

Vol 10 • No 07 • Pages 16 • May 15, 2017

# MERC TIMES



**MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE,**  
**UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR**

## SRINAGAR'S TRADITIONAL WICKER CRAFT IN LAST THROES

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## Govt. to utilize spaces beneath Jahangir chowk - Rambagh flyover artistically



❖ **Imran Ali Buth**

**Srinagar:** To utilize the available spaces beneath the under-construction Jahangir chowk - Rambagh flyover, J&K Government plans an artistic way to shape the urban landscape of Srinagar city. In a meeting chaired by Minister PWD (R&B), J&K Govt. Naeem Akhtar, ideas were explored to create vivacious spaces like kiosks, book shops, art galleries under 2.5 km flyover connecting Barzulla with Jahangir chowk without impeding the traffic the flow in the city.

The meeting which was called to generate ideas for beautification of the city was attended by various government officials as well as other experts. With a detailed presentation, INTACH J&K put forth the proposal of using the empty spaces under the 2.5 KM flyover.

While describing the technical aspects of the project, INTACH highlighted the possibilities how to use the spaces creatively without leading traffic congestion in the city. Illustrating with the examples of various flyover projects across the world, the proposal envisages vivid picture of the city flyover. The Minister PWD (R&B) directed the J&K Economic Reconstruction Agency (ERA) to prepare a preliminary report in consultation with INTACH, J&K and sketch out the roadmap for the project at earliest.

Speaking to MERC Times, Ikra Syed, Architect, INTACH J&K, said, "We proposed to well use the empty spaces under flyover keeping in mind to add aesthetics to the city centre without putting any hurdle in terms of traffic congestion."

While highlighting the project components she said that it includes of building light structures to shift road-side vendors especially in residential areas falling in the line of flyover, landscaping in busy areas ensuring regulated movement by creating entry and exit at zebra crossings. "The project emphasizes to creatively utilize the spaces by creating kiosks, book shops, art gallery at suitable locations and to ensure smooth traffic flow without putting any sort of hindrance", she added.

## BHAND PATHER: A LOST HERITAGE

❖ **Munawar Hussain**

**Srinagar:** Folk theatre is a composite art and since time immemorial it has been widely used to deliver the critical messages with a spice of entertainment. This kind of an art can be regarded as 'edu-tainment' in modern nomenclature of fine arts, where both education and entertainment are served synchronously to the audience.

In Kashmir, the importance of Folk theatre can be traced back to 8th century. Kalhan, author of Rajtarangni mentions in his book that Kashmir had the rich tradition of arts-music, painting, dance and drama. The book stands witness to phenomenal development in fine arts from 8th to 15th century.

The Bhand Pather is not an unknown word for the Kashmiri inhabitant, but the people who are associated with it come mostly from a hamlet, 15 Kilometers away from the Srinagar city. The village is famously known as Wathora.

Gh. Mohi-u-Din Aijaz, president of National Bhand Theatre is a resident of Wathora. Since 1965 he has been tirelessly working to bring this art form in par with the modern ways of information communication tactics. Mr. Aijaz, also a former wireless communication officer in J&K police department has made significant contributions to the Bhand Pather.

"Four generations: my father, myself, my offspring, and their progeny. We all have religiously and passionately been associated with this art form, and we will continue to take the true meaning of Bhand Pather to posterity, say Aijaz."

National Bhand theatre is the lone folk theatre organization in valley which has been approved by Cultural academy, Sangeet Natak Academy, Ministry of Culture-Govt. Of India, and North Zone



Culture Center (NZCC). The Cultural Ministry has given a salary grant to the organization.

National Bhand Theatre has won over 25 awards including Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Purskar and an award from National School of Drama for best Angrez Pather (Satirical drama on British colonialists) of the year. Currently around 37 people are a part of his organization.

The founder of this organization has seen many harsh and trying times as a Bhand Pather artist. Mr. Aijaz recalls, "In February, 1998, a fake militant outfit threatened us to shut the practice of performing at national holidays. Perturbed by the threat, we stopped to be a part of it. The person went on and asked for money. Fortunately, as I was in the police department we were able to bust the man and get back to the artistic adventure."

Now, seventeen years from the incident, Aijaz and his Four sons are constantly working to pour a new life in the Bhand Pather industry. In their dwelling place

in Wathora, the family has dedicated an entire room for the National Bhand Theatre organization. They call it 'Theatre office' and it is equipped with modern advanced gadgets.

"We have brought our own lighting system, digital cameras, multimedia projectors, video cameras. The facilities help us to carry the different task of organization effectively. The National Bhand theatre has its own website where information about every new event is showcased, says Director National Bhand Pather, Shah-e-Jahan."

Mr. Ashraf Tak of cultural academy said, "We are providing them financial assistance at the end of every month. Also, we organize different cultural events for them."

Mr. Aijaz, however complains that, "To carry this art form to future generations, a school dedicated to performing arts should be established. Mere support in the form of equipment and financial help is not panacea."

## Govt to monitor basic facilities in Ramadan

❖ **Ali Pathan**

**KULGAM :** In view of the coming holy month of Ramzan, J&K's Minister of State for Haj & Auqaf, PHE, PDD and Industries & Commerce, Syed Farooq Ahmad Andrabi, Saturday evening conducted an extensive tour of Anantnag and Mattan towns of Anantnag district to take stock of general facilities made available in the towns for the upcoming holy month of Ramzan. Visiting various locations in the towns,

including Lal Chowk, Cheni Chowk, Mattan Adda, and Janglat Mandi, Andrabi directed for ensuring availability of all basic facilities besides repairing of defunct street lights and installing high mast lamps wherever required at public places.

Visiting the Child Care and Maternity Hospital, the Minister interacted with doctors and patients and enquired about medical facilities made available in the hospital. He directed the concerned Medical Superintendent to ensure

availability of all facilities in the hospital during the holy month.

On the occasion, Andrabi also paid homage at the holy shrine of Reshi Moul Sahab (R.A), where he interacted with the management of the Shrine and assured them that all their concerns will be addressed on priority.

The Minister was accompanied by DC Anantnag, Chief Engineer PDD, SSP Anantnag, SEs of R&B and PDD, senior officers concerned municipalities among other concerned officers.

## State Government focuses on waste segregation methods

❖ Sabeeha Shaheen

**SRINAGAR:** Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) has failed to comply with mandatory Solid Waste Management Rules (SWMR) despite directions from the state government to ensure scientific treatment of waste. The J&K Government recently directed SMC to initiate collection of waste in a segregated form from households from April 7 this year.

As per sources, SMC has failed to adhere to this government directive and have limited the segregation of waste project to issuing advertisements.

“People through advertisements are asked to segregate the waste. But what is the fun to segregate the waste when later SMC authorities mix it again. They have not pressed any men and machinery to lift the segregated waste in scientific manner and to ensure that the segregated waste doesn’t mix up again,” said residents of Barbar Shah.

In Budgam town, a non-government organization in association with local Municipal Committee has started to undertake source segregation of waste and composting in five wards.

During his recent interaction with media, Commissioner SMC Dr Shafqat Khan claimed that 65 percent of waste is segregated by SMC and rag pickers across Srinagar. However, heaps of mixed waste (biodegradable and non-biodegradable) can be seen loaded in huge vehicles of SMC near Hyderpora bypass near Jamkash showroom, Bypass Chanapora, Bagh e Mehtab railway crossing and other places in civil lines area.

Official records reveal that SMC has a full-fledged Compost Officer who is supposed to treat Biodegradable waste at Achan Landfill site. But till now not even 10 kgs of compost (organic Manure) has been prepared by SMC.

“In Srinagar Fruit Mandi, the SMC after loading all the



quintals of biodegradable waste daily in its vehicles is dumped at Achan, while as same rich organic waste from fruits and vegetables could have been converted into organic manure by the Compost Officer of SMC,” said an expert.

SMC Commissioner, Dr Shafqat Khan, said that all preparations have been put in place to comply the SWMR in letter and spirit. “We are in process to tender the collection of segregation waste and to compost it scientifically. The entire process will be completed shortly,” he said.

## KU among top 100 universities in all-India ranking

❖ Saba Khan

**SRINAGAR:** The University of Kashmir has figured among top 100 universities in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF-2017) released by the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development on Monday.

The NIRF outlines a methodology to rank academic, technology and research institutions across the country on the basis of standard parameters.

The University of Kashmir has figured at Rank No. 73 (Point Score: 36.32) in the ranking system, where about 3000 institutions of higher education participated.

The parameters on which the University, like other institutions across the country, has been evaluated include Teaching, Learning & Resources; Research and Professional Practice; Graduation Outcomes; Outreach and Inclusiveness and Peer Perception.

