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Potential tourist places neglected in Pulwama, Shopian

❖ Ali Saifudin

SRINAGAR: Despite their beautiful meadows, lush green forests and bestowed with rivulet of Romush, a main tributary of river Jehlum, Kehrut, Namlan, Shidak and other places in Shopian and Pulwama districts have failed to attract tourists as government has been apathetic to them and has done nothing to bring them on tourist map of the valley till date.

These places are located to west and south west of south Kashmir's Pulwama and Shopian districts and have everything that a nature loving person would wish to see and enjoy. These places can also become best tracking spots in Jammu and Kashmir as there are a number of lakes and springs present these forests which provide water that is an elixir for life.

The beauty of these places can also be judged by their location as they are in pirpanjal mountain range and fall in vicinity to newly developed tourist spot Yusmarg in north and Mughal road in South.

"These places are located between world known health resort Gulmarg in the north and historic Mughal road in the south and can become an important link for two different areas for trekkers," said Mohammad Jamaal Gors, a resident of Sigharwani.

The places Shidak is also known destination of Gujjar and Bakerwal communities and can attract large number of religious tourists from across the South Asia.

Most of the meadows in these forests have become abode of seasonal migrants who along with their families, migrate to these meadows for about six months and return only when winter season sets in.

"The seasonal migration has proven detrimental for the forests as most of these people indulge in timber smuggling as they indiscriminately cut down trees during their period of stay," said a teacher from the area, who wished to be anonymous, adding that these people could have made fortunes in these forests if they would have used it judiciously.

He also alleged that lack of interest on the part of government is polluting the beauty, serenity and tranquility.

However, Director Tourism Kashmir, Talat Parvez said that government has sanctioned eight crore rupees for the development of the places falling in Mughal road circuit.

"We have started construction of tourist bungalows in the Dubjan and have notified two camping sites in the area," he said.

He further said that they were yet to get permission from wild life authorities for constructions at seven other places which would be taken soon and the areas would be soon on tourist map.

Shadra Sharief: Haven of Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah

❖ Hasina Khan

Srinagar: Shadhra shrief is one of such shrines popular in Jammu. It is situated in the Rajouri district of Jammu. It is associated with great saint Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah, 19th century. Baba Ghulam Shah reached this village in 1765 and found the setting of this village perfect for meditation. It is believed that Gulab Singh got this shrine constructed in the honor of this great saint.

Shadhra shrief is surrounded by beautiful mountains from all directions. Manuwal Nikka Mountain adjoins this shrine from East while Kopra and Paglanalli lie in the west. North of this shrine is surrounded by Sirhi and Jammu Chmarer Galli. The shrine looks

astonishingly beautiful with a small stream flowing besides it. The architecture of the shrine is a mix of Kashmiri and Multani, the slope that leads to this shrine is decorated with Mughal styled garden. It enhances the beauty of the shrine. A famous tree near the shrine, bears fruits all over the year and it is called the Sada Bahar tree. It is believed that the fruits do not get decomposed with time and can be stored for longer periods without refrigeration.

A langar is held at the ziarat everyday to feed thousands of people. The Urs of the Sufi Saint is celebrated on 10th of Muharram every year with great devotion, people irrespective of castes come to take part in these celebrations.

TRENDY TILLA

❖ Shahina Rahim

Tilla, an ethnic craft of embroidering cloth using threads of gold and silver was under threat during the past years. It was mostly restricted to married women and the trousseau of brides. But from the last two years, it is back in the markets and is riding the popularity waves again.

A young girl in her 20's says that she "realized that tilla is something that can be worn by women after marriage, I mean I always used to associate it with elderly women and brides."

Young folks have joined in hands to preserve this incredible ethnic craft.

"As designers began to showcase it in various fashion shows, it started to be in vogue in Kashmir as well," she adds.

"Machine-made tilla is easily available at cheaper prices, that has increased its popularity," says Arshie a University student.

"It's elegant and it is associated with indigenous Kashmiri fashion.... I would always prefer a blend of two", she adds.

Busy in his work, Mohammad Shafi, a shopkeeper in the city Centre Lal Chowk, deals with Tilla embroidery, he believes that it is one of the famous arts of Kashmir.

"It has seen many highs and lows. In the past years, it had gone into darkness. Its demand was very less. Only married women and brides would buy this stuff which lessened the demand of this work. But from last year it has made a comeback



in the market," he says adding that now not only women but also young girls are interested in this embroidery.

Afshan Lone, Journalism student believes that she likes it because it has a unique look. "I feel it joins one culturally it's something that will always remain in trend. I feel it will never be outdated. Tilla has also been used by Manish Malhotra in his collection which indeed shows its popularity."

Working in her kitchen, Wahida Pandith, a homemaker says, "I believe our posterity should keep on reconstructing the trend of Tilla work. It is a beautiful way of preserving our culture and standing at par with others in the fashion world."

Rumi : The Soul Healer

❖ Humaira

SRINAGAR: It was in the year 2007, Professor Abdul Wahid, the then VC of Kashmir University inaugurated the famous Maulana Rumi Gate. This name takes us to the streets of Konya in Turkey. Its name holds great significance in the heart of poetry lovers. It is the name that has stood the test of time and emerged victorious. This name gives hope to carry on despite all odds.

Rumi Gate prompts one to think about the person whose name has been chosen for this Gate. He was a wealthy man and a genius theologian. His life changed dramatically after encountering Shamas of Tabrez.

“You came suddenly and stole three things from me,

The patience from my heart,
the colour from my face, And the sleep from my eyes.” Shamas, a wandering Dervish instigated a spark in him that made him an impassioned seeker of love. He became his teacher and their companionship made him to say,

“Sad kitaboh sad waraq dar nar kun

Jaan o dill ra jaanib e dilldar

qun”

(throw all your books in the fire
And turn with heart and soul to your beloved)

He became a poet of love and produced two great works “Deewan e Shamas” and “Masnavi Mewlana Rum.” His message has the element of universality in it where the source is one but the means to reach may be different.

Rumi’s message of love and universal brotherhood holds prime relevance in contemporary times when the world has been held hostage to the demon of Capitalism, with chaos all over people under serious distress. Consumerism has proven detrimental for the world. Humanity is being crushed every day in the name of religion where fundamentalism reigns. He tries to show us our glory. He shows us the beauty in ourselves and in others.

Passing through the Rumi Gate, we are being led by Mewlana Jalaludin Rumi to a state of existence which is free from the problems that grip mankind today worldwide and he shows us an immortal life untouched by disappointment.

KU JOINS PRESTIGIOUS HIMALAYAN UNIVERSITY CONSORTIUM

❖ Sharoz Khushal

SINAGAR: The University of Kashmir has become a member of the prestigious Himalayan University Consortium (HUC), a vast network for sustainable mountain development of the Hindukush Himalayan region.

Vice-Chancellor, Prof Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi signed a formal HUC Charter in this regard, during an international-level conference in New Delhi.

The Consortium is an international 33-member University network for education and research for sustainable mountain development of the Hindukush Himalayan region covering many large, vulnerable, and fragile ecosystems in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. The HUC vision includes contributing to enhanced collaboration among the universities of the region and promote centers of excellence on key areas relevant to it.

The aim of the HUC is also to build a dynamic mountain knowledge partnership among universities to promote regional cooperation on research and learning.

The MoU was signed during an international-level conference organized by the Indian National Science Academy (NSA) at New Delhi where the participants included 20 Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of universities from eight regional member countries, as well as representatives from a number of other regional and international organizations interested and engaged in

university-level education and research in the region.

In his address at the Charter-signing ceremony, Prof Andrabi assured the HUC partners that Kashmir University would contribute significantly towards achieving the mission and vision of the consortium. “KU is keen to share its knowledge resources with other HUC partners for judicious and informed management of the mountain resources in the HKH region,” he said.

Prof Shakil Romshoo, Head of the Earth Sciences Department at KU—who spearheaded the efforts of the University for international cooperation with HUC and other international organizations—said the HUC-KU cooperation shall open up various collaborative opportunities for the University’s faculty and students in a wide range of areas including climate change, water resources, glaciology, ecological monitoring, high altitude research, bio-diversity, transboundary issues and ecotourism.

The conference titled ‘Mobilizing University Research For Tackling Water, Climate Change and Adaptation Challenges in the Hindu Kush Himalayan Region’ was organized with the active support of the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India.

The HUC, apart from 33 full members from eight regional countries, has 10 associate members mostly from Australia, Europe and North America.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) currently hosts the HUC Secretariat.

❖ Peer Viqar

Srinagar : University’s Directorate of Internal Quality Assurance (DIQA), organized a day long workshop on workshop on ‘4th amendment in UGC regulations on appointment and promotion of teachers at conference hall of the Ghandi Bhawan , which was attended by the faculty of the University.

Kashmir University Vice-Chancellor Prof Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi while presiding over the inaugural function of a workshop on ‘4th amendment in UGC regulations on appointment and promotion of teachers’, said his endeavour hasn’t been to make big building structures “but make things simple and transparent so that the society stops asking us questions and that we address our stakeholders’ concerns beforehand.”

