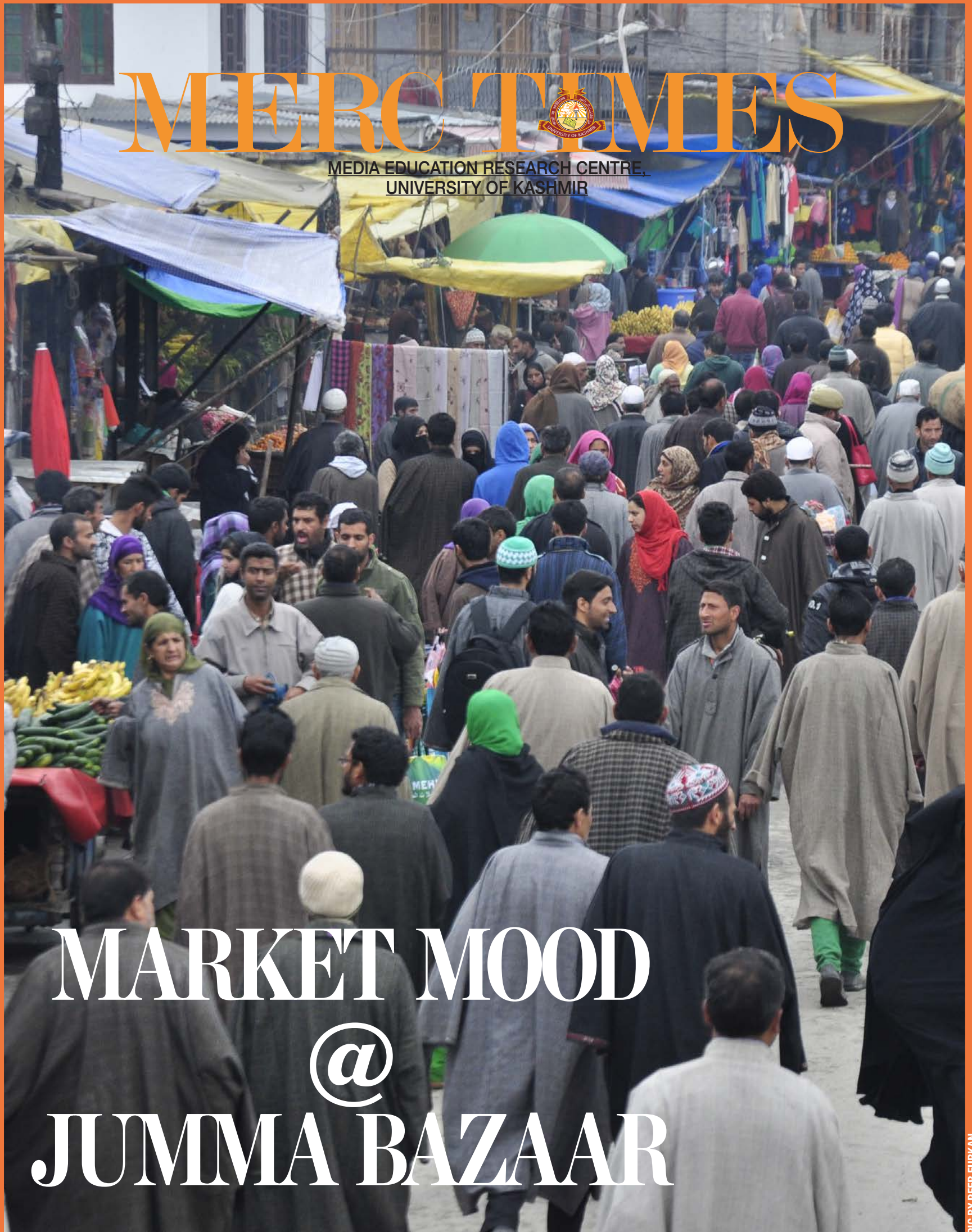


MERC TIMES



MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE,
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR



MARKET MOOD @ JUMMA BAZAAR

PIC BY PEER FURKAN

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Hangul Population increasing in Kashmir: WCF



❖ Sharoz Khushal

Srinagar: On the occasion of Wildlife day, Wildlife Conservation Fund (WCF) rejects the claims of Wildlife Institute of India which puts the population of Hangul in Kashmir at 140. According to WCF, Hangul population is around 287 at present.

This was stated by WCF's Executive Director Nadeem Qadri while speaking at SP College's Auditorium on the occasion of wildlife day. He said "the future of wildlife lies in our

hands and need is to strengthen gene pool, which is inexhaustible."

It is pertinent to mention that Wildlife Department few years back had launched 'Save Hangul' project.

