

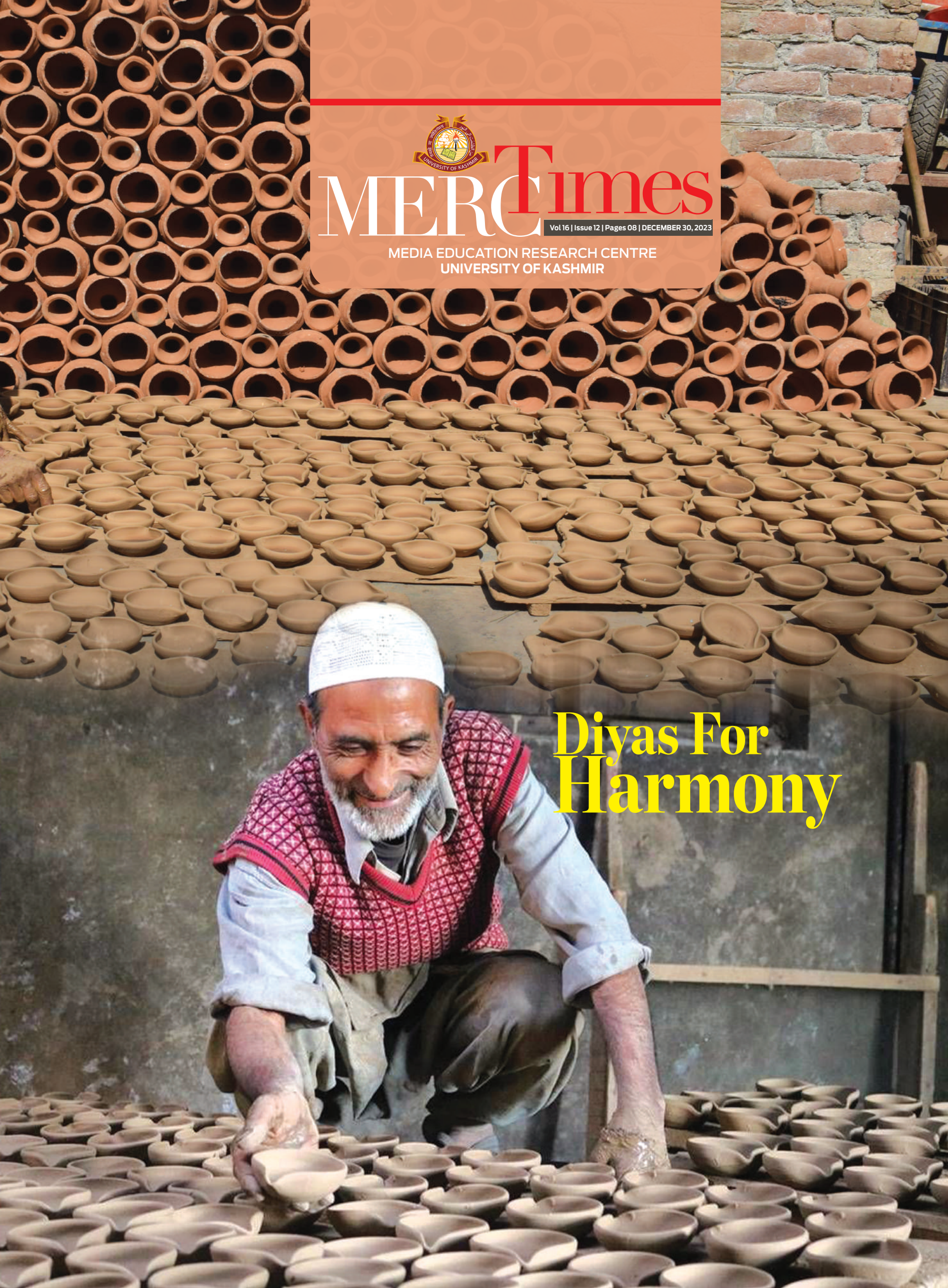


MERC Times

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MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR

Diyas For Harmony



Ambulance Delays Pose Life-Threatening Challenges, Say Frontline Responders

Qamran Javaid Mir

A critical patient's life hung in the balance as an ambulance struggled to navigate through congested traffic. The dire situation unfolded when a truck, in the midst of unloading on the road, inadvertently obstructed the ambulance's path. First responders in our community are voicing their concerns about the alarming challenges they face in ensuring timely emergency medical care due to traffic-related issues. Ambulance drivers, paramedics, and a senior medical consultant have shared their experiences and insights, shedding light on the critical nature of the problem.