He said the University is mulling to have a “better way of teacher assessment in place

which shall be based on a broader 10-point scale.” “We are holding a meeting of all concerned in this regard and later put the proposed mechanism for feedback from different stakeholders,” he said.

He said the University has been prompt enough to have an online application form, in tune with 4th amendment in UGC regulations, in place.

“We are also putting in place an online Travel Desk, online system of purchases, a paperless system for varied transactions while taking several other transparency measures as part of University’s commitment to gradually have a fool-proof system of governance,” he said, complimenting the DIQA team for working hard on its academic assignments.

The workshop was, apart from teachers, attended by several KU officers and officials, apart from a team from Directorate of IT&SS.

DIQA holds workshop on ‘4th Amendment in UGC regulations’

Work on Jehangir Chowk-Rambagh flyover resumes, after five months

❖ Furqan

SUMBAL: The prestigious Rs 369 crore Jehangir Chowk-Rambagh Expressway Corridor (flyover) project will be completed by November 2017, an official from Economic Reconstruction Agency said.

The construction work on the flyover resumed on February, after remaining suspended for more than five month due to prevailing unrest in Kashmir Valley. Earlier, work on it was stalled for more than three months in wake of September 2014 floods. An official told that after persuading the laborers and engineers affiliated with the flyover, the construction work was resumed on Saturday

The work on 2.42 km flyover, which begun in 2013 and was funded by the ADB, was scheduled for completion in March 2017. While 61 percent of the project cost had to come from the ADB, the remaining funding was to be taken care of through the Prime Minister's Reconstruction Program

for J&K. So far, Rs 130 crore has been spent on the project and the work completed has been 54 percent.

Another official from ERA said that that the flyover will save approximately Rs 20 crores annually once it is completed. "Our detailed survey suggests that the saving will mostly come from the fuel saved by reduction in traffic jams in the area from Jehangir Chowk to Rambagh." The project was expected to be completed in three years time. The original deadline for the completion of the flyover was September 2016. "Due to 2014 devastating floods which resulted in damage to most of the equipment and fleeing of workforce to their respective States, the deadline had been renewed to March 2017.

Once completed, the 2.4-km flyover is expected to reduce the journey time from Jehangir Chowk to Rambagh from 15 minutes to just 2.5 minutes and will go a long way in reducing the traffic congestion in the area.

Protests over closure of Mehjoor Nagar bridge



❖ Farheen Qureshi

SRINAGAR: Authorities closed the Mehjoor Nagar Bridge for both traffic and pedestrian movement, sparking protests in south city areas. The bridge was closed for heavy motor vehicles (HMTVs) after one of its supporting pillars collapsed yesterday.

The bridge connects Syed Abad Soiteng, Lasjan, Padshahibagh, Vethpora, and its adjacent areas with the city-centre. Hundreds of commuters were left stranded after the bridge was closed.

The closure also caused massive traffic jam at Padshahibagh, Rambagh, Jawahar Nagar and other adjacent areas.

Locals at Syed Abad Soiteng, Lasjan and other

adjacent areas held peaceful protests, giving authorities ultimatum of 24 hours to either re-open the bridge or complete the under-construction bridge within next 48 hours.

Later, various affected localities appeared at Press Enclave here, staged protests, demanding re-opening of the bridge.

"We must have some intelligent officers who are able to know the consequences of their decisions. Scores of patients couldn't reach the hospitals, students missed their classes," said Akbar Khan, a locale.

"We have elected the government and therefore we hold R&B Minister responsible for our inconvenience," said Bashir Mir of Mehjoor Nagar.

"It will take five working months to complete the bridge," said Vinod Sharma, ERA Chief Executive Officer while as Abdul Hameed, Chief Engineer, R&B said the bridge would not be re-opened.

"Our priority is to save human lives. People have to understand that bridge is unsafe and we have closed it in public interest. I have also informed the concerned minister about its closure. It is not going to re-open, I am telling you," he added.

However, he said that they would prioritize the completion of under-construction bridge to connect these areas again with the city centre.

Mustafa Abad Residents against protest delay of drainage system



❖ Syed shahriyar

SRINAGAR: Residents of Mustafa Abad , Sector A , (Abu Bakr lane) HMT are up in arms against the authorities for their failure in constructing the drainage system in the area.

Locals said with the moderate rain, the roads here turns into cesspool.

"During rainy days, the roads of our area become inundated and gives tough time to the pedestrians," said a resident.

"Uniform of our children gets dirty because of accumulated rain water on the roads. Government has not bothered to construct the drains in our area," IP Singh another resident of the area told this reporter

The Drainage Problem has been in many of the Areas in Srinagar we are Already on work, the delay in the work is due to the Harsh Weather in the valley with continuous Snowfall's and Rains As soon as the Weather improves our people with get to the work Said an official from the R&B Departement.

AFGAN CAPS – A NEW RAGE IN KASHMIR

❖ **Hirra Azmat**

ANANTNAG: The bustling and cheerful atmosphere of the University campus always acts as a mood-maker for me. This morning I entered the University Campus with a sullen face. The momentary lack of sleep had dropped my serotonin and dopamine levels to an all-time low. I slackened my pace with no visible hurry. My slow speed made me look closely at the passing students and their gets ups. A tall sturdy guy with a chocolate brown Afgan cap and ash grey Loafers walked ahead of me. Somehow the brown colour and neat folds in his cap arrested my attention. Everything around him became a blur. I felt it was a newly brought cap. Perhaps the newness and traditional touch in the cap held me in awe. He kept walking ahead till we reached the Humanities Block. I saw a group of boys and girls sitting on the dusty wide stairs of the department. They fondly waved at him. He raced towards them. They greeted him with hoots and whistles. I heard them singing some lines from a popular Bollywood number “AfganJalebi, MashookaFarebi, ghayalhaiteadeewana”. The AfganCapguy was all smiles. So I was no exception. His friends too fancied the cap like me. By the time I reached the department my happy hormones were back. The

Afgan Cap magic had actually worked. What exactly is an Afgan Cap? Where has it come from? How is it catching up with Kashmiri youth? I became curious to know the answers and surprisingly my new found obsession added to my knowledge of caps.

The Pakol or Pakul Cap is an Afghan / Pakistani headdress of woven wool (Sheep or Camel wool) from Nuristan / Chitral. Afghan refugees in Pakistan began after their expulsion from their homeland to wear this cap and so the Pakol soon became the symbol of resistance in Afghanistan. First of Pakol was more worn by Pashtuns. By Ahmad Shah Massoud but was increasingly becoming a symbol of the Northern Alliance.

The Pakol is a 15 - 20 cm long tube made of woven wool to which a round lid is placed. The wool is sewn in several places to wrinkles, giving the Pakol a great shape. On the underside of the lid of Pakol is fed. This “wool tube” is then rolled up to individual taste. The Pakol caps mostly come in Black, Beige, Light Brown, Brown, Ivory, Off White colours.

I always believed that caps and hats are worn to seek protection from cold and look stylish at the same time. But this quote by Frank Sinatra makes me re think.

““Cock your hat – angles are attitudes.” -

Uri sans civic facilities, people suffer

❖ **Idrees Bukhtiyar**

URI (BARAMULLA): Residents of border town Uri in north Kashmir’s Baramulla district are up in arms against Municipal Committee Uri (MCU) for failing to provide the town with civic facilities.

Residents told MERC Times that they have to face a lot of inconvenience due to the non-availability of public toilets in the town.

“With the lack of public toilets, people are either forced to defecate in the open or request shopkeepers to use their toilets,” said Muneer Ahmad, a shopkeeper.

“Women are suffering, too. There is not even a single toilet in the entire town, which shows the officials’ apathy,” he said.

The residents also complain about lack of parking space in the town.

“Dozens of vehicles are parked on the roadside every day as there is no parking slot in the town. It always results in traffic mess and day long jams,” said a delegation of locals.

According to Municipality officials in Uri, around two dozen streetlights were installed in the year 2005.

“The lights were damaged in the same year following the devastating earthquake. Since then no official has paid any attention to restore them,” they said.

The General Secretary Traders Federation (TFU) Uri, Qayoom Chalkoo said that the department has turned a blind eye towards the development of the town.

“It is not only the traders but locals also are facing a lot of problems. We have approached the concerned department many a times in this regard but nothing has been done,” Chalkoo alleged.

Executive Officer Municipal Committee Uri, Firdous Ahmad said that the department needs land for the construction of such facilities. “We will provide compensation to those who will give their land for construction but nobody among locals is willing to.”

ReT teachers protest against government, demand release of salaries

❖ **Aneesa Khan**

SRINAGAR: Demanding immediate release of their salaries, the Rehber-e-Taleem (ReT) teachers of North Kashmir’s Bandipora district carried out a protest march against the government for failing to release their monthly salaries.

The protesters holding banners assembled at Nishat Park and marched towards Bandipora’s mini-secretariat to mark a protest against the

government.

The protesting ReT teachers were demanding release of their salaries, which they said have been pending for the past seven months.

