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Social Media becomes a boon for entrepreneurs

❖ Ahsan Ul Shafi

SRINAGAR: She has an Instagram account and it is not used to post selfies. The squared thumbnails are her shelves and the photoblog is her online store. She has done her masters in Linguistics but the language she weaves is beyond the words.

24-year-old Iqra Ahmed always had a dream to do something for Kashmir and today she is living that dream. Though fashion designing was not her field of study at the university has not stopped her from pursuing her passion. In November 2015, Iqra started Instagram and Facebook pages to display her designer work - a blend of Kashmiri tradition and modern style, and thus began the journey of a brand called TulPalav.

“People just think that everyone has a dream but what I am doing right now was really my dream. I am just living that dream,” says Iqra. “I had no business background and there was no idea how to do things but now I’m kind of experiencing also how it (business) takes place.”

It has been more than a year since the creation of TulPalav and today it is a flourishing online fashion store with everything from embroidered Kashmiri pheran to shrugs on display. “I mostly focus on Tilla. The collection is sold almost within a month of its release. Tilla products get many orders and 90 pieces have already been sold of the items made public last month. Orders come in bulk,” says Iqra.

Born in a family where her father and brother are lawyers and mother a government employee, Iqra’s family had expected that she would become a civil servant but that was not to be because her dream was to create something beautiful and new. “Initially even no one at family knew about it. I just got some clothes and thought of a name and uploaded the work on internet. The first pictures weren’t even worth looking at but people appreciated even that. It started then and has continued,” she says.

Boosted by the encouragement and positive feedback from customers, Iqra last year did a crash-course in fashion designing to add to her skills and creativity. She had done her graduation in Arts from Women’s College at MA Road.

The demand for the designer wear, she says, has been increasing since day one and it is not possible for her to handle such number of orders. “There is no team. I procure the material myself; then there is designing, stitching and delivery. I’ve to handle everything. It is all done from home,” she says.

When Iqra started the venture, her friends at Kashmir University would help her deliver the products to customers but now she has hired a full-time delivery boy to meet the rush of orders.

But her dream does not end here. TulPalav may soon be available offline too. “There was no plan for physical store but now there is one...,” says Iqra.

Year on, Uri fire victims yet to receive compensation

❖ Idrees Bukhtiyar

Uri (Baramulla): A year has passed since the deadly blaze destroyed 50 structures in border town of Uri in north Kashmir’s Baramulla district but not a single victim has yet received any compensation from the district administration.

The deadly fire broke out in the midnight of 23rd and 24th February last year.

The traders are aghast over what they call the “callous attitude” of the district administration. The General Secretary Traders Federation Uri (TFU) Qayoom Chalkoo, told that the district administration has failed to provide compensation despite a number of assurances.

“After the fire incident, the district administration visited here and assured that everybody would be given the compensation for the losses they suffered,” said Chalkoo adding, “It is very unfortunate that one year has passed but the traders and shopkeepers are yet to receive any compensation.”

“The residents of the town are poor and their livelihood totally depends on their business they run as most of the agricultural lands here have been occupied by the power generating companies and army,” he said.

Chalkoo said: “Leave the compensation; the

traders who lost their business to the devastating fire were not even rehabilitated. As the administration has failed to provide the compensation, the traders here are on the verge of starvation”

“I brought new grocery items worth lakhs of rupees after I lost my shop to the devastating fire. But till date we have not received any compensation,” said Farooq Ahmad Mir, a trader in the town.

Besides 50 shops that were gutted in the devastating fire, there were a few godowns, textiles and medical shops which too faced the blaze. Khawaja News Agency- the only news agency in Uri was also damaged in the fire incident.

Last year in Legislative Assembly, MLA Uri Mohammad Shafi Uri questioned the then Minister for Revenue, Relief & Rehabilitation Basharat Bukhari about the relief and rehabilitation process of the Uri fire victims and in reply the minister had said that the ‘relief will be provided under Chief Minister Relief Fund’ (CMRF) at the earliest.

Deputy Commissioner Baramulla, Nasir Ahmad Naqash told MERC Times that they have already taken up the matter with the government.

“In case of commercial losses, the victims are paid a special package from Chief Minister Relief Fund (CMRF) but so far we have not received it,” Nasir said



Chenani-Nashri tunnel inaugratation soon: Govt

❖ Musaib Hafiz

Srinagar: After seven years of work, the Chenani-Nashri tunnel on Srinagar-Jammu highway is finally heading towards its completion as the tunnel is already open for testing.

All civil works on the tunnel and its adjoining roads are now complete but the extensive Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing (MEP) tests are underway which are prerequisite for compulsory awarding of Commercial Operations Date by the National Highway Authority of India.

The 9.2 Kilometer long Chenani Nashri tunnel,

considered as India’s largest road tunnel, will be inaugurated by Prime minister of India on April 2nd.

The MEP tests were started in the last week of December 2016 and were supposed to be completed by January 31, 2017. But due to bad weather conditions and snowfall on the highway, the electricity supply to the area was interrupted, thus difficult for the executing agency to continue with the testing and inspection processes.

The two-lane tunnel, connecting Chenani with Nashri in Ramban area, will slash the 31-km of the journey and reduce the travel time by two hours.

Srinagar girl uses social media to help needy

❖ **Aaqib Hyder**

SRINAGAR: At a time when everybody tries to remain busy in chatting with friends and other people on social media, this Srinagar girl uses social media as a tool to help the needy people.

The 27 years old Nida Rehman who hails from Zakura is helping the children of transporters who were the sufferers during 2016 unrest.

“During the unrest, I observed that transporters were the mostly affected. Afterwards, I thought that I should take an initiative to help them as much as I can,” Nida told MERC Times.

Having completed her masters in Kashmir and South Asian Studies from University of Kashmir, Nida said it was difficult for her to decide how to help the children of transporters.

“Later, an idea came to my mind to help community having financial crises so I took an initiative to distribute free books, copies, schools bags to their children for next class. So that children of transporters community can continue their education, she said.

Nida keeps uploading status on social networking site face book requesting

people to donate books, copies, bags for these children.

“Huge numbers of people share my status and came forward to become part of this program. Since day one I

got good a response from friends, members, society and who came forward and started donating,” Nida said.

“It’s a great initiative which deserves a lot of appreciation and donation to keep it alive and working.

I came to know about it on Facebook and chipped in to help,” said Murtaza Hussain, a donor.

When asked about for what organization she works for, Nida replied, “I am not associated with any political party or with any NGO. The program, I have started is called GAASH (means light) an initiative by IITIFAAQ (Unity) and all those working here are volunteers.”

Explaining about her passion for social work, Nida said: “It was after 2014 floods that I had an assignment and came across their poor condition” she said.

“I have wished to do something for these people and that time I launched first online campaign for their help. My aunt suggested me name IITIFAAQ, a helping hand for those who had been suffering from cancer,” she added.

Meanwhile, under GAASH program they have distributed around 500 study material to the students so far and will be distributing more such material in near future.



❖ **Nausheen Naseer**

Srinagar : Defying the state government’s tall claims of providing all amenities to them, Kashmir’s leprosy patients, living on the outskirts of Lal bazaar in Srinagar, have their own stories to tell.

“The walls of my house are about to collapse. I can’t move out since I have nowhere else to go,” said Ghulam Rahman, a leprosy patient at Bahrar, Kashmir’s last leper colony.

Bahrar, established during the British rule in 1881, is home to 84 lepers and their families, who live in clustered one-room mud houses with crumbling walls and inadequate space.

“For a total of 200 people (including the patients) there are only 64 rooms here. To make up for the lack of space, we have arranged beds with mosquito nets outside the quarters for some patients,” said Mohammad Yaqoob, a government doctor at Bahrar.

In 2009, the JawaharLal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) had sanctioned Rs 4.25 crore for the construction of 300 housing units, each with two rooms, a kitchen and bathroom, for the lepers at Bahrar. But after seven years, only 61 units have been completed.

“Back then Deputy CM Tara Chand had assured us that these units would be constructed in 18 months,” said Ali Tak, a patient from Kargil.

Besides improper accommodation, the inmates also complain about insufficient food and clothing. “We run out of basic food supplies before the month is even over and get only one piece of clothing every year. They (government) do not even provide us with enough clothes, we have to buy them ourselves,” said Tak.

Promises of jobs by the government also remain unfulfilled, the patients said, adding that their children work mostly as laborers while some others are employed in education, engineering and water works departments.

Surviving on meager government grants of Rs 400 per month, they also alleged that the cost of medical care for non-leprosy diseases like hypertension, hypothyroid, CAD and diabetes is beyond their reach. “Here we are treated only for leprosy but for other ailments we have to consult doctors outside Bahrar and buy medicines worth Rs.1000-Rs 2000. The amount we get from the government is too small to cover such expenses,” said Tak.

Denying the patients claims, Yaqoob said, “From clothes to medicines, we provide them all the basic amenities,” adding that they do, however, face a lot of social stigma.

But the patients claim that they are living on the edge. “We do not expect anything from anyone now.”