Ambulance Driver Muzamil Mohi-u-Din spoke candidly about the difficulties they encounter on the road, saying, "Nobody gives way to ambulances, and sometimes, a critical patient dies in the ambulance because of traffic jams."

"Expressing his frustration over legal constraints, he added, "My ambulance has been seized twice by traffic police because I used the siren without a patient in it. It is an emergency response vehicle, and we should be allowed to use the siren anytime."

Paramedic Adil Bashir Khan emphasized the life-or-death implications of traffic delays, particularly for patients with conditions like cardiac arrest. He explained, "If we have a cardiac arrest patient in the ambulance, we have to take them to the hospital within the first hour, also called the golden hour. There are chances of survival, but because the road is blocked, the patient's condition becomes more critical."

After dropping a patient and returning to the hospital, sirens should be allowed to use. I'll say yes because the same ambulance has to reach another spot and carry another patient. If the driver does not use the siren, it's not possible for them to reach on time. For that matter, it's always an emergency

Senior Critical Consultant Dr. Iqbal stressed the necessity of allowing ambulances to use sirens on their return journeys to the hospital, stating, "After dropping a patient

and returning to the hospital, sirens should be allowed to use. I'll say yes because the same ambulance has to reach another spot and carry another patient. If the driver does not use the siren, it's not possible for them to reach on time. For that matter, it's always an emergency."

These firsthand accounts underscore a pressing issue in our community where ambulance response times are impeded by traffic congestion and legal restrictions. Local authorities are now actively considering these concerns, exploring potential changes to regulations, and launching public awareness campaigns to improve cooperation with emergency vehicles.

Efforts are being made to ensure that ambulances can swiftly reach their destinations and provide life-saving care to those in need, with the overarching goal of safeguarding the well-being of patients and the community.



Threads of Destiny

Uzma Shabnam

Nadi Azad, a 24-year-old pursuing a Master's in Women's Studies at the University of Kashmir, stumbled upon hoop embroidery by chance. "It all happened by accident," she revealed. Initially engrossed in personalized stone art, her serendipitous encounter with a needle and thread in 2019 sparked a revelation. Crafting initials on hand gloves marked the inception of a remarkable journey into the world of hoop embroidery.

Speaking about her artistic evolution, she recounted, "My focus was on stone painting until an exhibition at the University of Kashmir in April 2019. I reluctantly showcased my first hoop, which garnered unexpected admiration." The overwhelming response ignited her passion, and since then, there has been no looking back.

Venturing into the realm of social media, Nadi established her Instagram handle, 'AthKaem by Nahida,' in March 2020, which swiftly transformed her hobby into a thriving business. "Orders started pouring in, marking the onset of a continuous stream of creativity. To date, I've completed almost 110 orders," she shared with a sense of



contentment.

Crucial to her journey has been the unwavering support of her parents, whom she credits for her achievements. Nadi emphasized the symbiotic relationship between dedication and familial encouragement, deeming parental support as indispensable for a child's success. "My

parents have always been very supportive and have been with me at every step and making it to this point has been a big achievement for me," she said.

Discussing the nuances of hoop embroidery, she envisions a promising future for this intricate craft. "It's an evolving art form with immense customization potential," she remarked. Expressing her aspirations to expand her work by creating landscapes and portraits from threads, Nadi is resolute about enhancing her designs and pushing the boundaries of her craft.

It was difficult for her to keep up with her studies and her developing artistic career, yet she found equilibrium with time. Her advice to aspiring embroiderers echoes simplicity: "Just start. Embroider whatever you like."

Nadi Azad's story epitomizes the resilience and ingenuity of Kashmir's young talent. Her journey, from stumbling upon an art form by chance to becoming an entrepreneurial success, stands as a testament to the transformative power of passion and perseverance. As she meticulously threads the fabric of innovation, Nadi continues to inspire, embodying the essence of artistic dedication amidst the scenic splendor of Kashmir.