Wildlife Warden Central Kashmir, Tahir Shawl termed the achievement as 'zest and zeal' of ground staff. He on the occasion of wildlife day stressed upon its department's ground staff to continue their hard work. He said "special efforts to revive Hangul will continue till this nature's endowment is saved from extinction."

Ignored School of Rajouri

"WE ARE HELPLESS": ZEO

❖ Hassina Jameel

Srinagar: In a stark contrast with the Pirpinjals's picturesque Rajouri district, Manjakote Middle School lies in shambles. School authorities believe that due to the lackadissical approach of the government, school suffers badly.

Talking to MERC TIMES, teachers rue that government's apathy towards this school due to unknown reasons make students suffer.

Giving graphic details of the miserable conditions they face on daily basis. Zahoor, a student of 7th standard shares that there is no library in the school.

"shortage of space in the classrooms creates various problems for us", a group of students said. They added that they are facing a step motherly treatment from the men in chairs.

Shortage of water, washrooms and non-availability of teachers in the school has added insult to the injury.

"we relieve ourselves in open, attending nature's call gives us an embarrassing time." a group of female

students said. They said even the mid-day meal is not given to students.

Talking to MERC TIMES, Headmaster Ghulam Jeelani lambasted the government for not providing enough funds.

"our teachers do their best." he claimed. Zonal Educational Officer(ZEO) Manjakote Shahnawaz Khan showed helplessness by saying that he had contacted the higher ups but has not got any response so far.

"What can I do. I am helpless."He concluded.



WE RELIEVE OURSELVES IN OPEN, ATTENDING NATURE'S CALL GIVES US AN EMBARRASING TIME

AN-32 Aircraft Courier Service

RELIANCE IN A STATE OF DESPAIR FOR KARGILI PASSENGERS

❖ Zakir Hussain

Kargil: In progressive 21st century, when the rest of the world is dreaming to be on moon, Kargil despite of carrying cross-border strategic importance is still nowhere in the air-map of India. During harsh winter season when the national highway connecting Srinagar-Kargil-Leh gets closed, people are left with no option than combating the vicious winter.

As a ray of hope to the hopeless people of the district, in the year 2008, an air-transport back and forth from Kargil to Srinagar and to Jammu in the form of AN-32 Courier Service (Locally called Dakota) got started. The military air-base Kargil with the runway of 1830 x 32m is under Indian Air Force and its use for civilian purposes is a long



pending dream and demand for the local inhabitants. The operation AN-32 courier service at the beginning got great response from the inhabitants, but with time it's uncertain cancellation, poor rendered service, the estrange treatment of the authorities satiate the people with deep dispiritedness and

discontentedness.

"The state and the union government is dissipating the main issue of Airport extension for public use and Zojila Tunnel by providing a mere assistance in the form of AN-32, I am not appeased by this trifle." said MLA Kargil Haji Asgar Ali Karbalai. Responding to

MERC TIMES, Hassan Hundurmani a student said, "The flight provides less service and much despair. Indeterminate cancellation and poor service at the airport are among the big issues we face. We are neither allowed to use trolleys nor allowed to use toilets at the airport. We almost feel alienated and marginalized there."

"Nepotism is the key cause of all the havoc," Hasina Batool a student said.

She alleged that the liaison in charges provide tickets to their relatives than people who need it in emergency."

While talking to the Liaison incharge AN-32 Courier service Srinagar Mr. Mohd Yousuf said, "We are trying our best to provide proper help and assistance from our side". He further said that efforts are on to improve the system."

KU holds seminar on ‘Religious Scriptures and World Peace’

❖ Irfan Tramboo

Srinagar: 29th March 2016: Kashmir University’s Centre of Central Asian Studies (CCAS) on Monday organized a day-long seminar on ‘Religious Scriptures and World Peace.’ Vice-Chancellor Prof Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi presided over the national-level seminar, organized on the eve of World Philosophy Day. Prof. Andrabi said “There is great of importance of all the religious scripture present in the world” he



Photo Courtesy|CCAS

further said that “all the ‘scriptures’ lead to the ‘ultimate truth’ ” While delivering the keynote address

Justice (ret.) Bashir Ahmad Kirmani, member of J&K Accountability Commission (JKAC), enlightened the audience

with the historical ‘background’ of scriptures.

Prof G N Khaki, Director CCAS formally welcomed the participants and Dr Wahid Nasaru from CCAS introduced theme of the seminar.

KU’s Dean Academic Affairs, Prof M A Wani chaired a session, and Prof Anil Kumar Tiwari from SMVD University, Katra, delivered a Special Address.

The proceedings of seminar were conducted by Dr Abid Gulzar, while Dr Fayaz Ahmad Lone presented Vote of Thanks.