Leprosy affected people cry over lack of basic amenities

KASHMIR TULIP FESTIVAL BEGINS FROM 1st APRIL

❖ Fasil Sidiq

SRINAGAR : The Secretary Tourism and Floriculture Farooq Ahmad Shah Tuesday said this year will witness the mega Tulip festival which will be part of, Bahaar-e-Kashmir event to showcase the Asia's largest Tulip garden in Srinagar.

The Tulip garden has more than 20 lakh tulips in its lap with 46 varieties spread in the garden in the backdrop of mighty Zabarwan range of mountains.

The Secretary announced that this festival will start from April 01 and will continue for

15 days. He said the festival will witness food and handcraft stalls, kiosks to showcase the rich craft and cuisine of the valley with traditional ethnic touch.

Shah also said that on the sidelines of this mega Tulip festival- Bahar-e-Kashmir, one Aalmi Mushaira will be organised in which world famous poets will participate and will enthral the audience with their latest poems in Urdu . This programme will be one of the first of its kind in the valley.

He was accompanied by the Director Floriculture



Kashmir MH Mir ,Director Tourism Kashmir Mahmood A shah ,Dy Director Tourism Kashmir Zahoor Peerzada and other officials of Tourism and floriculture, later the secretary also had an interactive session with the SKICC staff and discussed about various methods and strategies to improve the quality of services in the said international conference centre.

He stressed on the employees to work with zeal to ensure the delivery of quality services with adequate quantity and maintain the international standard of the centre.

Rugby stars create Guinness world record

❖ Shahjhan Mughal

SRINAGAR: The first ever Guinness World Record in Rugby was created by Vickrant and Irfan at Indoor Stadium.

Former Mr India first runners-up and founder of Super-positivity Movement, Vickrant Mahajan from Jammu and Irfan Aziz Botta, General Secretary, J&K Rugby Association came together to accomplish this historic feat.

Encouraged by hundreds of Rugby enthusiasts, they created a new Guinness World Record for the most rugby passes in one hour by a pair.

Starting at 11 am, they performed 2,543 rugby passes in one hour and surpassed the previous Guinness World Record of 2,000 passes in one hour.

It is pertinent to mention here that Vickrant is on a mission to perform 100 Guinness World Record attempts in one year in J&K and this was his 73rd Guinness World Record attempt since May 2016. He has the unique distinction of being the first person in the world to give a nonstop 48 hour speech, and he also holds Guinness World Records for the Longest Play, the Largest Greeting Card and the Largest Handwritten Book in the world.

Vickrant has been holding a series of motivational talks in schools and colleges across Srinagar and has promised to come back to inspire the local youth to channel their energies positively and work towards putting Kashmir on the world map for positive reasons.

Waste management sense improving among people

❖ Ather Shah

SRINAGAR: Waste management has been a serious headache for people as well as the government all over the globe, but in the recent years, modern society has become more responsible when it comes to waste management.

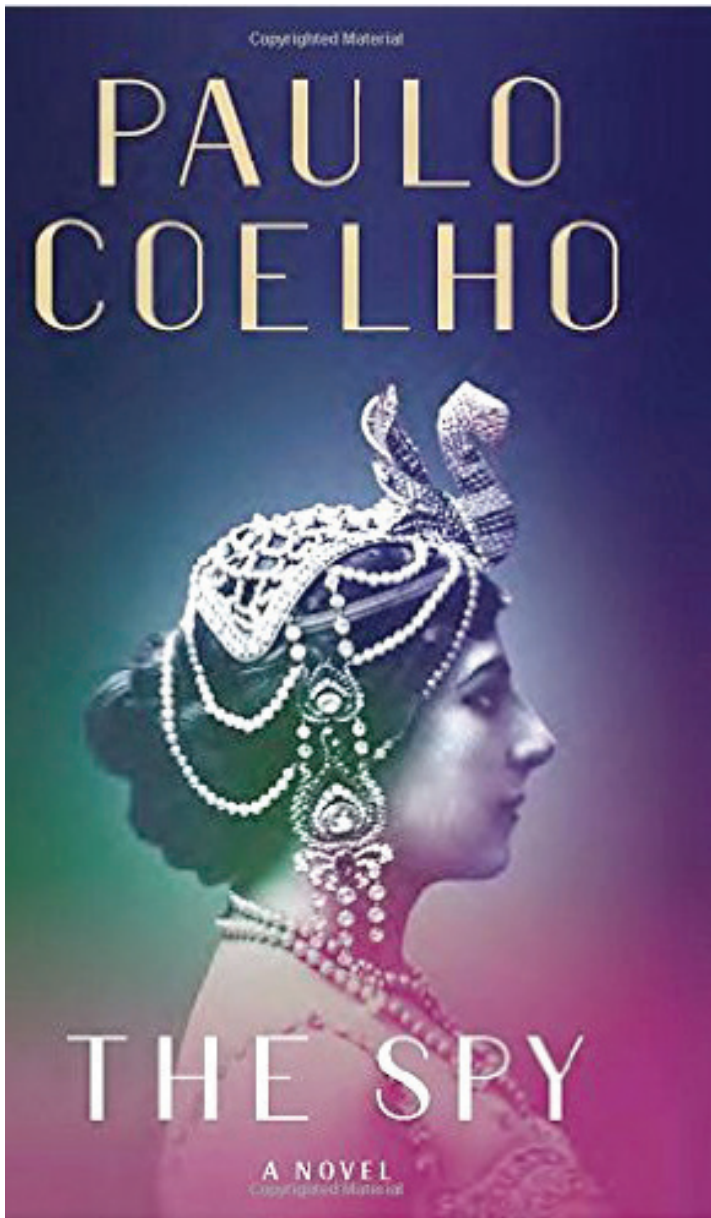
Waste disposal has emerged into an industry and is more than just removing waste. The organic waste is segregated from non-recyclable and inorganic waste. This has allowed cities to make use of organic waste to create compost for public areas. There are even some cities that package and

sell the compost to make money. These items can be reprocessed and recycled and will be used in producing new products. This method has helped reduce further consumption of natural resources and at the same time lowers the ultimate needs for waste disposal.

In the past, burning waste in the landfill or in the backyard was a common practice. But according to health agencies, when garbage and plastics are being burned, they produce particulate matter that are solid compounds and are suspended in the air.

Exposure to this can increase the risks of developing heart disease, respiratory disease, asthma and emphysema. Proper disposal of waste or waste management relocates waste to areas where they can be left, incinerated or disposed of in a safe manner. Removing waste from public areas helps reduce risks to overall health, decreases exposure to biohazards and reduces infestation of pest. Waste energy is basically a derivative of some techniques of waste management.





The Spy: a review

❖ **Farooz Ahmad**

Title The Spy
Author Paulo Coelho
Publisher Random House
ISBN 1786330555, 9781786330550
Length 192 Pages

The Spy, a new novel by Paulo Coelho, the best-selling author of *The Alchemist* (which sold more than 65 million copies) and many others, characterizes one of most unfathomable mysterious women in history named Mata Hari. The story of her celebrated yet enigmatic life as an exotic dancer and courtesan, and her controversial execution as a spy during the First World War unfolds as a fascinating first-person narrative of self-creation and bravery.

Her only crime was to be an independent woman: "I do not know if the future will remember me, but if it should, may no one ever view me as a victim, but as someone who moved

forward with courage, and paid the price she had to pay."

Paulo Coelho, on the anniversary of Mata Hari's execution for espionage in 1917, re-evaluates her life in a fictional memoir. In a series of letters, written from prison on the eve of her death, Mata Hari reflects on the choices she has made to always pursue her own truth—from her childhood in a small Dutch town, to unhappy years as the wife of an alcoholic diplomat in Java, to her calculated and self-fashioned rise to celebrity in Paris and across Europe as an exotic dancer and confidante to the most powerful men of the time. Though there was little evidence to incriminate her, Mata Hari was unable to escape persecution and prosecution by French military intelligence, and at the novel's end, Coelho re-creates a final letter, written by Mata Hari's lawyer, Edouard Clunet, that offers a captivating view of Europe at war and the fatal price of suspicion.

Smart Phone: An addictive drug

❖ **Hikmatyar**

SRINAGAR: Cell phones have been widely adopted by pre-teens and teenagers for everyday use. Cell phones are used to micro-coordinate day-to-day activities between friends and acquaintances or with parents. The cell phone also offers a sense of security if the child needs to contact a parent in an emergency.

Cell phones play a role in youth identity formation - fostering a sense of self-esteem, showing social connectedness, and providing a teen with an independent means of communication. The mobile phone therefore plays a key role in a child's development as an adolescent. In many instances, this mobile youth culture adds to the generation gap between parents and youth.

As a parent you cannot escape the fact that cell phones are part of today's culture. If your child doesn't already have a cell phone you probably feel the pressure to provide them with one. There are several reasons why you may feel you want your child to have access to a cell phone.

Young people are now so addicted to their mobile phones it feels like they have lost a limb when they are without them, a study finds. The findings, by

the University of Maryland, show the growing reliance that the younger generation has on technology and how it has become central to their lives. While phones were the most essential device, other technology such as computers, MP3 players and televisions were also considered essential to get people through their day.