IICP Kashmir University organizes seminar on Seerat writing

Saqib Ali Bhat

The one-day Seerat seminar conducted by Kashmir University on November 7th, 2023, focusing on "Urdu Mein Seerat Nigari" was a significant event organized by the Iqbal Institute of Culture and Philosophy (IICP) and the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages (JKACL).

The seminar aimed to explore the impact of the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Urdu literature, with special attention to the works of Allama Iqbal.

The unveiling of the book titled "Jahan-e-Hamd-o-Naat," a compilation of Urdu poems dedicated to the Prophet (SAW) by various poets, added a valuable literary dimension to the event.

The session began with the recitation of the Qur'an by Hafiz Shahnawaz, the Imam of Kashmir University mosque, followed by the recitation of verses from a poem by Allama Iqbal by Nazir Ahmad Kumar, a Ph.D. scholar at the University.

Moulana Showkat Ahmad Keng, a distinguished religious scholar and



orator, presided over the inaugural session, emphasizing the significant global influence of literature depicting the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He highlighted the relevance of this literature in the current materialistic era, emphasizing its importance for the current generation.

Dr. Abdul Hafiz Shah Masoodi, a senior bureaucrat, and Prof. G M Sangmi were guests of honor at the seminar. Dr. Masoodi praised the efforts of IICP and JKACL for organizing the seminar and commended the book "Jahan-e-Hamd-o-Naat" as a valuable addition to Urdu literature.

The second session of the seminar

featured a Naatiya Mushairah, where poets from across the valley recited their poems dedicated to the Prophet (SAW). Gulzar Jaffri moderated the Mushairah, adding a creative and expressive element to the event.

The seminar concluded with a vote of thanks from Dr. Mohd Ameen Meer, Assistant Professor at IICP. He expressed hope that the seminar would inspire individuals to delve deeper into the Seerah (biography) of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and apply his teachings in their lives. The event successfully blended literature, culture, and spirituality, creating a platform for poetic expression and scholarly discourse on the life of the Prophet.

In Astanmarg beauty and struggle converge



Uzma Shabnam

Astanmarg, a picturesque meadow in the Zabarwan range near Srinagar, offers breathtaking views and thrilling paragliding experiences. However, beyond the allure of adventure and natural beauty lies a story of struggle for the local Gujar community residing in this scenic locale.

Despite being a hotspot for tourism, the residents of Astanmarg face challenges, particularly in terms of basic amenities. The juxtaposition of exhilarating paragliding experiences and the daily struggles of the locals creates a complex narrative.

Residents like Mohammad Irshad Bijran highlight issues such as high electricity bills, lack of heating facilities, and limited healthcare services. The cost of electricity becomes burdensome, especially for those working as laborers under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA). The absence of heating facilities, coupled with frequent power outages, compounds the challenges faced by the community.

Irshad also emphasizes the difficulties in accessing healthcare services, especially during emergencies, as the lack of an ambulance service and limited transportation options makes reaching

hospitals in Srinagar a daunting task.

In this juxtaposition of adventure and struggle, the Sarpanch of Astanmarg, Shameema Bano, acknowledges the issues faced by the community. She mentions ongoing efforts by authorities to improve road infrastructure, aiming to enhance access to necessities and transportation options. The goal is to uplift the living conditions of the people in Astanmarg.

The complex reality of Astanmarg, where tourism and natural beauty coexist with local struggles, underscores the need for comprehensive development initiatives to ensure that the benefits of tourism reach the community, improving their overall quality of life.

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In Sickness and Health

Husband's Undying Love in Wife's Cancer Battle

Sajid Raina

The story of Kulsum Bashir and her supportive husband, Ishfaq Ahmad, is a touching testament to the power of love and resilience in the face of a life-altering battle against breast cancer. The couple, hailing from Zainakote, HMT Srinagar, navigated the challenges of the illness with unwavering strength and mutual support.

Their journey began in the early months of 2021 when a routine checkup revealed Grade 1 breast cancer. Despite the initial shock, Ishfaq became the pillar of strength for Kulsum, assuring her that they would face the battle together. The unanimous decision to remove the affected breast emerged, and despite emotional moments, Ishfaq stood resilient, emphasizing their shared fight against the disease.

The support from in-laws played a crucial role in Kulsum's journey, with special mention of her father-in-law's continued concern for her well-being. Their connection not only remained strong but grew stronger, a testament to the power of love in adversity.