The South Asia Youth Festival @ IKS, UoK



❖ Ubeer Naqushbandi

Srinagar: Institute of Kashmir Studies (IKS) on March 17, 2016 held valley’s first South Asia Youth festival. The festival aimed at strengthening the camaraderie amongst the youth of diverse nationalities of South Asia.

The IKS is a home to South Asian Association of regional Cooperation (SAARC) member nations as every year two students from each nation is selected to study in University of Kashmir at IKS.

This year, nine SAARC students graduated from IKS successfully completing two years degree in ‘Kashmir and South Asia Studies’. The students are supposed to study history, politics, geography, literature, economy of South Asia besides theories of Peace and Conflict Studies and International relations.

On the occasion of first South Asia Youth festival, Vice Chancellor, University of Kashmir, Prof Khurshid Andrabi was the chief guest. Besides, Rising Kashmir editor-in-chief, Dr Shujaat Bukhari was guest of honour.

The students from different countries had prepared varieties of foods for the guests. Besides, they wore traditional dresses.

A souvenir which included pieces of experiences by the IKS students was released on the occasion besides, a group discussion on “how media can help bridging the gaps in South Asia” was held in which noted columnist, Mehmood Ur Rashid; MERC Coordinator, Faruq Masudi; Prof Nasir Mirza; MERC Times Editor, Muslim Jan; The Hindu Srinagar Correspondent, Peerzada Ashiq; The Economic Times Srinagar Correspondent, Hakeem Irfan participated.

Social Responsibility Initiative; KU goes 24X7

❖ Ikhlaq Rehman

Srinagar: The University of Kashmir is all set to start 2nd shift classes from this academic session. The move according to University authorities is aimed to help students both in terms of time and money.

Confirming the development Dean Academic Affairs Mohammad Ashraf Wani said “aim is to help those students who miss their seats just by a thin margin. At the same time this move is to help weaker sections who can’t go for outside universities.”

Every year over 17000 students apply for

various courses in Kashmir University. Out of which only 3500 students make it to the highest seat of learning. The left outs either opt for the outside universities, or try their luck next year.

In order to save precious time of students and help students from poorer backgrounds, this move has been initiated by the varsity.

The Dean also maintained we have adequate infrastructure and manpower to implement this plan. “We want to make 100percent use of it,” he said.

This measure is likely to make the atmosphere of Kashmir varsity vibrant this session.

Workshop on Translation Concludes

❖ Syed Humaira

Srinagar: A three day seminar-cum-workshop titled ‘Translation of Vernacular Languages into English’—organized by the department of English, Kashmir University, concluded with a ‘pledge’ to carry on with the translation work.

A first of its kind, the workshop got immense response from students, scholars and other faculty members of the varsity.

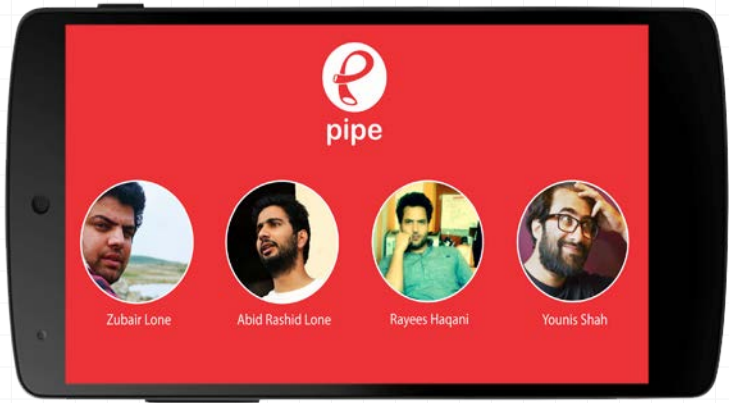
The concluding ceremony was attended by eminent poets like: Prof Rehman Rahi, Rafiq Raaz, Zareef Ahmad Zareef, Prof G. R. Malik, Prof Neerja Mattoo and Prof

Shafi Shauq.

While addressing the participants, Prof. G. R. Malik stressed on the continuous efforts in the direction of translation and said “seminars and workshops should not be an end; the work should continue out of seminars halls too.” he said

Prof. Neerja Mattoo said that she was ‘happy’ to see the ‘enthusiasm’ of the younger generation toward translating Kashmiri literature into English,

At the culmination, Prof Hameeda Bano, HoD department of English, said “I feel encouraged by the response, and we are planning to launch a full packaged 6 days course soon.”



