

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

MERC TIMES



MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE,
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR

FARMERS DISPLEASED OVER CROP CRUNCH

INSIDE
MERC
Times



'Yemberzal' evades borders
with style
P3



Sarahah earns popularity
in Kashmir
P9



Govt fully committed to empower
its consumers
P12

FISHERIES DEPARTMENT DESTROYS EQUIPMENT USED FOR POACHING



❖ Auqib Salam

Srinagar: Fisheries department of Kashmir on Friday destroyed thousands of nets and other equipment used by poachers in the unlawful catching in Srinagar.

The illegal nets including fixed gears, gill nets were destroyed by the employees of fisheries department at Fisheries Office on the banks of Dal Lake in presence of Joint Director Fisheries project, K. K. Khajuria and Chief Project Officer, M. M. Bazaz.

As per the officials, around two thousand illegal nets have been destroyed in various anti-poaching drives over the last five months.

The officials said that only 850 fishermen in Dal Lake are registered whereas 1500 are non-registered who are involved in illegal poaching.

Chief Project officer M. M. Bazaz while talking to MERC Times said that anti-poaching squad is working throughout night to eliminate illegal Gill nets, which is leading to total depletion of fish and proving fatal to bird population in the Dal Lake.

“Only registered fishermen can use cast nets and rods to catch fishes and that too in day time, but poachers are using illegal gillnets and fixed gears during night time which is both illegal and fatal for fish production”, Bazaz said.

“We are up in arms against this drive from many years now and you can see we are making a good progress in this regard,” he added.

Bazaz urged fishermen to shun illegal activities, be registered, and opt for various facilities that the department is providing to the registered fishermen.

Joint Director Project Fisheries Project, K. K. Khajuria while lauding the employs for their tireless efforts said that the department has put three different teams on task to check illegal poaching.

“We have tighten noose on poachers as a secret anti-poaching team is put on the field so that surprise raids can be carried out to check all the illegal activities”, K. K. Khajuria told MERC Times.

Fisheries department has ceased and confiscated around five thousand illegal nets in past two years and the officials are terming it as a huge success of the department.

TEENAGES REDEFINE START-UPS WITH ‘PAPERSQUARE’

❖ Sadia Mir

Budgam: Despite having no formal training of Information Technology, three Delhi Public Students(DPS) have catapulting the strife torn valley into headlines by setting the bench mark for new startup by developing their own software firm.

Transiting between classroom and boardroom, Abrar Yaseen, Muazzam Khursheed, Haider Parveez has carved a niche in the start-up culture with their endeavour called ‘PaperSquare’, which has clients ranging from hospitals to schools.

The venture was born after the students merged two separate firms to pool resources and consolidates gains, making a leap in the software developing sector. Their offering ranges from web and graphic designing to video editing, artificial intelligence and 3D printing. “Abrar and I are in Class XI and Haider is in Class X. We learned everything through internet and everything is on the right track,” said Muazzam. The trio pooled their pocket money to generate capital for the firm.

But getting here has not been a walk in the vale. Balancing school and work, then convincing parents that they could do it, has been an uphill task. “Like any parent, ours were a bit apprehensive. When we told them that we could excel in this field, they gave us the go-ahead,” he said.



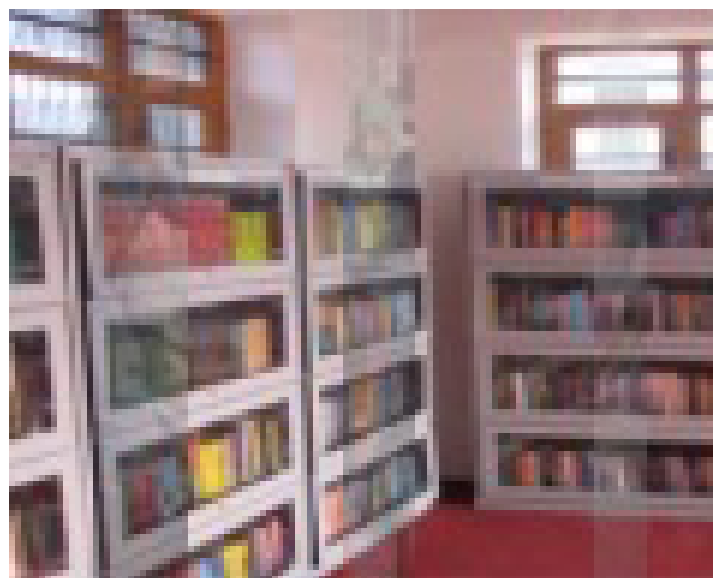
“We have divided a schedule in such a way that our education does not suffer and our work, too, goes on smoothly. Each of us goes to office for two days a week after school to complete pending work. We meet in the office on Sundays to take stock of things and chalk out future strategy. It has been working well for us,” Muazzam said.