“It is unfortunate that despite serving the department with dedication, the government has withheld our salaries and are paying no heed to our sufferings,” the ReT teachers said. The protesters said that when they approached the higher authorities, they were promised help but so far nothing has been done in this regard.

Water Bodies dying a silent death, reveals data

❖ **Ather Shah**

SRINAGAR: The State of Jammu and Kashmir has enormous number of fresh water bodies . The two most famous and attractive among which are the Dal Lake and Nageen Lake. The data collected by the J&K Pollution Control Board (PCB) and submitted to the J&K High Court has revealed that the self-purifying capacity of the Dal and Nigeen lakes at many spots has deteriorated as during monitoring the dissolved oxygen level in these two water bodies was found to be on the lower side, that is below the normal average.

In its previous directions, the J&K High Court had directed the Pollution Control Board (PCB) to regularly monitor the lake

waters and take samples for determining the water quality.

In last year April, The HC had directed the PCB to collect fresh samples from the Sewage Treatment Plants around the Dal Lake, including the STPs set up by the Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), Soura, Hotel Centaur Lake View, SKICC, and Grand Palace as the board had informed the court that the biochemical oxygen levels in the water samples collected from the Hotel Grand Palace and SKIMS, Soura, were found to be in excess of the permissible limit.

In its report before the High Court, the PCB has submitted that the water quality of the Dal and Nigeen Lake was monitored for dissolved oxygen levels up to the second

fortnight of October 2016.

“Among the monitoring stations, the water quality of Dal and Nigeen Lake in respect of dissolved oxygen levels was found on a lower side near STPs of Habak, Nishat Lam and Ashai Bagh Bridge,” the PCB report said.

As explained in the report, the quantity of the dissolved oxygen level determines the self-purifying capacity of the lake water. Consequently, concentrations of dissolved oxygen level above 5mg/litre indicates good water quality and the concentrations below it indicates degraded self-purifying capacity of the lake waters.

“In the report it has been further stated that the average concentration of the dissolved oxygen level in the Dal and

Nigeen Lake ranges between 4.3 to 7.0 mg/litre, which would otherwise mean that at some places the self-purifying capacity of the water bodies is not satisfactory, having concentration less than 5mg/litre,” a division bench of the High Court observed in its orders today.

Concerned as well as feeling alarmed over the revelations of the report, the High Court has now directed the Pollution Control Board to file a compliance report before December 26, 2016, specifying therein the places where the self-purifying capacity of the water bodies is less than the normal capacity.

The court in its order further expressed its displeasure over the “apathy” shown by the Lakes and Water Ways Development Authorities.

The shock of denied parenthood

❖ **Irfan Trambo**

SRINAGAR: With his remarkable ability to remain in the news, Karan Johar has fashioned a powerful personal brand that is, for the most part, celebrated in the media and among the chattering classes.

Recently, he added another feather to his brimming cap by announcing that he had become a father to two children via surrogacy. While such events cannot be planned, some saw the timing of the announcement as portentous, acting as a reminder to the government to return its divisive Surrogacy Regulation Bill to the limelight.

The Bill, which had come to the national centre stage last year due to its strident advocacy by Sushma Swaraj, got lost in the melee of demonetisation.

With the release of his new book, in which he outed himself as gay without, in a style only he can carry off, saying it in as many words, Johar's becoming a parent focuses attention on exactly the demographic that the proposed Bill targets.

Only heterosexual couples who cannot bear children will be allowed to opt for altruistic surrogacy, the kind where no money changes hands. Men like Johar will be placed

firmly beyond the pale, a possibility that may have forced his hand to opt for surrogacy at this time

Everyone agrees that surrogacy needs to be regulated. There is too much money riding on it -- a 2012 CII study pegged the market at \$2 billion, a number that would have substantially increased in the interim.

Social activists have also spoken about the rights of the surrogate, a group comprising mostly poor women who rent their wombs to meet urgent financial needs. There is much scope for exploitation in such a setup and regulation can ensure that things remain above board.

But to ban all commercial surrogacy and to restrict surrogacy to a small class of individuals is to take things too far.

Some in the government have tried painting the Bill as an attempt to get more Indians to adopt. While that is a laudable goal, the government's move smacks of the kind of mai-baap mentality that it had promised it would refrain from. Why should the government decide what sort of family one wants to raise?

Worse, the government's move to ban single men and women from surrogacy will eliminate a large group, including LGBT persons,

from raising children who are related to them by blood.

In India, any debate involving LGBT rights is immediately branded elitist, given we are a country still reeling from crushing poverty. But the Bill, and its intent, raise vital questions related not just to the frequently debated rubric of human rights, but also to another, less legally enforceable idea: empathy.

If the government took a less dim view of homosexuality, it would realise that enforcing moral codes on a beleaguered minority will further marginalise a community that already suffers the consequences of its irrevocable condition.

Remember that the surrogacy Bill was first introduced in the aftermath of Tusshar Kapoor announcing that he had become a parent via surrogacy. To imagine the government's move in this regard as a reactionary blowback against what it conceives as immorality run amok is not far-fetched.

It is customary, but also somewhat facile, to condescend to these concerns, to portray them as orthodox, worries drowning in the fear of an unknown moral universe.

Indeed, the modern gay rights movement has plumbed the other

extreme, presenting gayness as something special and worth celebrating. Between these two views stands a seemingly unconquerable chasm, as public debate in India around surrogacy has shown. Empathy, from both sides, can issue light.

It is a manifest fallacy, albeit one with compassionate roots, that gayness is special. Anything that involves constant negotiation and vast silence cannot be, and gay persons will be the first to tell you the execrable toll their sexuality takes on them.

I often wonder if perhaps religions decreed homosexuality as sinful not for nebulous moral reasons but to send out a cautionary message about its capacity for inducing mind-shifting trauma.

What LGBT persons can work with is kindness -- not disdain or celebration. Allowing them to raise families will make a world of difference to their psychological state. The inability to have children with the person you love is a foundational shock of being gay.

Whether and when LGBT persons in India will be able to have partners is a matter stuck in the courts. Meanwhile, the government can let them grasp at straws by permitting them the joys of parenthood.

Television Was His Guide

❖ **Qulsoom Beigh**

SRINAGAR: Shabir was the elder one amongst his siblings. When asked by his father what he would like to learn to support himself, he went silent. He didn't utter a word.

His furious father kicked him out of house. Thus, Shabir set out to learn how to sustain himself. He complained whenever he wanted to do something, he failed. Once a man offered him to stay with him, and learn the needle handiwork. He did, but one night set everything on fire and burned all the cloth that was brought to be worked upon. He got nervous and left the place without letting know anyone.

After this incident, he began wandering here and there. And then,

one night his father called him, asking him to return home, just because he didn't want to lose his son.

After many days Shabir went to his father's room, and watched a television show on Discovery Channel. After watching the show, Shabir grew more and more interested in it. Finally, Shabir started to spend much of his time watching television.

What interested Shabir, was to watch the tricks and techniques of how to trap and control wild animals, besides this, Shabir also remained in touch with all the day today happening via many news channels. His began to share these happenings with his friends whom he meets every evening at a nearby shop in his village.

One day Shabir heard some

noise. He came out of his house, enquiring about the noise, his mother informed him that there is a Leopard in the nearby village that has injured many people. Curious Shabir rushed to the place, and asked the authorities if he could be of any help. Luckily, authorities allowed him to demonstrate the skills he possessed.

Shabir accepted the challenge and went to the work. He used a trick that he had learned from the television show. luckily, he was successful in trapping the Leopard. The authorities applauded him; acknowledged his skills that saved many lives. After this incident, Shabir, on several other occasions, helped the authorities, and in return they offered him a

permanent job.

The day, when he was offered a permanent job, was the happiest day of his life. That very night, when he was sitting in his room, a voice full of joy and excitement hit his eardrums. It was his father's voice. Now that his son had a job, knew that his son is going to have a safe future.

Shabir now repairs all the electronic gadgets. People from nearby villages come to visit Shabir. They come with their faulty radio sets, irking televisions, and pestering mobile phones. His shop is well known in the village now. It was all possible because he learnt this from television. He was successful now, and the television had a part in his success.

TRAVELOGUE BUNGUS VALLEY

❖ Mir Ikhtlaq

Kulgam: Bungus is an upcoming tourist destination that will soon see its place in the tourist map of the state. It is one of the virgin destinations where the avid travellers look forward to visit.

On every Eid I, along with my friends, travel to different tourist destinations, but 2016 was something memorable and unexpected. As usual we were selecting the places and everyone was suggesting with different options. We were yet to decide the place and suddenly the Kashmir saw a new uprising, once again.

Days passed, situation worsened. Tiredness and laziness was all around. The only way to get out of all this was to relax at some distant place. Travelling to far-off places under these situations is always dangerous, so to avoid the risk, it was better to choose a place which was not too far. Finally we selected Bungus valley, only 30 km from our place, Kalmooa, Kupwara.

Bungus, a lush green meadow is situated in the lap of Himalayas, at an altitude of around 10,000 ft. above the sea level. It is around 160 kms from Srinagar, and just 48 kms from district headquarter Kupwara.