Financial challenges were navigated with determination, but Kulsum acknowledged the potential hardships faced by others. She urged collective efforts to alleviate the financial burden on those unable to afford



the high costs of cancer treatment.

Dr. Shabnam Basheer's positive approach and empowering words played a pivotal role in strengthening Kulsum's mental fortitude throughout the treatment. The husband's constant presence, particularly through the terrifying chemotherapy ward, provided the courage needed to face the daunting treatments.

Amidst physical transformations,

Ishfaq's unwavering love shone through as he rejected the idea of cosmetic surgery, emphasizing Kulsum's completeness as she was. This act instilled confidence and self-acceptance in Kulsum.

Reflecting on their journey, Kulsum noted that adversity had only strengthened their bond. Currently in Delhi for quality time, she described Ishfaq as her "complete moon."

To those battling cancer, Kulsum delivered a powerful message: "Cancer is a bend in life, not the end. Strength, resilience, and a warrior-like mindset are essential for the journey ahead." Emphasizing the need for support from family, especially spouses, during the challenging period of illness, she stressed that the fight against cancer is not a solitary battle. Urging against neglecting the importance of timely and costly treatments, she highlighted the irreplaceable value of a human life.

The couple's decision to focus on self-acceptance and love amidst the changes brought about by the treatment is a beautiful testament to their enduring bond. Kulsum and Ishfaq's story serves as an inspiration for others facing similar challenges, highlighting the importance of love, support, and acceptance in the journey against cancer.

HokhSyun:

Dwindling Delicacy of Kashmir

Yasmeena Rasheed

The tradition of HokhSyun, or sun-dried vegetables, in Kashmir holds historical significance as a method of preserving vegetables for consumption during the harsh winter months. Sun drying extends the shelf life of vegetables, allowing them to be stored for an extended period. Various vegetables like brinjal, tomatoes, turnip, and bottle gourd are sun-dried during summers. This practice was once widespread, with garlands of dried vegetables adorning the walls of houses across Kashmir.

While HokhSyun has cultural importance, the tradition has diminished over the years, with fewer households engaging in this practice. Improved connectivity with plains areas, better per capita income, and increased availability of fresh vegetables have contributed to the decline in the consumption of HokhSyun. Many shops that used to sell dried food have either closed down or shifted to more profitable trades.

To revive and promote the tradition of HokhSyun, the author suggests



leveraging social media, particularly through high-quality, enticing photos of these sun-dried vegetables. Visual content has high engagement on social

media platforms, and sharing appealing images of HokhSyun could attract attention and generate interest in this authentic Kashmiri practice.



Muslim Potter Family Makes **Diyas** for Diwali Festivities

Mehroob Mushtaq

Last year, Umar Kumar, a 28-year-old potter from Srinagar began making diyas (earthen lamps) for Diwali.

“We have sold more than 20,000 diyas. Each diya is priced as Rs 10. So, we have earned almost Rs 200,000 in a short span. Such profits were not possible if we had stuck to making traditional pottery items like cups, utensils, and decorative pieces,” he added.

The diyas made by Kumar are in great demand and he also receives bulk orders from neighbouring districts like Jammu as well as from Himachal Pradesh.

Abdul Salam Kumar, Umar’s father, said that Diwali has always been special for his family.

“We have always cherished Diwali as a festival of joy and togetherness. By making and selling diyas, we want to spread love and reinforce the bonds between different religious communities

in our region,” he added.

The Kumar family has taken it upon themselves to ensure that their beautiful diyas reach as many households as possible. With a production target of a thousand of diyas per day, they have been working for weeks, moulding, decorating, and carefully packing each diya.

Sham Lal, a Kashmiri Pandit who lives in the same locality as Kumar, said that the potter family is an example of how diverse communities in Kashmir now have a shared bond.

The Kumar family’s initiative has not only resonated with Hindu households celebrating Diwali but has also instilled a sense of pride within the Muslim community. This act of kindness has become a symbol of unity.

Irfan Ahmed, a local resident, said, “The Kumar family’s act of crafting these diyas for Diwali is inspiring. It sends a powerful message of communal harmony and solidarity.”