A rented a room in Raj Bagh in Srinagar serves as their headquarters. The office was inaugurated on 6 August 2017 by Ehsaan Qudusi, CTO at DPS Srinagar who has mentored the children at school.

Last year, the now-merged entities reported a collective turnover of Rs 1 lakh. This year, things have been looking up for the integrated firm with an expanded clientele.

“Our IT teacher has been supportive. He has been in the field for long and has a good network. He used his contacts to help us find clients,” Muazzam added.

Renovated public library offers everything to book lovers



❖ Faiza Khan

Anantnag: The district library of Anantnag located in the main centre of town, after renovation is offering something new for its readers. The two storey building holds home for thousands of books, ranging from different genres, fiction, non-fiction, children’s section, poetry, mysticism, apart from academic books.

The library is well equipped with electronic gadgets, like tablets with headphones for audio books and other tangible books.

Besides providing books for pleasure reading, the library offers study material for competitive exams, like NEET and JEE. The library has various regular visitors from different backgrounds, offering one single place for book readers to enjoy.

While talking to Faiza Khan, she said, “I got my membership recently, I borrowed three books the same day, it’s quite easy to have access to the books you like, besides that the staff here is really cooperative.”

“The place, despite being in the centre of hustle bustle is quiet and calm inside,” she added.

The library offers membership, which is open to everyone, and you can keep a book for 20 days. Though, the records are maintained manually, the system is quite efficient and quick.

“I’ve worked in different libraries over time, but this is the first library where I’ve seen such

active participation of students in reading and eventually learning, said one of the senior librarians.

“The audience here varies, there are students who are into serious learning and those who visit library as a part of their hobbies, both ways, it is better for us, for library, participation is really important,” he further added.

“I visited library few years back, and I remember all I could see were pigeons everywhere, things have clearly changed and I’m so glad,” said Nehad Fatima.

ROAD UNDER FLYOVER OPEN FOR TRAFFIC



❖ **Musaib Mehraj**

SRINAGAR: The road which goes under the flyover from Rambagh to Bakhshi Stadium was thrown open for traffic by the state government.

The residents from Rambagh to Haft chinar are breathing a sigh of relief and relish the completely macadamized road as they feel the development will always benefit them by various means.

“We have suffered a lot ever since the construction of flyover has taken place, now the development will benefit us and we are relieved

that this is the first step towards progression,” said Mohd Ashraf, a resident of Solina.

He further added that during the construction of flyover our health has been affected a lot, the amount of dust we people have faced is unimaginable our children refused to go out on various instances. Now we are relieved and happy at the same time.

“In the past five years we have suffered financially also as the flow of people and traffic was almost nil, looking at the traffic flow today it has enlightened our hope and we are happy

to see it,” said a delegation of shopkeepers in Solina.

Now we request the government to complete the Flyover construction as well so that we are able to feed our families as we did before, they further added.

Director Economic Reconstruction Agency (ERA) Kashmir, Satish Razdan said, “We have met our first deadline by developing road under the flyover from Rambagh to Bakhshi stadium, the flyover will get complete by end of this year and hopefully the first phase of it will be thrown open by September next month.”

KASHMIRI BOY FOUND DEAD IN MANALI

❖ **Rahil Hussain**

BUDGAM : A youth from central Kashmir’s Budgam district was found dead at his rented room in the tourist resort of Manali in Himachal Pradesh . Muneeb Hussain Mir, son of Nisar Hussain Mir of Wahdatpora, Budgam was found hanging inside his room at Bhajogi locality of Manali, family sources said.