This place is a part of a unique ecological area, comprising mountain and grassland with flora, taiga or coniferous forest. Extreme natural beauty, serenity, splendour are few synonyms associated with the majestic valley of bungus. The valley is surrounded by Rajwar and Mawar in east, Shamsasbury and Dajlungum mountains in the west; Chowkibal, Karnah Gali in the north, and Leepa mountains in the south.

After making necessary arrangements, it was July 18, 2016 that we finally were heading towards valley Bungus. After travelling about two hours in a cab with all the fun through hectic narrow roads, we reached Tee pee at around 10am, a mesmerizing place with beautiful gushing streams. We also came to know from the locals that there is no road connectivity to Bungus from here. It was a proper indication that we had to walk through gentle and steep mountain tracks passing through the surrounding dense pine forests.

Way to Bungus—

Bungus can be reached only by road with two main routes. The one is from Handwara through Mawar. This track can also be reached from Lawoosa, near Nowgam. On the same side there are another pony tracks. The one is known by the name of Kahrasdooni top. From Kahrasdooni top, a circuitous descent followed by another stretch of steep ascent leads to a small meadow known as Pooshdoori. The meadow is located on an altitude of 8290ft. above the sea level. From Pooshdoori the track again descends into large linear meadow known as Nilwan. The meadow is watered by the Mawar Nallah. Another route is through Kralpora, Chowkibal, from north side, which leads to Tee Pee. From Tee Pee through steep mountain tracks it finally reaches to Bungus.

Two hour trek finally leads us to Lokuth Bangus (Small Bangus), a meadow surrounded by low lying mountains. It was time to refresh, and to have some food. I along with my friends took some juice along with spicy nuts that we brought on the way from a shop. After some rest, we headed towards Bada Bangus (Big Bangus), at around 12pm. One can take Horse ride to reach Bada Bangus, But we preferred to trek.

Occupying an estimated area of about 300 sq kms, Bada Bangus consists of a linear elliptical bowl aligned along the east-west axis. The Bada Bangus also contains numerous narrow mountain passes leading into it, locally known as Gallies. In the middle of Bada Bangus, is flowing a gashing stream where we sat for a lunch break. Local people of nearby villages are running some shops to sell Nun Chai, and some other eatables.

We enjoyed our launch consisting of some dishes form Kashmiri Wazwan. We had rice, chicken and salad. Time was nearing 1 pm and our next step was to feel the actual essence of Bungus valley. We enjoyed a gala time with photography and other activities especially moving barefooted on the bog down flour which seemed like dangling on sofa beds.

Time was quickly passing and our next challenge was adventure, the mountain climbing. The nomads there earlier told us that if there is a paradise, it is on the top of that mountain. His words added to our curiosity. We straightaway headed towards that mountain. Climbing was not an easy task, but we took the challenge.

The labyrinthine terrain of the mountain, prone to avalanches, was the most dangerous trek. With slow cautious steps, we finally reached to the peak in two and half hours.

What we saw, our eyes still refuse to believe. There was, as if a green carpet under our feet. The scene was fascinating and worth to keenly observed; gusts of cold breeze was humming from all the directions. The sky seemed, as if resting on the small hills, and the rays from the sun was reflecting like a prism

To imagine, it was presuming that the heaven is here and only here. It was already 5pm, and it was time to descend from the mountain and head back towards home. We reached back home at 10pm.

One thing was clear and we all come to feel that one could not fully enjoy the nature and satisfy his quest at Bangus in one day. One needs to spend two or three days under open sky, to fully relish and taste the very essence of this virgin valley.

Note—

Some areas of the Bungus valley are at a stone throw distance from the line of control between India and Pakistan. Connected by the bus service from Magam in Handwara town (district Kupwara), tourists are recommended to take assistance of travel guides for the conducted tours. There is no adequate infrastructure for the overnight stay and the local transport to Bungus is not so regular. Travel agent's assistance is highly recommended.

J&K to host mega National events



❖ Aaqib Hyder

Srinagar: Department of Youth Services and Sports in the month of february hosted in Cricket and Tennis Ball Cricket, under the aegis of School Games Federation of India.

This was informed by Minister for Youth Services & Sports, IT, Technical Education Molvi Imran Raza Ansari in a meeting chaired by him to take a review of activities of the Youth Services and Sports Department.

While applauding the efforts of all the ranks of Department in channelizing the sports talent of J&K the Minister highlighted the importance of the Department and other such Institutions in shaping the skills of the young boys and girls.

Laying special stress on the mass participation of school children in games and sports, the Minister said that tapping sports talent at tender age is the need of the hour, adding that 'catch them young and coach them' formula is to be adopted.

Sports Minister further said that outstanding talents like Meenal Gupta, Tajamul Islam and others have shown nothing is impossible if one has a will to achieve something bigger.

The Minister directed the senior officers of the Department to ensure the best possible arrangements of boarding, lodging, food, cleanliness and other facilities for the participants of forthcoming National events.

Shiekh Fayaz while briefing the Minister about the activities of the Department, said that conducting the recently held National Level Championship in Football at Jammu has infused a new enthusiasm in the players and is proving helpful in luring talented youth towards sports.

He also informed that the Department has been able to clinch 60 medals by the participation of young student players in various National Level Events during this financial year so far and is expecting more in the forthcoming sports events.

Low wages pose threat to Kashmir's carpet industry: say carpet weaver

❖ Nausheen Naseer

SRINAGAR: Carpet weaving is fast declining in Kashmir due to low wages and health concerns of the weavers who have been forced to turn to other profitable ventures.

Earning as low as Rs 100 per day, the long working hours led to vision problems and backaches among craftsmen engaged in this business.

"My job requires me to work in daylight only but if I fall sick I won't be paid anything. How will I then be able to educate my children and support my family?" said Mohammad Ahmad Mir, a carpet weaver working in a loom in Srinagar's Zainakadal.

As per the official figures at least 200,000 weavers across the region create silk and woolen carpets for buyers in the West and India. But their number is steadily declining and weavers attribute various health problems and the long hours spent



working on the carpets to this trend.

"Earlier carpet weavers were respected and the business was considered profitable but now we are being paid peanuts so this business will soon decline," said Abdul Rahman, another

carpet weaver surviving on pithy Rs 3000 per month.

He says that selling carpets through the middlemen results in low wages for the weavers who do the actual work. "The middlemen provide us with the

material to weave carpets and then pay us according to the work we have done. If they don't like our work then they deduct our wages and pay us even less," adds Rahman.

Kashmiri carpet weavers start working at looms at an early age, which makes it difficult for them to turn to other professions in the middle of their lives. "Although the government has been setting up cooperative groups and other schemes for us nothing seems to be working out," said Salman Shabir, a carpet weaver in the outskirts of Srinagar.

Shabir says that the only solution to the problem is that buyers should buy carpets directly from them and the concept of middlemen should be done away with.

"We have started various beneficial schemes for weavers and other workers and are hoping that their grievances will be solved," said Mushtaq Ahmad, Director, Kashmir Handicrafts.

Illegal extraction of soil in Budgam goes unnoticed

❖ Mahdeesa Altaf

BUDGAM: Illegal extraction of soil is going unabated in Budgam district and its nearby villages, which has led to problems like road destruction, soil erosion and land sliding in winters.

Soil excavation work in Budgam began around 1998 after the work on Qazigund- Baramulla rail project was taken up. Hundreds of trucks, tippers were pressed into work by various construction firms which undertook various works for Railways which was executed by IRCON a mega construction firm that was allotted the Railway contract.

"This whole area used to be covered with orchards, but now you can hardly find any in this area," said Abdul Rahim, a local resident of Lakhripura, a village near Budgam.

Soil extractors have been seen working in broad daylight in villages like Palar and Razwen as well. Locals said that the land mafia uses the Karewa soil for filling water bodies which



are further developed into residential colonies.

Tippers are used to fetch that soil to

other places which led increase in rate of accidents, traffic jams and roads are harshly destroyed by their movement.

One of the local residents said that we can hardly find any other traffic rather than trippers in their area as the number of trippers is very high in summers they have to face dust raised by these.

"We are doing our best to stop such illegal acts our administration is very strict towards such issues. We go to the places where we are informed these things are going on and seize the documents of these job owners," said Mir Altaf Ahmed, DC Budgam. "I request the people to come forward and inform us if they come to know about the soil excavation in their locality so that we can take strict steps," he added.

According to locals there was a beautiful hillock on the outskirts of village Khanda in Chadoora tehsil of Budgam. The same was razed to ground by the construction companies after continuous excavation work. As per section 133-A of J&K Land Revenue Act, excavation of soil is banned for personal gains, but this process is going on unabated in several areas of Budgam district.

SULTAN OF HIS LIFE

❖ **Ahsan Ul Shafi**

SRINAGAR: He would leave early for college to make up for the different life he has been living since birth. Sultan was born without arms but his legs never felt feeble to stop him from catching the bus towards success.