Power of pipe application to communicate effortlessly

❖ Peer Viqar

Srinagar: Pipe is an android app that enables users to send and receive notifications, messages and links real time by setting up and connecting to “pipes”. It focuses on sharing information uniformly and real time with any number of people across locations, devices and platforms. A team of four young developers from Kashmir have designed pipe application. It Harnesses the power of Push Notification to keep users updated about the content which interests them. Pipe application is an innovation which provides a new platform and medium to acquire essential information without waste of resources. With Pipe, gain immediate attention and receive urgent, important and useful information, and content right away on your devices real time, rather than sorting through a bunch of messages, emails and social networking posts. This application is about creating, handling and transferring one’s own data enclosed in a secure line that’s why they named it “PIPE”.

“Earlier we decided make an application and use push notification to send alerts for civil services exams, by setting up office employing human resources person to push ALERTS by this way PIPE was born.” The co founder Abid Rashid said. Pipe

2.0 is future of pipe 1.0, which is currently in development phase. With new UI’s and improved backend technology. Pipe 2.0 will be on NoSQL databases and other server side technologies to make it highly scalable for the masses. Focus is to make Pipe a multiple platform app. Where in a user can receive information: on smart TVs, browsers or any other platform or even browsers.

“We are an Information Network which delivers notifications. It is neither a social nor political network. There is no need to reinvent the wheel, Think out of box! Focus on making a great product said, Rayees one of the developers.” This application has a great potential with a right business model, the application can take on the internet and soon stand somewhere in the list of apps like Snap chat, Twitter, Facebook or LinkedIn. Sometimes it’s the idea that sells more than the Product. Pipe application includes, cut through the clutter, access information in a flash, material design functionality & features have browse, setup pipe, bucket, connections and lot more.

The team of four, Abid Rashid (24), Rayees Haqani (26), Zubair Lone (28), and Younis Shah (25) have been working hard to make pipe successful and a productive software application

Mordernising Abaya’s

❖ Shaheen Rahim

Srinagar : The Persian art and craft, since ages has left a deep impact on the cultural belongings of Kashmir like: architecture, crafts and living. History narrates to us how Sufi saints, who came from Iran and other countries, taught different skill to the people of Kashmir.

‘Mehjooba Abaya House’ located in the old city of Srinagar, is run by two sisters, born and brought up in Iran: Atiya Rizvi and Nafsiya Rizvi. They returned to Kashmir 12 years back, and are busy changing the traditional look of Abaya, which they say was their ‘dream’.

30 years back, when their father moved to Iran, little did these two sisters knew that business will take them back to the valley.

“Initially, we started making different clothing items, which include: suits, bridal, and gowns. But the demand was up for the stylish and more modern Abaya.” says Nafsiya, who claim the trend of Kaftans also started from their block.

Atiya says that working was harsh in initial days of their business, adding that “only girls from the nearby area used to visit us. But with time Nafsiya’s different designs and unique stitching became popular.”

Over the years, the sisters have learnt the art of staying in touch with the changing trends of fashion in Kashmir. They say that Kashmir women prefer “simple and decent” clothes but with “trend and style.”

“We are happy that we are making traditional dresses like Abaya fashionable. It is back in vogue now” says Atiya.

The sisters claim that they were the first to design colored “Front Open Abayas”, which was “picked” by other designers later on. Fabric which they use is imported from Iran, Dubai and China.

“We have gathered a good customer base in Saudi Arabia, Australia, Iran, Dubai and of course in India too” says Nafsiya. The dream of these two sisters of: transforming traditional veil into designer Abaya and bringing out some modernity in the attire has apparently come true.



Three Days Photography Workshop Concluded in KGPC Srinagar.

❖ Arif Nazir

Srinagar: A Three-Day workshop based on basic photography concluded at Kashmir Government Polytechnic College Srinagar.

A group consisting of 45 students from various domains participated in this programme. The workshop was facilitated by Global Youth Corps (GYC) carrying the team of Syed Faisal, (Training-Coordinator), Shah Aadil (Talent & Acquisition Coordinator) and Mubashir Ahmad (Facilitator). Participants present on the occasion appreciated an entire Global Youth Corps team.

“In last three days, participants

learned how to use DSLR Camera and various other methods of capturing photographs,” Syed Faisal said.

“The DSLR Camera should be used as a weapon of peace worldwide,” Director Operations (GYC) Muzamil Maqbool said. He also discussed the upcoming project of GYC-Rumi Centered for peace, through which youth of J&K will be trained as peace ambassadors of tomorrow.

Guest of Honour, Shaista Shamim (Principal Kashmir Government Polytechnic Srinagar), Aijaz Ahmad Kakroo, HOD I.T, Muneer Ahmad, T P O, gave away certificates to all the participants.

KASHMIRI EMBROIDERY, EMPOWERING WOMEN



❖ **Qulsoom Beigh**

Srinagar: Embroidery is one of the traditional handicrafts of Kashmir, be it flowing designs on shawls or tunics. Kashmiris are known as the master artisans of embroidery. A Kashmiri artisan uses his/her needle in the same way as a painter uses his brush. The fabric is a canvas through which the artisan brings his designs to life.

