is to talk to school going children primarily up to high school level about contact abuse that is good touch or bad touch. The main activity in the campaign includes visits to public and private schools to make children aware about this shadowy menace

As part of its first initiative, Gaash donates books, bags and stationery to these children. The donations come from people who volunteer for it from different sections of the society.

"I overheard a conversation between two transporters about their deprived conditions due to the 2016 turmoil and it's what moved me to help them. I shared the idea of 'Gaash' with my friend Muheet Mehraj who is the co-founder of Ittifaq and CEO at Kashmir Box and he helped me in executing the plan," said Nida Rehman, founder of Ittifaq.

"The target of our initiative are the kids of sumo, Auto and Matador drivers who suffered for six long months and weren't even able to run their families, let alone studies of their children," said Rehman.

One of the sumo drivers at Soura sumo stand, Farooq Ahmad said, "My child has been helped a lot by this initiative, I am

very thankful to the people who are behind this. I will always remember them in my prayers".

After the grand success of its book donation drive, the non-profit organization, Ittifaq, moved to another campaign to create awareness about child sexual abuse.

The aim of the initiative is to warn people about the way our children are being exploited by people," Rehman said.

"There are a lot of people especially youth who are really fed up with this and want to speak up about this serious issue but can't due to certain reasons," said Rehman. Adding, "We are giving them a platform to speak up for themselves and for the welfare of the society. We want to let them know that we are here to give them voice."

"Ittifaq would ensure proper secrecy to the person speaking out against the heinous crime committed to them," said Rehman.

Ittifaq, requested all those people to come out and speak up against the harassment they have faced by way of receiving messages, letters, or by any other means.

Rehman further said, "It would be definitely putting a great impact on resolving the heinous crime doing rounds in our society while people are still afraid to talk about it; as if they are the culprits, so we want them to be bold enough to speak up."

Rehman also plans to start other campaigns like 'a cancer library' where those families can donate medicines whose cancer patients have died. "I want to do something for the society that would benefit common and poor people."

Rehman, with a strong belief in her has come up with 'ahead of curve' vision to help the Kashmiri society in best possible way.

Budgam roads in shambles, administration remains unmoved

❖ Mahdeesa Altaf

BUDGAM: A number of vital roads connecting dozens of areas with district Budgam are in shambles causing immense problems to commuters and reflecting the ‘culture of neglect’ within the government.

At least 21-km length of the road connecting Magam and Budgam via Beerwah is in need of repairs with its Aripanthan, Warihama, Arwah and Gondipora, Oultigam and Charangam stretches completely dilapidated.

A proposal of Rs 31 crores for the widening of this road from 12 to 25 feet has been shelved for the past two years, an official wishing anonymity said. “The Revenue department officials have failed to coordinate with R&B department in clearing major blocks on this road,” he further added.

“What fun is widening when main stretches of the road are

badly damaged? Only 11-kms were blacktopped last year,” a group of locals said.

About a kilometer of this road was washed away in September 2014 floods and hasn’t been repaired yet. The road connecting Magam and Budgam via Wadwan has also been ignored for decades. Its Souibugh- Kanihama stretch is in shambles and commuters are forced to take an alternative route.

The Hazarpora Khag road via Poshkar was macadamized some 12 years ago but has now caved in between Dadoora and Poshkar. The five-km long Narbal-Wadwan road is too crying for repairs.

The condition of roads from Budgam to Shogapora has deteriorated over the years. It has made driving difficult during rains and winter. “The roads have potholes, which make it difficult to travel. The government has turned a blind eye to our problems,” said Habib Dar, a local shopkeeper.



Food Street: Traditional Kashmiri delicacies to beat the winter blues

❖ Nausheen Naseer

SRINAGAR: Winter is the ideal time to indulge in hot, steaming wazwan and the food street at Budshah Chowk is ensuring that it does just that for the hordes of customers swarming it in the bitter January cold.

Comprising a total of 17 kiosks, the place is catering to local taste buds by offering hot, scrumptious Kashmiri wazwan for as cheap as Rs 40 per plate.

“I work at a nearby construction site and like coming here for lunch. The food tastes good and doesn’t dig a hole in my pocket,” says Manzoor Ahmad, a laborer.

“If it weren’t for this place, I would have to either carry tiffin from home or eat lunch at some expensive eatery nearby,” says GhulamManzoor who works as a salesman at a local shop.

The place offers everything from rich, aromatic meat dishes like rista, gushtaba, rogan josh and kebabs to hard-boiled vegetables and dals. And all this comes for just under Rs100.

“Cheap rates and sumptuous food are what attract people to this place,” says Ali Mohammad, President of the food street. A whopping two to three thousand people visit every day, he says, and the number is steadily rising.