Many young people reported mental and physical symptoms of distress and "employed the rhetoric of addiction, dependency and depression," when reporting their experiences of trying to go unplugged for a full day.

Students talked about how scary it was, how addicted they were," said Professor Susan Moeller, who led the project. "They expected the frustration. But they didn't expect to have the psychological effects, to be lonely, to be panicked, the anxiety, literally heart palpitations."

The study titled "The World Unplugged project" asked more than 1,000 students from 10 countries around the world, including Britain, to go without any media for 24 hours and monitored their feelings.

Prof Moeller said that more than 50 per cent of students failed to go the full 24 hours and everyone claimed to suffer some kind of withdrawal symptoms.



3 day Shah-e-Jeelan conference concludes in Bandipora

❖ **Imran Naikoo**

BANDIPORA: The sun goes down, the kangri (fire pots) comes out and the snow-clad valley has to face a number of challenges.

The Valley is cloaked in white blanket, the sun is disappeared and the most promising source of heat is the kangari, the traditional fire pot. The air is tinged with blue and grey, filled plumes of smoke and burnt wood. Pools of water on the streets freeze over, only to crack with a harsh sound when stepped on. This is chillai kalan, the 40 harshest days of winter in Kashmir that begins on December 21. Till the end of January, life in the valley is going to be slow paced and is dependent on the whims of the weather.

In January, Kashmir mostly remains covered with white cover and after continuous snowfall ended the longest dry spell in the state in 40 years. Flight movement remains disrupted and Kashmir has become a virtual place that remains cut off from the rest of the country after heavy snowfall.

Even Jammu-Srinagar national highway, one of the state's crucial road links gets disconnected

during snow time.

Apart from the isolation and gloom, uncertainty also looms over the Valley during 'wande', the Kashmiri word for winter. This is a time when electricity is erratic and activity comes to a near-



standstill. So, the impending winter shapes the activities of the months before. Before the cold peaks, Kashmiris scour the markets like ants to stock up on food and supplies that will tide them over chillai kalan.

When the winter has the valley in its grip, the

days shorten to a few hours and time spent indoors grows longer. The bitter cold casts a spell of laziness – burdened by multiple layers of clothing, topped by a pheran (a traditional knee-length cloak) and ensnared in the warmth of the kangri, one finds it hard to find the will to step outdoors.

Winter in Kashmir is not just a season, it is a way of life that compels people to go back to their roots – in the biting cold, only Kashmiri handlooms, weaves and handicrafts can come to the rescue; surviving without the pheran, kanger, namda carpets and gabba (traditional woolen flooring) is near impossible.

The 40 days of chillai kalan are followed by 20 days of chillai khurd, which translates to small cold and 10 days of chille bach (literally baby cold). This year, minimum temperatures plummeted to -5.6 degrees Celsius.

Every year, people cover their windows with plastic to prevent the cold air from seeping in during the peak winter.

For all the gloom it brings, the winter also brings some things to life in the Valley that you are not able to forget its memories.

PHE department supplies unfiltered water in Budgam

❖ **Mahdeesa Altaf**

BUDGAM: Dozens of villages in central Kashmir's Budgam district are being supplied unfiltered water, causing several water-borne diseases among people.

The residents of Raithan Check village (falling in PHE Sub-Division Khansahab) said they are being supplied spring water from Dragar village since 1990. "But the shabby reservoir and fencing around the spring were never repaired due to official apathy," they said.

The fencing around the spring is completely broken and its distribution lines are lying defunct. "We are forced to consume unsafe water," a local resident said.

Locals said instead of repairing the fencing and reservoir, the PHE department employees—as a short-cut—have diverted water from nearby irrigation canal "SoneManie" to this Reservoir. "This water is hazardous and unsafe for drinking," they said.

The "unsafe" water is supplied to more than 700 people residing in the village, they added.

According to local residents, their children have been developing intestinal infections due to contaminated water consumption.

Meanwhile, residents of Khandioora village in PHE Sub-Division Beerwah alleged that the department is supplying them unfiltered water directly from nallah 'Ashren'.

Locals said the department was supposed to supply them spring water but fed them with water from a nallah instead. Chief Engineer PHE Kashmir, G M Bhat told MERC Times he will look into the matter. "We will try to restore spring water supply in Raithan once its status is checked," he said.

AISHE WORKSHOP HELD IN KASHMIR UNIVERSITY



❖ **Syed Burhan**

SRINAGAR: A one day workshop of nodal officers in higher education was held in University of Kashmir on March 23rd. Professor Manzoor Ahmed Shah, Deputy Director Rashtriya Uchchatar Shikshiya Abhiyan (RUSA), presided over the function. He started on a welcome note and talked about the importance of this workshop.

While speaking about the significance of the workshop, Dr. Irshad Ahmed Mir from Government Degree College Kupwara said, "This workshop will help the nodal officers from different higher education institutes to collect the information and status of a particular institution that will be uploaded on AISHEs (All India Survey on Higher Education)

portal of MHRD and will help in making decisions regarding existing and new courses to be launched at higher education level."

The speakers also spoke in detail about the positive implications it can have in changing the education system of the colleges in the valley.

Ministry of human resource development had initiated an All India survey on higher education under its scheme RUSA a few years ago to prepare a database on a large and diverse system of higher education covering all higher education institutions of the country. From the year 2016-17, a new format has been developed as a part of the main data capture format to collect all the details of teachers employed by all the colleges and universities.

Srinagar youth holds reading session to revive 'Reading Culture'



❖ Farheen Qureshi

SRINAGAR: With an aim to revive the social utility of the public spaces of Kashmir, the three youth of the city have been focusing to revive the culture of reading books.

"Earlier, people use to narrate the poetry to other people outside their shops but now that culture has been lost somewhere. We want to revive it," said Taha Mughal who works as writer and architect.

"The aim of our reading sessions is always focused to inculcate the habit of reading among the youth," said Peerzada Sheikh Muzammil who works as Graphic artist & writer.

"Nowadays the youth is diverting from the habit of reading, but we have taken an initiative to bring them back," said Anis Wani who works as Artist & Photographer.

The three youth recently held a reading session of poetry and prose at Winterfell café on the banks of Dal Lake here.

Held under the banner, Waruk- The Telitale Heart-(A Reading session of Prose and Poetry), the session was held in three languages and six writers were called to be the part.

"The session was held in English, Urdu and Kashmiri. The writers who were called, included Huzaifa Pandit, Nighat Sahiba, Rafia Wali, Masroor Muzaffar, Peerzada Sheikh Muzammil and Anis Suhail Wani," Taha said.

"The session focused on different themes of poetry and prose that include Romantic lyrics, resistance literature, homosexuality, feminism and love," Taha added.

When asked that how this idea came to his mind, Mughal said: When I and other friends used to meet at Jehlum Bund Lal Chowk, we used to recite the poetry to each other. But one day we decided to make it to the people"

He said: "Anybody can join us who are interested in poetry or prose. There are no hindrances"

"Earlier, we held this session at Convocation Hall in Kashmir University where dozens of people participated. Now, we are planning to hold the same session but outdoors," he added.

Meanwhile, people from different walks of the life participated in the session.

LA Panel Examines working of Housing and Urban Dev Dept

❖ Ali Saifudin

GANDERBAL: The Committee on Estimates of Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly today directed the Housing & Urban Development Department (H&UDD) which met here under the Chairmanship of MLA, Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami, suggested for formulation of master plans for the towns of all districts.

The process for which has already been started. The committee also directed the Housing & Urban Development Department (H&UDD) to accelerate the process of preparation of Master Plans for the urban centres including capital city of Srinagar.

Special emphasis was given on the issue to complete the Master Plan formulation for the cities where the process has already been set in motion.

Legislators, Ghulam Mohammad Saroori,

Jeevan Lal, Daleep Singh Parihar, Mushtaq Ahmed Shah and Sheikh Ishfaq Jabbar gave their suggestions to improve the functioning of the department.

The Committee stressed on the concerned authorities to also involve the local legislators and the people while formulating any schemes and plans as they can guide them well in achieving need based development.

Commissioner Secretary, Housing and Urban Development, Hirdesh Kumar Singh briefed the Committee about the programmes and activities being carried out by the department.

He also elaborated about the activities undertaken by the department under Smart Cities Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission, rehabilitation of Dal-Nageen Lake, PMAY-HFA, AMRUT, Housing for all Plan of Action, Deendyal Antyodaya Yojana and National Urban Livelihood Mission (DAY-NULM).

Massive plantation drive begins across the valley



❖ Ayad Ullah Dar

GANDERBAL: The government officials said that 3,000 saplings would be planted on various campuses of Srinagar, whereas over 9,000 saplings of different varieties will be planted in colleges of Shopian, Pulwama, Baramulla, Kulgam, Ganderbal, Budgam, Anantnag, Bandipora and Kupwara districts.

Further, a total of 12000 saplings of conifer, Budul, Deodar and willow will be planted in the low-lying areas of the Kashmir Division during the drive which will commence from March 13 with the collaboration of the Forest Department.