Muneeb was immediately rushed to nearby hospital by his Kashmiri colleagues where the doctors declared him dead. Muneeb’s death has plunged his native village in mourning. His father Nissar Ahmad said that the news of Muneeb’s death has shattered the family. He said his son had promised him to come home on Monday for Muharram.

A case under section 174 CrPc has been registered and investigation is set in to motion. The cause of death will be ascertained once post mortem report will come to forefront said a police official. However, Mir’s family refuted the suicide version and alleged that their son has been murdered.

“Just a few days back, I spoke to him. He sounded perfectly fine. I don’t believe he has committed suicide, as claims are being made,” Nissar Ahmad

said. Seeking investigation into his death, Ghulam Rasool, Muneeb’s uncle said, “We demand free and fair investigation into his death. Raising questions over reports he said Muneeb has been murdered as he had a normal conversation with family and friends before this unfortunate incident happened. Muneeb, he said had left for Manali on April 20 this year for business purposes.

Another cousin of Muneeb said that Muneeb was asked by his colleagues to prepare food for dinner and at around 10 PM when they reached their room they found him lying unconscious. Muneeb’s friends who are in shock and grief said they were waiting for him to return on Monday as he had planned to attend Muharam here but nobody knew he is coming wrapped in a shroud.

He said they received report that before few days Muneeb had a scuffle with some people and he was beaten up. SHO Budgam Mohammad Rafiq Shah when contacted said that the police has taken up the matter with their counterparts in Manali.

Meanwhile, Budgam residents led a nocturnal protest against the mysterious death of Muneeb. “One cannot think about Muneeb’s suicide,

We know him very well, he has been murdered,” said a group of protesters.

‘YEMBERZAL’ EVADES BORDERS WITH STYLE



❖ **SYED JESARAT**

SRINAGAR: Pakistani pearl suits, stoles, floor touch embroidered attire and even Kashmiri embroidered Kaftans attracted a huge number of customers at one of its kind exhibition in Hotel R.K Sarovar Portico at Sonwar.

The two-day exhibition ‘Yemberzal’ offered unique glimpses of Pakistani fashion suits, bridal embroidered suits, flared pants, Pakistani parallels and tulip pants displayed on five different stalls.

Unstitched Pakistani suits, ready to wear embroidered chiffon suits and pashmina stoles stole hearts while beautiful Pakistani pearl suits and Pakistani style pants hanging on a round table added to the overall elegance and charm of the exhibition.

The exhibition was organised by a young Kashmiri, Farah Deeba, along with her cousins Seerat Zaroo, Arshia Zaroo and Ulfat Zaroo.

“This is our first exhibition and I feel very special and anxious at the same time. We got this collection from Mumbai. I am very eager on getting people’s feedback. I am happy people are coming to buy different varieties of Pakistani suits,” said Farah.

After a three-year stint running a boutique in Mumbai, Farah, returned Kashmir to start anew.

“Pakistani style is very famous in Kashmir. The trend of wearing suits and kurtis is making swift inroads in the valley. So, I decided to start with this exhibition. I want to make people aware of this news flair and make them feel beautiful,” she said.

While Farah spoke, her associate Seerat, the most active among the four cousins, welcomed all the customers with a smile. She beautifully motivated and provided information related to Pakistani suits to the customers.

While talking to MERC TIMES Seerat said, “I’ve always been a keen observer of people and style. I like explaining about the material, embroidery and other stuff to the people. This is our first exhibition and we have to give our best. We have a very good collection of Pakistani suits and other stuff here”.

“We also have unstitched suits, Pashmina suits and Kashmiri Aari embroidered kaftans available here. Customers mostly buy stitched suits which are ready to wear,” she added.

The four cousins Tuesday put their heart into the work in presenting clothing as an expression of the unique social cultural ethos of the place they are associated with.

The buyers and visitors too seemed engrossed and some even blown away by the designs.

“I like Pakistani suits. They are different and comfortable. I found a very good collection here. I think I may buy a few,” said Nuzhat, a customer.

The suits range from Rs 3500 to Rs 10,000.

FARMERS DISPLEASED OVER CROP CRUNCH

❖ USEEBA BASHIR

PULWAMA: The much hyped and talked about aromatic variety of rice, Mushk Budji has turned out to be a failure for the farmers in South Kashmir's Pulwama district.

