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UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR

First Girl Sufiyana Group Rocks



Steep increase in suicide cases worries people

Fawad Showkat

According to the World Health Organization, more than 700 000 people die due to suicide every year and suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds.

Kashmir Valley has also witnessed a dramatic increase in suicide attempts at an alarming rate as both young and old people are attempting to end their lives.

Killing self by hanging, jumping into rivers, and consuming some poisonous substances are some common methods people use to take the aforementioned extreme step.

Recently, a new wave of suicides emerged in the valley when many women jumped into river Jhelum to end their lives. Few bodies are still untraceable despite incessant efforts from the administration for weeks.



A local psychiatrist told MERC Times that several cases involved issues related to unemployment, depression, dowry, marital affairs, and other failures besides financial problems, emotional imbalances change in family ties, domestic abuse, relationships,

experiencing helplessness, and other problems prompt an individual to take such an extreme step.

Dr Yasir Rather, Professor in the Department of Psychiatry, GMC Srinagar said, "Suicide is like a ripple effect to prevent it we need to also create a simultaneous ripple effect." Talking to your children about emotional regulation, discussing how to vent your emotions, and positively reinforcing them when they share their feelings or are truthful will lay the foundation for the ripple effect, he said.

"Media needs to be very sensitive about covering news of suicide, it should not be glorified," he said.

According to the Crime Gazette of Jammu & Kashmir Police, Kashmir witnessed 472 suicide attempts in 2020 and 586 attempts of suicide cases in 2021.

Etching out Pain

Syed Aamir Mehraj Kamili

The roller coaster of adolescence is a phase through which every human goes. A process where kids step from childhood to adulthood. Some find themselves with the enigma of changes within and outside quite tumultuous. Living in a South Asian society where most parents believe in tiger-style parenting, it gets hard for kids as they walk alone into these uncharted territories to talk about their struggles to their parents.

With the lips of a razor kissing deeply into their arm, kids dealing with conflicting thoughts and situations, resort to an outlet of self-harm. Leading to isolation and anger directed toward society, these adolescents find themselves hiding their scars and trauma by putting on a façade.

"I was just 8 when I was molested by someone. Not knowing what has happened I did not pay much attention to it but, after gaining some understanding of things during my puberty; I did not know how to cope with this reality" recalls Anwar (name changed)

With serenity on his face, he looked towards his forearm where now a visible scar was present, and said "So many thoughts were going through my head, and one day, I just cut my forearm and for some reason, it paved the way for relief from within"

While for Anwar it was outside forces at play, for Faris (named changed), who recently broke out from the prison of his thoughts, it was issues within his family which lead to him hurting himself. "My parents were always good to me" as he recalled his formative years "but there were people, who I would put as greedy," said Faris.

Having an unfavourable and unhealthy environment, left Faris feeling confused and distraught. "I remember quite vividly those men and women who constantly kept shouting and bad-mouthing every now and then" Faris recalled, with his eyes filled with tears of disappointment.

Now in his early 20s, and having made peace with himself, the scars act as a constant reminder of what he has been through. "In my heart, I have forgiven everyone, not because they deserve it but, that is something I wanted to do" mentioned Faris, as a smile appeared on his face.

These scars may look the same for many but, hold different stories. While once they may have fallen prey to the perceived nihilism, now have emerged as survivors looking towards the future with a newfound optimism and a stoic attitude.

Although the content, many of these individuals face a new set of hurdles, as a person who chose to remain anonymous said "I believe everything happens for a reason and I can say that the scars on my forearm does not bother me but, whenever I am out in public, I wear full sleeved clothes because I do not want to explain to people who look with the glasses of judging." Adding further, the person anonymously said, "when I started talking to my parents about my issues, it was quite surprising, as they listened to me with an empathetic ear and helped me navigate amidst various situations and counselled me from time to time."

People with self-inflicted wounds often get misdiagnosed by Doctor Bamber's (people who are neither doctors nor clinical psychologists) of society as individuals who have failed in love or have a disdain for life (trying to commit suicide). Even if

there may be some truth to it, that is not the case for each and everyone who has acted upon an impulse. It can be considered as the culmination of various volatile emotions like guilt, shame, bullying, childhood trauma, and abuse which leads these adolescents toward the path of self-injury.