Mohammad Sultan is a counselor at Special Cell for physically challenged students in the University of Kashmir. Born in a north Kashmir village where no one had any concept of special education, Sultan learnt to write with his left foot and today, along with the job, is also pursuing doctorate in Education.

“I just had this interest and inclination towards education.

Children would go to the nearby school and I too would join them. My parents didn’t even expect that I would read but with hard efforts of teachers and a supportive family, I continued. It was difficult initially but I did not stop,” says Sultan, a resident of Wussan Bangil village in Baramulla district.

Sultan completed his schooling alongside the nondisabled children of the village in different government schools and thought he would never be able to join a college as a regular student but a constant motivation from his family would make him travel over 30 kilometers each day to pursue under graduation in humanities at Government Degree

College Bemina.

“When I passed my 12th, I thought it wasn’t possible for me to join college as a regular student. My family compelled me and told me to just give a try. They said if it turns out to be difficult then I can stop and shift to correspondence,” says Sultan. “My family always motivated me and told me nothing is impossible. They created such an environment back home that I never faced any difficulty.”

While Sultan had a supportive family - comprising his parents, two brothers and a sister, to be his source of hope when the world seemed dark; the journey outside the confines of home and his

Ramban turns into garbage dump, MCR unmoved



❖ **Shahjhan Mughal**

RAMBAN: Signifying failure of Municipal Committee Ramban (MCR) to put in place effective measures for solid waste management, Ramban town here has turned into garbage dumping site thus giving tough time to the residents.

Tons of stinking garbage has been dumped on the main road of the town causing inconvenience to pedestrians. The problem is compounded by presence of stray dogs who rummage through the accumulated garbage.

“Pungent smell emanates from the garbage dump making it difficult for pedestrians including women and aged to pass from the road,” locals told MERC Times.

“The stray dogs present at the garbage dump pose risk to pedestrians. Many persons have been bitten by the canines at the spot,” they said.

Negligence of Municipal Committee Ramban in maintaining the cleanliness of the roads has also affected the traffic movement in the town.

“The roads are witnessing thin movement of traffic now,” said Sikander, a local.

Executive Officer Municipal Committee Ramban, Zubaida Parveen told MERC Times that they have already installed dustbins at various places of town.

“Now it is the responsibility of every individual to use these dustbins and we need their support to make this town clean,” she said.

22-year-old dies in Mehjoor Nagar fire incident

❖ **Musaib Hafiz**

SRINAGAR: A 22-year-old girl died in a devastating fire incident in Mehjoor Nagar.

Roshni Kour was trapped in her home when it caught fire. She was rescued by locals and shifted to Shri Mahraja Hari Singh (SMHS) hospital where she succumbed later.

The family members of the girl have accused the authorities for the death of the young girl.

“Closure of Mehjoor Nagar Bridge for the traffic is the main cause of her death as fire and emergency services could reach on time,” locals told MERC Times.

Ghulam Muhammad Bhat, sub-officer Fire and emergency

Services, Rawalpura said that his team of men and machinery was rushed to the spot after receiving information about the incident.

“It is very unfortunate that we got stuck in a traffic jam at Rambagh for around ten minutes. These ten minutes made a difference and claimed a precious human life,” he said.

One of the medicos at SMHS hospital said the girl was put under treatment immediately. “We tried our best. But unfortunately we lost her,” a doctor said.s

A day after her death, the residents of Mehjoor Nagar protested against the authorities for not having installed the Fire and Emergency service in the area.





Naseem Bagh's beauty lures students

❖ Syed Burhan

SRINAGAR: Naseem Bagh has become a major attraction for students who spend their leisure time there taking selfies with each other. Students from the near by Music and Fine Arts department have also been drawing paintings there depicting the pain of the Kashmiri people. "I often go to Naseem Bagh to evade scorching heat during summers. The place is mesmerizing in the autumn season too," said Azad, a student at the university.

Built by famous Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in 1635, the garden is spread over 450 kanals of land. 696 chinara trees are presently preserved there. It is being developed into Chinara Heritage Park by the varsity

even the chinara trees have been planted in a very magnificent manner.

In autumn, Naseem Bagh has a different charm and look as the garden is covered by the fallen chinara leaves which give this garden a beautiful look. The coolness of the place attracts students from all departments. "Whenever I visit Naseem Bagh my soul feels so soothing as if I have entered Paradise," said Asif Bilal, a media student at the university.

Like other heritage sites of Kashmir, Naseem Bagh is a repository of rich and sweet memories of the past including the delightful tradition of the Mughals. A portion of it is occupied by hostel of boys and several departments of the university.

DR SIVAJI DELIVERS LECTURE AT KU

❖ Ayad Ullah Dar

SRINAGAR: Renowned Physic Scientist Dr Chandaram Sivaji delivered a lecture at the University of Kashmir. He spoke on "Opportunities for international research collaborations and fellowships."

Dr Sivaji, Scientist-F, is presently Director, International Cooperation (Bilateral) at the Department of Science and Technology that works under the aegis of Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India.

The lecture, attended by students, scholars and faculty members, was presided over by Dean (Research) Prof Sheikh Javed Ahmad. Dean Students Welfare Prof Fayyaz Ahmad and Chief Coordinator, Directorate of Internal Quality Assurance (DIQA), Dr Manzoor A Shah, coordinated.

In his lecture, Dr Chandaram talked at length on the role of DST in promoting scientific research collaborations and fellowships.

Referring to opportunities available to budding researchers and scholars through fellowships and research programs at the international level, Dr Chandaram said: "India is a rising powerhouse

in science and is participating in international mega science projects. The feedback we have received over the last few years shows that our international partners are highly impressed with the talent of students and scholars."

Maintaining that the recent initiatives by the DST have "reversed" the trend of brain-drain, Dr Chandaram said: "India has built its own mega science facilities and we welcome international participation, it is these initiatives that have reversed brain drain and started 'brain-gain' in the country."

Earlier, Dr Chandaram had a Isodetailed interacted with KU Vice-Chancellor Prof Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi.

Dr Chandaram has obtained his Bachelor's Degree in Physics and Masters Degree in Geophysics from Andhra University and pursued Doctoral degree at the Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad. He is involved in implementation of various Earth Science related programmes of DST such as Seismology, Microzonation, Deep Continental Studies, Science of Shallow Subsurface, National facilities in earth sciences etc., for promoting basic research.

Glory of Resham Khana

❖ Ubeer Naqushbandi

SRINAGAR: In the middle of a large swath of land, dotted by majestic Chinara and mulberry trees, the tall workshop building of the Power Development Department (PDD) attracts attention. Electric transformers, poles and bundles of transmission wire lie scattered all over the land. This is Srinagar's silk factory popularly known by its Urdu variant Resham Khana. Three rundown filature houses, a water storage house and the ramshackle office building — these are the remnants of what was once the world's largest silk factory — set up more than 120 years ago by Dogra ruler Maharaja Pratap Singh.

The factory once produced high quality silk, which was exported only to Europe and employed more than 2,000 people — it's been shut for 16 years now and is crumbling. But after recent efforts and a campaign by Tasaduq Mufti (brother of Jammu-Kashmir chief minister Mehbooba Mufti), the J-K government brought this architectural marvel and its premises under the State Protective Monument Act. "The aim is to revive cultural tourism," says MS Zahid, J-K's director, Archives

and Museums. "By conserving our rich heritage, we would also be showcasing our glorious past."

Ghulam Mohammad Tantray is the supervisor at the factory — and, one of the last 17 employees left. The rest are security staff. Tantray is curious to know what will happen to the factory and to their employment. "You know, Tasaduq (Mufti) sahib came here two or three times," he says. "Are they (government) doing something? If they want, it can be revived just by infusing a few lakh of rupees".

The buildings, made of mud, brick and wood, are crumbling, but the signs of glory are still visible. In his office room, supervisor Tantray points towards a network of metallic pipes in the ceiling and says: "Look, this building was fire-proof. The pipes had rubber valves, and, in case of a fire, they would automatically burst and sprinkle water all over to extinguish the fire."

Kashmir produced the best quality univoltine silk — a single crop is produced every year, so the production is much less than other states like Karnataka — but the quality is far superior. Being on the famous silk route, which started from China and passed through Kashmir, the secret of silk was leaked to Kashmir in the seventh century.

Garbage, stray dogs irks KU students, SMC in slumber

❖ Mudasir Majeed

SRINAGAR: The presence of huge chunks of garbage and dogs roaming freely inside the university campus creates a lot of trouble to the students. The authorities of the varsity have time and again failed to end this menace and have left the students high and dry.