Many farmers from Koil, Tahab and Wahibugh villages, who had sowed this traditional variety of rice, in their paddy fields on trail basis have suffered losses after this crop failed to ripen and yield any produce.

A group of farmers from Koil village said that they had sowed Mushk Budji on a small scale in their paddy fields with a curiosity to grow it on large scale from next season after demonstrations.

However, they said, "that the crop failed to grow, it failed to mature due to blast disease after the blossoming stage."

Abdul Rashid Wani, an aged resident of Koil village said that he brought around 10 kilograms of Musk Budji seeds from a private person at the rate of rupees 500 per kilogram and sowed it in his nursery.

"I heard about this aromatic variety from radio and it aroused my curiosity to take it on a trial before adopting it on a large scale," Wani said. "Once it was planted on trail



basis in the field we were disheartened after this variety was infected by blast," he added, the spikes withered prior to ripening.

Wakeel Ahmad Bhat, another farmer from Koil village, said that he became a laughing stock in the village after his trail with Mushk Budji turned into a failure.

"I thank my stars that I have grown it on a small patch of land otherwise, I would have been ruined," he said.

Another farmer from Shith Paripora village, Bashir

Ahmad Thoker had grown this aromatic variety of traditional rice on five kanals of land. The variety failed to yield any produce.

"The crop withered due to blast," villagers said. The affected farmer had to run from pillar to post for compensation but to no avail. Other farmers from Wahibugh and Tahab villages have similar complains.

Notably, Mushk Budji is a traditional aromatic variety known as heritage rice of Kashmir which was earlier extinct and has now been revived by the efforts of the SKUAST and many farmers in Sagam belt of Kokernag area, after it was grown commercially.

Chief Agricultural Officer of Pulwama, Ghulam Mohammad Dhobi, said that the variety is not feasible for Pulwama district because the area has hot and humid climatic conditions.

The variety grows in cold temperate areas where temperature doesn't go beyond 25 degree Celsius, he said, adding that it becomes prone to blast in humid areas.

"We have not recommended this variety to farmers," he said, adding it grows well in cold temperate areas like Sagam belt of Kokernag

Basketball coaching camp held at Indoor Stadium



Rafia Manzoor

SRINAGAR: A one-week summer basketball camp organized by Jammu and Kashmir State Sports Council started here at Indoor Sports Stadium, Srinagar.

"During the camp best training will be imparted to the aspiring players," an official of the Sports Council said.

International Basketball Coach, Pradyot Voleti is training budding players in the camp, where more than 200 players participated in the first day. "I will try my best to impart international level coaching to the players who are very passionate about the game," said Voleti, International Basketball Coach.

Meanwhile, the camp was inaugurated by Secretary, J&K State Sports Council, Jt Secretary, Sports Officer Kashmir, Manager Indoor Sports Stadium and other officials of the Sports Council.

Voleti imparted training to the thousands of budding players and held basketball camps in Central, South and North Kashmir districts, where the response of the players was extraordinary for the game.

"We started one-week summer basketball camp and we have covered almost every district of the Kashmir division by imparting international level coaching to the young and aspiring players," said Pradyot Voleti.

Meanwhile, the aspiring players said that such camps be held in future also to further groom the young players.

"I learned a lot and got exposed to various techniques of this game, which earlier I was unaware of. I hope that Sports Council holds such camps in future also," said Ubaid Mukhtar, an aspiring Basketball Player.

During the closing ceremony, Secretary J&K State Sports Council, Waheed-ur-Rehman Parra while thanking the International coach for imparting the training to the young and aspiring players said: "We are hopeful that such training will help the players to further chisel their talent and be helpful for them to feature in State and national-level competitions."

He further added that, "Sports Council would hold such camps in future in which more players would be taken in to further groom the budding players."

District Hospital Anantnag still awaits completion

SYED BILAL

ANANTNAG: Despite spending huge amount of money, the district hospital in Anantnag is yet to be completed. The massive catchment area comprising tens of thousands of people in south Kashmir's Anantnag district depend primarily on this district hospital for the basic health facilities but the authorities continuously ignore it plunging the locals into a plethora of miseries.