Commissioner Secretary Higher Education Department, Dr Asgar Hassan Samoon has directed for formulating a comprehensive action plan for effective plantation drive.

Dr Samoon has also directed the Principals to distribute plant saplings to every student so that they can plant it in their homes which will help in restoring ecological balance.

He also called for a mass awareness program among the students and masses through seminars and other related activities on the importance of planting more and more trees.

Officials said that around 3 lakh saplings of different varieties would be planted in Kulgam this year. They said that Forest Department is going to plant 1,10,800 saplings, Social Forestry 36,800 saplings, Soil Conservation 18,000 saplings, Horticulture 27,000 saplings and 30,000 saplings will be planted by Sericulture Department, besides as many as 430 Chinar saplings would also be planted at identified locations in the district.

Cycle rally to create road safety awareness

❖ Adil Amin

SRINAGAR: To encourage people to move towards eco-friendly modes of transport and to create road safety awareness, a cycle rally organized by Traffic Police City Srinagar under its Civic Action Programme was held here today.

As many as 350 children from various schools of Srinagar district participated in the awareness rally which was flagged-off by DIG Traffic in presence of Chairman & CEO J&K Bank, SSP Traffic City Srinagar, SSP Traffic Rural Kashmir, and representatives of Police Wives Welfare Association.

The event was supported by J&K Bank, Police Wives Welfare Association, FireFox, KRSF, Hyundai, Honda, Himalayan Motors and V-Mart.

During the rally, a huge cavalcade of cyclists in an extremely disciplined formation of batches rode from Traffic Police office via Dalgate, Boulevard, Lalit, Gupkar, TRC and concluded back at the Traffic Police Office City Srinagar.

On the occasion, various speakers appreciated efforts put in to emphasize the safety of youth and pedestrians on the roads. The Traffic Police officials said that the Department is committed to work towards reducing rising rate of accidents and appealed people, particularly youth, to adhere to traffic rules for their



own safety.

Other speakers while hailing the organizers for holding the rally said that involvement of youth in any endeavor is an absolute imperative in spreading the message of safe riding. It was said that the Traffic Department shall continue to organize such events in future as well.

Casual laborers allege legislators of discrimination

❖ Ikhtlaq-ul- Rehman

SRINAGAR: Casual laborers in Kashmir cry of “discrimination” and rue over the fact that legislators “hike their salaries” and also allege of neglect due to which they have been forced to live the life of penury.

After treating themselves to yet another hike last July, the fifth since 2002, J&K’s legislators get a princely salary of Rs 160,000 per month. But right under their noses, in various government departments they are supposed to oversee, casual workers are made to toil for a meager Rs 150 or Rs 250 a day.

Nearly 61,000 people work for the J&K government and its agencies as casual laborers or “need-based workers”, a majority of them since 1994. Although every government since, including the incumbent, has talked about regularizing their services, it hasn’t translated to anything beyond “promises”.

Mir Sarwar Hussain, 37, is with the tourism department since 2008, employed as supervisor to a landscape expert. He took the ill-paying job hoping the state would regularize it sooner rather than later. Nine years on, he is still waiting. “There is always hope that if not today, and then maybe tomorrow we will get a job. The higher authorities keep promising that this will happen someday; it’s become a never ending cycle,” Hussain says.

A J&K legislator gets a basic salary of Rs 2,000 per day. A skilled laborer, as per the government determined wages, gets just about 11.25 per cent of that and an unskilled worker gets 7.5 per cent. These wages, in fact, are just 10-15 per cent of even what a retired lawmaker gets as pension. And while a lawmaker holds office for only six years unless reelected, most casual laborers have put in more than 12 years of service.

What’s more, they are critical to the smooth functioning of the state machinery. As a senior government official put it, “They are gardeners, watch and ward men, officer hands, helpers, linemen, electricians, computer operators and what not. They are not non-essential.”

While they have toiled hoping to get regular jobs, the age limit for state jobs has passed many by, leaving them staring at an even more uncertain future. “The government has assured the overage workers that the issue would be looked into,” says Hussain, the representative of 232 casual laborers in the tourism department. “They have given their blood to their departments, where will they go now? Some have even died with this hope in their hearts that someday they would get regular service; many are suffering from serious ailments because of our poor working conditions. But who will help a poor man?”

2-day workshop on ‘Open Access’ concludes at Kashmir University



❖ Hasina

SRINAGAR: A two-day workshop on ‘Open Access Platforms in Research’ concluded at University of Kashmir on Wednesday.

The workshop, organized by Department of Library and Information Sciences (DLIS), was attended by faculty members, scholars and students from the University and other academic and research institutions of the country.

Dr Abdul Majid Baba, Head, DLIS said the main objective of the workshop was to make academic community aware of open access literature available online. “The digital era in libraries has set new trends of accessing information and brought to light new services. The Digital era that brought a new word in the scholarly world- “Open Access” has reduced the scholarly barriers to a greater extent,” he said.

Mr Nasir Mirza from University’s Media Education Research Centre deliberated on open access in journalism, while Dr Sumeer Gul from DLIS highlighted contributions of faculty members of University in leading Open Access Research Platforms. Ms. Rosy Jan conducted the proceedings of the workshop while Dr. Shabir Ahmad presented vote of thanks.

Experts delivered lectures on different aspects of Open Access Literature available online for different fields of specialization and also discussed Open on-line journals/books/libraries/repositories / newspapers and archives.

JOKE OF 'EIGHT SEATS RESERVED'

❖ **Furqan Khurseed**

SRINAGAR: Despite eight seats being reserved for women and Specially abled in the mini-buses operating in the city, the female commuters here are often forced to remain standing as the earmarked seats are generally occupied by the male passengers. In 2012 government under the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, had in 2012 issued an order directing the mini-bus operators in the Valley to reserve eight seats for women and physically challenged passengers. However, the rule is hardly followed.

"I have never seen any traffic police personnel or official inspecting buses to check the violation of this rule,"

said Insha Noor, a B.A student. She also complained of harassment in the overcrowded buses. "I am fed up of the regular harassment. It is common to get pushed and teased in buses," she said. Traffic officials, however, blamed lack of public transport for the situation.

There are just 3,000 buses for 15 lakh people in Srinagar, which has added to the violation of the rule, said a Traffic department official. SP, Traffic, Srinagar, Maqsood-Ul-Zaman said that the department was imposing fines and impounding vehicles for the violation. "We too have our limitations, we have only 300 traffic police personnel to check various violations and it is not always possible to keep a keen eye on mini buses," the officer said.

Mini-buses have a capacity to seat a maximum of 25 passengers, but they are usually overcrowded. "Buses here are always overcrowded and it is awkward to remain standing," said Ifra Mubashir, a Class XII student. Ifra while sharing her travel experience said she

had to regularly face inconvenience in the overloaded buses. "Male passengers don't bother to offer seat to women even as they watch them struggle amid a crowd of men," she said.

Abdul Majid Rather, Assistant Regional Transport Officer said: "To implement this rule more strictly we are going to hold a meeting with drivers and conductors."

CULTURAL CUP OF TEA

❖ **Humaira Ahad**

Sitting in the tea room and peeping through the Victorian era windows, a person is able to see the picturesque bund in the summer capital Srinagar. The scene makes a person nostalgic about the grand past of the Jhelum bund. This tea room is named as 'Chai Jaai', a Kashmiri name chosen for the place which much care and thinking.

"The idea about the tea room struck my mind when I was sitting at Peerzu restaurant. I was reading about the mahatta studio on BBC website "says the founder Roohi Nazki." Mahatta is a place with great history. The building has a touch of both Kashmiri and British architecture. While doing the renovations I have tried to maintain the originality of the place. I did the interiors myself and tried my best to use the little space in the best possible way", adds Roohi Nazki.

Offering varieties of tea ranging from

the ethnic noon Chai to Kehwa, to other forms including white tea, green tea, oolong tea, yellow Matcha and various forms of Herbal Tea (peppermint, chamomile, jasmine jade, lavender spell, hibiscus lush), this place is a heaven for tea lovers.

"This tea house has infused a new life to the ethnic Kashmiri bakery", says Danish, a customer at the restaurant. Lavasa pizza and tchwoor pizza are the new additions in the long list of traditional bakery items which includes Makai Tchyott, Soth, Kulcha and others.

"We are trying our best to promote Kashmiri culture. We also hold programs to encourage budding artists of the Valley. We are organizing a program called 'Phulai', to celebrate spring which is to be held on 1st and 2nd of July in the Jhelum View park adjacent to 'Chai Jaai'. The main aim of the program is to publicize our culture and traditions", says Roohi Nazki.

SMC Employees Strike Hits City Sanitation

❖ **Irfan Trambo**

SRINAGAR: Heaps of garbage are dotting the roads in the city as municipal employees have been observing strike on Sunday and Friday in support of their colleagues allegedly arrested on corruption charges.

At Commercial hub, Lal Chowk, roads and drains were seen full of garbage, raising serious health concerns.