We have always cherished Diwali as a festival of joy and togetherness. By making and selling diyas, we want to spread love and reinforce the bonds between different religious communities in our region



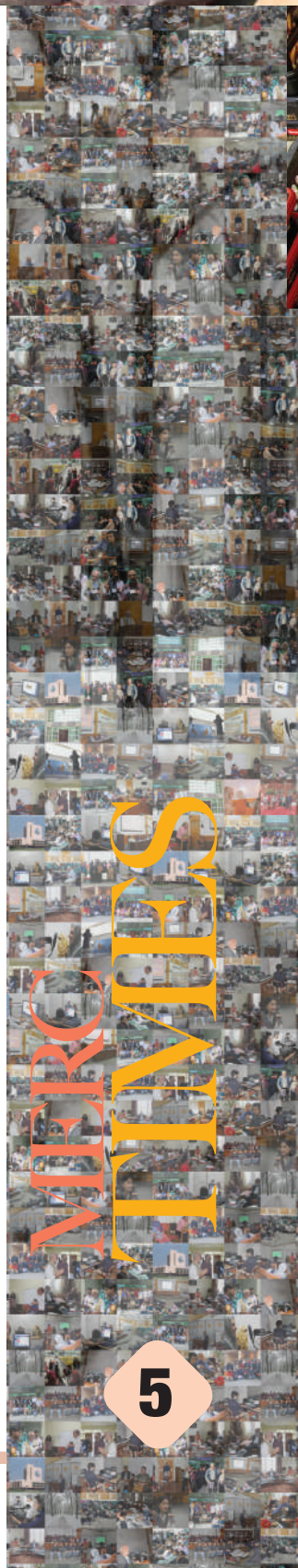
IPL 2024 Auction: Shortlist Includes Nine Players from J&K

Faizan Qureshi

Nine players from Jammu and Kashmir have been shortlisted for the Indian Premier League Auction 2024, scheduled to take place in Dubai on December 19. The final auction list comprises a total of 333 players, with the auction starting with capped players, beginning with batters and following the sequence of all-rounders, wicketkeepers, fast bowlers, and spinners.

Out of the original 991 registered players,

the franchises trimmed the list down to 333, with nine players from Jammu and Kashmir making the cut. Vivrant Sharma holds position 49, Rasikh Salam at 58, Nasir Lone and Abid Mushtaq, both all-rounders, are listed at 209 and 213, respectively. Other players on the shortlist include batter ShubhamPundir at 221, left-arm fast bowler Basit Bashir at 270, Waseem Bashir at 271, ManitJasrotia at 303, and MujtabaYousuf at 312. Many of these shortlisted players attended trials with different franchises in the lead-up to the auction.





Decline in Landline Service Usage Marks Decade-Long Trend in Kashmir

Ishfan Dar

The Kashmir Valley has undergone a significant shift in its telecommunications landscape over the past decade, with a noticeable decline in the usage of landline services. Once an integral part of communication for households and businesses, landline phones are gradually becoming less prominent as residents increasingly opt for the convenience and accessibility offered by mobile phones.

Factors contributing to this decline include the widespread adoption of mobile phones, improved network coverage, and the availability of affordable data plans. The arrival of services like Jio, offering free calls and internet, has played a pivotal role in reshaping communication preferences in Kashmir.

Mohammad Maqbool Dar, a current employee in the BSNL telecommunication company, notes the impact of Jio's arrival, stating that many people felt they no longer needed landline services.

Businesses and establishments that were once reliant on landlines for day-to-day operations are making the transition to mobile and internet-based communication platforms. While indicative of progress, this shift poses challenges for those who may not have easy access to or familiarity with newer technologies.



However, concerns are being raised over potential drawbacks of this technological

transition. Some argue that the reliability and stability of landline connections are unmatched, particularly during emergencies and natural disasters when mobile networks may face disruptions.

Rouf Ahmed, a resident of Srinagar, recalls the reliability of landline and BSNL mobile services during a flood, highlighting their crucial role in making rescue calls.

As the Kashmir Valley moves into a new era of communication, the diminishing prominence of landline services poses both opportunities and challenges. The community is adapting to changing times, and there is a need for a thoughtful approach to ensure that communication remains efficient, reliable, and accessible for all residents.

The decline in landline usage has also impacted the workforce associated with its maintenance, installation, and customer support services. Skilled technicians and support staff are facing dwindling opportunities, with some opting for voluntary retirement due to the reduced demand for landline services.

The evolving telecommunications landscape in Kashmir reflects broader technological shifts, emphasizing the importance of adapting to changing communication preferences while considering the potential social and economic impacts.