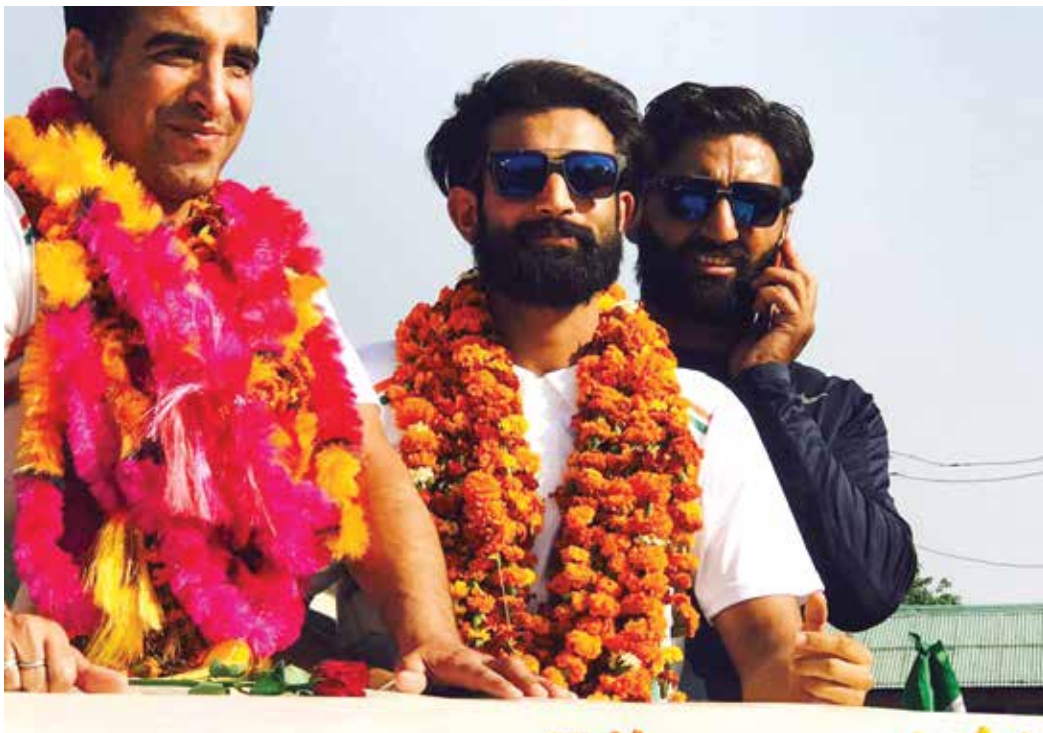
“University authorities have failed to control the roaming of stray dogs inside the campus”, said Asif Ahmad, a student. He further added that it is a matter of concern especially for those who lives in hostels as these canines chase them. Some handful

of students have fallen prey to their bites.

“Whenever i used to go through Naseem Bagh,i always prefer to pick up a stick or some stones in my hand for my safety. These dogs have made life very difficult here”said another student, khalid latief. He further added those mounds of garbage and other waste materials outside many department is another matter of concern, bad smell emanating from it troubles students as well as passerby.

The students beseech the authorities to kindly look into the matter and take some immediate measures to bring an end to their plight.

Surya Creates history, Wins Gold medal



❖ Shaheen Shafique

SRINAGAR: Well-wishers and relatives of Surya Bhanu Partap Singh was felicitated with full zeal and zest at his home in Jammu.

Representing India in 6th World Paras Wushu Championship in Iran, Bhanu has won Gold medal by defeating Iran’s World number one ranking player in the final match.

World Paras Cup Wushu Championship was held in Iran in February, in which Wushu players of 15 countries participated.

While talking to this reporter over phone from Jammu, he said: “With full love and good wishes of my family members and people of our state achieving my goal was possible. Especially my coach did a lot of hard work on me and this is the result of his hard work”.

“I am very happy after winning this Gold medal. Now, my dream is to become world’s number one Wushu player,” he said.

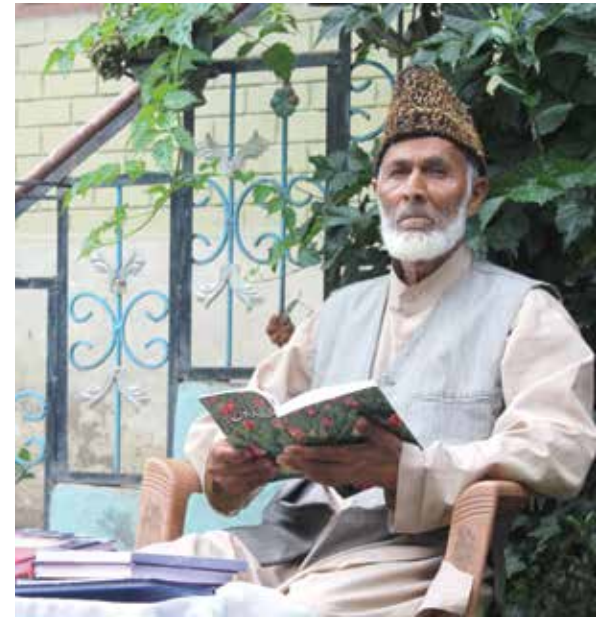
He further added: “Our state is lacking sports facilities then other states. Government should establish separate grounds for every game and provide full facilities to players of our state”

One of his close friend Mushtaq War said: “Partap is a guy who is working with full dedication and seriousness in his game. I very happy with his performance. Because of him the Wushu game has become popular in our state”

“If our state government will provide him full support, he will become world’s number one Wushu player,” he said.

Bhanu is currently world-ranking number 2 wushu player. He has won bronze medal for India in World Wushu Championship in 2015.

Meet the poet, who spreads message of communal harmony



❖ Pardeep Singh

SRINAGAR: While attempts are being made all over the globe to divide people in the name of religion, Ghulam Qadir Shaad is using his his pen to spread the message of communal harmony.

Hailing from a small village Dardpora in north Kashmir’s Baramulla district, Ghulam Qadir uses the medium of poetry to spread the message of communal harmony. Shaad is a retired teacher who served in education department for forty two years.

“Poetry is a medium which you don’t choose. In fact poetry chooses the poet. I was interested in writing from childhood. I was in 9th class when I wrote a write up. I started taking part in local level Mushairas and poetry recitation programmes in Radio Kashmir,” he says

In 1974, Shaad became the member of Cultural Forum Kreeri. He has written many poems on brotherhood and considers it is aim to spread peace. “A writer uses his/her writing as a medium to convey his/her message. I have taken to writing to spread the message of communal harmony and peace. In fact I have been also writing poems on Sikh’s first Guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji,” he says

What inspired him to write about Guru Nanak was his good deeds. “I have read a wonderful piece about Nanak Ji’s life in ‘Sacha Soudha’ (True Trade) where the concept of Langar was mentioned. This is such a beautiful concept to help needy irrespective of their religion, creed or caste,” Shaad says.

Dardpora is a village where both Muslims and Siks live together. Shaad sees no difference between the two communities. “Prophet Mohammad (SAW) has remarked, If your neighbor feelinsecure from you, then you are not a Muslim. We are living here like two sons of a mother. We are always together sharing each other’s joys and sorrows. We are humans and live the way humans should live,” Shaad says.

KAS-SSC Exam dates clash: Aspirants seeks govt attention

❖ Raashid Manzoor

GANDERBAL: Jammu and Kashmir Public Service Commission (JKPSC), in a recent notification notified about Combined Competitive (Preliminary)-2016. It notified about the deferred date of examination, which was scheduled to be held on March 12, 2017. As per this notification, the fresh date of examination is March 19, 2017. The reason behind the change in the examination date is, the festival of colours, Holi, which is to be celebrated on the 12th of March.

Like other victims of 2016 Kashmir Unrest, JKPSC is a worst hit. Initially the prelims was scheduled to be held on 25th September, 2016. As the uprising went beyond expectations, the Commission had to postpone the exams for a large spell of time.

"I am very much depressed about the clash, as I've been preparing for both the examinations. I can't skip any one of



them. I request the JKPSC to look into the matter", an KAS-SSC aspirant told MERC Times.

The state of dilemma may cost them of their focus from the preparations. Now the spotlight is on JKPSC. Aspirants are in a deadlock with the last hope, that the prelims will be postponed for a few days. Staff Selection Commission (SSC), a

Central Government recruiting agency comes with fixed dates unlike JKPSC. Students who have qualified SSC tier 1 and tier 2, have been preparing for tier 3, which is the last mile for the aspirants to qualify in. Unfortunately tier 3 is fixed for March 19, which may remain unhindered and will commence on such date.

Snow Carnival: No hike in the economy of J&K Tourism Department

❖ Sajidah Yousuf

GULMARG: Snow carnival in Gulmarg was recently organised, to woo the backpackers, to showcase the winter activities.

Chief Minister, Mehbooba Mufti inaugurated the fifteen-day snow carnival at Gulmarg. The carnival included a series of activities like Skiing, Ice Hockey, Snow Sculpting, Snow Mobile Rally, Snow Rugby, Night Skiing, etc. Snow Sculpting was yet another newly-introduced activity, that impressed both the tourists and locals. The local artists from the Department of Fine Arts, Kashmir University, sculpted these sculptures with a magical touch of the State's rich culture and heritage.

The official said that the Government was expecting around 50,000 tourists would visit Gulmarg, during the festival. But a huge chunk of tourists got diverted to the States like Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, because of the hike in the airfare to Kashmir. Sources also say a large amount of money had been earmarked for the snow festival, but that money was unlikely to reap benefits for the tourism sector.