“All sorts of people come here. Drivers, construction workers, shopkeepers and even tourists regularly visit us,” says Irfan Ahmad, whose grandfather set up a kiosk here nearly 40 years ago.

People usually throng the place in the afternoons when it gets so crowded that there is barely any room for people to turn their heads. “Most of the kiosks here have a capacity of upto 20 people. Mine is perhaps the only one that can accommodate around 70 people. It gets difficult but we manage somehow,” says Ahmad.

Lunch at these kiosks comprises a plate of rice and dishes bursting with the rich flavors of Kashmiri chilies and spices. The dishes are also spruced up by simmering gravies and desi ghee.

“Rogan josh, lotus roots, dumaloos are some of the favorites with the locals,” says Khurshid Mir, who owns one of the kiosks.

Khurshid and other owners are pleased with the flood of visitors they are receiving. “We are glad that business is good and people are enjoying the food,” says Mir. “We work tirelessly throughout the year since there is no off season for us, so it feels good to see your hard work paying off.”

With its aroma of delicious Kashmiri cuisines and cheap food, the food street is worth every buck in the pocket.



ILLEGAL STRUCTURES COME UP IN THE CITY



❖ Syed Burhan

SRINAGAR: As the valley was going through turmoil, hundreds of structures were built amid the unrest. Land grabbers and encroachers took advantage of the unrest and hundreds of structures were built along the roadsides.

In many areas of Srinagar, illegal constructions have come up around Dal Lake, Eidgah, Lal Bazar, Gojwara. Meanwhile sources said illegal constructions are also coming up in Brein, Nishat, Shalimar, Hazratbal and its adjacent areas.

“The construction material was ferried in these areas during night and day. Some people resorted to stone pelting to ensure that the area remained disturbed and authorities are unable to visit area,” locals said.

“The authorities have completely failed to demolish these illegal constructions,” said a resident of Shalimar.

The locals have appealed the authorities to take action against those who are involved in this illegal act.

When contacted the Srinagar Municipal Commissioner Shafat Khan said, “These illegal constructions have come up during the recent unrest in the valley. We are trying our best to curb this menace.”

Jammu and Kashmir High court has also directed authorities to issue contempt notices against people who have started illegal construction in and around Srinagar.

AIRLINES BAN SAMSUNG NOTE 7



❖ Peer Viqar Ul Aslam

SRINAGAR: Samsung’s recalled Galaxy Note 7 smartphone was banned from US airline flights. The order was passed by the FAA and the Department of Transportation’s Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) after an announcement about Samsung ending production of the phone entirely. The ban has been in place since 15th Oct. Apart from the Brand name damage this product failure will cost Samsung up to \$17 Billion.

FAA made the decision to ban the Smartphone after reports suggested dozens of the recalled phones have been catching fire, including one on a Southwest Airlines jet that was parked at the gate. Experts have been blaming the faulty batteries as the cause of these explosions and have deemed the phone highly risky on airplanes.

Now other airlines across the world have started to Ban Samsung Galaxy Note 7 completely and passengers won’t be allowed to carry the phone even if turned off nor will be allowed in Check-in luggage.

Morocco’s Official Airline, Royal Air Maroc has already issued travel advisory of not charging or carrying Samsung Galaxy Note 7 on board, but the statement did not mention any restrictions on Check-in luggage.

“Following recent incidents and concerns raised by Samsung about the Galaxy Note 7 and the recommendations of the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration), Royal Air Morocco shall inform passengers of the prohibition of lighting or to recharge the on-board equipment and the prohibition of their acceptance in all hold baggage. This is to ensure passenger safety and that of the

Ban on Samsung Galaxy Note 7 completely and passengers won’t be allowed to carry the phone even if turned off nor will be allowed in Check-in luggage.

plane,” said the statement.

Carriers in Australia, Asia and Europe have put the phone on a prohibited list now and more airlines are issuing statements about their ban of Samsung Note Galaxy Note 7.

Singapore Airlines said, on its Facebook page that “the Galaxy Note 7 smartphone will be prohibited from being brought on board all our flights in person, in carry-on baggage or checked-in baggage with effect from 16 October”.

Effective immediately, passengers will no longer be allowed to bring Samsung Galaxy Note7s on-board Qatar Airways planes or check them into luggage, announced Qatar Airways on Saturday.

Etihad Airways, the airliner announced the Note 7 ban in series of tweets.

More airlines are following the ban and can be expected to impose complete ban on Samsung Galaxy Note 7.

LOW SAFFRON PRODUCTION WORRIES GROWERS

❖ Ahsan Ul Shafi

PAMPORE: The golden crop is gone from his fields, but saffron farmer Abdul Rather still wanders around, looking for any purple flowers left behind after the harvest. For a cash crop whose demand outstrips supply at least six times over, each flower of saffron is precious. But, with no irrigation, yield has been all time low for quite some time now.