"It is quite unfortunate that the Srinagar Municipal Employees (SMC) have started the strike over an irrelevant issue. If someone did something wrong, he should face action," said a shopkeeper Aijaz Ahmad at Regal Chowk.

Similar reports are pouring in from other parts of the city, uptown as well as the downtown, with people appealing the SMC employees to call off their strike.

At Khanyar near Shiraz Cinema, the residents said that a dog's carcass was not removed since Thursday evening, resulting in inconvenience to them.

At many places, the garbage dumpers have not been replaced. The people are forced to throw garbage in open.

Vigilance Organisation had on Thursday arrested Mohammad Ashraf Warsi (Enforcement Officer), Fayaz Ahmad Khan, Bilal Ahmad Baba, Mushtaq Ahmad Sheikh (Ward Officers), Urfan

Hussain Joo, and Bashir Ahmad Bhat (Building Inspectors) on corruption charges.

It was found that these employees, along with others, had allowed the construction of Hotel Royal Arabia at Khayam.

The SMC Commissioner, Dr Shafiqat Khan, said that they were in touch with the employees. He said they were aware of the difficulties faced by the people because of the strike.

"There is no justification to the strike. If someone has indulged in the malpractices, he should face the music. There is no scope of letting anyone accused of corruption free," he said.

He said that I have asked the accounts officer, who is also the departmental vigilance officer, to dispose of all the complaints in accordance with the law and take action wherever needed.

"I am always there for the rights of the employees," he said.

President SMC employees Union, Nazir Ahmad Khan, said that there was no proper mechanism in place for various works and that was why they were observing the strike.

"We want a proper mechanism to be in place for the proper functioning of the corporation. The field staff is being targeted at random," he said.

"After thorough deliberations, we will decide the future course of action," he added.

Srinagar girl starts her own designer label

❖ **Aneesa Khan**

SRINAGAR: A 24-year-old girl from Srinagar's Sanat Nagar has started her own designer wear collection. Iqra Ahmed started TulPalav two years ago in November and displayed her work on social networking sites Facebook and Instagram. "I didnt invest much initially but used my creativity. I learnt

everything from internet and then started my business," she told MERC Times.

Iqra finished her graduation from Womens, M.A Road, Srinagar and masters in linguistic from Kashmir University. She has always been interested in fashion designing and loves perhans. She mostly focuses on Tilla work. "I am getting very positive feedback from customers."



Mobile subscribers for six telecos increases

❖ Sharoz Khushal

PAHALGAM: The mobile subscriber base of six telecom operators, including Bharti Airtel, Vodafone and Idea, jointly increased by 2.27 million in February to reach 817.42 million, according to industry data.

“...the number of mobile phone subscribers showed an increase to 817.42 million in February 2017. The net increase in subscriber base is 2.27 million in the month of February,” the Cellular Operators Association of India said in a statement.

This includes data of all COAI members except Reliance Jio Infocomm. Bharti Airtel led the subscriber growth by adding 1.25 million new mobile customers, followed by Idea Cellular (1.21 million), Vodafone (0.79 million) and Aircel (10,000 new customers).

“The growth in the subscriptions indicates that consumer base is expanding and reaching new horizons in the country. We are an enabler of comprehensive growth. The industry has also ensured that government’s plans reach even the farthest corners of the country and everyone is equally benefited,” COAI Director General Rajan S Mathews said. Telenor, whose business has been acquired by Airtel, lost 0.99 million mobile customers.

UP East added the maximum number of subscribers at 74.61 million in February. Maharashtra came second with 70.32 million mobile subscribers, with Bihar coming a close third with 69.31 million subscribers.

Kashmiri Jewellery: OLD LOVE IN NEW FORM

❖ Hirra Azmat

SRINAGAR: The craftsmen of Jammu and Kashmir have over the years excelled in the art of making jewellery with stones, gold and silver. They have honed their skills into making ornaments with finesse and ingenuity. Srinagar, a centre for precious and semi-precious jewellery is flooded with traditional as well as modern designs. Most of the jewellery is custom made to meet the demand of the ever increasing market.

“Women folk vehemently follow the fashion trends on social media sites nowadays. They come up with screen shots of various jewellery items lifted from various FB pages and Instagram. They guide us to design their desired jewellery pieces in the same way,” says Abdul Hamid, a 40 year old jeweller from old city.

While most of the jewellery is customised, some cheap Halaqbands, bracelets, hair clips are kept for sale to the rural population.

The rural men and women folk in Jammu and Kashmir wear huge circular ear rings called kundalas while large anklets called nupura are worn by the rural women in Jammu. The women of Rajouri district fancy a silver cap or crown known as chaunk phool which is worn on the head under the veil.



“I have seen my late grandmother wearing a sliver cap with black strips under her veil. She had a collection of such caps in her Almirah. She believed the cap was like a wreath to her adding grace and charm to any woman who wore it,” says Saira Khan, a medical student from Rajouri.

Halqaband, a traditionally tight choker which is studded with rubies, emeralds, semi-precious stones and even mirrors is usually made of silver, gold or brass and has interlocking sections joined together with thread. The Dejhor which hangs from the upper portion of the ear is worn

by every Pandit woman as a symbol of marriage.

Local Goldsmith in Kashmir said, that this, particular design, the rather traditional design for Dejhor, is not in vogue anymore and few craftsmen can re-create it.

Gunus, a thick bangle of solid gold and silver with a snake or lion head at either ends is popular even today.

“I have made two Gunus bangles for my engagement ceremony. I particularly chose this design because they look very elegant on the wrist and can go well with any attire,” says Fatima Shah, a 25 year old would be bride.

STATE AUTHORITIES' LAUNCHED MASSIVE EXPANSION PROGRAMMES

❖ Yawar Shafi

HAZRATBAL: In effort to tackle with poor thoroughfare links, Jammu and Kashmir’s state administration stressed upon fine connectivity of roads leading to all major and minor villages and city of the state.

“The Government has launched a massive road connectivity programme in the state under different schemes to unlock the huge economic potential in rural areas”, Minister for Animal, Sheep Husbandry and Fisheries Abdul Gani Kohli said.

“Better road connectivity is correlated with economic development as it promotes access to economic and social services”, He added

The Minister also placed a foundation stone of a 3 Kilometer long road from Jarota Gala to Pata Khetar in Rajouri at an estimated cost of Rs 2.5 crore under state sector. The road will connect

thousands of souls of the twin villages thereby fulfilling long pending demand of the locals.

Pertinently, A large gathering of locals, earlier, welcomed the Minister in their village and thanked the government for fulfilling their long pending demand.

In a meantime, addressing a huge gathering, Kohli laid stress upon the efforts that the government put in place by launching extensive road connectivity programme in state to drive the economic growth by connecting the villages which is the basic requirement for the development of the state.

Minister asserted that better road connectivity is pivotal for bringing speedy socio-economic transformation in the state and described the R&B department as a core sector for people that lends support and boosts activities of other departments meant for people’s welfare and state’s overall development.

State Told To Study Retaining Capacity Of Wular

❖ S.M. Ubeer

SRINAGAR: Even as J&K is in the process of preparing a Detailed Project Report (DPR) for a new flood spill channel from Dogripora in south Kashmir to Wular in north Kashmir for preventing floods, the Central Water Commission (CWC) has asked the state government to study the retaining capacity of the Wular Lake.

The J&K Government has also been asked to see whether the proposed 80-km-long spill channel, which is termed vital by the experts for long-term management of floods in Kashmir, will have any implication for the Indus Water Treaty (IWT) between India and Pakistan.

The Centre has already directed J&K to prepare a DPR for the spill channel.

“We have been asked by the Ministry of Water Resources to formulate a DPR on the alternative channel and we will be doing it soon,” said Hanief Lone Chief Engineer, Irrigation and Flood Control. He added that the CWC has raised queries on the proposed spill channel that mostly included technical and environmental aspects of the proposed project.

“The CWC has asked whether the Wular Lake, where

the proposed channel will open, has the retaining capacity once the new channel is constructed and its impact on environment. They have also asked if there will be any implication for the Indus Water Treaty,” he added.

The additional spill channel that would cost Rs 20,000 crore would have a discharge capacity of nearly 55,000 cusecs.

The Jhelum that runs through Srinagar has the capacity of carrying 35,000 cusecs and the existing flood channel has a capacity of 12,000 cusecs.

In September last year, when the floods hit Kashmir, over one lakh cusecs of water passed through Jhelum, submerging 70 per cent of Srinagar.

“The new channel is a vital long term measure to save Kashmir from floods,” said an engineer from the Flood Control Department. “However, the feasibility of this channel depends on the water upholding capacity of the Wular Lake and the outlet discharge carrying capacity,” he added.

The engineer said when huge flood discharge of Sangam will be put in Wular, it should be able to balance the inflow with the outflow with the help of its storage capacity. “If this balance is not achieved the purpose of the flood channel may not be fulfilled,” he added

State Government Fails to Meet WHO Standards in Doctor-patient Ratio

❖ Syed shahriyar

SRINAGAR: The Jammu and Kashmir government has failed to meet the World Health Organisation (WHO) standards for doctor- patient ratio in the health sector, with one doctor catering more than 1800 patients in the state.