This marks a significant progress by the University of Kashmir in the last three years in the standard parameters used for the ranking.

The NIRF was approved by the MHRD and launched on 29th of September 2015.

The progress made by the University of Kashmir owes to a series of reforms put in place over the past few years, especially in teaching and research.

Vice-Chancellor, Prof Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi expressed satisfaction over the progress made by the University and congratulated one and all, including the team of Directorate of Internal Quality Assurance (DIQA) for the achievement. He emphasized that the University shall continue to strive to improve its credentials in teaching and research in tune with the globally-set benchmarks.

## National electronic media denting tourism sector in the valley

❖ Adnan hilal

**SRINAGAR :** The Kashmir state is witnessing huge decline in tourism business as distorted representation by the national electronic media coupled with prevailing situation has put the Kashmir’s tourism sector in dire-straits. The decline in tourism has resulted in huge business to the people who are associated with tourism sector.

As per records of the tourism department, the tourist arrivals to Kashmir have declined more than 50 percent than 2016. The figures reveals that during the month of April this year around 67,000 tourists visited Kashmir, which is less than year 2016, where numbers of tourists were of 1,42,761.

“The fabricated representation in some paid news channels has adversely affected our handicraft business. The Pashmina shawl industry has incurred a great loss because of the decline of tourists” said Hilal Ahmed Sheikh

The lesser tourist arrivals is inflicting financial losses to hoteliers as well as travel agents, who have to pay idle wages and



fixed bills, causing huge financial burden on them.

“Negative publicity has marred our tourism sector. There is a hidden hand to defame our tourism sector. Government needs to take proactive action to safeguard interest of thousands

of people affiliated with this sector and that they are working hard to promote tourism through promotional efforts’, said Chairman JK Hoteliers Club, Mushtaq Chaya.

President, Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Mushtaq Ahmad Wani said, “Tourism arrival is going from bad to worse in Kashmir. The decision of the government to hold elections in April which subsequently led to killings derailed the tourism sector badly.”

Chairman, Kashmir Economic Forum, Showket Chowdhary urged the government to play a proactive role in revival of tourism in Kashmir.

“While as other sectors are recovering slowly but Kashmir’s tourism sector is still in dire straits following the colossal losses it suffered during 2016,” Chowdhary said.

Vice Chairman, Travel Traders Interest Guild, Bashir Ahmad Karnai said tourism body is worried due to lesser arrival of tourists. And, since 2016, the tourist arrivals have not picked causing huge losses to the tourism traders,” he added.

## Good weather may push apple production

❖ DANISH PATHAN

**ANANTNAG:** After almost three years of a lean stretch, the apple growers in south Kashmir are expecting an increase in their final production.

The south Kashmir region, comprising four districts, had a collective production of 7, 71,000 metric tonnes in the year 2016, according to the planning and marketing wing of the horticulture department.

The growers say the increase in production is because of good weather during the pollination period and an increased use of naphthalic acid spray by orchardists.

“The weather remained pleasant, which ensured better pollination compared to the last few years. That’s the basic reason that we are expecting an increase in the crop this time around,” Sheikh Mohd Ali, a fruit grower from Kulgam District.

He said even though it snowed and hail storms were witnessed, “it was before the pollination season and had minimal effect on the bloom”.

Shopian district is among the leading producers of apples across the Kashmir Valley, followed by Kulgam, Anantnag, and Pulwama.

The lower fruit load on apple trees in the last few years is also one of the reasons for a better crop forecast this year, experts say.

“The bloom has been abundant this year owing to a lower fruit load in the last few years. Which means the low final production in the previous years will ensure a better crop this time around,” a Horticulture Department Official told MERC Times.

The officer, who did not want to be named, is however apprehensive of a “June Fall”.

June Fall, he explains, is the phenomenon where apples tend to drop from the trees in the month of June.

“The primary reason for June Fall is the use of naphthalic acid, which, I am afraid, has been used abundantly this year around,” the official said.

He said the horticulture department allows the use of this acid only in extreme conditions, and its lavish use can damage the crop.

Chief Horticulture Officer (CHO) Roshan Dar said, “we are looking at an expected increase of 15 to 20 percent compared to last year, and this is good for the department as well as the growers.”

He brushed aside the issue of the use of naphthalic acid, saying the department does not allow its use unless absolutely necessary.

## Ganderbal Karate championship concludes

❖ SHOWKET WANI

**GANDERBAL:** Around 360 participants participated in a two day District Karate championship which was organised by Ganderbal Karate Association (GKA) at COE Institute Armapora. Boys and girls from various educational institutes participated in the Karate event.

The event was held between 12 and 13th may and event was managed by General Secretary of GKA, Mujhayid Maqdoomi.

The championship was played in four age categories; Sub-junior, Cadet Junior, Senior(Boys Girls),

Iqra Rasool, Musab Bilal, Nazima Bashir, and Nargis Showket won gold in these categories respectively.

Gold Medalist Iqra Rasool while speaking to MERC TIMES said “that this was a big platform to show case her talent, Girls should participate in these kinds of sports. Karate can be used as a self defense. I invite other girls to learn and practice Karate”.

On the Promotion and development of Karate in Ganderbal, Mujhayid Maqdooma, said “I am tirelessly working for promotion of Karate in Ganderbal. I am black belt in Karate and I am passing on my skills to youth here in Ganderbal. Karate had good potential in terms of career. It can be also used as a tool of self defense especially for girls”

He further said that “they have produced many National karate players and Players in Ganderbal both boys and girls have potential to represent Country at International level if they Work hard with dedication.”

## Official negligence creates trouble for Dal residents



❖ Waseem Ahmad

**SRINAGAR:** In absence of a proper road and failure of implementing the resettlement policy, residents of Dal Interior are facing immense hardship.

In 2012, Government with a project cost of 1.40 Lakh allotted four Kilometres road connectivity to interior areas of Dal Lake. But due to official apathy, the road which was supposed to be completed in one year was left mid-way.

“This road is like a lifeline for us as this road is the only

way we are connected to other part of the valley. We have to face various problems due to the dilapidated road,” said Nasir Hussain, resident of Mir Bahri

He also said that the government’s resettlement policy for the Dal Dwellers was not implemented effectively.

“If government thinks, we are the root cause for polluting Dal Lake, then why the resettlement policy was not implemented properly and moving at snail’s pace,” said Nasir

Under the resettlement project, 2000 plots were supposed to be allocated to the Dal dwellers. But so far

only 200-300 families have been shifted to the Rakh-e-Arth in Bemina area of Srinagar.

The residents also said that families who were being shifted to Rakh-e-Arth, Bemina are finding hard to live there as the houses they were giving are in a bad condition.

In order to conserve prized Dal Lake, High court has put a ban on any sort of construction within 200 meters radius around the Dal Lake, which hampers the repair of the houses inside the Dal areas.

“Neither we can repair our houses nor we are being resettled, what will we do? Die here! , Imran Hussain, a resident said

Assistant Executive Engineer (AEE), Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LAWDA), Gurmit Singh said that the resettlement policy is being implemented in three phases. Currently the work on first phase is going on.

“The work on first phase of the project was stopped due to halting of work by the Budgam authorities. But the issue is being settled now. It will take some time to complete the project,” Gurmit said

Asked about the dilapidated road, Roads and Buildings (R & B) Department, Chief Engineer, Abdul Hameed Sheikh said that he had no information about that project.

“I don’t know exactly about that project. I am out of state right now, when I will be back; I will look into that matter, he said.

## Top Cyclists to participate in Budgam



### ❖ Bint ul Huda

**BUDGAM:** Top cyclists of valley are going to participate in 3rd edition of Celestial Buds Cycling Championship which will be held in the month of July at Check-i-Kawosa, Budgam, informed by the authorities.

The race will start from the main gate of Celestial Buds High School, after five rounds outside the school on Srinagar- Gulmarg road, the race will end at the starting point.

As per guidance, the Race will be conducted in two categories Indian made category and foreign made category. The winners will be awarded with cash and trophies; however, School students will also take part in the race.

“I am glad to see that cyclists of my area have dominated the cycling arena in valley from last few years. There are 20 professional cyclists with imported cyclists in my area,” said Muzaffar Ahmad Bhat, who is one of the sponsors of the race.

“With increasing number of vehicles, our environment is affecting, cycling will help us to keep our atmosphere neat and clean,” he said, adding “we should support such events in the valley and promote cycling among the members in our society.”

Pertinently, J&K’s prominent cyclist Akbar Khan will take part in the Cycling championship, who is secretary of the event, he said topers will get chance to participate in upcoming national cycling events.

“Our riders will be seen in first bunch of 140 km race and point race in coming National cycling championship in Karnataka in October this year. We have prepared ourselves for National championship and I hope, we will bag at least 4 medals this year,” he said.