“When I was growing up, my father used to reap 100 tolas of saffron per kanal,” says Rather, 60, a resident of Pampore. “Today we get three. There is no source of irrigation.”

In 2014 came the floods followed by 2015 and 2016 which had barely any rainfall. Officials say the Saffron fields in Pampore needed 183 mm rainfall from August to October but in 2016 only 16 mm was received. 2016 is not the only year when the farmers have witnessed the dry season. Lack of water has long



been known as the cultivators “biggest challenge”.

In 2010, the central government launched its ambitious National Saffron Mission (NSM). Its main objective was to fill the irrigation vacuum by building 253 bore wells connected with sprinkler systems which would provide

drip irrigation to the saffron farms. But today, after six years and 200 crores expenditure, only eight bore wells are functional.

Altaf Aijaz Andrabi, Joint Director, Department of Agriculture, says they drilled the ground for 92 bore wells and dug trenches for their sprinkler systems

back in 2014. The project, he added, was then transferred to the Department of Mechanical Engineering to fix the machine equipment but three years on the work is yet to be completed.

“The biggest hurdle in our work has been the land mafia who want to convert the farmlands,” says Rajnish Bal, Chief Engineer, Department of Mechanical Engineering. “They do not let our contractors work in peace. They have told the farmers that if sprinkler pipes are laid under their fields, the government can later cease their land.”

Pampore’s proximity to Srinagar makes for an attractive real estate market. In the past two decades, as saffron cultivation grew economically unviable, farmers began turning to the land mafia. From 5,707 hectares in 1996, land under saffron cultivation had reduced to 3,715 hectares in 2010, in spite of a government ban on conversion of saffron farmland.

Kashmiri girl wins gold in World Kickboxing Championship



❖ Aneesa Ashraf

BANDIPORA: An eight year old girl from Bandipora created history by winning gold in the November World Kickboxing Championship held in Italy.

Tajamul Islam, who studies at Army Goodwill School Bandipora is the youngest gold medalist in J&K. The championship was organized by the Italian Kick Boxing Federation.

“I want to play more and win more medals for my family and school,” said Islam.

Islam first won a gold medal in the sub junior category at the 2015 National Kick Boxing Championship in Delhi after which she got an entry to compete for world championships in Italy. She is the first ever girl to do so.

“She is a hero at home now and people have been showering her with a lot of love,” said Mehreen, Islam’s neighbor in Bandipora.

Islam’s father, a driver, is equally proud of her and has always been supportive. “My family and school have always supported me and they are happy for me,” she said.

Central Excise Division holds workshop on GST



❖ Humaira Ahad

SRINAGAR: A Seminar on Migration of Existing Central Excise Assesseees to Goods and Servie Tax (GST) was held at Central Excise Division, Hotel Mini Ikhwan, Bishember Nagar.

The seminar was organized by Central Excise Division, Srinagar with the view to create awareness among existing central excise assesseees of Srinagar division about the overview of model GST and the process of migration of existing

central excise assesseees to GST. Several central excise assesseees of central excise division, Srinagar and some unregistered aspirants, as well, attended the seminar.

“The seminar proved very beneficial to us, most of our doubts were cleared”, said Ashfaq, a participant of the event.

“We are planning to hold such seminars in the future also to create awareness amongst people”, said Sh. A. H. Khatana, Assistant Director Central Excise Division J&K.

Specially-abled community seeks extension of disability law to state

As per Law, no Act of Parliament gets automatically implemented in Jammu and Kashmir until the state Assembly ratifies it on the floor of the House

❖ Sharoz Khushal

SRINAGAR: The specially-abled community in Jammu and Kashmir has sought immediate extension of the disability law, passed by Parliament last week, to the state saying it would make a “sea-change” resulting in improved living standards. “The Rights of Persons with Disabilities bill passed by Parliament should be extended to the state of Jammu and Kashmir at the earliest possible,” Khursheed Ahmad Malik, Vice President of the Voluntary Medicare Society which works with specially-abled persons, told MERC Times.



As per law, no Act of Parliament gets automatically implemented in Jammu and Kashmir until the state Assembly ratifies it on the floor of the House. Malik, who suffered a spinal injury in a road accident in 1987, said, the present environment in the state was “very disabled unfriendly” and the new bill passed by Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha during the winter session can make a vast change.

“The provision of punitive action will definitely bring about the

necessary change in making various facilities accessible to people with disabilities,” Malik, a retired IAS officer, said.

The Lok Sabha on Friday passed the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill 2016, which replaces the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. The Rajya Sabha had passed the bill on December 14.