As per the health profile compiled by the government in recently released Economic Survey, that state currently has a doctor -patient ratio of 1:1880 against 1:1000 recommended by the WHO.

While the ratio witnessed some improvement during last few years which previously was recorded as 1:2104 in 2014, the manpower crisis are still affecting the functioning of this sector.

The Economic Survey claims in 4433 health institutes of the states including primary, secondary and tertiary levels, 6674 doctors are in-position to meet the health care needs of people.

It claims that despite the man power issues faced by the health sector, the flow of patients at the state’s health institutes has increased ‘drastically.’

“The workload of tertiary care hospitals district hospitals, Sub-district hospitals, Public Health Centres hospitals and medical care institutions has increased manifold due to law and order situation in the valley,” it says.

As per figures released in the survey, as many as 226.16 lakh patients have been seen in Outdoor Patient Department (OPD) in the year 2012-13 which grew to 259.94lakh in 2013-14, 263.54 lakh in 2014-2015 and 281.53 lakh finally in 2015-2016.

In In-Patient Department (IPD) 9.93lakh patients have been treated in 2012-13, 12.45 lakh in 2013-2014, in 2014- 2015 and 11.34 lakh in 2015-2016.

The patients who had visited for major surgeries was recorded 4.06 lakh in 2012-2013 grew to 1.32 lakh 2015-2016.

For minor surgeries, 4.06 lakh had visited to state’s hospitals during 2012-2013 which rose 6.02 lakh in 2015-2016.

J&K presently has 12965 bed capacity in different hospitals under GMC Srinagar / Jammu comprising of 6967 in Kashmir and 5998 in Jammu regions.

Further the existing bed capacity of primary and secondary care health institutions has been recorded as 7882 while that of tertiary care institutions alone has 5083.

During first two quarters (Q1&Q2) of the financial year 2016-17, the expenditure level of the health as per the survey has been recorded as Rs 152.97 crore as against Rs 153.61 crore during the same period of the financial year 2015-16(Q1&Q2).

Meanwhile government in the survey claims that it was working to enhance manpower in the sector under various health programmes.

“1443 Specialists, MBBS/AYUSH doctors and 5494 paramedics have been hired on contract basis under National Health Mission (NHM) respectively. Besides, 826 sub-centers, 371 New Type Primary Health Centers (NTPHCs) and 87 ISM dispensaries have been sanctioned recently,” the economic survey says.

Making Good Art

❖ Shahina Rahim

SRINAGAR: You may have seen different types of traditional art in Kashmir, be it paper mache, carving or other handicrafts, but today we are introducing you to a new art, which is an innovation of a young Kashmiri boy.

He is Mohsin Rashid of Nishat area of Srinagar city. Mohsin has made different traditional decorative items with papers. He makes Shikara Boat, Traditional pot Kangri and many more.

No teacher, no guide Mohsin has introduced this amazing art which is widely appreciated in the valley. This boy has participated in various events at state level.

A commerce student Mohsin has lost his father at the early age. Since then he was toiling hard to get a job at hotels and restaurants to shoulder the responsibilities of his mother and three younger siblings.

“I lost my father when I was a kid. I had responsibility to feed my family. I was hunting for a job and I start working in a hotel, but I was not satisfied. I decided to pursue my art as a par time and I got good response. Now I am planning to focus on it if I get some sort of support to get its recognition and

establishing it,” Mohsin told.

Interestingly Mohsin made his passion for art a source of livelihood now besides inspiring many other like him.

He has bagged many awards in the new art. Last year Mohsin bagged the prize in an event at Kala Utsav in Jammu. Mohsin has also sold some of items. Kangri was sold for Rs 12, 00 and a Shikara for Rs 2,500.

He is now planning to make a Samovar. “I got several orders in a shorter period of time and sold many of my hand mad decorative items”, he said.

Mohsin is running a Facebook page “Paper Art of Kashmir” through which has also sold some of items. Mohsin said that social networking is an important tool for him to reach his customers around the globe.

“If I am being provided little support, I can create many more unique items with this art. Even I have myself start building a group of boys, girls of my age to train them to promote this art. We are focusing on social marketing as at this stage can’t afford a shop or place to rent for display of these unique art related to Kashmir tradition, culture”, he added.

Let’s buy these unique creations of paper art of Mohsin to encourage, support him and to inspire other youth with talent.

Locals weed out the waste from Dal Lake



❖ Zahak Zakir

SRINAGAR: From decades now, the Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LAWDA) has been unsuccessful in cleaning the Dal Lake. Dissatisfied locals under the banner of ‘Ashai Bagh to Saida Kadal Development Committee’ have started a cleanliness drive to wash out the wastage from Dal Lake.

“Dal is our lifeline but it has been dying. Though, it is known worldwide for its serene beauty, but what’s not so well known is that the lake is getting choked by an increasing web of weeds (Azolla, algae, lily pads, other wild weeds, garbage). This is causing problems for the people for whom the lake is home,” they said.

In the first phase, the local people along with their boats weed out the unwanted phytoplanktons. They said that wastes like polythene, and other non-biodegradable wastes were removed from the lake.

Eyewitnesses said that the cleanliness drive continued for hours and during this period several kilograms of polythene, plastic bottles and other harmful substances were removed from the lake. “Though LAWDA was created in 1997 to restore the pristine glory of this lake, but it has miserably failed. The irony is that LAWDA till date has not been able to draw a clear map of this lake,” the people who were part of the cleanliness drive said.

The locals said that if thick mats of Azolla that block sunlight to the lake’s flora and fauna are not removed, Dal will dye its own death and LAWDA will be solely responsible for this destruction. They said that cleanliness drive will continue. They said that the scientific drainage system could largely prevent the Dal lake from being polluted.

Gender Equality: A walk through the blind alleys

❖ Peer Viqar Ul Aslam

SRINAGAR: Our society, which claims to be moving forward – otherwise called as development – at a fast pace, is still patriarchal by demeanor and sometimes misogynic by nature.

Women are not given the space to express themselves or present their opinions like men are. Their roles are confined to the chores within the four walls under the roof. Few exceptional cases are preached as success stories that end up distorting the reality of discrimination and control over women.

Women are considered to be the second gender; they are preceded by men as provider for the family and as responsible member of the society, further alienating the women from the roles they could play in building a society.

Women have been challenged and continue

cases are related to domestic abuse, eve teasing and harassment, last year we recorded 1359 cases domestic abuse, and 2 cases of rape in 2016” said Inspector Anita Katal, who heads the women’s police station in Jammu.

The women’s police station in Anantnag was recently inaugurated. “Almost 100 cases have been registered with us, of which most of the cases are of domestic abuse, with one rape case and another case of cybercrime” said Station Head Poshmala Akhtar. “Four FIRs have been launched with most of the domestic cases being resolved at the station,” she said.

On International Women’s Day, women spend the day in the hope of celebrating their freedom and achievements as an equal society, though the world is still very challenging for the female gender.

“I don’t feel like celebrating, I have been

looking for a job for months now and am highly stressed as most of the times I get rejected for my gender. I wanted to go out and build my career but my parents won’t allow it is not that they don’t trust me but the relatives and the society will not spare them for giving me this too much freedom,” says Humaira Farooq, a software developer.

“On other days around the year, women are harassed and disrespected and only on this day we are equal to men which is hypocritical! Islam has given



to struggle to establish themselves as equals in the society, cultural responsibilities have subdued them while men have evolved and today exercise total control. The obligations on women to act according the gospel of men has erased their identity and representation as a key stake holder in the society, our economy is the weakest because more than half of our women are home makers; elsewhere women are “Nation Builders”.

Most cases of women harassment or domestic violence go unreported either due to the social stigma attached to such exploitation. “Most of the

women equal rights, any sort of injustice and oppression against women is not just inhuman but Unislamic too,” says Gousiya Khan, a postgraduate in Psychology.

“Another day in the long list of days which we celebrate every year, nothing has changed! The patriarchal mindsets are there, a bold woman having many male friends is still seen as a harlot! Travelling alone is again an unthinkable idea. Where are women’s rights? Just hollow talks and much ado about nothing,” says Hirra Azmat, a journalism student.

Cracks found in the dome of Hazratbal Shrine

❖ Madhiya Nabi

SRINAGAR: The dome of the main building of recently renovated Hazratbal Shrine has developed cracks which lets the rain water percolate through, and falls in the interiors of shrine building.

The rain water accumulated on the dome swamped the mating in the shrine causing the difficulties for the devotees. The spot below the dome which remains occupied with the devotees most of the time

remained wet for two- three days after the rainfall. “No one would sit there,” Mushtaq Ahmad, a regular visitor said.

The locals said that the dome and roof of the shrine building was renovated recently.

The locals and devotees accuse that Waqf Board is not taking due care of the Shrine. “The detritions of the dome are due to the carelessness of the

Board,” a local, Bashir Ahmad said. “The cracks in the dome are widening and no one from Waqf Board is bothered about

it.” He added.