“My motive is to revive the cycling culture here which keeps a healthy body. At least in every house they should have their own cycle,” he added

## HAZRATBAL, history of the holy relic



### ❖ MOHAMMED NADEEM.

**The Book, HAZRATBAL:** History of the Holy Relic, not only covers the architectural, historical, social and religious importance of the Hazratbal shrine and the Holy relic, but also deals, in detail, with the heart wrenching story of how this shrine and holy relic was used by politicians in order to maintain their power in the valley.

Based on in depth research, this book can be considered a final word on history of Hazratbal Shrine. Muzaffar Khan, the author of this book traces back the journey of Holy relic, its authenticity and all other important historic moments of the shrine.

After preface and introductory note, there are 8 Chapters that discuss the history of the Hazratbal shrine and the Holy relic; the background and management of the shrine, its architecture and development. Chapter 5 and 7 deals with the horrifying sacrilege, the siege and how the holy relic was stolen and how the sentiments of Kashmiri Muslims were treated as trash.

The research conducted by the author leaves no doubt in the reader’s mind that India was behind the entire horrifying game of thrones.

It was in 1963, the holy relic was stolen from the shrine. It was all a political game that costed hundreds of innocent Kashmiri lives. The protest gatherings were fired at mercilessly resulting in massacres. Although they (Government/ police) were able to ‘replace’ the Holy Relic, but who were behind it and why it was done, still remains a mystery as the Government never released any official details.

Again on March 29, 1996 Indian troops were successful to spill innocent blood in the premises of the Holy Shrine and even destroyed a large portion of it by using gun-powder resulting in 22 deaths.

To trace back the history of the shrine and the holy relic, the author has mainly relied on the original sources and oldest history books written in Sanskrit and Persian and Kashmiri language.

There are six appendices giving extra information on importance of relics in Islam. Appendix IV deals with Id-i-Milad and to remain objective in this regard, the author has quoted from Von Greunbam’s book ‘Muhammadan Festivals’ which leaves no doubt that this festival has nothing to do with basic Islamic teachings and was first celebrated by kings of Egypt only for amusement and lavishness.

## Cement factory to come up in Gulab bagh

### Bisma Farooq

**GANDERBAL:** Despite stiff resistance by the residence of Chamnthan, Gulab Pora in Central Kashmir’s Ganderbal district against re-establishing of cement factory, the district administration however said the factory is destined to be rolled as Pollution Control Board has given permission to go ahead with the cement factory.

The Gulabpora residents has been protesting from days against the plan to restart cement factory in the area that was shut a decade back, the people say that the factory if set up will become main source of pollution affecting public health.

Residents alleged that continuous pollution emanating from the cement factory when it was running in the area not only effect the health of humans but also the cattle population of the area.

“Factory is barely 100 meters away from the local school posing a health threat to the students studying there, the protesting residents said.

Sheikh Fayaz Ahmad said, Hundreds of people were diagnosed with tuberculosis due to the pollution coming out of the factory when it was functional between 1990 to 2000.

“We have already suffered a lot; we don’t want to suffer again due to the factory.” he

said.

Residents said that the District administration had assured us that the factory will not be restarted.

“Additional DC Ganderbal had assured us that the factory will not be restarted; now few powerful people are pushing to restart it posing a health threat to the population and agriculture land there”. Ghulam Nabi a local imam of the area said.



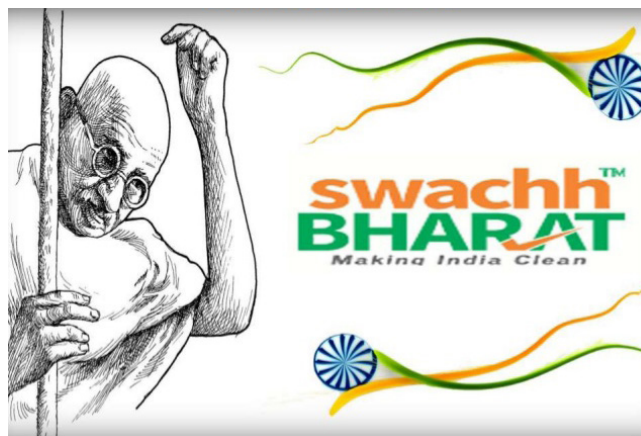
# Leh among 100 cleanest cities, Srinagar, Jammu stand way below

❖ **Wajahat Shabir**

**SRINAGAR:** Despite having received huge amount of money from government of India for implementation of much-talked sanitation program “Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA)”, the state has largely failed to fully implement it in both Jammu and Kashmir.

While showing a positive sign in cleanliness in the all India city ranking, Leh has achieved 100th rank in India while topping the list in Jammu and Kashmir in the survey of 434 cities, conducted as part of the Modi government’s Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, or Clean India Mission.

The cleanliness survey was carried out during January and February. Launched in 2014, the Swachh Bharat campaign aims to make India clean and open-defecation free by 2019, the 150th birth anniversary year of Mahatma Gandhi.



Leh, which is free of polythene-free, is followed by Anantnag in South Kashmir 197, while Srinagar and Jammu got 241 and 251 rankings, respectively.

Inside sources has revealed that except few districts, the state has done little to mitigate health threats

from improper sanitary facilities in households, hospitals and educational institutes.

The sources further said that the state had also lagged behind in the implementation of the National Rural Drinking Water Programme, with more Rs 310.15 crore unspent in last many years.

According to the data, More than 71 per cent of schools have no wash-basins or taps available near toilets and 9.18 per cent schools have no drinking water.

It is pertinent to mention here that according to the DISE survey, 6,351 JK schools in JK lack toilets for girls and 8,098 lack toilets for boys and more than 71% of schools have no basins or taps to wash hands near toilets and urinals.

While officials said that though they have conducted sanitation drives at hospitals, schools and shrines, a lot more still needs to be done for effective implementation of the Swachh Bharat campaign.

## Fashioning pashmina to regain its lustre

❖ **Saher Iqbal**

**SRINAGAR:** The newly introduced Kashmiri brand “Phamb” is out to take the luxury apparel market by surprise at least in the famous Kashmir pashmina segment.

Behind this entrepreneurial zest lie dream of 26 years old Junaid Shahdhar, who says, “One year back as a venture to diversify Pashmina, Phamb Fashion Pvt. Ltd is now eyeing to launch two to three retail outlets, starting from Srinagar to Delhi, besides participation in a dozen odd art exhibitions in different countries.

So far our e-commerce portal has received great response from the United States and Middle East apart from the expected response from India, he further said.

Though I belong to a business family and my father used to supply raw pashmina but diversification of pashmina needed much more. It was about connecting to the weavers and at the same time reach out to the suave market out there,” Shahdhar said.

Shahdhar is aware of the problem of fake products and misbranding Kashmiri pashmina, which was once so famous world over that it got named after Kashmir, as Cashmere wool and still is known by the same in most parts of West, South East Asia and China.

“Dealers who are misbranding pashmina are committing sin and bringing bad name to Kashmiri handicrafts. Even if one is selling pashmina, let him be clear to the customers that it is semi-pashmina products,” said Shahdhar.

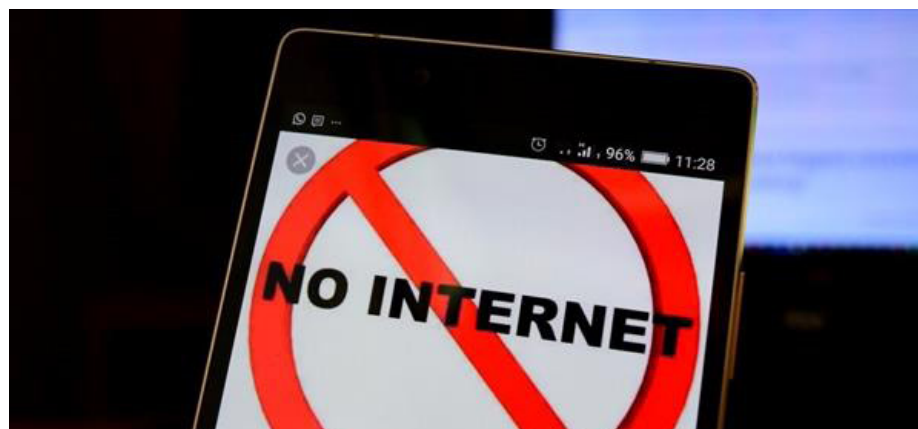
“To deal with this problem, we will provide a bar code certification to every Pashmina shawl to authenticate the product.”, he informed.

For Shahdhar though there is literally no looking back. But he still keeps his partnership in a metal trading business. As far future plans at Phamb are concerned the list is long.