Farooq Ahmad, team member of state wheelchair basketball team, suggests, “We have seen so far that the governments have only done lip service for the welfare of people with disabilities. We are not begging for sympathy but a conducive atmosphere to compete.”

Malik suggests that even religious institutions too should be brought under this new legislation. “I want to pray in a mosque but I cannot find a mosque that has the facilities that will allow me to enter it,” he added.

SHATHGUND PAYEEN- Kupwara’s Forgotten Village

❖ Abid Rashid

KUPWARA: The next time, you visit Shathgund, a picturesque village of Handwara town in this frontier district, gear up for long walks on potholed tracks. Come summer, this village gives visitors a feeling of being in a ‘paradise’.

But dwellers of this “paradise” accuse the most vocal assembly member, Sheikh Rashid aka Engineer of neglecting them.

“We voted him to power with the intention that he will listen to us,” a group of villagers told this reporter adding that he failed to represent them.

“He never listened to our grievances, we requested him to construct a road link between the

main roads so that we too could have a sigh of relief but our plea’s fell on deaf ears.” Ab. Qayoom, a student who shuttles between Baramulla and Handwara told the reporter.

Qayoom added that during recent heavy snowfall, they remained cut off from the entire district. “we find it extremely difficult to ferry essential commodities during heavy snowfall or incessant rains due to this acute issue.”

They said that it becomes very difficult for the students particularly girl students to walk on the muddy track to reach their educational institutions.

“We request our MLA to please concentrate on the matters which are of prime importance.” A group of girl students said; adding that

they want Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti’s intervention in this regard.

On a parting note, villagers appealed this reporter to highlight their genuine problems so that the concerned authorities could take the necessary action for the general good of the public they represent.

We find it extremely difficult to ferry essential commodities during heavy snowfall or incessant rains due to this acute issue

Second Anniversary of KEHWA TALK



❖ Hirra Azmat

SRINAGAR: Centre for research and Development (CRDP) came forward with another season of Kehwa talk. Kehwa Talk 2 was held at a crowded hall in Hotel Comrade Inn on the new year’s eve.

Renowned Academicians - Dr. Dibeysh Anand and Dr. Nitasha Kaul delivered power point presentations on two different subjects, ‘Colonial Practices of Post-colonial Nations’ and ‘Post-colonial Neo-liberal Nationalism in India’.

“One sees dominance of sovereignty talk and territorial control in post-colonial nation states. Also, democracy is used for political control,” asserted Dr. Anand

He spoke extensively on colonial practices adopted by post-colonial states like China, India and Pakistan, regarding normalisation of dominance, language of control and challenge, identity, interest, ideology, sacrality, colonisation as asymmetrical relation of power.

Dr. Natasha began her talk by discussing symbolic landscapes and “imagined lost glory” of the Indian state and attempts to legislate the memory of rewriting history, maintenance of ambiguity as central to maintain power and dehumanisation and the neo liberal nationalist project.

“Landing in Srinagar after a gap of five years, I was surprised to see how Indianised Srinagar has become through the lettering, signboards, and symbolic landscape, etc,” said, Dr. Nitasha.

The talk was followed by an hour long question-hour session. It was moderated by Dr. Suhail, Director Centre for Research and Policy Development (CRDP). He talked about the success of kehwa talk 1 which inspired him to hold another session. The vote of thanks was presented by the editor-in-chief of Rising Kashmir- Shujaat Bukhaar

Various participants included Gowher Geelani, a renowned journalist, Human rights defender, Khuram Pervez, Parveena Ahanger, founder of APDP, Ijaz-ul-Haq, a columnist at Greater Kashmir.

Valley girl suffers from mysterious disease

❖ **Ubeer Naqushbandi**

SRINAGAR: Kashmiri doctors have found a girl suffering from hereditary sensory autonomic neuropathy (HSAN) — a disorder with insensitivity to pain and almost exclusive among Jews which is the first ever case in the whole of India.

The four-year-old girl from north Kashmir's Bandipora district had developed a painless ulceration on the right hip and fever which were unresponsive to drugs.

While the physical development of

the girl was found appropriate for her age, doctors said she had no history of feeding problems or seizures.

"I think this is the first case reported from India. There is no treatment for this disorder but the cases reported in some parts of the world have been found not fatal," said Imran Majid, Associate Professor, Dermatology, Government Medical College, Srinagar.

Dr Majid reported the case after the girl was referred to him by Valley psychiatrist Arshad Hussain. The girl bites her tongue, lips and fingers, her mother had reported to the doctors.

"This (biting) used to lead to injuries on accessible sites and, as a result, the child had scarring at multiple sites on the body," Dr Majid said.