40 year old shamima sits with her two daughters and other 6 women from her neighborhood, in a room adjacent to her kitchen as she finds the room comfortable so that she can manage her kitchen chores along with needle work she does.

"I learnt this from my mother," she says. Shamima wants her 11 year old son to be a doctor. Both her daughters are school dropouts, with no other bread earner in house.

Both the sisters started needle work some 3 year ago to help their mother financially.

"The artisans are not getting enough wages, if we work from morning to evening we earn rupees 200 a day, which is not sufficient to support a family, shamima said, "with the introduction of

machine work, which is blooming nowadays, it has effected our hand work.

Shamima, distributes the fabric to almost 50 other girls of the neighboring villages. She feels proud to be the source of income for other women as well, who desire to be independent. Shamimas form of work is unusual, as this type of fabric distribution is done only by males in her area.

"It's a challenge to make people self-reliant especially those who belong to a low socio-economic background, we are not qualified or skilled but shamima helped us to reinforce our economic stability as we are no more dependent on our families now, said a women who is working under shamima.

" Together with my mother and sister, we are working hard to run our family, we all have a dream to see my brother as a doctor and for which we will work more hard so that our miseries and poverty will end, said Nelofar shamimas elder daughter.

Shazia, another artisan said, "it gives me happiness of being self reliant, even though the wages are not enough but being independent for me is somewhat extraordinary.

Changing Weather Posing Threats in kashmir

❖ **Ayad Ullah Dar**

Srinagar: With no snowfall during the winter period in Kashmir this season, people in general and the experts in particular have raised serious concerns on drastically changing weather conditions.

'Chilla-e-Kalaan', (harsh winter period of 40 days) this season failed to bring some respite from dry winter. Gulmarg: the most popular winter tourist destination of Kashmir received 1 ft snow this winter, which earlier used to be between 10 to 15 ft.

Professor Irfan Rashid—faculty member and researcher at the Earth Sciences department of Kashmir University termed "global warming and rising levels of pollution as the main causes of the low snowfall trend" in the valley. He predicts "low agricultural yield in coming seasons" as the "main crop yielding plants of Kashmir are not adapted to such weather."

With the change in weather conditions another sector which is likely going to be affected, after agriculture is tourism. The effect is going to be colossal, and its shadow is going to fall on economy as well.

"Tourism, a key contributor to the economy of the state is another important sector which is likely to be affected." said Dr. Reyaz Qureshi, who is Director North Indian Tourism and Hospitality Congress (NITHC) He also added that "the climate of the valley itself is an attraction for tourists and any deviation in it is going to halt tourist inflow directly thus, the economy is going to suffer."

While, changing weather conditions are going to hit tourism and agriculture, there are speculations that 'net productivity' may decrease which will be a setback for the economy." "Changing climate will put a long term effect on economy of the state which is largely dependent on agriculture and tourism" said Dr. Ibrahim Wani, faculty member at Department of Economics, Kashmir University.

❖ **Adil Amin**

Srinagar: Providing self employment opportunity to identified poor girls, UMEED, a national scheme under rural livelihood mission has achieved its coverage to the large number of households in district Anantnag.

On 19 March, additional development commissioner Anantnag Mr. Muhammad Younis Malik highlighted the achievements of UMEED. He said "Out of total 25696, 13173, 11878 household's respectively in block Breng, Dooru and Khovripora of district Anantnag 500, 217 and 375 Self Help Groups (SGHs) were formed till date in the area."

All the three groups in the three blocks respectively are graded "A" under planned

intervention which enables them to avail additional funds. ADDC said that "We are stressing on the implantation of UMEED in every backward area by maximum coverage of families.

He further added that "NRLM is a complete package for installing of SHGs in the rural area as the scheme provides assistance at every level."

The scheme is for social empowerment that ensures that at least one female member of every poor family is provided an income generating platform by way of including her in the SHGs. "The SHGs are provided space voice and resource to elevate the economic levels of girls by reducing their financial dependence," ADDC added while giving details of the scheme.

While revealing the numbers ADDC said

that "Rs. 1755000 of Revolving Grant has been availed by the SHGs of Dooru while SHGs of Breng have availed Revolving Grant and Community Investment Fund of Rs 11440000."

Further he said "Similarly SHGs of Khovripora have availed Revolving Grant of Rs 3525000 and Community Investment Fund Rs. 6680000."

The scheme is being viewed as starting point where from it will be made sure that the females in every house hold are made financially independent by providing them certain platforms excel; where from they can grow further.