Outlook Traveller Awards 2023

Lolab valley secures gold for best offbeat destination



Syed Batool Andrabi

Lolab Valley in Kupwara has been awarded the Gold for Best Offbeat Destination at the prestigious 2023 Outlook Traveller Awards. The valley se-

cured this recognition due to its breathtaking scenery and expansive mountain ranges. Despite being around 100 km away from Srinagar, requiring approximately 3 hours of road travel, Lolab Valley's enchanting beauty continues to attract domestic tourists.

The Secretary of Tourism, Syed

Abid Rashid, expressed his delight at the acknowledgment, considering it a recognition of the J&K government's efforts to promote lesser-known destinations. He highlighted the government's focus on unveiling destinations with untapped tourism potential, aiming to extend tourism growth across Jammu and Kashmir.

Beyond the accolade, Secretary Rashid emphasized that identifying offbeat destinations creates opportunities for local communities to sustainably benefit from tourism. He underlined the department's commitment to democratizing the tourism sector and ensuring an equitable distribution of advantages.

In addition to its scenic allure, Lolab Valley offers attractions such as the Kalaroos Caves, rumored to hide a direct route to Russia, and vast water bodies. A resident of Dooniwari Lolab, Farooq Ahmed, praised Lolab Valley, stating that it has become a hotspot for tourists over the years, thanks to government efforts, well-built infrastructure, and easy connectivity with surrounding areas.



River Jhelum To Have Water Transportation from 2024

Sajidah Masalli

The Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, Vijay Kumar Bidhuri, led a meeting to assess the operation of water transport services in the Jhelum River and Dal Lake in Srinagar. The project, managed by Srinagar Smart City Limited (SSCL), aims to rejuvenate the water-based public transport system in Srinagar. The commissioner urged SSCL to expedite the Request for Proposal (RFP) preparation, focusing on an eBus contract model. Stressing the importance of water transport as an additional mode, he instructed SSCL to finalize routes, and fare structures, and promptly issue tenders. The initiative is expected to enhance the appeal of water bodies for both locals and tourists. The meeting involved key officials from various authorities and consultants.

Meanwhile, in another report, the Jammu and Kashmir Bank faced criticism for ongoing issues with its digital services, particularly UPI transactions. Despite informing customers of a service interruption, users reported persistent difficulties in conducting transactions through UPI services. The bank attributed the inconvenience to a UPI platform upgrade, urging users to reset their UPI PIN/Passcode through registered apps. Customers expressed frustration, especially those relying on online payments outside Jammu and Kashmir. In a separate development, the Jammu and Kashmir Science, Technology & Innovation Council (JKSTIC) granted a substantial fund of 2.00 crores to Sher-

e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) Kashmir. The funding is intended to support 72 research projects and provide seed money to 17 innovators, fostering innovation and research in the region. The university has consistently excelled in innovations, patents, and start-ups.

This initiative, orchestrated by Srinagar Smart City Limited (SSCL), represents a significant endeavor to rejuvenate the aquatic public transport system in Srinagar City.

The selected site in Reshipora has been chosen strategically, ensuring accessibility for residents of Budgam and surrounding areas. This decision aims to provide swift and efficient medical attention, marking a positive shift in the region's medical landscape.

The comprehensive nature of the services offered by the new hospital, ranging from primary care to specialized treatments, reflects a holistic approach to healthcare. The incorporation of advanced technology is a commendable step, as it is poised to streamline diagnostics and treatments, contributing to timely and accurate medical care for patients.

The enthusiasm and ambitious plans expressed by Medical Superintendent Dr. Mohammad Iqbal Sofi further underscore the transformative potential of this project. The commitment to equip the hospital with the latest modern technology and cutting-edge machinery signals a significant leap forward in healthcare services for the community.

As the construction progresses, the

anticipation among residents is palpable, marking a promising chapter in Budgam's healthcare history. The new 125-bedded District Hospital is expected to raise healthcare standards and become a testament to the government's dedication to improving public health in the district.

The positive sentiments expressed by villagers highlight the community's excitement and optimism regarding the forthcoming District hospital project. The acknowledgment of the project as a "ray of hope" and a means to bring relief and improvement to the healthcare system reflects the significant impact it is expected to have on the overall well-being of the village.