Now as many of these individuals walk towards the horizon of self-discovery, partaking by the members of society becomes crucial. For an all-around personal development, helping to socialize and making the subject, matter, or topic of mental health not taboo, will create a vibrant and pleasant climate for them to breathe in.



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MERC organizes special lecture on media's role in shaping perspectives on international relations

Saima Shaban

Media Education and Research Centre (MERC), University of Kashmir hosted a guest lecture titled "International Relations and Media's Role in Shaping the Public Perspective."

The lecture was delivered by Dr. Syed Jaleel Hussain, a Fulbright-Nehru Postdoctoral Fellow at the Mario Einaudi Centre for International Studies at Cornell University, New York. He is also associated with the Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

The lecture was attended by the faculty members, students and scholars of the department.

In his lecture, Dr. Jaleel emphasized the pivotal role of media practitioners as



perspective builders, highlighting their influence in shaping global discourses. He stressed the need for media students to develop a clear and comprehensive understanding of different levels and analytical techniques to make informed assessments of international relations and global situations.

Furthermore, Dr. Jaleel underscored the fundamental role of media in conducting international relations. Drawing upon various global scenarios, he provided students with a three-pronged approach to analyzing contemporary events at both the global and regional levels.

In addition, Dr. Jaleel shed light on the significance of the ancient Indian text, the "Arthshaastar," in comprehending the conduct of international relations.

KU signs MoU with CDRT on disability studies



Zarka Shabir

University of Kashmir organized a two-day workshop on disability studies. University authorities also signed a key Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Centre for Disability Research and Training (CDRT), Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi to promote disability sensitization programs and holistic understanding of the emerging academic discipline.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Nilofer Khan chaired the inaugural session of the workshop. The workshop was organized by the Department of English in collaboration with the CDRT.

Addressing academics and students, Prof Nilofer underlined the role of the University in promoting workshops on key aspects related to disability studies to realize its goal

of creating a "truly inclusive space for equal academic progression of all the students."

She said the University will seriously pursue setting up a center for disability studies to help higher education institutions (HEIs) in the J&K UT to promote this emerging area of academic inquiry given its vast societal importance.

The VC congratulated the Department of English for collaborating with the CDRT in organizing the present work, as well as for signing the MoU with the prestigious Centre. The MoU seeks to promote disability studies as an academic discipline and foster a wider understanding of the need to engage students in research on disability studies.

In his keynote address, Prof Someshwar Sati, Coordinator CDRT, referred to the importance of disability studies as an emerging subject of academic inquiry. He said the workshop as well as the MoU aim

to study the "complexity" and "complex aspects" of the phenomenon of disability to arrive at a "full understanding" of it.

"With today's activity, the University of Kashmir has taken the right step to foster intellectual engagement in disability studies," Prof Sati said.

Dean of Academic Affairs, KU, Prof F A Masoodi, who was the guest of honor, also spoke about the workshop theme and its importance for academic institutions.

Earlier, the Head of the Department of English, Prof Iffat Maqbool, provided a detailed account of the workshop themes and key highlights of the MoU.

She also spelled out academic and extracurricular programs held by the department in the last few years.

Prof Shilpa Das from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, and Prof Banibrata Mahanta from the Department of English, Banaras Hindu University, are resource persons for the two-day workshop, which is being attended by 70 participants from the University of Kashmir, some of its affiliated colleges as well as few other academic institutions in the J&K UT.

Prof Mufti Mudasir from Department of English, KU conducted proceedings of the inaugural session and also delivered the vote of thanks.



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Snow cricket tournament for girls receives wide appreciation

Ilhak Tantray

Khelo India started an initiative to organize a Women's Snow Cricket tournament in Panzgam village of North Kashmir's Kupwara district, to encourage thousands of female athletes.