Shahdhar is planning to launch a “Pashmina Washing and Caring unit”, which will dry clean Pashmina and cater to clients with traditional activities such as “Roufufu.”

## Students of Kashmir troubled by frequent Internet gags

❖ **B M Hussain**



**SRINAGAR:** With state government continuing mobile internet ban in the valley, the student community are facing immense problems particularly related to their academics.

The state government banned mobile internet in Kashmir after killing of militant Hizbul Mujahideen commander, Sabzar Bhat in an encounter on Saturday.

Sabia, a final years students at Government Women’s College said that their problems have aggravated since government enforced ban on the mobile internet.

“Students mostly rely on the mobile internet for study material nowadays. The government had an option to ban social network sites only, but it seems that they are least bothered about us,” she said.

Another post-graduate student Muzaffar Hussain, said that he couldn’t apply for a job in hospitality sector due to the internet gag in the valley.

“I have recently completed my diploma in hotel management and was looking for a job opportunity. Last week, I couldn’t apply for a job in one of the leading hotel chain of India,” he said.

Similarly, many students who are preparing for various courses echo similar views of their sufferings due to the internet gag.

Sadia Ahmad, a graduate in arts stream said that she couldn’t make it to find a suitable college during past one week to apply for post graduate course.

“We are unable to check the notifications of various entrance exams of different colleges of India during past one week. Students like me who have no access to the internet currently have no option other than to wait till ban is over.”

The students appealed to the administration to restore the Internet as soon as possible. “If officials were afraid of the circulation of inciting messages on Whatsapp and Facebook then such applications should be banned. But at least allow the people of Kashmir to use other websites”.

## Traffic Police issues new diversion plan for Srinagar City

❖ Saba Gul

**SRINAGAR:** Traffic Police in Srinagar City issued a new diversion plan for public service vehicles (PSVs) in view of the opening of newly constructed Bailey bridge at Barzulla connecting Allochibagh.

According to the SSP Traffic Srinagar, PSVs including Sumo, Tavera and Tata-407 coming from Rawalpura, Sanat Nagar and Hyderpora shall take left turn at Barzulla

Bridge towards Old Barzulla and follow Bailey Bridge-Allochibagh-Cargo Crossing- Stadium Crossing-Naaz Crossing-Jehangir Chowk route.

Similarly, PSVs coming from Chanapora, Nowgam, Natipora shall take left turn at Rambagh Crossing towards Barzulla Bridge and follow Old Barzulla Bridge- Bailey Bridge-Allochibagh-Cargo Crossing- Stadium Crossing-Naaz Crossing-Jehangir Chowk route.

While as PSVs with destination Batamaloo shall adopt route along Bailey Bridge-Danderkah-Batamaloo route.

The SSP said that no vehicles shall



be allowed towards Rambagh flyover construction zone for safe commuting and congestion free traffic. She further said that the diversion plan will be implemented strictly and violators, if any, shall be dealt as per law.

Meanwhile, in a traffic advisory the Traffic Police said that vehicles coming from Allochibagh Bund Road who have to move towards Bemina or Tengpora Chowk shall move from Tengpora under Bridge and merge into that traffic tube at the flyover landing near City Hospital gate.

Whereas, the vehicles moving from Allochibagh Bund towards Hyderpora shall turn right and then take the flyover route by making a U-turn.

## New Engineering Colleges to function this year

❖ Muneem Farooq

**SRINAGAR:** The government has decided to start courses in two new government engineering colleges coming up in Ganderbal district of Kashmir and Kathua district of Jammu division from this year.

The announcement was made today by the Minister for Education, Syed Mohammad Altaf Bukhari at a gala event organized by Government College for Engineering and Technology (GCET) to celebrate its annual day. Altaf Bukhari was Chief Guest at the Annual day function of the prestigious Engineering institute of the state.

“We are in process of starting two colleges one at Safapura in Ganderbal, Kashmir and another in Kathua of Jammu division and start the courses in these new professional institutions from this year” the Minister

announced. He said the decision in this regard has been finalized.

Minister of state for Education, Priya Sethi listed the steps taken by the government to rejuvenate education sector. She said transparency, accountability have been made benchmark for working of all public institutions and services. She also hailed the performance of the students and congratulated the toppers of different batches. She also advised the young engineers to give their best to society and country, describing them as true nation builders.

The college also brought out an e-magazine on the occasion and felicitated the students who achieved excellence in academics, sports and other co-curricular activities.

So far nineteen batches have passed out from GCET, while four batches are presently pursuing courses in different streams.

## Work Underway To Restore Narbal Flood Channel

❖ Mu’Azzam

**SRINAGAR:** The state government has issued directions to all concerned authorities to undertake land acquisition and expedite compensation with regard to re-sectioning of the flood spill channel Narbal to increase its carrying capacity.

The welcome step has been taken in a bid to avert flood threat to Srinagar.

Official data reveals that authorities have acquired 511 kanals against the target 1500 kanals. A drastic demolition drive involving huge cutting down of trees inside the flood spill channel will be undertaken from Village Durbal to Shariefabad with the restoration aimed at increasing the water carrying capacity of the flood spill channel to 20,000 cusecs through various phases from its present carrying capacity of 4000 cusecs in Srinagar. The water carrying capacity of the flood spill channel decreases further while moving towards North Kashmir.

“It will surely contribute a lot to

minimize frequent flood threat. In fact, the measures should have been taken earlier.” said a hydraulic expert.

Some Police assistance was also required for the execution of work as during the earlier days of work, some of the locals tried to hamper the project thereby forcing stoppage of the work.

“The work was hindered as some locals were not ready to cut down the trees. Now after taking the assistance of police, that hurdle has been cleared and the process of restoration of the flood spill channel is set to go on without such interruptions.” said an official.

The project is being executed under “Priority Works – Comprehensive Flood Management Plan Phase-I” on river Jhelum including the flood spill channel by the Department of Irrigation and Flood Control and the acquisition of land for the restoration of flood channel is expected to be completed by or before the end of May, this year.

## Mehjoor Ali, star in the making



❖ Failsa Khan

**SRINAGAR** Mehjoor Ali, 26 year old young fast bowler is bringing laurels to the state, and has become the new Cricket sensation, after his brilliant performances in both national and state level tournaments.

After joining the cricket academy in Bangalore in 2007, there was no back foot for Ali. Being associated with state level tournaments from his early age, Mehjoor has played under 19 and under 22 for J&K. He is a prominent member of J&K Ranji Cricket Team.

While having a telephonic conversation with Ali, he talked about his IPL journey and

said, “It has been great to be in Rajasthan Royals Development squads in 2010, and with Kings XI Punjab in 2011 and being associated with Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings in 2014-2015 and I’ve learned a lot overtime.”

Mehjoor emerged out as highest wicket taker and helped Sports Council XI to book their place in the final of the Chief Minister’s cricket cup against Shimla Cricket Club.

Talking about his further plans Ali said, “I am in consideration with various clubs in England, Ireland and Canada and there is a chance I may play cricket in one of these countries soon.”

# Eridanus Software launches Jk Meeqat app



❖ Syed Jesarat

**SRINAGAR:** Eridanus Software Solutions launched special Ramadan update for JK Meeqat prayer timing application. The new update comes out with new material design for its 50,000 users in the Holy month of Ramadan.

JK Meeqat is the first application developed by software engineer from Jammu and Kashmir that provides users with accurate prayer timing based on their location in Jammu, Ladakh and Kashmir.

The head of android developer, Sajad Bn Nazir said

“Ramadan is the holiest month on the Islamic calendar, and our team has been working for months for this update launch. I’m sure the users will love the new update.”

“I’m very proud of Sajad as he has been working tirelessly on this project without seeking any remuneration. He is one of the best developers Kashmir has ever produced and Eridanus is proud to have him in the team,” said Waseem Aslam, Founder – Eridanus Software Solutions

The application is equipped with various features like Call to Prayer (Azaan) notification, Qibla locator, location based timing, Islamic Hijri calendar and Custom Suhoor/Tahajjud Alarm feature.

Every district has some prayer time variance, the Meeqat application is aimed at providing the precise prayer timing notification and help Smartphone users keep track of Suhoor/Tahajjud and Iftaar timings.

The application is available on Google Play store, and has an impressive rating of 4.5 stars on 27th May 2017.

Uneeb Wani wrote on the app’s Play store review page, “One of the best applications from Kashmir, I have downloaded it specifically for Ramadan. I recommend it to everyone.”

# Sringars only Deaf and dumb school to get high class education

❖ Nazima Rashid

**SRINAGAR :** In order to review the facilities provided to the students by the authorities Divisional commissioner, Baseer Ahmad Khan visited Deaf and Dumb school at Ram Bagh.