He said the patient's mother also gave the history of absence of crying in the child in response to painful stimuli such as on receiving injections or even after self-inflicted injuries.

The HSAN is used to describe a group of inherited disorders that are associated with sensory dysfunction, including reduced reflexes, altered pain and temperature perception.

An extensive literature has been

written by researchers on the ancestry of Kashmiris from the Lost Tribes of Israel. In Kashmir, various places are called with Israeli names such as Har Nevo, Beit Peor, Pisga, Heshubon. It is also true with names of people and villages.

Kashmiri researchers are of the opinion that many inhabitants of Kashmir are the descendants of the Lost Tribes who were exiled in 722 BCE. The priest, Kitro, in his book, the General History of the Mughal Empire, said that Kashmiri people are the descendants of the Israelites.

AVIAN VISITORS KEEP THEIR TRYST WITH KASHMIR.

❖ **Aaqib Hyder**

SRINAGAR: Keeping up with their tryst with Kashmir valley, over 7 lakh migratory birds of different species have arrived at different wetlands of Kashmir valley this year so far.

The wildlife warden for wetlands Rauf Zargar said that, the number of the migratory birds is expected to increase in coming days.

He said that, Hokersar wetland had received the maximum number of birds.

"Above 7 lakh migratory birds from different countries have visited Kashmir wetlands and water bodies as of now. Majority of these birds have arrived at Hokersar wetland. We are expecting more in coming days as the weather conditions have been extremely favourable," Rouf Zargar said.

"Initially it was feared that the number of visiting birds may witness a decline and there was a dearth due to prolonged dry spell in the month of December last year. However, the valley received good amount of snowfall and weather remained favourable and good precipitation was witnessed. Therefore, the number is expected to go up

further", he further added.

Abdul Rauf said, that all initiatives including feeding facilities were being taken into consideration to ensure an infrastructure for the avian guests besides checking on the poaching of the same.

"We provide the birds with artificial feeds during the core winter period. We take cognizance of every poaching report that is conveyed to us." Rouf Zargar said.

Some of the species that have visited in huge numbers so far include Common Tailes, Pintailles and Mallards.

Every year with the onset of winter season, wetlands in Kashmir are flocked by migratory birds from several continents which include Central Asia, Siberia, Europe, Philippines and many other places to avoid the harsh winter across these continents.

The arrival of the birds indeed adds to the attraction and beauty of the wetlands. The birds stay at the wetlands which include Hygam, Hokersar, Gangbug, Pampore, Munibugh and other water bodies of Dal lake, Wullar lake etc. Birds start arriving in the month of October and stay at wetlands till the month of March.



❖ **Zakir Zakir**

KARGIL: A village in Kargil got electrified after 70 years of Independence. People for the first time saw an electric bulb glowing in their homes. "No village in my constituency is left without electricity". This was stated by Advocate Haji Amir the acting chief executive councilor LAHDC Kargil while inaugurating Nano Grid electricity at Stakchey Brok and Fooker Bodh Kharbu of Kargil district.

He told that in view of approaching Ladakhi New Year (Losar), DC Nano Grid Technology has been used to electrify two un-electrified villages which is a gift to the villagers.

Expressing satisfaction on the electrification of all villages in his constituency, chief guest Advocate Mohammad Amir said, "We must appreciate the efforts of our leaders for their initiatives to develop far-flung areas like Stakchey Brok."

Stakchey Brok is situated at an altitude of 14,000 feet above mean sea level. It has been electrified with three grids of 250kW, 100kW

and 70kW capacity. Three grids of 70kW, one grid of 250kW and five grids of 100kW capacity have been installed in Fookar Bodh Kharboo and every household can now have seven DC LED bulbs.

These two projects were inaugurated by acting CEC and Executive Councilor, LAHDC, Kargil, Advocate Mohammad Amir who is also the councilor representing Stakchey Khangral constituency. He was accompanied by Project Director of Kargil Renewable Energy Development Agency (KREDA), Kacho Ahmad Ali Khan.

While talking to the villagers, Kacho Ahmad Ali Khan said, that Chairman of J&K Legislative Council, Haji Anayat Ali is himself prioritizing the electrification of these villages. "The project was delayed due to the lack of response from the sponsoring company. Haji Anayat Ali is now sponsoring the electrification of these villages," he added.

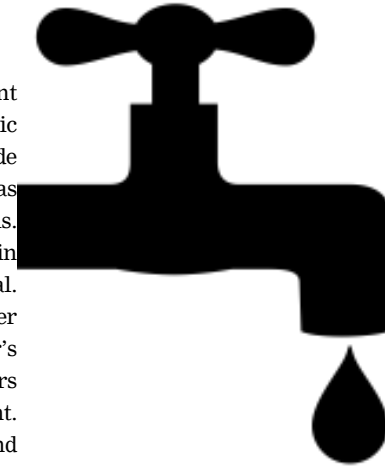
However the villagers have warmly welcomed the initiative taken by KREDA and the LAHDC Kargil for redressing their plights which they were facing since decades.