This has been a tremendous uplift for young women in the valley who are desirous to accept sports as a profession. Girls were seen playing cricket on the snow-clad ground with a stunning view of the snow clad mountains in the background.

Thousands of spectators thronged the snow clad ground to watch the matches. Videos of the cricket match that took place on the snowy field with a stunning view of the snow-covered mountains in the background have also gone viral on social media.

Snow Cricket is highly applauded by locals and is thrilled about getting chances and platforms for young cricketers from the valley to showcase their talent. Apart from snow cricket games like snow boarding, tube pulling and volleyball will also be conducted.

The tournament is also an excellent opportunity for the girls of northern Kashmir to come together and celebrate their love for cricket. The locals praised the efforts of the organisers for promoting winter tourism in the region.

As the girls played with zeal and zest, representatives and locals watched in admiration, and these initiative have received unbelievable response from women in the area.

"Over 10,000 spectators from Nook and



If we talk about cricket, all over Kashmir girls are not getting much platform in it. Even, girls here have a lot of talent and interest in cricket. However, it would be great if similar cricket tournaments were conducted

other places in northern Kashmir were seen celebrating and applauding the female players of the teams during the match," said Sabiya young female cricketer.

"It is appreciable to see girls playing cricket in such freezing temperatures," said Gulam Hassan a local resident. And hopes the area gets much attention for sightseeing, adventure sports like trekking.

"It has never been witnessed before in our district, and it is a dream come true for the girls here who love cricket," she added.

Tamana, the other cricket athlete expressed her desire for more sports infrastructure for girls in Kashmir, as she believes that the young girls in the area poposes the talent in the sports field.

Meanwhile, Shakir Ahmad a local cricketer says that the Kupwara district has the potential to be a centre of winter sports. The area remains draped in snow for six

months, yet there has been very minimal assistance from the government to utilize it.

Recently, a women's cricket tournament has been organized here, which is a good initiative. The government should take such an initiative so that the girls can also show their talent to the world, Ahmad said.

He said the girls have potential in sports, but the government attention is required.

"If we talk about cricket, all over Kashmir girls are not getting much platform in it. Even, girls here have a lot of talent and interest in cricket. However, it would be great if similar cricket tournaments were conducted," she added.

Notably, over the past few years snow cricket on the frozen fields has become popular among the residents in Northern Kashmir. Gurez is one of the most picturesque places in the valley and there can't be a better spot to play cricket.

On February 14, Jasia Akhter, a woman cricketer from South Kashmir's Shopian was bought by Delhi Capitals for Rs 20 lakhs during an auction held in Mumbai.

Jasia Akhtar, a resident of Braripora village, some 63 kms south of Srinagar – the Kashmir region's main city, made her foray into women's T20 cricket in 2019 when she found a place in the Women's T20 Challenge Squads for an upcoming tournament announced by the Board for Control of Cricket in India.

This was met with great enthusiasm by the local community, who commented that the initiative to get more girls involved in sports is extremely beneficial, as it allows their talents to be showcased to the rest of the nation, affirming that they are no less capable than others.



Sufiyana Group of young Kashmiri girls breaks tradition, receives accolades

Saima Shaban

A bold move to revive the fading art of Sufiyana music a group of young Kashmiri girls has come together to make their mark in this traditionally male-dominated field. Led by Irfana, a talented musician from Gunistan, a remote village in North Kashmir's Bandipora district, has been breaking barriers and captivating audiences with their soul-stirring performances.

Five years ago Irfana inspired by her father's santoor playing embarked on a journey to learn the art of Sufi music. As she honed her skills and began singing Sufi poetry with traditional tunes at home her passion ignited a spark in her younger sisters and other girls in the neighborhood. Two more girls joined her father's class and together they formed the Sufiyana group.

Despite hailing from humble backgrounds with limited financial resources their determination drove them forward. They used the earnings from their concerts at social functions to purchase musical instruments, managing their endeavors without any external support from the government or NGOs.

Irfana, currently studying in the Department of Music at the University of Kashmir, recognized the urgency of preserving Sufiyana music, which was on the brink of extinction. The girls faced numerous challenges including social media backlash nevertheless they marched on undeterred and eventually garnered overwhelming

appreciation and love from many quarters.