The Divisional Commissioner was informed that Deaf and Dumb school in the Valley which provides free education along with hostel facilities to the visually impaired students.

The Divisional Commissioner directed the Director Education to submit a DPR in regard to it for the school within a week to finalize the project and start work as soon as possible.

D.C said, “Project will provide modern facilities besides high class education for the children to enable them to become independent in their lives.’ Also hi-tech computer lab, sports facilities, laboratories, school building among other infrastructure will be the part of the project.

The Divisional Commissioner also directed the Health officials to conduct monthly medical health check-ups of students at the school.

Director Health, Director School Education, Chairman JKBOSE, Chief Education Officer Srinagar and other concerned officials accompanied the Divisional Commissioner on the occasion.

# Gujjar community seeks CM’s intervention

❖ Auqib Salam

**SRINAGAR:** Members of Gujjar community held a protest in Srinagar against the wildlife department for fencing the road leading towards their mosque and graveyard in Mulnar.

They also alleged that government is proposing to build a degree college on their ancestral graveyard in Kaala Kot Rajori

Zahid Chaudhry, a Gujjar activist said “DFO wildlife came last week and restricted a 50 year old grave yard and mosque in Mulnar by raising a fence on the road leading to local mosque and graveyard, we are not allowed to offer our prayers.”

Zahid further added that in 2016 then Education minister Nayeem Akhter visited Kala Kot Rajori to access the site proposed to built college, the proposal was rejected as locals protested against building college there since the site included their ancestral graveyard , we don’t understand why is government is again trying to built college on our graveyard



forcefully”.

Gujjar Community also demanded CM’s intervention in Kalokot Rajori where authorities are planning to build a collage on 200-year- old Graveyard.

A group of protesters said, “Previous governments rejected the proposed citing its disputed nature, but current govt. is pushing to build the college on the disputed site”.

Protesters alleged that the community is being deliberately targeted. “We will not allow this kind of insensitive behavior towards our religious freedom, they called on Muslim Waqaf board to interfere in these matters and solve them as soon as possible,” protesters said.

GhulamNabi, local imam of Mulnar mosque threatened of valley wide protests if authorities continue to curb their religious freedom.

“Dachigam area around our mosque is left open while authorities have purposefully fenced the road leading to the mosque, this is sheer harassment and interference in our religious affairs,” he said.

## Srinagar's traditional wicker craft in last throes

❖ **Mehvish Mumtaz**

**SRINAGAR:** Dusting a set of chairs made of wicker work in his modest shop at Hazratbal market, 50-year Mukhtiyar Ahmad Sheikh is among last generation from his family to carry on the traditional business of making wicker items.

"The wicker art is dying a silent death" lamented Sheikh pointing towards his shop decked with variety of items made of wicker. The craft is popularly known as Keani Keam.

Taking a deep breath, he said "there is no one to look over this traditional handicraft." Mukhtiyar's family has been promoting wicker craft from many generations and he learnt the once cherished art from his father Abdul Ghaffar Sheikh.

"As a child, I used to watch my father make wicker items. There was huge demand for wicker chairs and baskets.



Even foreigners thronged our shop, but gradually the art lost its sheen due to varied reasons. Almost every household in Srinagar had varied wicker items, but

now it is confined to some hotels for decoration purposes," he said.

Mukhtiyar believes that the wicker craft did not get its due attention from successive regimes. "Wicker craft was considered one of the important crafts in Srinagar, but it was neglected by authorities by failing to promote and regulate it," he says.

Elaborating, he said wicker items have not any officially fixed rates. "Intermediaries fix rates as per their interests. Artisans get peanuts are in a fix whether to continue with this work or switch to any other alternative.

Government does not make any effort to regulate prices or to protect the craft from threat of extinction. Some artisans are taking undue advantage of the trade by selling the products on hefty rates and compromising on quality.

This brings bad name to our already diminishing trade," he says.. "Dargah

## Sports stadium in shambles



❖ **Rafia manzoor**

**SRINAGAR:** From grazing cows to stray dogs, the Polo Ground sports stadium is a centre of attraction for many except sports fraternity. Even though much has been claimed and talked about the Polo ground sports stadium, the ground is a perfect example of official neglect and callousness.

The famous Polo ground of the city, just few yards away from the business hub Lal Chowk has been left unattended by the sports department.

The Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti approved the first cricket academy here; the already existing sports infrastructure here is in shambles and in pathetic condition.

According to spectator, earlier this part of ground was considered very crucial for organizing sports events and for practice purposes. The ground always remained thronged with players and sports instructors.

"It is an achievement of sorts that we have ground in the heart of city but unfortunately our sports officials are in deep slumber

and never trying to show their seriousness towards developing this stadium on scientific lines," Abdul Rasheed, a former football player, who often used to come this ground said.

"After the establishment of synthetic turf for football, the major part of ground was forgotten and left unattended by the sports authorities and they are never bother about it," he said.

Pertinently, work on the multi-purpose indoor hall at Polo ground was started on November 2013 after then Minister for Youth Services and Sports, Taj Mohi-ud-Din laid its foundation stone.

"At that time it was announced that multi-purpose facility would be built at a cost of Rs 1.82 crore and it will have facilities for playing games like basketball, judo, martial arts, table tennis etc? It was also announced that work on the facility would be completed within a period of six months but it still awaits completion," Rasheed further said.

## KU Health centre aid students, employees

❖ **Musaib Mehraj**

**SRINAGAR:** The health center at Kashmir University is providing relief to the students and the employees as it offers basic medical facilities including first aid, dental check up, X-ray technologies and other tests.

Chief Medical Officer Dr. Khalid said, "Health Centre has the facility of 12 beds, 2 doctors, one dental surgeon and more than 20 paramedical staff. The basic medication is free, even ticket is free of cost for students and Rs 5 is charged for employees.

He added, two ambulances are also available 24x7 in case of any emergency and students visit the centre regularly for medicinal purposes

"Besides first aid, we provide dental check up and the facilities like filling and extraction of the tooth", Dr Khalid said.

"We also have the short stay admissions where the patient is kept for few hours. In serious cases we refer them to the nearby hospitals like SKIMS Soura or JLN Rainawari", Dr Khalid informed.

He also added that "the health center also offers its services to the physical education department for the players during their sports activities."

"Besides, if university organizes any educational camp, we keep our services available for them in case of any emergency and provide health service during sports activities, he said.

While talking to MERC times, a student Haseena said "I visited the health center once and I feel it serves its purpose. They don't charge anything for consultation or basic medication or even an OPD ticket".



## INTERNET-A 'DIGITAL NATIVE' FOR YOUTH



❖ **Shahzad Ashiq**

**SRINAGAR** internet is being used by all age groups. As a generation of 'Digital Natives' Youth often knows about the ins and outs of online then their parents do. Today's youth has been brought up with the advent of the internet, there's a clear disengage between what children are doing online and what parents believe they are getting up.

"Google is my Baba", said Ather when asked about the use of internet. "I never get that kind of stuff from books what I am getting from the internet, its like fun and study at the same time, I am up to date always", he further said.

Internet was introduced first to help in official jobs and sending messages to distance in squat time. But now it's being used for all purposes like as study, news, entertainment, music, videos, games, research and lot more. Internet is helping everyone to know things in very short time period. We can know

what's happening around the world from internet by sitting at home or office.

There is good side as well awful side of everything; similarly although internet is helping us in many ways. It is distracting some people from the core of their aim. Nowadays, the majority of youth are spending lots of time on surfing internet for being in touch with their friends through networking sites and playing online games, which is very harmful for their physical development because our body needs exercise to grow healthy but internet is stopping.

"Internet if used carefully can be useful and entertaining at the same time, if you use it can prove fatal one should always depend on books rather than looking for things online because it isn't necessary what you see online is always right and factual", said a research scholar Nayeem who is pursuing Phd in Botany from Kashmir university. No doubt internet is a link to the world but to some extent it separates you from people around you.

## Rash driving by tipper drivers terrorize commuters

❖ **Rahil Hussain**

**SRINAGAR:** Rash driving by the tipper drivers during evening hours on the city roads is taking a heavy toll on the pedestrians in the city.

The rash driving of the tippers can be seen on roads like Tulsi Bagh, Batmaloo, Jahangir Chowk, Lal Chowk, M A Road, TRC, Rajbagh, Jawahar Nagar, Mehjoor Nagar and many others.

A group of locals from Bemina told MERC Times that the rash driving by the tipper drivers is posing threat to their lives.

"The tippers run so rashly that I feel scared and at times to save myself I park my vehicle in some interior lane till the deadly tippers go away," said Fayaz Ahmad, a resident of HIG Colony Bemina.