SUBSTANDARD PESTICIDES AFFECTING APPLE GROWERS

❖ Firdous Azad

Sopore: A town from the North part of the valley, Sopore is very famous for its apple production, all across the country. But the use of substandard pesticide and fungicides have spoiled the quality of apples, the major factor of low apple production from Sopore.

"Our orchards are under threat, because of substandard pesticides available in the market. The Department of Horticulture failed to provide us information about quality pesticides", said fruit grower, Mohd. Altaf Bhat. "There are various types of pesticides available in the market, but we don't know anything about the high quality pesticides and fungicides, to be used in our orchards. From past few years, the low quality Apple production have affected our livelihood", said an apple Grower from Dangarpura, Sopore.

When contacted the Horticulture Department, one of the officials said, "It's a matter of serious concern, but our department is trying its level best to give all kind of possible help to the apple Growers of Sopore. This time we are going to make awareness programmes regarding substandard pesticides, so that people can purchase registered pesticides", he added.

KHANYAR SCHOOL TURNS INTO GARBAGE DUMP

❖ Madhiya Nabi

SRINAGAR: Heaps of garbage collected from the adjacent areas is dumped along the main roadside at Khanyar near Government Girls Higher Secondary School causing immense inconvenience to the inhabitants of the area in general and students in particular. The people of the area alleged that the officials paid no heed to their grievances despite making several representations to the concerned department.

Locals also said that garbage piles attract stray dogs, that is yet another matter of concern for them. They are reluctant to move out in the early mornings and late evenings to avoid the dog bites. Children can easily fall prey to the dog bites as they can't outrun them. Moreover the presence of dogs in huge numbers can lead to the life threatening disease called Rabies.

"It's is very difficult to study in such a reeking environment especially in summers because of the stinky smell from the muck dumped outside our school", said a circle of students. "Not only students, we the staff members are also the sufferers of this garbage dump", said a Lecturer. The presence of huge chunks of garbage near our school has made its environment unhygienic. Children are reluctant in eating in school premises", said one of the staff member.

The locals urged the concerned department to kindly shift the dumping site to some other place and bring an end to their plight. When contacted, the Chief Sanitation Officer, Dr Manzoor Ahmed Parray, he said "we are trying our best to stop this dog menace and removal of garbage. Further he said, "we are trying to modernize our system and equipments to fight this menace in a speedy way. We will also outsource to make people aware, through NGOs, about the dumping the waste matter of every household. It will take some time, to get rid of this situation, we are putting our best efforts".

Suicide Attempt

❖ **Abid Rashid**

PULWAMA: Life is not a bed of roses. We all face ordeals. William Shakespeare has rightly said that when miseries come, they descend in bundles. My childhood was entirely different for what I hear from others. Besides schooling, I helped my father with farming.

Burned midnight oil and toiled hard under scorching sun. No external force compelled me to do such odd jobs at the tender age of 15. It was a routine. Due to domestic issues, I had to work as a construction labourer along with masons in a neighbouring village. I was the most sought after labourer during Apple picking and Paddy sapling seasons. I could easily abandon studies but Almighty always pulled me up when I was felt dull, down, dizzy and disturbed.

I finished my class 12th from Government Hr.Sec. Institute Baramulla in 2010. But going to college turned out to be a distant dream. Excitement died a silent death. I had weaved different dreams about my college life but I never knew I can't fulfil them like any other collegiate.

Then I started looking for menial jobs, enrolled myself for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act as a labourer. As I write this, my eyes are welling with tears. I still remember, the Supervisor would overburden us. Today I advocate against child labour because I have the firsthand account of how suffocating it is. Exploiting in the name of work had become a daily affair. They would either less wages or over time.

I could not continue due to gruelling work load. Then, I started as a salesman which seemed a decent way of earning. But again, at the end of the month, Owner would rudely call all the salesman and handover peanuts in the name of salary. But I must admit here I learnt ethics, how to be decent and convince customers, how to suppress your inner anxiety and smile at your client. Being salesman taught me to think out of the box, to raise your standard by taking a cue from your boss. Team work and how to be at par with others is what I learned here.

I was being questioned by one and the all that why I didn't join college. I would hang my head in shame; curse myself and leave past them. Depression started giving me sleepless nights. I started consuming sedatives and attempted to end my woes forever.

I never visited that shop thereafter. I joined a local orphanage, found refuge here among the destitute. Thus 2011 marked a different chapter in my life. It was the year that changed me forever. Finally, I joined Baramulla College in 2012 and vowed to never look back. I have come a long way since. I continue to strive for the path of Excellency.

WORLD RADIO DAY, RADIO IS YOU

❖ **Yawar Shafi**

BARAMULLA: Radio is that saviour that connects people, connects lives and connects hope.

It was to honour this radio that the United Nations proclaimed 13 February as World Radio Day in 2011, with the vision of celebrating how it helps shape our lives. Radio is most relevant for the developing societies which are clearly disadvantaged by their lack of access to the latest information technologies.

This is most relevant for the developing societies which are clearly disadvantaged by their lack of access to the latest information technologies.

To quote from the UNESCO website, "By listening to its audiences and responding to their needs, radio provides the diversity of views and voices needed to address the challenges we all face."

The switch to the global information super highway would give an unfair advantage to rich nations over the poor, feels the Third World which continues to root for radio. Radio broadcasting crosses the barriers of isolation and illiteracy

and it is the cheapest electronic medium to broadcast and receive.

The challenge in India with its population of 1.25 billion and huge diversity in ethno-socio-linguistic characteristic, literacy levels, economic disparities, gender inequality, disparity in distribution of resources, rural-urban gulf and

spreading the message of planned parenthood, diffusion of agricultural innovation, rural regeneration, skill development to capture benefits of the demographic dividend. The AIR is also preserving and strengthening India's cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity and fortifying India's democratic and secular traditions and values.

Father of the Green Revolution and eminent agricultural scientist, M S Swaminathan praised radio's development initiatives:

"Even those who were excluded from the technological transformation could be included because they heard about new technologies through radio. This is why I would like to pay a tribute to All India Radio which is in some respects the unsung hero of the Green Revolution."

Radio is a Long Playing song that changes its beat with the times. It is adapting to 21st Century changes and offering new ways to interact and participate. Becoming more and more interactive. This explains why the theme for World Radio Day 2017 is "Radio is You!" – a call for greater participation of audiences and communities in the policy and planning of radio broadcasting.



digital divide.

The public service radio broadcaster All India Radio (AIR) has risen admirably to this challenge by its steadfast focus on the development of a learning society/a knowledge community, inculcating scientific temper, empowerment of women. The amelioration of the underprivileged,

Stray dogs pose threat to city residents

❖ **Sabreena Mushtaq**

SRINAGAR: The stray dogs menace in Kashmir is threatening the lives of locals.

Those who bear the brunt are mostly the students going to tuitions early morning.

The latest dog bite cause is mauling of four year old kid of downtown area, Srinagar, who was bitten by a pack of stray dogs, and is presently under the treatment at SKIMS hospital.

"Our locality is full of stray dogs due to which I never let my kids go alone to the market," says Rafiq Ahmad, a resident of downtown Srinagar.

According to official figures, at least 20 people have died of Rabies, in the last five years, and as far as the case of bites are concerned, they have touched 80,000 over here.

During 2008 to 2012 some 58,095



cases of dog bites have been reported, while at Anti-Rabies Clinic, SMHS Hospital Srinagar, 22,650 cases were registered.

In last five years, the number of dog bites has grown as population of stray dogs has grown unabated.

According to data from Srinagar Municipal Corporation, for every 13 people in valley there is one stray

dog. In Srinagar only, there is said to be one lakh dogs putting the life of a commoner in danger every day.

Even a special program of dog sterilization — to curb the population of dogs, was carried out by government but that too brought no relief.

People say that government should come up with such measures which can stop this menace once for all.

Kashmiri Female Cricketer to Play for North India

❖ Adil Amin

SRINAGAR: Kashmiri girl got selected after outstanding performance in U-23 Women's league.

Rubia Sayeed of Badasgam Anantnag was selected in North Zone Women's team of India and will play inter-zone tournament being organised by BCCI at Mumbai. North Zone Team comprises of players from Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and J&K.

Rubia Sayeed is the only cricketer from J&K to represent North Zone.

In the qualifying Under-23 Women's league tournament at Amritsar Punjab, Rubia scored 160 runs with highest score of 82 runs in the inaugural match played against host team Punjab.

Coach of the women cricketer, Sakeena Akhtar praised the cricketer and said that despite limited resources available to the Women Cricketers, she performed well. Sakeena said the players couldn't practice last season because of unrest. If the cricketer's would have practiced last year they would have performed even better. She said if proper infrastructure is provided to the women cricketers they will shine as they are not less than any other cricketer in the State.

There is a need to give more promotion to female participation in sports. Although the situation has improved considerably; there is still the need for secure proper facilities to develop women's sports. There is no lack of women cricket talent in J&K, Coach added.