“Safeguarding and protecting this holy place is our duty but this ideology seems to be limited to only few people as authorities are in deep slumber,” Mohammad Sultan, a local said.

“We have no such inputs of cracks. Had that been the case then whole

Kashmir would have come out on streets in protests,” Secretary Jammu & Kashmir Board for Muslim Specified Waqfs informed when contacted.

VALLEY IN PANIC BY A 'FLU' LIKE SICKNESS

❖ Arif Nazir

SRINAGAR: 'Flu' like sickness among thousands of children in many parts of Kashmir has created panic like situation. Doctors have maintained that the sickness was, seasonal and every cold was not flu while reiterating that influenza activity has been high in Kashmir during the past few months.

Kashmir hospitals are witnessing an increase in number of patients with respiratory ailments and flu like symptoms since past few months. While doctors said many of the patients and their attendants especially parents of young children had apprehensions that the illness could be influenza. Doctors have stressed that much of the search in cases was 'expected and seasonal'. Authorities at directorate of health services have not issued an advisory on the flu yet.

With viral infection among thousands of children, samples of infected children examined by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC),

New Delhi have been found negative for swine flu, giving a big relief to doctors and people at large.

The samples were taken from children who were suffering from fever, cough, sore throat and nasal catarrh. The doctors had suspected that the children



were suffering from influenza-a H1N1 (swine flu)

Influenza expert Dr A Kaul said the influenza activity was high since beginning of this year but it was not 'H1N1

While doctors stressed the need to distance a sick child from a healthy one to prevent infection transmission,

they said much of the increase in the number of cases was due to the fact that parents did not keep their sick child home." Schools have started recently after a long time. And the surge considering with school reopening as well as seasonal change," Dr Naveed Nazir Shah, Head Pulmonary Medicine at chest diseases Hospital said.

Doctors at G B Pant Hospital said that they were treating children with anti biotic and stressing on the need t exercise safety measures such as keeping other children away from infected child, cleaning hands, cough etiquettes etc."Children are responding well to treatment," hospital administration said. Most children, doctors said, were between 5 to 10 years.

The authorities have suggested people not to panic and expected that the flu would go in couple of weeks. It is also said that there is no need to take high antibiotics as flu is very normal and cant lead to health complications.

Kashmiris promoting cultural music to outsiders

❖ Sabreena Mushtaq

GANDERBAL: Singers like Irfan, Bilal and Mehmeet Syed, are promoting Kashmiri Music in many parts of the world to bring people back in the Kashmiri Music. These singers are doing fabulous work to promote and are inspiring other interested groups of new singers to come up with their own cultural music.

Kashmir has been a grand arena of Arts from quite a long time. There have been great Poets, Writers, Dramatists and Musicians, who have attained glory in the literary and art world.

In Music, Kashmiri Pandits from time to time have contributed a lot to bring music of Kashmir to a more

advanced and organized state. Their achievements have been remarkable and to talk about these achievements of past, gives a sense of pride and pleasure ---- It rejuvenates the spirit.



(Source: The Traditional Music of Kashmir By Dr. Ramesh Kumar). Music an art form is held to be the heart of a culture. In Kashmir, the musical consciousness was defined by

Sufiyana Mosiqui(or Sufi Music). This form and genre of music however is dying in Kashmir. People-especially the youth are gyrating to other forms and genres of music, but nowadays new Musical Artists using new genres of musical instruments with the help and support of Musical Organisations of Jammu and Kashmir are promoting Kashmiri Music in foreign countries like, Australia, UK, USA, etc.

"Music attracts outsiders so much, people from Europe countries can't understand the language of Kasmiri music but they love to hear Kashmiri music," a Kashmiri musician Bilal matta said.

DARBAR MOVE: Burden on State Exchequer



❖ Pirzada Shakir

SRINAGAR: The civil secretariat including Chief Minister's office and the Governor's house In the winter capital Jammu is supposed to be closed on 28th of April and will resume in the summer capital Srinagar in the first week of May and alternatively the state secretariat including Chief Minister's office and the Governor's house gets closed down in Srinagar capital in October each year and resumes in Jammu in the first week of November.

The Government hesitates to abolish the "Darbar Move" mainly for fear that it would increase the feeling of alienation between the two different religious communities predominating two divisions of the state.

As per reports, Darbar Move practice costs about Rs 50 crore to transmit about seven thousand employees from one place to another and then to make accommodation and the security arrangements for these government servants in both the places i.e, in Srinagar and Jammu.

An official was quoted saying "If Jammu & Kashmir High court and other private institutions can operate from both the places, why not civil secretariat?" The wasteful expenditure on Darbar Move can be utilised for providing jobs to the unemployed youth of the state. The state government should fork the departments by creating separate directorates on the outline of DIC headed by common secretaries which to a large extent could save the state exchequer from the evitable expenditure incurred on Darbar move every year.

To facilitate the shifting of office records and staff to the Srinagar/ Jammu after the Darbar closes in Jammu/Srinagar newspapers every year reads like this- "Today, vehicles will be allowed to move from

Srinagar to Jammu but no vehicle will be allowed to move on the highway in the opposite direction."

Srinagar Youth Participates in six different Games

❖ Sajidah Yousuf

SRINAGAR: Reyaz Ahmad Wani alais Tiger is one such sports person, who has excelled in six different sports. He has represented the State in two International Championships and more than 30 National Championships in six different sporting disciplines so far, and he didn't remember how many District, State and other cross country road and cycle races he has won.

Reyaz has represented State and country in two International events in White Water Rafting Championship. He took part in Four Square white water rafting challenge in 1999 and 2000. The championship was held at Rishikesk Uttranchal on Ganges River in which teams from USA, Australia, South Africa and many other parts of the world participated. Reyaz was part of Kashmir University team. Reyaz came to limelight in cycling in which he represented the State nine times. He has participated in four road cycling nationals from 2002 to 2007, four MTB national from 2003 to 2007 and also took part in one National Track Championship at Patiala in 2005.

In Cycle Polo he has played 10 nationals from 1999 to 2006 and he has also participated three rope-skipping Nationals where he bagged several medals. Triathlon that is considered the toughest event in sports involving three disciplines Swimming, Cycling and Road Race, Reyaz has represented state in one National that was held at Chandigarh in 2004.

Reyaz has also participated in NCC activities and has acquired B and C level certificate. He was also been part of NCC State team, which did Sailing expedition of 553 kilometers in Bilaspur Himachal Pradesh in 1999. He is the only person in J&K who participated and completed successfully Enduro challenge that was held in 2004 at Maharashtra.

Besides participating in Nationals Reyaz has also participated in skiing at Gulmarg, White Water Rafting in Sind and Chenab Rivers, Rock Climbing

career. "I was not interested in sports during my childhood and it was only when my friend Sajad Ahmad who was studying with me at SP Higher Secondary registered my name for Annual Cycle race of school. I won that race and started practicing hard in athletics and cycling. It was again Sajad who gifted me brand new Atlas cycle and this proved to be turning point in my career" recalls Reyaz.

"I was basically interested in athletics, but when I saw that the associations don't have funds and players are spending out of their own pockets I switched from to cycling, cycle polo, swimming, triathlon and many other sports as well. The other reason for excelling in so many sports is that athletics is base of all sports and it was easy to switch from athletics to cycling and others. But now I consider myself as a cyclist and wants to ride on my cycle to every possible hilly area of whole state" added Reyaz.

Reyaz doesn't recall how many athletic championships, cycling races, triathlon races, Dal cross he has participated. But he remembers the major ones such as Tour-de-Kashmir race from Srinagar to Pahalgam which he won twice, Chinar race from Ganderbal to Srinagar which he won thrice and bicycle trip from Srinagar to Leh traversing about 450 Kms.

Reyaz is now associated with many clubs and associations on Voluntary basis and in past 10 years has made cycling one of the popular sports in Kashmir and developed the concept of sponsorship among the emerging cyclists. Valleys top cyclists Akbar Khan, Shabir Akhoun, Umar Nabi and others are also the students of Reyaz.



at Patnitop as part of Kashmir University team from 1997 to 1999.

Reyaz, a resident of Gojwara Srinagar, working in Government m

aterial Testing Laboratory got in touch with sports when he was a Class 11 student at SP Higher Secondary School and won first cycle race of his

Kupwara VILLAGE Sans Drinking Water Facility, Authorities Helpless

❖ Shaheen shafique

KUPWARA: Shumnag, a village in North Kashmir's Kupwara district is without water supply since decades, and in bone chilling winter amid snowfall, the local women folk have to fetch water from wells and local river.

The residents of Shumnag which comprises of 500 households, the residents told us that, they are lacking drinking water facility and the Government has never bothered.

Our women have to walk in this harsh winter to fetch water from wells and streams, said a local, Bilal Ahmed Lone.

The locals said that we drink the water of wells and streams but owing to increased pollution we are scared to further consume its water. Our men, women, and children fall ill, every time,



by drinking that polluted water, said an elderly Abdul Ahad.

Residents accused the successive

Governments, of neglecting the area."Till date, No government provided us drinking water facility. We have been using water

from streams and wells. But now, due to pollution we are concerned."