Under the guidance of Irfana's father, Muhammad Yusuf, a talented musician himself, the girls received comprehensive training in various aspects of Sufi music.

Muhammad Yusuf emphasizes that Sufi poetry and music form the true essence of Kashmir's identity and must be safeguarded. He ardently believes that the efforts of his daughters and

mission to revive and preserve this cherished art form. Their melodious voices now resonate through Gunistan, a previously forgotten village in North Kashmir, breathing new life into the age-old tradition of Sufi music.

The Sufiyana Group's journey serves as an inspiration, challenging gender stereotypes and breaking down barriers in the pursuit of their passion. Their efforts underscore the significance of preserving cultural



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the Sufiyana group will yield fruitful results, but emphasizes the need for government and non-governmental support to ensure the survival and growth of this art form.

The Sufiyana group has showcased their talent beyond the borders of Kashmir, receiving appreciation for their captivating performances. Their achievements have been recognized through several awards, further fueling their determination.

Rehana, another member of the group, highlights the importance of support from the government and NGOs to preserve this dying art form and encourages them to extend their assistance to groups like theirs.

Irfana said that their shared love for Sufi music brought the group together and ignited their collective

heritage and highlight the need for collective support in preserving and nurturing fading art forms.

As the group continues to captivate audiences with its enchanting melodies, its mission to revive Sufiyana music gains momentum. Their determination, resilience, and talent shine a spotlight on the power of music to transcend boundaries and breathe life into the rich cultural tapestry of Kashmir. With each performance, the girls carve a path for future generations, proving that traditions can be rejuvenated and cherished, even in the face of adversity. As their harmonies echo through the valleys, the Sufiyana Group represents a beacon of hope, ensuring that the timeless beauty of Sufi music continues to thrive in the hearts of people for generations to come.

Fine Arts teacher sets example by planting trees in KU campus

Mir Mehmood

Showkat Katju, a senior Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Kashmir, has recently started an initiative to plant trees in the Hazratbal campus of the university. According to Katju, this initiative is aimed at inculcating a sense of responsibility towards the environment among the students, as well as incorporating environmental concerns into their creative work.

Kashmir University is located in a region known for its rich biodiversity. The university's campus is spread over an area of 263 acres and is home to a diverse range of flora and fauna.

Speaking to MERC Times, Katju said that he believes that planting trees would help students develop a greater appreciation for the natural world, and would inspire them to take action to protect it. He added that he had personally found the experience of planting trees to be a cathartic exercise, and was also interested in exploring whether this type of engagement with nature could help counter drug abuse and violence among students.

In this regard, Katju has quoted the famous Russell Page, who said that "to plant trees is to give body and life to one's dream for a better world." This quote highlights the crucial role that trees and plants play in creating a sustainable future for ourselves and future generations.

The initiative has already gained support from many students and faculty members at the university, who have praised Katju for his dedication to promoting environmental



awareness. Some have even suggested that the initiative could serve as a model for other universities and institutions looking to encourage sustainable practices and environmental stewardship.

Showkat Katju also emphasized the need for the university to start a programme to raise awareness about the importance of saving trees and plants. According to him, this would help to preserve the rich biodiversity of the region and contribute to the larger goal of environmental sustainability and migration of different bird species.

Nasir Hassan, a final year painting student, and Shajar Lateef, a third year student, were inspired by their teacher Showkat Katju's act of sowing seeds around the campus as a part of his personal initiative to create a greener and healthier

environment for future generations.

"Katju's initiative truly inspired us to take up the cause of environmental preservation. We realized that we must take responsibility for our environment and sow seeds for the coming generations," he added.

Shajar Lateef said, "We have sown a variety of seeds including native plants and trees. It is our hope that these plants will grow into a lush green cover and attract more birds and animals to our campus."

Katju, who has been leading by example, was overjoyed to see his students take up the cause of environmental preservation. He said, "I am extremely proud of Nasir and Shajar. They have shown great initiative and commitment towards preserving our environment. It is heartening to see our students take up causes that are crucial to the well-being of our planet."