As of now the scheme as done well in the district Anantnag, and it is expected that the other districts will respond in the same way.

'UMEED'
DOING
WELL IN
DISTRICT
ANANTNAG

Giving Life to Dying Art



❖ Ali Safiudin

Srinagar: A nation constitutes of a lot of elements which are essential for upholding of its indigenous nature. One such element which is integrant to the nation is: the traditional sound. One of the richest form of our traditional music is the Kashmiri Sufiana Music. The Sufiana music includes 'Kalaams' which are mostly Mystical Sufi poems or Naats written by saints and poets. The Kashmiri Sufiana music is a dying art and the hosting of these Sufi musical gatherings called Mehfiles, are on the verge of extinction. It is therefore essential to acknowledge, value, document and preserve this art form.

One man who is doing his bit for the preservation and documentation of this art form is Ghulam Rasool from the uphill area of Brain Nishat, Srinagar. Ghulam rasool is a potter by profession, he works where he lives and in his working area you will find all the things related to pottery except one thing: An almara full of cassettes of Sufiana music. Most of these cassettes are the tape recordings of Sufiana Mehfiles which he has attended and recorded himself.

He believes that this large collection of authentic Kashmiri Sufiana music is a result of his habit of having this music playing while he's working or even relaxing. He feels that this music acts as a source of spiritual feed for him. He says that "he can't work if the Sufiana music is not there."

While explaining his passion for music, Ghulam Rasool says "I need to have this music playing back all day long and even at night before sleep. I am not a general music fan it has to be only Kashmiri Sufiana music for me and specially naats."

He has compiled a huge collection of Kashmiri Sufiana music, and of which many recordings, he says "have recorded myself in various Mehfiles" which he has attended over a long period of time. He pensively says that "listening to these tapes gives me a transcending experience and keeps me off from the fatigue of work."

This form of music he says is "deep" and "definitely not easy going" it has certain traditional and spiritual value to it. "We as Kashmiri's need to understand this and value it." he says

His collection is what he says is a "vital cultural asset." The recorded cassettes have captured the "live sonic feel" of actual Sufiana music gathering. He is not of a habit of keeping these records to himself "I frequently share his tapes with different people" he continues

A man of his age and profession who is least associated with technology is surprisingly well aware of the craft and technology of rerecording and duplicating the tapes. He said "tuhi hekyuw yem beath chipas maz the trewith (you can even transfer these songs into 'chips'" By chips he meant digital formats.

Ghulam rasool is also a crafted Tumbak Naari and Nout maker. He explained that the Tumbak Naris which he makes are "slightly bigger" than the average one's. He does this because he knows how to get the authentic sound from these instruments.

He is doing his bit although only on individual level without any help, to document and in a way preserve the beautiful Kashmiri Music.

He loves the sound of his nation to the extent he feeds on it's spiritually. His small but passionate effort needs to be acknowledged and fostered by the people concerned.

MarketMood @Jumma Bazaar

❖ Abid R Baba

Srinagar: Spent a day at Friday market Hazratbal to get the reactions of the vendors of what it means to sell second-hand items at cheaper prices.

It is raining sheets. Clock just ticket 9:00 in the morning. The downpour has disturbed everyone, everywhere. Many call it a "dirty drizzle". People no longer enjoy the incessant rains, not at least the vendors at Friday market here at Hazratbal.

Braving chill, Abdul Hameed, 50, just installed his stall. He sells colourful sweaters. Every Friday morning, he heads towards Hazratbal to feed his family of five. He is satisfied with whatever 'meagre' he earns. Hameed has been selling the second-hand items for 30 years now.

A few meters away from Hameed, Fayaz Ahmed, sporting salt and pepper stubble, shouts to convince his customers who have circled his hand-cart.

Meanwhile the customer rush mounted. People keep pouring in to the market from different quarters and remote hamlets of Ganderbal. This market caters to the downtrodden section of the society.

As this potential customer tries to bargain, the vendor tries to convince her, "Madam. This water bottle costs 200 in the market at Lal-chowk, but we sell it at 20 only."

The street trader waves his arms and shouts, "shabaash shabaash, walsa 20 20 rupye 20 20 rupye."

Hammed informs that the people from lower-middle class usually throng the market. "We sell cheaper items, affordable for our target class." Hameed continues, "If we start selling items costing above Rs 1000, people won't come here."

What Hameed perhaps would not tell me is that the purchasing power of the shoppers has considerably gone down from last couple of years. Many believe Inflation is the major factor responsible for the low-key profile of the market.

These vendors have to pay the fee as per the space they occupy. The fee ranges from 2000 to 20000 annually. The Contractors collect the money every Friday and finally it goes to Auqaaf Committee of the historic Dargah Shrine.