While lashing out at politicians, the residents added that they come to their village only at the time of elections." First they come, seek votes

in the name of providing basic civic facilities, but after winning polls, they disappear till next elections. The politicians simply betray poor masses", the local's blame. When MERC Times contacted,

Farooq Ahmad, AEE PHE Division, Kralpora Tehsil, he said," that a Water Supply Plant is under construction and by the end of March it will start its operations. The drinking water will be supplied to this village thereafter "

Peoples Conference Leader and local MLA Kupwara, Bashir Dar said that the issues of drinking water, the villagers face, will be resolved as soon as possible.

Islamia College volleyball tournament concludes



❖ Mudasir Majeed

SRINAGAR: An inter group volleyball tournament held at Islamia College students here concluded today.

The tournament was organised by the department of Physical Education of the college.

In the final match of the tournament, ICS Greens defeated ICS Oranges by 2:1 sets to lift the trophy in a thrilling final volleyball encounter.

The final score was 25:23, 17:25 and 25:23. Faisal, Aqib, Waqas and Mehraj Mushtaq played very well in the finals.

15 best players were selected from the teams who had taken the part in this group tournament for the college volleyball team, which will be finalised after they are further trained in a volleyball coaching camp in the college soon.

Meanwhile, an inter group Football tournament for the Islamia College students will start from tomorrow at college play field.

Prof. G M Tibetkhal principal was the chief guest on the occasion; he has distributed prizes among winners team and the runners up team.



KU holds seminar on IRCF

❖ Firdous Azad

SRINAGAR: The University of Kashmir had hosted a program on “Opportunities for International Research Collaborations and Fellowships”, in which the special guest, Dr. Chandaram Sivaji delivered a lecture, insisting the students to focus on research and to participate in International Research Programs. The lecture was attended by students, scholars and faculty members of various departments, especially from Science streams.

After finishing the lecture students were very happy as they were highly motivated by the lecture given by Dr.



Sivaji . “There were lot of confusions in my mind about the research, but attending this lecture, cleared my all confusions”, said Zubair Ahmad, one of the Scholars from Chemistry Department.

Another student from Botany Department, Irfana said that this lecture inspires me to do research .She further said that I was really unaware about the good future in research work before this lecture.

This initiative was appreciated by all those who attended the Seminar. The University should take steps to invite world personalities to benefit the students not only in Science but for all the streams.

Kashmir Sikh Sangat holds 17th annual convention

❖ Pardeep Singh

SRINAGAR: Appreciating the role of Sikh Community in the development and progress of the Country, Speaker Legislative Assembly, Kavinder Gupta said that government would take all possible steps to ensure equal opportunities for the socio-economic empowerment of the community.

Mr. Kavinder Gupta was speaking at the 17th annual convention of Kashmir Sikh Sangat . MLC, Charanjeet Singh Khalsa was the guest of honour on the occasion.

Speaker said that the contributions of Sikhs are written with golden words in the history and their role in progress of the country is commendable.

He said that soon a chair in the name of Guru Gobind Singh ji would be set up in Jammu University to commemorate his 350th Birth anniversary. Speaker also exhorted the need to promote punjabi language and stressed on encouraging the youth to speak in their mother language.

Appreciating the role of Kashmir Sikh Sangat which is working on the principles of Sewa, Simran and Parupkar, Speaker said that need of the hour is to make collaborative efforts to move ahead on the path of social equity. He said that such interactive sessions are vital to discuss and redress the issues of the community.

MLC, Charanjeet Singh Khalsa in his address appreciated the services of Kashmir Sikh Sangat for the betterment of community and said that government shall make all efforts to redress the issues projected by the speakers.

Chairman KSS Dr Dhanwant Singh while speaking on the occasion apprised about the functioning of the organization in field of education, providing social



assistance to needy and health sector.

He also highlighted the problems and demands of Sikh community specially residing in the valley.

President KSS Sewa Singh in his welcome address informed about the initiatives of the organization.

Mr Manjit Singh member KSS while speaking on the occasion projected various issues pertaining to Anand Karaj Act, implementation of minority commission Act in the state.

The members of community who have shown excellence in the fields of Sewa, Simran and Parupkar were felicitated on the occasion. Life time achievements award was conferred to Sardar Ujjagar Singh Retd D.C for his self-less and visionary service to the community. Awards were also given to the personalities who had shown excellence in different fields viz. Sports education medical services etc.

The others who spoke on the occasion, included Prof. Inder Singh, Tejwant Singh, Manjeet Singh, Dr .Danwant Singh, Sewa Singh (President) and Babu Singh (Gen. Secretary).

Seminar on Disaster Mitigation concludes at KU

❖ Qulsoom Beigh

SRINAGAR: Vice-Chancellor of University of Kashmir Prof Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi on Saturday underscored the importance of disaster mitigation strategies and training people at grassroots for minimizing human and material losses during disasters.

Speaking at valedictory session of week-long Seminar-cum-Workshop “Disaster Mitigation: Approaches and Strategies”, organized by Department of Geography and Regional Development, Prof Andrabi said: “Though we cannot stop natural disasters, we can certainly minimize their impact by training people at various levels with set skills and educate them on how to manage and coordinate with other agencies when a disaster strikes.”

Prof Andrabi said teaching disaster management strategies and techniques must not remain confined to classrooms alone, but need to be spread across the society.



Prof Talat Ahmad, former KU VC and incumbent VC of Jamia Millia Islamia New Delhi, said “disaster management has assumed huge significance throughout the world today due to rapid and extreme climatic changes and it is not only for the scientists and researchers to find solutions but economists,

engineers, policy makers and administrators also have to play their role vis-à-vis mitigation measures and policy-making.”

Prof. Tasawoor A. Kanth, Seminar Convener, said he was hopeful that the deliberations would be beneficial to all and help us realize the role of stakeholders in disaster mitigation. Prof. M. Sultan Bhat, Organizing Secretary, highlighted the importance of disaster mitigation and emphasized need for community-oriented disaster management systems.

Later both Vice-Chancellors distributed certificates amongst participants of the workshop.

Eminent Professors and scientists including Prof. Chandan Ghosh, NIDM, New Delhi, Prof. S.R.Kumar, NIH, Patna, Prof. Malay Mukul, IIT, Mumbai, Prof. A.P.Dimri, JNU, New Delhi, T.K. Panwar, Shimla delivered lectures and conducted interactive sessions during the week-long programme.

Prof. Ishtiaq A. Mayer, Co-Convener, presented formal vote of thanks while Dr. Pervez Ahmed, Co-Organizing Secretary conducted the proceedings.

Tourism in Kashmir limping back to Normalcy



❖ Rashid Manzoor

SRINAGAR: The tourism in Kashmir is back with full enthusiasm after 2016 uprising and long and severe cold spell. New warmth of anticipation is being slowly felt memorizing all odds of the past. Kashmir is again looking for the flocks of tourists to arrive; People associated with tourism are keeping their fingers crossed this summer. This time, tour operators are getting huge enquiries from foreign nationals especially from East Indies countries, which seem to be a new chapter in this matter.

A tour operator from Srinagar said to Merc Times “We are getting a lot of queries from Thailand and Indonesia for this summer, which is very

heartening to us” Amarnath yatra which comes as a blessing in disguise for the people of Kashmir who are related with tourism in general and the tribal population of hilly areas especially Baltal and Pahalgam in particular. Last year because of the unrest many devotees missed the chance to visit the amaranth cave, this year it is expected that the vacuum created last year will be filled

by a huge flow this summer.” We are praying that the summers of 2016 be the last one of its kind, we can’t tolerate it anymore, we are scared of the rumors”, said a Hotel Manager from Dalgate area of Srinagar.

Kashmir known for its beauty and pleasant weather, has always been the first choice for those people from Asia who can’t afford Switzerland or any other such western nations, but the rotten dispute and the unrests have remained as a ‘bone in neck’ when it comes to tourism. This Summer The only forecasting that is being done from assembly to streets and from schools to colleges, is when are we going through the last flaming episode. The only hope and the only condition for the refulgence of tourism in Kashmir is peace.

SAAYA launches its official website

❖ Shabaz Qutab

SRINAGAR: Head and Dean of Faculty of Law University of Kashmir, Dr Muhammed Hussain today launched the website of SAAYA, a non-governmental organization.

SAYA is Srinagar based Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), working for the social causes and for development of education among students

The website could be accessed at www.saayango.org.

The Dean congratulated the office bearers of Saaya for playing the pivotal role in uplifting the society and launching various initiatives for the betterment of society.

He lauded the members for their outstanding work for the society.

Abdul Rashid Wani, former Principle Chief Conservator was also present on the occasion. He lauded the efforts of young social workers of Saaya and said the social workers associated with Saaya group are real asset of the society and everyone should follow the footsteps of social workers of Saaya.

Dr S A Bhat and Mr Muhammed Yousuf Faculty members of Law Department Kashmir University were also present and congratulated the office bearers of Saaya on the launch of their website.

The website has been designed by Haji Group Pvt Limited.