Shahgund Sans Drinking Water

❖ **Mudasir Majeed**

BANDIPORA: The PHE department has come under intense public criticism over its failure to provide potable drinking water to the areas that are facing huge water crisis. The department has also failed in keeping water tanks functional. The much talked Shahgund water supply scheme in north Kashmir's Bandipora district, 30 kilometers from Srinagar city is a case in point.

The water tanks of the Shahgund village have been going under construction for years now. It is said that 60 lakh rupees were approved on its structure by the government;



although adequate amount has been granted for its construction, its still incomplete the locals allege.

"We have seen construction going since long, they further added Chief engineer Kashmir division is completely ignoring us and would be responsible for any water born disease as my village continues to drink polluted water." Ishfaq Bashir, a local resident said.

"The main issue of inhabitants of Shahgund is water, we are being forced to drink contaminated water" said Halima begum, a local resident.

When the Reporter contacted with Chief Engineer Sumbal Mohammad Shafi he said, "I have recently joined the office, let me collect the due information then I will talk to you."

Centre Approves 2 tunnel projects to improve intra-state connectivity



❖ **Shahbaz Qutab**

SRINAGAR: Giving the intra-state connectivity a major push, the Union Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has accorded in principle approval for work on two ambitious tunnel projects viz Mughal Road tunnel and Singhpora-Vailoo tunnel and ordered that DPRs for both the projects be prepared at the earliest.

It has also ordered that bidding process for the Rs. Eight thousand crore Zojila tunnel to be finalized quickly and work on the tunnel be started.

These decisions were taken in a meeting Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti had with Union Minister for Road Transport & Shipping. She strongly pitched for improving connectivity in the State in view of the harsh climatic conditions and inaccessibility of certain areas in the State.

The Chief Minister, apprised the union Minister about the necessity of constructing these tunnels; not only to improve all weather connectivity within the State but also keep the different regions connected throughout the year.

"It will help us to travel safely and spare our time. It will improve connectivity between two states and is a step towards development" a member of transport union said.

Mehbooba Mufti also flagged the issue of constructing ring roads in Jammu and Srinagar capital cities at the earliest in view of the increasing traffic density. She was informed that all preliminary works including land acquisition were proceeding at fast pace and work on both ring roads was likely to be awarded and started this year. The Chief Minister raised the issue of development and upgradation of a number of other roads including Budhal-Shopian road, Kupwara-Bungus road, Srinagar-Bandipora road, Tral-Pahalgam road, Panikhar-Pahalgam road and other tunnels including Sadhna, Razdan and Chatergalla tunnels and sought expediting the works.

"I welcome this step taken by our CM, it will help to maintain the traffic movement simultaneously and alleviate the traffic mess" R&B National Highway engineer Sudhir Kumar said.

Raees movie: SRK's comeback stardom

❖ **Shahjhan Mughal**

Raees is a romantic thriller directed by Rahul Dholakia. The story is set in the 1980s Gujarat. The director has given a socio-political touch to the movie criticizing the prohibition of alcohol, and illegal drugs in Gujarat. The film tells the story of a cruel and clever bootlegger, whose business is challenged by a tough cop Jaideep Majumdar (Nawazuddin Siddiqui).

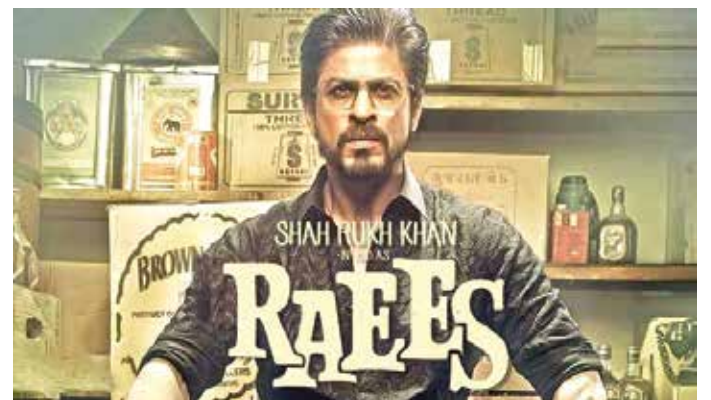
Raees (Shahrukh Khan), the only child of a poor widow, becomes a bootlegger. He starts heaving and smuggling alcohol and becomes the king of business. He falls in love with a girl called Aasiya (Pakistani actress Mahira Khan) and marries her. Raees comes in contact with a don, Musa, in Mumbai and takes monetary help from him.