Manzoor Ahmad Khan from Nigeen who has been selling tea for 21 years, here, seems dissatisfied with the trends changing the market. "Earlier, we used to earn enough to meet both the ends but the time has changed." "People no more buy the old-stock," reasons Khan.

Unlike Manzoor, This market has turned fortunes for non-local vendors like Faizal Malik. Malik came all the way from Nagla Risaalदार Basti of Aligarh district, "My father recommended me to come over. The sale is good." Malik sells balloons and cotton candy and is contented with his day long earnings.

As it was getting dark in the evening, Haleema, who sells earthen ware and some wooden items, was packing up her bags. "This market has lost its sheen now. It does not feed the needy now. It no longer is a poor man's market. Had it been the case, I would have sold my stock by now."

Promising MERC Student bags Award “Capture Your City”

❖ Yawar Shafi

Srinagar: In yet another accomplishment Syed Shahriyar Hussain has bagged an award with primary position from an entire J&K state in National Photography Contest held by a stylish brand for Home Solutions in India “Tangerine” under the theme of the competition “Capture Your City”.

A Post Graduation student of Media Education & Research Centre, University of Kashmir, Shahriyar had won accolades for his exceptional work in most horrible inundation of Kashmir in September 2014.

“I am so glad and feel honoured winning a prize at the National Photography Awards, One of the most im-



pressive photography awards in my vocation and ofcourse it’s a moment of pride for me, truly a huge achievement”, Shahriyar said.

Even as Encouraging Photography lovers with his best wishes and heights of feat Shahriyar further added that “I am not a great photog-

rapher but I am very serious about my Photography. Winning such a great competition will encourage me to persevere my passion in photography in better ways”.

Shahriyar’s awe-inspiring photographs depicting the moments of the day which leaves an impression in the minds of the people had won him this prestigious award.

Budding Lenseman’s work has been featured in most reputed news outfits like Time, The Guardian and The Sun.

Coordinator Media Education and Research Centre Faruq Masudi appreciated the work of Syed Shahriyar and wished him more success in future.

Air Travel to Kashmir: Not for All

❖ Shahriyar

Srinagar: With tourism season in its toddling stage, the airline companies have started making an ‘undue’ hike in its airfare to Srinagar which is giving sleepless nights to the valley tourism players. Kashmir has been witnessing a steep fall in the arrival of the foreign and domestic tourists since last two years after valley witnessed devastating floods in 2014.

The tourism department this year is expecting a good flow of tourists to the valley as the department

during past many months has held multiple road shows and other tourism promotion activities outside Valley in different parts of the country and around the globe as well.

But contrary to its promotional activities, the airline companies since last week have been fluctuating the prices of air tickets to the valley.

“The airline companies from last three days have made a hike of above 200 percent in its airfare to Srinagar. The air ticket from New Delhi to Srinagar is being sold at a whopping price of Rs.12000-17000. For March 18,

AirIndia offers an airfare of Rs 17131 which a week ago was around Rs 6000. Similarly Indigo Airline Company is mentioning its airfare as Rs.14880 which is followed by Spice jet which offer Rs.13000 as its airfare for March 18. The airfare from Srinagar to New Delhi has been kept normal which ranges from Rs.3000 to 4800 for March 18.” said one of the travel agents.

President Travel Agents Association of Kashmir (TAAK) Manzoor Sidiq termed this hike in airfare as ‘unacceptable’ and ‘unjustified’. “the skyrocketing of the airfare has become usual practice for the airlines companies during the beginning of tourism season in valley.” he said. “the tourism players have been demanding the Union Civil Aviation Ministry to check the airfare hike to Kashmir repeatedly.” he added.

Peerzada Fayaz Ahmad a tour operator said that the move could divert the tourist to other destinations. He said that “the government has failed to pressurize the airline companies to maintain their airfare.”

Earlier the State Human rights commission in 2014 have taken serious note of the airfare hike and have termed it violation to the right to equality and human rights.



'WHEN TOURISM SEASON ARRIVES, AIR FARE TOUCH SKIES'



Books & Bricks Café. American restaurant & book store



❖ Hira Azmat

Srinagar: With the growing number of cafes in the valley, each trying to add a Kashmiri touch to their place, the two young entrepreneurs, Arsalan Sajad and Danish Yousuf are all

set to break the stagnancy by introducing the first-of-its-kind American Diner along with engaging books.