Mushtaq Ahmed said, "300-bed Mirza Afzal Beg Memorial Hospital (MABMH) project was sanctioned way back in 2007 and Jammu and Kashmir Project Construction Corporation (JKPCC) was set in the year 2010 as the deadline for its completion".

He added, "After 11 years, the district Hospital Anantnag still awaits completion and lacks some basic facilities, the hospital has no drainage system in which the patients who are admitted in wards having a threat of infection".

Sources told MERC Times that the government has failed to the made drainage system in the hospital. The Drainage system in a hospital is idle all sewage is stored behind the hospital lives patients put on risk inwards.

Talking to MERC Times CMO said, "We are working in two shifts to meet the deadline of completing the whole construction process. We assure the public that the hospital would be fully functional before winters".



Tral sports stadium in shambles,



❖ Asif Bilal

PULWAMA: The cricket stadium at Bajwani, Tral in south Kashmir's Pulwama district is lying in dilapidated condition, with government going least to repair it for sports lovers. The existing stadium has irregular surface on the turf and also lacks proper sitting arrangements.

Moreover, there is no proper fencing around the stadium and no dressing room constructed for the players.

The players complained that they are facing troubles while playing due to the presence of numerous unwanted trees that have grown within the stadium.

"It is due to the presence of trees in the middle of the stadium which sometimes leads injuries to the players and disturbance to the games," said a cricketer Yawar Nabi from Tral.

"There is no dressing room for the players and there are mulberry trees, which is posing trouble to fielders. When it rains, we are not able to play for five to six days. We all want renovation of the stadium."

"The dilapidated condition of the ground is a major hindrance for them as quality professional sportsmen", local cricketers said.

"We always come to this stadium to practice and hone our skills but the condition of the play field is so bad that we face the danger of injuring ourselves in this dilapidated stadium," said a group of local youth.

"We approached the concerned authorities several times and urged them to repair and renovate the playfield. We too want to make it better but owing to the lack of proper infrastructure, our efforts always go waste. Besides, persistent attempts of bringing the matter into the notice of the authorities proved futile," said the cricketers.

Due to the callousness by the government, many skillful and talented cricketers are now lacking interest in this game. "Tral should have separate sports field for football, cricket, Basketball and other indoor games. It is dangerous even to walk through the playground as it is full of potholes and filth while parts of it remain submerged in rain-water. Foul smell makes the ambience stinky and we hardly can concentrate on the game", they lamented.

The work on the stadium started so many times but due to some unknown reasons, authorities always stopped the work on it and the situation of stadium remains constant till now", a cricketer from Tral said.

The players urged the authorities to improve the condition of the ground on immediate basis.

Uri Bridge awaits restoration since 2005 earthquake

❖ Shahzad Ashiq

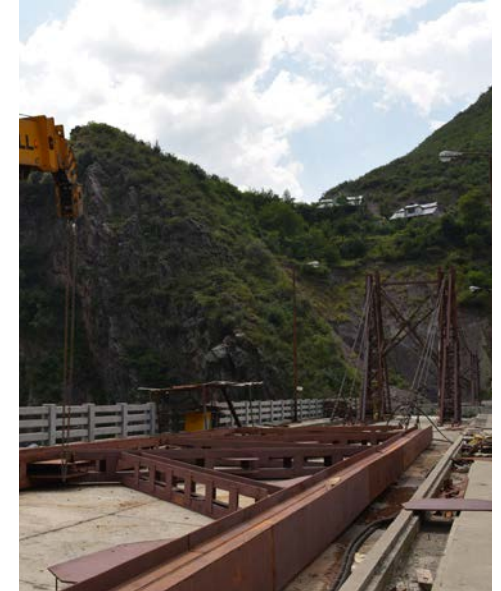
Srinagar: More than a decade has passed, but historic Nand Singh Bridge in border town of Uri in North Kashmir's Baramulla district still awaits restoration.

The work on the bridge is incomplete since last 12 years. The bridge was damaged in devastating earthquake of October 8, 2005. It is located on Haji Peer Nallah and connects more than 35 villages with Uri Town.

According to locals, the construction work on the damaged bridge was taken up by the Project Beacon of Border Roads Organization (BRO) but the contractor who was allotted the work abandoned it abruptly.