Raees' philanthropy towards poor people gets him a sizeable followings but the cat and mouse game between the cop and Raees lands him to jail. While in jail, he turns the tables on the administration. He stands for elections and becomes an MLA.

What's interesting in the movie to watch out for Shahrukh with Grey shades after decades and complete pathani look. The chemistry between Shahrukh and Nawaz seem interesting. Classy dialogues further add to the beauty of the movie.

The music is decent, most entertaining song which holds the breath is the chartbuster "Laila Main Laila" and the romantic one "Zaalima". Shahrukh seemed perfect for this role while Mahira – a debutante has done her part well. Direction seemed to lack some good bites as it could have been better than what is produced before the viewers.

The dialogue delivery in the movie is hard hitting, with powerful striking punch lines. Over all the movie isn't a bad one. Though it isn't a 'must watch' it definitely marks Shahrukh's powerful come back.



Former Lecturer Bags “Silver Elephant Award” for Scout and Guides Movement



❖ **Yawar Shafi**

RAJOURI: Adding another feather to Jammu and Kashmir, Assistant State Organizing Commissioner Bharat Scouts and Guides, Mr Muhammad Bashir Shawl, a Retired Lecturer of Thanamandi, Rajouri, has been honoured with the “Silver Elephant Award-2015”

Muhammad Bashir Shawl received this prestigious award from President of India, Pranab Mukherjee at an impressive function held at Darbar Hall in Rashtrapati Bhawan on 5th December, 2016.

The award has been conferred

to Mr. Shawl in recognition of his exemplary leadership and outstanding contribution to Scout/ Guide movement in Jammu and Kashmir.

He utilized opportunities to improve his scouting skills by participating in International Courses and events held in Sri Lanka, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

During his tenure as District Organizer for Scouting, Mr. Muhammad Bashir has inspired large number of adult leaders to undergo training of Unit Leader of Scouts/Guides and arranged Training Programmes.



State Chess Championship held at SK Indoor complex Srinagar

❖ **Arif Nazir**

SRINAGAR: The State Chess Championship organized by All J&K Chess Association was held at Sher-e-Kashmir Indoor Sports Complex Srinagar. Almost 135 players, including 35 girls from the state also participated in the event.

The event started on 31st Dec 2016 and concluded on 4th Jan 2017. The main sponsor of the event was J&K State Sports Council.

It was for the first time that players from Ladakh division and Karnah, Tangdar participated in the championship.

Total 5 rounds under Swiss system were played in the championship.

In senior's category Khalid Amin Gojwari became victorious, while Saqlain Afaq bagged first place in U-19 category.

Irfan Majeed bagged the title in U-17 category, Zubair Ahmad

topped in U-15 category and Syed Mohsin topped in U-13 category.

Ahmad Bin Altaf and Mohammad Gous Bandy won U-11 and U-7 category respectively.

In girls section, Mushinah Farooq bagged first place in U-17, Zobyiah Riyaz topped U-15 category, Mehroz Sajad topped U-13 category while Ambroz Sajad won U-9 title. Mohammad Gous Bandy and Ambroz Saajad were awarded youngest participants.

Khalid Amin Gojwari said, “Being a winner I am happy not only for myself but, for all participants especially young participants who are really playing an important role in inspiring coming generations”.

The General Secretary of All J&K Chess Association, Ashiq Ahmad Kolou said, “We are looking forward to conduct more such events in the State to encourage and inspire the youth of the State.”

SRINAGAR GETS SEASON'S FIRST SNOWFALL

❖ **Musaib Hafiz**

SRINAGAR: The eager wait for season's first snowfall in Srinagar has finally ended as fresh snowfall lashed the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. Joyous residents started to feel the fresh snowflakes on their palms. The snowfall provided much relief from the intense cold as mercury rose due to cloud cover.

The younger generation is also trying to add little variations to the existing snow sculpture. They have come up with interesting and innovative snow art ideas.

As the snow gathered everywhere, children came out to play and enjoy the snow. They also made snowballs and indulging in friendly snow fights. People

shaped dolphins, Shikaras, cakes, elephants and other imaginable shapes and designs out of the accumulated snow. A new wave of self-proclaimed artists emerged from everywhere to try their hands at snow art and showcase their talent. Braving the cold, they shoveled the snow, delicately crafting art pieces which were appreciated widely after their photos began to spread on the social media.