"The speed with which they are running in the evening hours, it seems that they are drunk and can ram over anyone who

comes in their way," he said.

Residents of Mehjoor Nagar said that the rash driving can lead to untoward incident anytime.

"It is not for the first time. Drivers have been indulging in rash driving in past as well. If it goes unchecked it will continue to create problems for the commuters," they said.

"The worrisome fact is that the drivers can get away with the killing as most of the times they speed away in dark or even if they are caught they are booked under softer laws with lesser punishment," locals of Saida Kadal alleged.

SSP Traffic City Sargun Shukla said that strict action will be taken against the erring drivers.

"These tipper drivers have to drive according to the Motor Vehicles Act (MVC). And whosoever ever violates the rules the police department will go tough against them," the SSP said.



## SRINAGAR WITHOUT FEMALE WASHROOM

❖ **Sadia Mir**

**SRINAGAR:** Swachh Bharat campaign by the Government of India seems to have failed to make an impact in Srinagar, given the absence of female washrooms in most of the frequent places in the city giving different scenario.

Out of 75 public toilets in Srinagar only 11 are for females. Besides locating toilets for women is also a matter of concern.

"There is one public convenience for women but I would not prefer that because of its location. It is located at the centre of Regal Chowk and lacks privacy," said Naira, Women's college student.

Few years back, it was even difficult to find a usable toilet

for men in the city. While things have slightly improved, it is still difficult to find a public toilet for women, even in the busy commercial centers frequented visited by women, she added.

"We spent half the day in shopping and rest in locating the washroom. Most of our time was wasted in finding a public convenience. We were not able to complete our shopping and it got delayed to next day," said Tanzeela who was in the city for wedding shopping.

Bhat Hafsa, an MBBS student at SKIMS, said that the problem becomes grave for women who suffer from diabetes or have any other health problems.

"People suffering from diabetes have to visit washrooms frequently thus are the worst sufferers of this

inconvenience. Though government has taken initiatives but still there is shortage of civic facilities in the city," Bhat said.

"I want to point out here that the funds available under Swachh Bharat Mission should be used to build public lavatories in cities, towns and villages of our state considering the fact that the people in our state are comparatively more conscious of the need to have toilets in their homes." Tasleema said.

"There should be separate toilets for females but the unavailability of land is one of the big constraints. We have received applications from general public but unless land is not provided we cannot do anything", said Ghulam Rasool Dar, Sanitation Officer.

## Enhancement of CD fund up from 1.5 to 3cr



❖ **TAJAMUL ISLAM**

**SRINAGAR:** In a significant decision, the state government approved enhancement of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) of the legislators from Rs 1.50 Crore to Rs 3 Crore from the current financial year.

As per the new guidelines, a legislator can now utilize up to Rs 20 lakh as medical assistance, with a ceiling of Rs 10 lakh per patient, out of CDF for providing assistance to BPL patients for treatment of liver/kidney transplant, bone marrow and heart transplant, blindness and

other life consuming diseases. This could also supplement Red Cross or other NGO assistance.

The order said that augmentations support to the centrally Sponsored Schemes (both central share as well as state share) can be recommended out of the CDF while indicating the geographical area where scheme could be implemented. Such a contribution will not be beneficiary-oriented.

Smokeless Biomass Cook stoves: Up to Rs. 5.00 lacs could be utilized out of the CDF for providing assistance for purchase of Smokeless Biomass Cook stoves as approved by MNRE, to the BPL/ most vulnerable sections of society.

## Substandard material used in school risking lives



❖ **Tawqeer UI Islam**

**KUPWARA:** The staff of the Government High School Budnamal in Kupwara is aghast at the substandard quality of an under-construction building meant for the school.

Staff members of the school alleged that the new building, which was still under construction, had already developed cracks in its walls and the concrete ceiling.

Ali Mohammad, Headmaster of the school, told MERC TIMES that the work on the new building for the school, approved under RMSA scheme, began in 2010, but only one story has been completed so far, in which very substandard material has been used.

“It is visible that the constructed building has developed major cracks in ceiling and walls, because contractor used mud and low cost material in construction,” Ali Mohammad said.

Officials say that despite complaints to concerned authorities, no action has been taken so far.

“We cannot run a school in such poorly constructed building. Many a times I requested officials to stop the construction and order a probe but nothing happened,” Zonal Education Officer Mumtaz Ahmad Khan said.

Khan said that he had visited the construction site himself and found the building unsafe, as it was badly damaged.

“I think the contractor has political influence that is why officials are silent, otherwise this is a criminal act,” ZEO said.

Deputy Commissioner Kupwara, GH Mohammad Dar told MERC TIMES that he would look into the matter.

“I assure you that matter will be taken seriously and will not allow such to happen,” Dar said.

## State Government fails to implement central sponsored scheme

❖ **Syed Bilal**

**SRINAGAR:** Despite announcing many central sponsored schemes (CSS) for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, the Jammu and Kashmir has failed to implement central sponsored scheme.

According to the figures, as against availability of Rs 3894.98 crores only an amount of Rs 1814.52 crore was spent by various departments under Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

“The purpose of these schemes is to help states in speeding up developmental process on all India level and to bring about uniformity in developmental exercise, so that it leads to closer cooperation among the states and consolidates economic integration of the nation. These schemes are in addition to the developmental plans undertaken by the states” said an official.

“J&K is unique among Indian States for the number of reasons. Keeping this in mind developmental schemes have to be devised in a manner that suits the requirements of each region, CSS are of general nature and encompass the overall requirements of the people in all the three regions. If properly implemented, all CSS would prove highly beneficial to the people of the state and would lead to rapid development in all areas. Unfortunately, the state of J&K has not been able to derive maximum benefits from these schemes” said Governor N.N Vohra.

“Just to give an idea of how much loss we are undergoing by not implementing these schemes, it has been found that during the three quarters of the financial year 2016-17 only 47% of the funds allocated by the Centre for CSS has been utilized. Although almost all departments have been the defaulters in this respect by not utilizing the funds in full, yet Home, Agriculture and Forest Departments have performed the worst” he added.



## Non-local beggars swarm Kashmir



❖ Asif Bilal

**SRINAGAR:** People across Kashmir valley are facing nuisance by the non-local beggars who have taken positions at various important points in the city, especially in commercial hub, Lal

“Beggars are seen in every nook and corner of the city causing huge inconvenience to pedestrians, shoppers and tourists. These non-local beggars have made lives of local population miserable and have become headache for foreign tourists too said”, Muataq Ahmad

Rohit Sharma, who hails from Jammu said, “I came here to explore the beauty of Kashmir, but every moment I step out of the car, I am surrounded by beggars, who do not let me go till I give them some money. See helping poor is good, but here the beggars make almost 100 rounds a day to get money,”

Abdul Hamid, a local shopkeeper in Dalgate said, “This place is a tourist hub, that’s why it is full of beggars. Most of them are those who cannot even walk. I think it is a big business nexus and government should take serious note of the problem”.

He added that most of these beggars are professionally trained to take advantage of people’s emotions and force them to give money to them.

Government should take immediate steps to curb this menace.

When contacted Chief Enforcement Officer, he said, “we are formulating a strategy in order to handle this issue, however we need immediate cooperation of people also.”

## Four J&K players selected for national coaching

❖ Useeba Bashir

**SRINAGAR:** Bringing laurels for the Jammu and Kashmir, four players from J&K state have been selected for the National Coaching camp of Taekwondo being organized by the School games federation of India in New Delhi.

The players were selected after going through the trial process for the World School Games at Tyagraj Stadium New Delhi.

In the trial J&K Taekwondo players including two girls outshined their opponents. Aryan Gupta secured 2nd place under 45kg, Ajay Kumar secured 2nd place in 51 Kg, Afreen. Hyder got 2nd Place in 59 Kg and Shah Barrera Fatimat bagged 2nd place under 68kg.

Atul Pangotra, the Taekwondo Coach termed the selection of the players as a good omen.

Pangotra said, “It is for the first time that International School Games Federation conducted a Taekwondo event here and our four players were selected for National Coaching camp. They (players) worked really hard for this (selection) and it is good to see it paying off. It is a moment of pride for me as well as the state.”

Taekwondo is a world-renowned game which is fortunately becoming famous among budding sportsmen of our state. They need proper guidance and advanced infrastructure, said Pangotra

“The Government should initiate steps to provide the players better coaching facilities and appreciation,” he added.

Pertinently, Pangotra who has acted as an International referee was invited by School Games Federation of India (SGFI) as Selector cum Selection Committee member.

## State Cricket Academy to organize Coaching Camps



Hayat Manan

**SRINAGAR:** In its first, State Cricket Academy run by the J&K State Sports Council will conduct its maiden coaching cum fitness camp from May 8.