The efforts of these students serve as a reminder that environmental preservation is the responsibility of every individual. With their actions, they have shown that it is possible to make a positive impact on the environment, one seed at a time.

Katju said that he is excited to continue planting trees and working with students to promote environmental consciousness through art and creative expression. "I believe that we all have a responsibility to protect the planet and its resources," he said, adding, "By working together and engaging with nature in a positive way, we can make a real difference for future generations."

From inheritance to passion

Iqra Qayoom

Our valley witnesses visit of different species of birds every year. But the visiting of these birds made an entrepreneur to pitch a resort on the bank of Dal.

A Kashmiri man has set up a forest resort at Dal lake Srinagar Mohd. Yaseen A tour operator by profession and a bird lover has set up a bird resort, where he feeds a number of exotic migratory birds every morning.

Mohd. Yaseen says that his love for birds and nature is inherited from his mother. His mother also used to feed the birds and also guided yaseen to do the same.

Mohd. Yaseen says that it is more than a mission to me and i want local people to move forward and preserve the water bodies.

He claims that he want the next



generation to experience the joy of bird watching according to yaseen he feeds many species of exotic birds like pond heron, egret and migratory birds like Siberian breed eagles, myna king etc.

He had made some nests which would help the birds to hatch their eggs even in harsh weather conditions. This resort has now become a main attraction to people as it provides both the locals and tourists a

chance to spare a moment from the hustle bustle of life and indulge in some peaceful moments in nature.

Its not only about his mothers legacy or inheritance, it is about an inspiration how we can serve our mother nature, Everyone should do their own kind of attempt to protect the nature. We should avoid throwing garbage in the water bodies as these are connected to our identities He said.



Thousands throng Dargah Hazratbal to commemorate martyrdom of Hazrat Uthman Ghani (RA)

Devotees pay tribute to the Fourth Caliph of Islam

Iqra Qayoom

Thousands of devotees on Friday congregated at the Dargah Hazratbal shrine here to commemorate the martyrdom anniversary of the Fourth Caliph of Islam, Hazrat Uthman Ghani (RA).

The occasion witnessed a harmonious blend of prayerful offerings and a solemn display of the holy relic of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), as the believers expressed their unwavering faith and deep respect for Hazrat Uthman Ghani (RA).

The devotees said they were feeling a sense of spiritual unity.

Men, women, and children from different walks of life gathered within the premises of the revered shrine. The devotees had arrived from various parts of the region, driven by their heartfelt desire to pay homage to the revered



Caliph of Islam, who was also the son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

Led by the head priest, the crowd

engaged in prayers, seeking blessings and guidance from the Almighty. The atmosphere was solemn yet serene, with the rhythmic recitation of sacred verses resonating through the surroundings.

One of the devotees while expressing his gratitude for being part of the commemoration said, "It is a privilege to be here today, to commemorate Hazrat Uthman Ghani (RA) and to witness the display of the holy relic. This gathering is a testament to the strong bond that exists among the Muslim community, transcending borders and differences," he said.

"I visit Dargah Hazratbal every Friday, and Alhamdulillah, I am very much happy to be present here today on the martyrdom anniversary of Hazrat Uthman Ghani (RA). I pray for the peace and prosperity of Jammu and Kashmir and asked my Lord to make everyone happy here," Abass, a devotee from Srinagar, said.

Govt increases retirement age for University professors to 65

Fawad Showkat

In a highly anticipated decision, the Jammu and Kashmir Government has announced an increase in the retirement age for University Professors from 62 to 65 years.

An official document stated that the decision was taken by the Administrative Council under the Chairmanship of J&K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha. However, as per the document, a committee has been constituted under the Chairmanship of the Chief Secretary, J&K, through Government Order No. 183-JK (HE) of 2023 to examine each case individually and determine the eligibility for age enhancement on a case-by-case basis.

In light of this development, the Higher Education Department (HED) has communicated the Government's decision to the Registrar of Jammu University for necessary action and dissemination of information.