The echoing sentiment throughout the village, coupled with the anticipation of positive changes, underscores the transformative potential of the new hospital. The community's eagerness for improved healthcare services reflects the high expectations for the positive impact this project is poised to bring to their lives. Overall, the approval and initiation of this healthcare initiative represent a commendable step towards enhancing public health in Budgam.

The approval for the transfer and construction of a new 125-bedded District Hospital in Reshipora, Budgam, is indeed a momentous development for the region's healthcare system. The decision by the Administrative Council under Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha reflects a commitment to enhancing healthcare services and addressing the medical needs of the community.

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Nadru in Peril: Kashmir's Lakes Face Environmental Crisis



Mehroob Mushtaq

The famed Nadru production in Kashmir is witnessing a decline, with growers attributing it to water pollution stemming from drains flowing into water bodies.

The declining water quality not only jeopardizes the delicate ecosystem but also puts the livelihoods of Nadru cultivators at risk.

Growers said that each passing year sees a further decrease in production as the water quality is worsening due to heightened pollution levels.

Mohammad Ashraf, 60, a seasoned Nadru grower from Sangam Srinagar, expressed concern over the continuous decline in production over the past 16-18 years. "Both the public and the government are responsible for this negligence," he said.

He said that drains constantly discharge into water bodies, contaminating the water and contributing to the decline in Nadru production. "Water bodies such as Dal Lake are the source of livelihood for thousands of families, and Nadru has faced a sharp decline in production since the devastating floods of 2014. We used to harvest hundreds of

kilograms of Nadru from the lake before the floods. Since then, we have been struggling," he added.

The grower said the production has continued to decline over the past few years due to rampant pollution, degrading water quality, and encroachments in the lake. He expressed apprehension that Nadru faces the risk of disappearing from the lake entirely unless substantial measures are taken to restore the water bodies.

Growers also expressed concern over the dilapidated condition of available boats – required to extract Nadru from water bodies – and the unavailability of deodar timber for (boat) repairs, which add to their challenges.

Deteriorating water quality in Dal Lake and other water bodies, a result of both excess water and pollution, has exposed Nadru plants to diseases and fungal growth, rendering them unsuitable for consumption, they said.

The declining Nadru production is a concern not only for local farmers but also for the flourishing Kashmiri food industry. The unique texture and flavour of lotus stems are crucial to various Kashmiri dishes, including NadruMonje and NadruYakhni.

According to official data, the government is committed to the revival of Nadru. They said large-scale cleaning initiatives in water bodies are underway, and appealed to the public to refrain from littering and discarding waste materials into the lakes.

Campus Clean-Up: Fostering a Sustainable University Environment

Nahida Mushtaq

Nestled in the captivating scenery of Kashmir, the university transcends being merely an academic institution. With its splendid architecture and the enchanting NaseemBagh in the fall, the campus becomes an attraction for visitors. However, an alarming issue threatens the essence of this special place—some individuals are neglecting its care.

Despite the university's conscientious deployment of waste disposal facilities, a disheartening segment of people remains indifferent to the call for environmental responsibility. This negligence not only impacts the physical beauty of the campus but also diminishes its overall attractiveness.

Amidst the expansive green area, strategically positioned dustbins stand as silent sentinels, aiming to foster responsible waste disposal. Unfortunately, their presence often goes unnoticed.

The problem extends beyond mismanaged waste. The carefully tended lawns and impeccably clean roads, intended to showcase nature's splendor, now serve as improper parking lots for both staff and



students. This not only detracts from the aesthetic harmony of the surroundings but also challenges the very ethos of a campus designed to be a haven of learning and enlightenment.

This dual challenge, where waste mismanagement converges with improper parking, initiates a ripple effect. It disrupts the physical environment and simultaneously severs the emotional connection that students and staff should ideally have with their academic home—a connection steeped in pride and respect.

In response to this challenge, Mubarak Lone, a devoted Ph.D. scholar at Kashmir University, emerges as a beacon of responsibility. His passionate advocacy against polluting the university with disposables and his persistent encouragement of proper waste disposal align with the sentiments of those who truly appreciate the authentic charm of this academic oasis. In his words and actions lies a call to rekindle a collective commitment to preserving the pristine beauty of the campus—a commitment that transcends individual neglect and upholds the essence of this academic haven.

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