The coaching camp will be held exclusively for the U-16 age group cricketers.

“The 21-day programme to be conducted at Srinagar’s Bakhshi Stadium where cricket academy is housed, will be overseen by certified coaches and

fitness trainers with an aim to inculcate budding cricketers with nuances of the game from young age,” said Secretary Sports Council.

As fitness has become a crucial part in any cricketers’ growth, trainers at the camp intend to keep the players abreast with the latest trends in managing one’s body for optimum performance.

“The registration forms will be available at the office of State Cricket Academy, New Administrative Block, Jammu and Kashmir State Sports Council from May 2, 2017,” informed officials of the Sports Council.

State Cricket Academy, a novel initiative, first of its kind in the state after getting approval from the Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti and Sports Minister Imran Raza Ansari last week.

“While work on the main area of the academy is still in progress which is believed to be completed by first week of June 2017. Once ready, academy will be laced with modern facilities where cricketers will be able to hone their skills,” Sports Council officials added.

## North Kashmir’s remote village scrabbles for basic facilities

❖ TAHIR BHAT

**SRINAGAR:** The residents of North Kashmir’s Poshpora, Babagund, and Kunan villages of district Kupwara live age of primitive times. The basic facility of drinking water is missing in their area. Locals allege that it is the official apathy.

Talking to MERC TIMES, a resident of the area said that the area has no water supply since decades “and in bone chilling

winter amid snowfall the local women folk have to fetch water from wells and river.”

The three villages comprise of around 500 households. The residents alleged that they are without drinking water facility and the governments have never bothered.

“We drink the water of wells and streams but owing to increased pollution we are scared to further consume it and this has posed serious threat to our existence”, an elderly Abdul Ahad said.

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 increased water pollution, we are concerned about our health,” Ahad added.

While lashing out at politicians, the residents said that they come to their village only at the time of elections.

“First they come, seek votes in the name

of providing basic facilities but after winning polls, they disappear till next elections. The politicians simply betray poor masses”, locals allege.

When contacted, Farooq Ahmad, AEE PHE Division Kralpora Tehsil, he said, “Water supply plant is under construction and by the end of March it will be thrown open for the public. The drinking water will be supplied to these villages thereafter.”

## Hailstorm damages fruit crops in Sopore

❖ Iqra Akhooon

**SRINAGAR:** Hailstorm damaged fruit crops in dozens of villages across Sopore area of North Kashmir's Baramulla District on Friday Evening.

Intensive hailstorm, which lasted for more than 12 minutes, damaged the crops of cherry, apple and vegetables in Malpora, Doru, Brat and many other villages in the adjoining areas of Sopore.

Apple crops were in blooming stage in Kashmir. Fruit growers say that if the situation persists there may be a loss of more than 50% of apple produce across Kashmir this year.

"We were expecting bumper fruit crop this year, last year our fruit business was affected by 2016 unrest this year the vagaries of the weather have dashed our hopes.

In the month of April, orchards



are in full bloom. Rain, hailstorm and cold conditions have damaged the flowering process," said Ab Rashid Mir resident of Malpora sopore.

Horticulture is the main source of the economy in Kashmir with lakhs of people associated with this sector.

Another Fruit grower Fayaz Ahmad said, "The Apples is only

source of our Economy but hailstorm shuttered our hopes."

While talking to MERC TIMES, SDM Sopore, he said, "I visited the affected areas, assured farmers and orchard-owners that an expert team of agriculture and horticulture departments will visit the area and estimate the loss soon."

## 5-Day payaam-e-Ramadan Festival begins at Kashmir University



❖ Fahmeeda Rashid

**SRINAGAR:** Payaam-e-Ramadhan festival 2017 began at Kashmir University on Thursday and was inaugurated by Professor Musadiq Amin Sahaf, Dean Academic Affairs and acting vice chancellor. The festival will continue till June 20.

The festival is being organized by Dean Students Welfare, Kashmir University. The occasion started with the inaugural speech of Vice Chancellor. In his speech the VC spoke on the importance of Ramadan and appreciated the participants and organizers for organizing the festival.

Dean Student's welfare professor G N khaki was also present on the occasion. He highlighted the purpose of organising the competition.

"These competitions provide the students an opportunity to share their passion for Islam and Qur'an through their Quests for Azaan, Naat and Art of Calligraphy.

"The students of different departments of Kashmir University, Colleges and the students of different higher secondary schools of the valley will participate in the competition.

At least 800 students from across Kashmir valley have registered their names for their participation.

## GARBAGE STENCH TROUBLES RESIDENTS

Tanzeela Qazi

**SRINAGAR:** The residents of Puj Mohalla Rainawari and its adjacent areas have expressed displeasure over the garbage dumping methods.

"The municipal committee collects garbage from the main roads of city but neglects inner roads and with increasing temperature, there can be outbreak of an epidemic in an area," a local resident said.

The residents also complained that pungent smell is emanating from the accumulated garbage.

"We are down to live a tough time as the nasty odour has engulfed roads and streets," said a local Bashir Ahmad Dar.

Many residents are irked by "non serious" attitude of SMC towards the unclean city roads and streets.

"Moreover, the garbage remains unattended and it is very difficult to venture out as dozens of stray dogs always hover around the place," Mushtaq Ahmad, a local resident said.

"We have repeatedly approached the authorities regarding the issue, but they don't even bother to listen to us, let alone solving the problem," the local alleged.

While talking to MERC Times, Chief Sanitation Officer, SMC said, "I will look into the matter and public grievances will be resolved soon."

## Gutlibagh link road continues to be in shambles

❖ Farhad khan

**GANDERBAL:** A Road in Gutlibagh village of Gandarbal district is becoming dangerous for the local people as government fails to repair it.

The commuters of an area are having a tough time due to dilapidated condition of road.

Locals alleged roads and buildings (R&B department) has failed to carry out necessary repairs of the road.

"The link road was repaired many years back, however, there were certain stretches which were left unattended. Now those un-repaired portions have turned into craters posing risk of accidents," said a resident.

Government's inattention is driving locals to come out on road, few days back locals took protest rally and block the Srinagar -Leh highway. Meanwhile, on next day minister for public works J&K Naem Akhter visited the area and took the matter in notice. He promised for the early macadamization of the road.

## DYSSO BUDGAM ORGANISES SEERAT CONFERENCE



❖ Asim Rajah

**BUDGAM**, District Youth Services and Sports department Budgam organised Inter Zone Seerat Conference cum Naat Competition at Babul Elim High School Budgam today. Boys from different schools of District Budgam participated in the programme. In Seerat Conference (Topic), Muntizir Allaie from Soibugh Zone bagged first place, Irtiza Mohammad from Dreygam Zone secured second place while Sheikh Uzair from Beerwah Zone got third position.

In Naat Competition, Waqar-un-Nabi from Soibugh zone bagged first position, Zubair Ahmad from Budgam Zone secured second position and Mohammad Asif from Beerwah zone got third place.

District Youth Services and Sports officer Budgam, Sukhdev Singh was

the chief Guest on the occasion, who distributed prizes and certificates among the winners. Other officers and officials of District Youth Services and Sports office Budgam were also present on the occasion.

Several prominent Islamic scholars from different parts of the area participated and extensively deliberated on the teachings of Islam and prophet Muhammad (SAW). The speakers highlighted the teachings and messages of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) laying stress on helping the needy destitute. They Urged the audience to spread the message of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to ensure peace and prosperity in the universe.

Meanwhile, Seerat Conference and Naat competition for girls would be held on April 03 at Babul Elim High School Budgam.



## STRAY DOGS ROAM KASHMIR UNIVERSITY

❖ NAVEED WANI

**SRINAGAR:** The stray dog roaming in main campus Kashmir university is creating a big hue and cry as dogs are even seen entering campus departments hence questioning the administration's indifference towards campus sanitation.

As per students, dogs are seen wandering campus all the time and even some times enter department premises. A student from one of the departments told MERC TIMES that, "she saw the dogs entering the departmental premises, another student of Merc department was chased by a dog, as Shaheen Shafique said that while coming to university in morning she was chased by a

dog and somehow managed to run."

Kashmir university being one of the reputed institutions of valley should be devoid of all such things said another student.

Dr Naseer iqbal, Chief Proctor Kashmir university when contacted told Merc times that, "due to the presence of residential quarters in the university campus and other locality around the campus the domestic wastes do invite the dogs to campus, they have done lot regarding this matter in the past and in future we are looking forward to increase efforts to deal the problem more seriously and overcome all the prevailing challenges regarding the sanitation and other related issues," he added.