"The construction work on the bridge continued for only one year after the earthquake. Later we came to know that the contractor has left the work halfway," said Touseef Zaffer, a trader from the town. As the construction was put on halt, the Beacon constructed a temporary bridge nearby along Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Highway for smooth vehicular movement which however also got damaged in September 2014 floods.

"The temporary bridge was constructed again but it is weak and has no proper support. We fear it can collapse again," Touseef said. Though the Beacon is yet to take over the construction work



of the bridge again but the traffic continues to ply through the risky bridge.

Chief Engineer (CE) Beacon, Brigadier A K Das said that construction work on the bridge will start in October this year. "The contractor who was allotted the work went to court against us as he wants change in the drawing of the bridge. Now we have appointed a new contractor for the work," the CE said, adding "we expect the work to restart by the month of October this year."

ANANTNAG MATERNITY HOSPITAL CONTINUOUS CASE REFERRALS



Surgical wards with the capacity of seven or eight beds are huddled with 18 to 20 beds, choking the admitted patients.

Consequently, doctors on the pretext of shortage of space and beds refer almost all the expecting women brought to the hospital after 4 pm to Srinagar thus delaying treatment to them. Dr. Humaira Jan, a pediatrician posted in the hospital said that it is not only the patients who suffer due to the space crunch in the hospital but doctors also have to bear the brunt at times.

TAJAMUL ISLAM

ANANTNAG: With referrals becoming a norm at Maternity and Child Hospital Anantnag due to the space crunch and bed shortage, the top health authorities continue to sit over the proposal to shift the hospital from its present location in congested Sherbagh locality.

The hospital building has been declared unsafe by the Fire and Emergency Services authorities in their Safety Audit report few years back. Due to the space crunch in the hospital, the Labor and

"When any emergency case is brought to the hospital and there is no bed available, the attendants just go berserk and thrash the doctors and Para-medics on duty," she said. Though the process of shifting the hospital to old district hospital building located in Janglat mundi was started but locals allege that the political intervention stalled the move.

Mubashir Ahmad, a local resident described it ironical that the authorities are not taking any measures for shifting the hospital, thus making patients suffer

Staff crunch chokes maternity hospital

❖ Malik Nisar

SRINAGAR: The Maternity and Children Hospital (MCH) in South Kashmir is facing severe dearth of staff as well as space. This has caused great inconvenience to the patients coming here. The hospital began functioning in 2005. No recruitments have been made for the hospital since then and the number of beds is also the same.

“The hospital caters to the health care concerns of patients from Anantnag, Kulgam, Pulwama and Shopian, and also patients from far-flung areas such as Kishtwar, Banihal, Rajouri and several other places also come here regularly,” said a senior doctor at the hospital.

He said the patient inflow from all these places is hampering the functioning of this hospital which is already short of space as well as staff.

Sources said the hospital has 48 daily wagers and more

than 20 volunteers but it is not sufficient to cater to the large number of patients coming to the hospital. “The



daily wagers are paid out of the Hospital Development Fund (HDF) while the voluntary staff does not get paid

at all,” sources said.

Moreover, there is inadequate space for patients in the hospital. The patients are made to share beds. “The patients are forced to share beds and accommodation for the attendants remains a far-fetched idea in this hospital,” an attendant said.

Many patients said they do not have any option as it is the only maternity and child care hospital in the area, “We cannot afford private nursing homes,” another attendant said.

Sources said the administration has been writing to the higher authorities regularly about the hardships the patients have to face; however, the authorities seem to have turned a blind eye towards the issue.

“We need to recruit 180 staff members, including doctors and other paramedical staff. The hospital superintendents have tried to get the attention of the authorities but to no avail,” sources said

Water Rafting Marathon held in Ganderbal



❖ Nazima Rashid

GANDERBAL: To promote adventure tourism in Kashmir, a one day Water Marathon was held in Wussan Kangan, in the central Kashmir’s Ganderbal district. The event was organized by Adventure Tour Operators Association of Kashmir (ATOAK) and J&K Ski & Mountaineering Association (JKSMA) in collaboration with Department of Tourism Kashmir.

The marathon was held in Nallah Sindh from Wussan to Wayil Manigam bridge and witnessed the participation of “Eleven dare devils”.