The recent snowfall had much more than snow in store for the people. A thick, white film of snow covering the mountains, gardens and by-lanes came as a breather for the entire valley, ending the longest dry spell in recent times. The white blanket of snow spread happiness among people, for a while making them forget the past

Lal Chowk vendors relocated back to SRTC yard

❖ **Farooz Ahmad**

SRINAGAR: Barely six months after their forcible evictions from the SRTC yard here, authorities on Tuesday relocated the street vendors of Lal Chowk at the same spot.

However, the vendors have sought assurance from authorities to ensure that they would not be forcefully evicted again in future.

“Srinagar Municipal Corporation authorities informed us that we can shift back to the SRTC yard and we shifted back,” said Zahoor Ahmad Bhat, President Young Man Footpath Union Lal Chowk.

“Last year, we were forcefully evicted from the yard by the authorities,” Bhat said adding

the union demands permanent rehabilitation.

In May 2016, street vendors and hawkers who had occupied footpaths and roadsides in Lal Chowk and its adjacent markets were shifted to SRTC bus yard.

However, authorities closed that market during last year's unrest as they had refused to open the market. Hawkers alleged that their belongings were taken away during unrest and they claimed that the market was closed without any prior notice.

Commissioner Srinagar Municipal Corporation, Shafqat Khan told MERC Times, “The Lal Chowk vendors have been completely rehabilitated to SRTC yard now”

CM's super 50 coaching back again

❖ Ayad Ullah

SRINAGAR: Chief Minister's Super50 coaching scheme is underway for the second consecutive year at G.H.S.S. Hyderpora Srinagar . The classwork commenced from January the first 2017 and 250 students across the valley are attending the classes .

"Renowned faculty from across the valley has been selected for the teaching purpose and modern facilities like smart classes, central heating system are provided", said the principal of Hyderpora branch. "The coaching scheme is entirely free except for the minor heating charges. The scheme has attracted a bulk of talented students across the

valley." He added.

The scheme was started by former CM Mufti Mohammed syed in 2016 and is implemented through J.K.B.S.E.

20 Students who underwent coaching under the scheme grabbed seats in various Medical and engineering colleges in 2016.

Forest department fails to curb encroachment on forest land in shopian, Pulwama



❖ Syed shahriyar

PULWAMA: Thousands of kanals of forest land have been illegally converted into arable land and orchards in Pulwama and Shopian districts by the villagers adjoining the forest and the forest department is still showing laxity in curbing these encroachments.

The villages which have been involved in encroachment of the forest land include Achagoza, Chewa, Abhama, Sangherwani, Dunoodu and Underwali.

Sources said, that the encroachments were being done on a systematic pattern in which first a temporary residential structure is constructed and then after the land surrounding the structure is fenced which is ultimately dug and made usable for other purposes. Then after some months they start

mobilizing construction material and construct a permanent house, in the forest.

"After constructing a temporal house, the residents bribe the in-charge official" said a resident of Abhama village, who wished anonymity.

Sources said that most of the employees deputed to guard the forest seldom attend their offices.

"The forest employees rarely fulfill their duties towards the department.

It is pertinent to mention that some people in these villages were allotted one Kanal each per family by government long ago but today every household owns more than hundred kanals in these villages.

"Every household in the area which is supposed to have one kannal of land, has illegally occupied more than a hundred

kanals now and is doing everything to acquire more." said a social activist.

While admitting huge encroachment, Divisional Forest Officer Shopian, Mohd Ashraf Kotoo said, that he has been given the charge of this forest division two years back as it was a part of Pirt Panjal forests. He, however, said that they have curbed encroachment since then.

"We have checked the intensity of encroachments in the area and very few incidents have come to my notice since then. I will myself visit the area and would act strictly against the erring persons." he added.

He further said that he had already done an eviction drive in Dubjan area of Shopian and would follow the same way in these areas also.

Power woes in Baramulla



❖ Qulsoom Beigh

BARAMULLAH: With the growing demand for electricity; the frequent and erratic power supply in kunzar of baramulla district is giving a real tough time to the locals.

Though the power department claims that it has given a surplus power for three years, the unscheduled power cuts have become routine in the area. The overloading of the feeders is considered a main reason.

Among the most affected villages are Manglora , Wussan , Waripora , Hard Bani , Taki Batpora.

Many of these villages suffering from power cuts stretch for five to 12 hours. "We have been experiencing unscheduled power cuts for the past many years. Power cuts at night hurt the most as one cannot study well and its more difficult when we have a patient at home." said Irfan Lone, a resident of Manglora .

"Power cuts without prior intimation have been causing a lot of inconvenience." said Sakeena resident of Wussan.

Candles and solar lanterns come handy. The dependence on candles, meanwhile, has raised. People say the trend is adding to pollution..

Chief Engineer, Ab Ahad , said, " The situation is the result of less power supply to our nearby stations. Though problems occur in power lines, it is usually rectified once we receive information".