## QAMARWARI BRIDGE AWAITS COMPLETION

❖ Kaisar Majeed

**SRINAGAR:** After missing its first deadline in 2014, Qamarwari bridge is awaiting its completion from past six years. The bridge is being made to reduce the traffic congestion on the already existing old bridge there and connects Qamarwari with rest downtown area of Srinagar City.

The authorities in the Roads and Building (R&B) department have miserably failed to complete the project on time as it has so far missed several deadlines.

The work over the construction of the alternative bridge was started in June 2011 at the estimated cost of Rs 9.85 crore while the bridge was supposed to get completed in June 2014.

Sources said the construction of an alternate Qamarwari bridge was sanctioned by the government in 2011 to reduce traffic congestion.

"The work was started in the year 2011 but after passing



six years, the bridge is still incomplete and a lot of work is also pending," official sources said.

Locals however accused the department for ignoring their plights and demanded immediate completion of the bridge.

The locals said that the inordinate delay in constructing the bridge has resulted in immense hardships to the

residents here.

"The resident especially the commuters are being forced to face hardships as the area witnesses frequent traffic jams due to the congestion on the already existing bridge in the area," they added.

Following the missing of first deadline, the Chief Minister J & K, Mehbooba Mufti during her tour to the city area in May 2016 set an another deadline for the completion of the bridge.

She, according to the locals has said that the bridge would be completed by end of Mar 2017 despite authorities failed to construct the bridge in this period.

Officials in the R&B department told MERC TIMES that the acquisition of land and shifting of a local Masjid was the main reason behind the delay in completion of the bridge.

However, he said that all the issues have been settled now and hopefully the construction of the bridge will be completed by the end of this year (2017)."



## Soaring mercury: Two boys drowned in Kashmir



❖ **Sajad Bashir**

**SRINAGAR:** The soaring mercury has gradually started taking an indirect toll. Boys enjoying summer holidays go for bathing in major streams and not return home. Sunday witnessed two such deaths.

A 10-year-old boy drowned in Jehlum in central Kashmir's Maloora area Sunday afternoon. The deceased was identified as Sahil son of Abdul Hamid Parray, a resident of Gulshanpora Maloora. Sahil drowned while taking bath in the river that passes through his village.

SHO Police Station Parimpora told MERC TIMES that the rescue operation was going on to fish out Sahil's body.

Earlier, a 15 year old boy drowned to death in Habba kadal area of Central Kashmir's Srinagar district while he was taking bath in Jehlum.

Locals Identified deceased as Towseef Ahmad Najar, son of Muhammad Yousuf Najar, resident of Habba Kadal.

SHO police station Mahraj Gung told MERC TIMES that Towseef's body was fished out from the river and rushed to nearest hospital where doctors declared him brought dead.

## RESIDENTS OF HMT AGHAST OVER BAD ROADS

❖ **Shabir Parray**

**SRINAGAR:** The residents of HMT Mustafa Abad and Umer Abad are up in arms against the authorities for failing to repair and macadamize the old HMT road which locals call now "Shaheed Gowher Road."

The road was macadamized few years back. However, the road could not withstand rains and developed potholes, locals told MERC Times.

"During rains, the dilapidated roads turn into cesspools. When water remains stagnant for a long time, it further damages road," said Adil Ahmad, a local.

"Due to potholes vehicles have suffered damages. The dilapidated condition of the road poses risk of accidents. The road is vital as most of the vehicles including school buses pass through it," said Mohammad Jamal.

Accusing the authorities for ignoring their plights, the residents demanded immediate redress their grievances.

The residents told that the authorities have failed to maintain and macadamize the road which has resulted in the immense hardships to the commuters.

They said that they approached several higher ups in this regard but unfortunately nothing has been done so far.

"Despite assurances by the authorities, the department has failed to take measures to macadamize the road," they added.

The residents appealed to the higher authorities to look into the matter and redress their genuine grievances at earliest so that the people especially commuters here could feel a sigh of relief.



## District Shopian Rugby Championship Concludes

❖ **Junaid Manzoor**

**SHOPIAN:** Two days long District Shopian Rugby 7-S Championship 2017 Concluded at Zainpur Sports Stadium today here. The championship was inaugurated on 22nd of this month in which 20 teams of Shopian district participated in the championship.

The Championship was held in two age groups under-14 and under-17. KGP won the final title under-14 defeating Hanfia Public school and the final title of under- 17 was clinched by Allama Iqbal by thrashing Boys Higher Secondary Shopian.

The winners and runners up teams got berth in the state championship which will be held at Bakshi stadium Srinagar in the month July.



Organizing Secretary of the championship Mohd Shafi said, "the winners and runner-up teams will perform better in the upcoming state championship and we hope that our district players will get selected for the forthcoming National championships in near future.

Principal of the National Innovations public School (NIPS), Nadeem Ahmad was the chief guest on the closing ceremony of the event and he distributed the prizes among the winners and runners up team.

The championship was organized by District Shopian Rugby Association under the aegis of J&K Rugby Association and under the supervision and sponsored by J&K State Sports Council.

## Baramulla school has 2 teachers for 7 seven students



❖ **Syed Arshad Geelani**

Baramulla: Government Primary School Peernia in this north Kashmir district has two teachers for teaching seven students in six big rooms.

This School started functioning even before 1947, and has educated many good names in the valley.

The school building comprises of six big rooms, one of which has its total population of seven students occupying half of it. The remaining space is unused.

The school has two teachers, making it student-teacher ratio of 3:1, roughly. The locals have been appealing the authorities for proper utilisation of the resource, but in vain. "Over the years, government has been making tall claims of revolutionising the education sector. But this

balloon of claims gets punctured in the far-flung areas of our state," commented an elderly resident.

When a female teacher in the school was asked about the minimal roll of students, she said: "I am here to teach students, not to increase the roll. I can't force parents to send their children to our school."

She said her salary has been withheld as "I refuse to go door to door (to convince students)". "The locals working in these private schools attacked us several times with an intention to dissuade our students."

"The concerned ZEO said the school was surrounded by three private schools, which "take the lion's share". "I neither understand from where they (private schools) got registrations nor am I comfortable in merging this old school with any other," he said.

## Tapper boy invents sweeping machine

**Malik Nisar**

Srinagar: Aaqib Rashid, a Class 10th student from Government High School Tapper has come with a path breaking innovation of cleaning cum sweeping machine. He has broken all odds by designing a clean cum sweeping machine.

"Actually, it was a kind of assignment given by our teacher to one of my classmate. I carefully heard the instructions given by the teacher to that very student. Back home, I started working on it, my classmate failed to do it, but I did it," said Aaqib.

He added that it works on electricity. The machine collects the dust around it, than throwing it around.

Aaqib attributes this innovation to his hard work and parental support. Aaqib's father Abdul Rashid, a labour by profession says "He is used to such kind of things from his early childhood. I always found him fiddling with electronic equipments, many a times I reprimanded him for doing such kind of things, till one day he surprised me by his skills, than after I supported him whole heartedly", added Abdul Rashid.

## JKMBA TO ORGANISE BIKING EXPEDITIONS IN J&K

❖ **Sheikh Saman**

SRINAGAR: Jammu & Kashmir Mountain Biking Association (JKMBA) held executive members meeting at Heaven Resort Shalimar to boost the Mountain Biking and to revive Cycling culture here.

During the meeting, members of JK MBA decided to organize Multiple Biking Expeditions and to revive the cycling culture in J&K.

"This is an adventure Sports and without adventures in a life it become boring. We want to involve more and more participants in this adventure Sports and take all possible steps to organize many mountain Biking and Cycling events in our State," JK MBA General Sectary Reayaz Ahmad told MERC Times.

"With the Mountain Biking, we are also trying to bring back cycling culture



in our state, which we had earlier. There are many advantages of cycling, it keeps our health free from many diseases and cycling also helps to decrease environment population," Reayaz added.

In the meeting, some important decisions were taken by executive members of JK MBA like Implementation of registration system for Riders, Development of Mountain

Trials and Sunday Expeditions.

Meanwhile, during the meeting, election for few office bearers and Technical Committee members was conducted, in which Bashir Damna and Jamsheed Ahmad were elected as Vice Presidents. While as Khalid Amin and A. R Bhat were elected as Joint Secretaries. Younis Ahmad was elected as treasurer, Nawab Mozam & Tufail Qureshi were elected as Trail specialist's, Adil bhat and Ahsan Ali elected as Project Manager.

While Tariq Ahmad Khan was elected as Chairman of Technical Committee and Ehtisham Khan, Ashiq Ahmad, Mushtaq Bhat, Khurshid Ahamad, was elected as Executive Members.

On the conclusion of election, President of JK MBA Asif Iqbal Burza congratulated all the elected office bearers and wished them good luck for future work.