The quaint café is adorned by the pages of readers digest editions and book shelves. The ceiling is made in wooden

our plans. Another problem was to start the work post-floods which were a very difficult phase. The valleyites were already dealing with the trauma of the deluge and finding the right people to build this café was not easy. Our plans materialized exactly after a period of five months," says Danish, 27-year-old owner.

planks with tungsten bulbs hanging from it, giving it a rustic touch. The tag line goes "you can find magic everywhere you look, sit back and relax. All you need is a book "

The café is located in the busy area of Gogji Bagh. Being a hub of tuition centres and huge shopping complexes, its main focus is to pull the young crowds.

The UK read entrepreneurs describe how setting up the café proved to be a herculean task for them.

"We wanted to set up this café in 2014 but unfortunately floods thwarted

Books are the main attraction at this place. Famous novellas by renowned authors rest on the shelves quietly tempting the bibliophiles to enjoy food with reading.

"We mostly see that book reading culture is not prevalent much in Kashmir. This place is also for book lovers who enjoy reading in a laid back atmosphere as well as relish some good food. Our café is just right the place for them," says Arsalan, co-founder of the café.

Arsalan and Danish have been best friends since childhood. Their companionship is defined by their efforts to make this venture a success. While Danish is busy helping the chefs in the kitchen, Arsalan sets the mood of the café by playing the right kind of music in the background.

The owners are planning to introduce a full English breakfast menu in the future. They are committed towards their dreams of meeting the international standards of food.

"It's been only two months and the response is very good. We have our target audience and slowly we are reaching towards building our customer base,"

Kashmiris are known to be mega foodies whose taste buds have only known the rich taste of flavoursome Wazwaan. Will the idea of bringing a totally new kind of food to the valley flourish? Can something like pancakes and maple sauces ever replace the taste of nun chai and crispy Lavasa? Only time will tell.

From Movies of Khayyam cinema to barbeques, of "Khayyam chowk"

❖ Peer Furqan

Srinagar: Still a gigantic draw, Srinagar's Khayyam Chowk is flooded with people, tasting the delicious barbecues its vicinity. Khayyam Chowk, which had Shiraz Cinema hall in the neighborhood, has already gained popularity across the Valley for its appetizing barbecues.

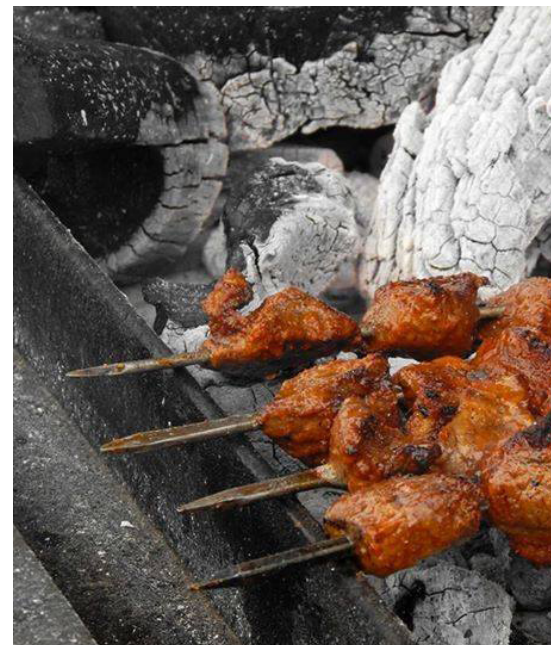
In the 90s, several shopkeepers of the valley at the time of insurgency switched to barbecue businesses who otherwise were serving tea to the people visiting cinemas. As the Khayyam was also popular for the "Khayyam cinema" at that time, like as other cinemas in the valley.

"All shops in Khayyam Chowk were small stalls serving tea who visit Khayyam Cinema before 1990. However, after the armed insurgency broke out in the Valley, cinema halls were forced to close down," Zuhaib and Idrees, who are working at Imran's Barbecue Shop - one of the oldest shops in the area

- for the past two decades, said. Imran is a witness to how the market has emerged into a popular food street over the years. "All shops in Khayyam Chowk were small stalls serving tea, to the visitors visiting Khayyam Cinema before 1990. However, after the armed insurgency broke out in the Valley, cinema halls were forced to close down," Zuhaib and Idrees added. "Those who visit the street, mostly bring their friends and colleagues another time to make everyone live through the delicious barbecues. We provide them with what they look for," they further added. In the 90s, several shopkeepers switched to barbecue business which

picked up gradually in the Valley. A decade ago, a stick of barbecue -six small pieces of meat - cost around Rs 25. Over time, the price of one barbecue stick has soared to Rs. 150.

"What we sell here is different from what they get in restaurants in Srinagar and other streets. Tourists also come to Khayyam Chowk," Zuhaib and



Idrees said. Tourists often visit Khayyam chowk."I have come to this place to eat barbecues, One of my friends who had been to this street earlier recommended this place to me for barbecues," said Vishakha, a tourist from Mumbai.

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