Ladakh's Women Hockey Team : Of All Odds, making country proud

❖ Zahak Zakir

KUPWARA: Ice hockey is a crowd pleasing sport internationally and Ladakh is known among other places for its origin. Ladakh in the lap of Himalayas and the mountain range glowing behind, you will find an all women team who found their passion in this unconventional sport. These women have proved they love this sport too much to give up. For them, ice hockey is what gully cricket is for the rest of the country.

Earlier they used to play for the love of the game with no rewards to show but now there is something more.

Noor Jahan, while talking to the reporter said, "People started mocking at me when I started playing ice-hockey as the game is considered for men. Even my family forced me to focus on studies and domestic chores rather than playing ice-hockey, but my passion for the game always dominated".

Last year, the team went on to participate for the first time in an international competition in Chinese Taipei. Even though they returned from the 2016 IIHF Challenge Cup of Asia without a win, there were many positive things about visit. This relatively young Indian team came close to beating Malaysia in the group stages, and Noor Jahan was even awarded the tournament's Best Goaltender Award after saving 193 shots from a possible 229.

Last year, the girls prepared an ice rink on their own. They would fill buckets, and the frozen pool from 8 PM to 3 AM in groups of four. Even a small amount of water that splashed on their clothes would freeze.

While even thinking of being out at this time in the Himalayas would normally give us the chills, these girls were determined not to let any obstacles thaw their grit and ambitions.

Another problem has been the lack of funding, which has affected their growth. To receive funding from the government, the sport needs 75% affiliate member states, which is difficult at the moment. There is an artificial rink in Dehradun, but with no caretaker or money to maintain it, it lies neglected.

Amidst all these challenges, what the girls have is the determination to succeed. Breaking stereotypes these unusual girls are making all possible efforts to make their dream come true. With their future at stake, the Ice Hockey Association of India has been trying to build an ice hockey culture amongst the next generation. More importantly, to get recognition to build the winter sports future in our country, to create more sporting opportunities for women, break stereotypes and to build more platforms for unconventional sports. Apart from Ice Hockey, these players are also excellent in speed skating at national and international levels.

While for many of us it only remained a dream to follow our passions, here we have a bunch of women who are fighting against all odds to uphold an unconventional sport. Today, they represent every sports person who couldn't make it big, every dream that couldn't be fulfilled, every aspiration that didn't get wings, and every passion that couldn't be funded.

Intra-University 'extempore speech contest' held at KU

❖ Arif Nazir

SRINAGAR : Division of Youth Affairs of Kashmir University's Department of Students Welfare (DSW) organised a day-long 'Intra-University Extempore Speech Contest'.

40 students from various teaching departments and affiliated colleges participated in the contest.

Faakira Irfan from KU's Department of Law secured first position while Mahoor Mufti Shaw from The Business School bagged second position and Mehak Batool from Government Degree College for Women Baramulla bagged the third position, in the competition.

Bilal Naik from S P College and Shafiya Mehraj from Department of Clinical Bio-Chemistry at KU, were given the consolation prizes.

The performance of participants was evaluated by a panel of experts including former Dean Students Welfare Prof S M Afzal Qadri; Prof Lily Want from KU's Department of English and Prof Nasir Mirza from Media Education Research Centre (MERC).

Prof Sheikh Javid Ahmad, Dean Research at KU, gave away prizes among the winners.

Dean Students Welfare Prof Fayaz Ahmad welcomed the participants and Shahid Ali Khan, Cultural Officer DSW, conducted the proceedings.

Kashmir's Star Skier Avails Crowd Funding

❖ Dar Aadil

PULWAMA: For raising funds, an online fund raising campaign has been started at bitgiving.com for Arif Khan, a professional skier from Gulmarg for supporting his participation in Asian Winter Games 2017, and South Korean Winter Olympics 2018.

Since 2005, Arif has been consecutively winning national and South Asian Skiing Championship in Slolam and Giant Slolam. Despite his excellent performance for Indian national team, neither the Indian Olympic Association nor the Winter Games Federation of India funds his training, equipment or travel. Arif's father Yaseen Khan runs a local ski shop in Gulmarg.

Arif strongly believes that ski racing shows one's true potential, mentally, emotionally,

psychologically and obviously physically.

Arif is determined to represent India at the Winter Olympic 2017 scheduled to take place from 9 to 25th Feb. 2018, in South Korea.

If the required funds would not be raised, "he will represent India in the Asian Games regardless of the amount of funding collected in this campaign. It would just mean that his father, Yaseen will have to dip in his savings to help his achieve his dreams. Also his ultimate target of representing India in the Winter Olympic Gamed 2018 will get that much harder. The precious time that could be better spent on training, will have to be diverted towards fund collection,' reads the campaign. This campaign is widely rotated through social networking sites like facebook, yet the participation of Arif in South Korean Winter Olympics remains a question.

7 years on, Kulgam bridge awaits reconstruction

❖ Hikmatyar

KULGAM: Residents of Ashmuji and Gund villages falling in Kulgam district are waiting eagerly from past seven years for completion of a bridge constructed over mighty river Vishew linking the two hamlets comprising of 10,000 inhabitants.

The villagers allege official apathy and negligence for sluggish pace of work on the bridge. However, officials maintain the bridge would be complete in November.

It was back in 2010 when the foundation stone of the 350 meters long bridge was laid by JKPCC with a promise of completing the construction work by 2013. "It has been six years and the bridge is still incomplete," said a local.

Villagers said that government's seriousness in

completion of the bridge can be gauged from the fact that it took over six years for JKPCC to construct the main structure of the bridge. "This speaks volumes about the callous attitude of the government towards the miseries of the people," said a local Nazir Ahmad.

He added that after constructing the super structure in 2010-11, the Government left the bridge and stopped the work altogether. "The work on the bridge resumed in early 2013 and continued at snail's pace till September 2014 when floods came and washed away some of the construction material, thus giving JKPCC contactors an excuse to stop the work altogether," Ahmad maintained.

To minimize their hardships, villagers have constructed a makeshift bridge over the river. "During winter season the makeshift bridge becomes slippery due to heavy snowfall in the area and it becomes risky

to cross the bridge specially for women and children," said residents of Gund village.

JKPCC officials, meanwhile, said the bridge will be completed in November. JKPCC DGM, Kulgam Shabir Ahmad Najar said, "Due to delay in the approval of the funds by the government, the construction work on the bridge has been left midway. Initially the total cost for the project was Rs 10.40 crores for 330 metre bridge. Later additional 50 metres and footpath were added to the bridge, for which more funds were needed. The government did not provide funds in time which resulted in long delay in construction work.

"The remaining funds were allotted to the department and construction work will be started within next 10 days. The bridge will be completed in November this year at the total cost of Rs 17 crores," he further added.

Looting of green gold goes unabated in Baramulla



❖ Imran Naikoo

SRINAGAR: Expressing concern over smuggling of timber, Sarpanch of Haiqa Dangarpora area of Narwaw in north Kashmir's district Baramulla said that some people were taking undue advantage of heavy snowfall and were looting the forests. He said that 80-90 hectares of forest land have been encroached upon in during winter.

Addressing the residents in Gram Sabha at Panchayat ghar Halqa Dangarpora, he said that smugglers have become active and have deforested various parts of forests in Danagarpora, Laridora, Nowgam, Kawhar, Malpora, Heewan, Namblan and Taripora

compartments. "It is very painful to see that smugglers have cut down hundreds of trees in forests. They are converting green areas into deserts. They are taking undue advantage of recent heavy snowfall and looting green gold," he said.

"We are totally dependent on the forests our life is 90% connected with forests. But unfortunately smugglers looting this green forest and the concerned department employees are not taking any action," the sarpanch said.

"Those people who are indulging in timbre smuggling, strict action will be taken action them," said Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Baramulla.

No alternative site available to shift Achan dumping yard: Govt

❖ Farooz Ahmad

SRINAGAR: Much to the dismay of residents of Saidapora in Eidgah Constituency of Srinagar, the Jammu and Kashmir government has stated that there is no alternative to shift Achan dumping yard – the shifting of dumping site has been a long pending demand of local residents.

"It was concluded by the concerned District Development Commissioner that no other alternative suitable site is available for dumping the solid waste," said Deputy Chief Minister stated in a written reply to a question raised by NC MLA, Mubarak Gul in a recently concluded Budget Session of the legislature in Jammu.

Spread over 600 kanal, the garbage dumping site at Achan remains the focal point of the agitation against the Srinagar Municipal Corporation. The stink emanating from the dumping ground is giving sleepless nights to the residents of the nearby localities even as the government is making efforts to tackle the problem.

While the government is on its toes to ensure adequate waste management measures, the residents are demanding shifting of the site or setting up of waste treatment plants. "Give us clean air. The garbage dump has led to many ailments among the residents, including breast cancer, throat and stomach ailments," said residents living in the vicinity of the site.

Meanwhile, the government reply states that government had constituted three member committee comprising of officers of Srinagar Municipal Corporation, Srinagar Development Authority and Revenue department headed by Additional Deputy Commissioner Srinagar in the year 2008.

"The department after visiting various places in and around the Srinagar city concluded that no suitable land is available and recommended strengthening of existing of dumping site," it adds.



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