According to the Government order, the performance of University Professors will be thoroughly reviewed and evaluated



based on several parameters before they reach the age of 62. The committee will consider the overall performance of the professors, including their physical and mental health and suitability for teaching and research assignments at the university.

Furthermore, the order stated, the committee will assess the Professors' general conduct and behavior, taking into account integrity and conduct standards as per the Civil Service Regulations of the J&K Government. The evaluation

will also consider the Professors' teaching contribution, which will be assessed based on student feedback and the adoption of new pedagogical approaches.

As per the order, the Committee will additionally evaluate the academic contribution of Professors, considering factors such as the number of publications, books, chapters in books, seminars, conferences, and workshops attended, the development of new syllabi and courses, patents, and consultancy assignments, as well as awards and fellowships received.

The order further stated that research contributions will also be assessed, taking into account the number of research publications in reputed journals, the number of enrolled and awarded Ph.D. candidates, as well as research projects and fellowships undertaken by the Professors.

Finally, the order stated, the committee will evaluate the Professors' contribution to the institution, including their participation in University Committees and their overall contribution towards the betterment of the institution.



Menace of child begging on rise despite legal prohibition

Zarka Shabir Bhat

On a busy Nishat road, a very popular tourist destination in the outskirts of Srinagar city, a luxury car pulls up. A ten-year-old girl who identified herself Aafiya: like a blooming flower, dressed in fair clothes, with dishevelled hair and bare feet, approached the car and stretched out her hands to beg.

The man in the car rolled down the glass and gave her some coins and as he started to drive away, she turned back and gave a slight smile.

Carrying her little sister in her arms, Aafiya says that she is a resident of Delhi and came to Kashmir during the COVID-19 lockdown in search of work.

"My father is a daily-wage labourer," she said. She, however, refused to talk further and hurriedly walked away with another girl.

Despite laws and multiple directions by the government to end child begging, the Kashmir valley particularly central Kashmir's Srinagar city has been witnessing a spurt in the number of child beggars. This menace has terribly plagued the lives of thousands of children who have lost their beautiful and innocent childhood by becoming slaves.

Every morning, Abroo (13) leaves her rented room in Dalgate area of Srinagar and makes her way to the Nishat garden. She gets by on alms from people who visit the heritage garden. "I have been visiting here each day for six months now," she said, adding that no one who visits here leaves without paying me around Rs 10, Rs 20 or

sometimes even Rs 50. "Everyone here is generous," Abroo added.

"We come across people of all types. Some are kind and give us money and some scold us or even slap us," said Muskaan, another similar minor beggar who claims to earn Rs 500 to 700 per day around Nishat garden.

Official data suggests that more than 3000 children were found to be begging on streets or selling pens, ballons and flowers in the city particularly near traffic signals.

Mohammad Younus, who is running a tea stall same opposite the Nishat garden said that it has been commonly seen in winters that young girls hold toddlers without clothes to gain maximum sympathy.

"It's their routine practice and no action is being taken against this practice," he said. Younus believed that small children are deliberately harmed and injured to get maximum sympathy of people.

Section 24 (1) of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children Act 2000) provides that whoever employs or uses any juvenile or child for the purpose of begging or causes any juvenile to beg, can be imprisoned up to three years and shall also be liable to fine.

Those who abet begging are also liable to punishment. Section 363A of the Indian Penal Code provides punishment for a person who kidnaps or maims a minor for purpose of begging.

Meanwhile, an official said that child begging is something which can be twisted and manipulated by larger forces at work to give it the shape of thriving business as it functions mainly on sympathy-mongering.

"All of these children are not homeless. They stay in settlements in the city and

they are forced into begging by parents and guardians in many cases. This makes it difficult for the authority to stop this practice. However, we are trying different measures to bring greater community awareness and vigil to put an end to child begging," he added.

He said that the children begging on the streets face a lot of abusive behavior and torture. "They are abused by their parents, guardians, traffickers and other peoples," he said, adding that sometimes they are sexually abused, beaten, tortured and forced to beg on the streets without any excess to shelter and food.



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