On the occasion, the officials of Tourism as well as organisers were present. Deputy Director Tourism while speaking at the event said that one more such events would be organized in the future to promote the adventure tourism in Kashmir.

Later the participants and winners were awarded certificates of participation and were honored by the medals respectively.

The president of Adventure Tour operators of Kashmir Rouf Tramboob thanked the participants and other local people for their support and cooperation. “The most popular white rafting runs in other states in country as well but rafting in sind Nallah is amazing and is very joyful and pleasant”, said Rouf Tramboob. “I also want to thank and congratulate all the participants and locals for their cooperation” He added.

The Deputy Director of Tourism, Ghulam Jeelani, including Dy Director Tourism (Recreation) Zargar, Qazi Sarwar Chief Executive Officer of Sonamarg Development Authority, Mohammad Yousuf General Secretary ATOAK and other officials were present on occasion

Traffic chaos in Anantnag

Mehvish Mumtaz

ANANTNAG: With number of vehicles increasing every day, the traffic management is becoming a daunting task for the authorities in South Kashmir’s Anantnag district, especially in the main town.

Huge traffic jam on Khanabal–Janglat mandi road is increasing day by day, it sometimes takes hours to reach Janglat mandi from Khanabal because of the heavy traffic jam on the road. Couple of policemen can be seen on the beginning of the day, manning roads and chowks but as the day advances they vanish in thin air.

The chaos can be seen on roads, and is created by illegal sumo stands and unauthorised parking stands. The vital routes leading to Child and Maternity hospital and the District Hospital Anantnag often remain clogged with traffic, the sick and infirm become the worst sufferers. The bumper-to-bumper vehicle jams often block vehicles, even the ambulances carrying critical patients.

“We are facing problems to reach our destinations on time because of the traffic jam on said road” said a commuter. “I request everyone to follow traffic rules so that we can commute smoothly,” he further added.

The destination which should take just 20 minutes actually takes more than an hour, this is the traffic scenario in Anantnag, said a local.

“Vendors and shopkeepers display their stuffs on the pavement, public walk on the streets, traffic police fails to implement traffic rules, If all of us contribute our bit, this problem can be reduced to a large extent,” he added.

The drivers park their vehicles just outside the general bus stand on K.P Road, Mehandi Kadal and all vital places which lead to the traffic mess.

“I had to get down from the ambulance while my wife was writhing in labour pain inside the vehicle; some callous people had parked their vehicles in the middle of road. We remained stuck for half an hour from the Maternity hospital at Sher Bagh due to traffic congestion,” said Muhammad Altaf, resident Wanpoh Anantnag.

However, the authorities are trying their level best to make smooth movement of traffic on said road but the private cars parked illegally on this road, unnecessarily stopping of passenger vehicles and immature driving skills of some drivers are not helping to solve the problem.

One of the senior District official said that the administration has devised a traffic plan for the town. “We have devised a plan for the smooth movement of traffic. We are taking advice from the citizens of Anantnag also. We are creating vending zones for vendors and parking spaces in order to avoid these traffic jams.”

Wagoora to be developed as model village



❖ **Tawqeer-ul-Islam**

BARAMULLA: A Wagoora village in north Kashmir district would be developed as Model Village under centrally sponsored Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana (SAGY).

Member of Parliament, Muzaffar Hussain Baig today laid the foundation to develop Wagoora as a Model Village under centrally sponsored SAGY, aimed to develop the basic infrastructure in rural areas.

Under the SAGY, village Wagoora is the first village that was chosen under the SAGY for the development of basic amenities.

Former Deputy Chief Minister Baig sought the cooperation and support of the public in developing the village as the model village replete with all the facilities of life. He said that about 50 centrally sponsored welfare schemes have been launched in the State by which the developmental infrastructure can be upgraded which will be helpful in poverty alleviation.

While citing the example of poverty alleviation and employment generating scheme MNREGA, Mr Baig said that the Centre is very keen with regard to the development of the State and the present coalition Government has taken many initiatives in this regard.

Stressing upon the officers to work with added zeal and enthusiasm, he said that the SAGY will be implemented with full transparency.

Meanwhile, the MP emphasized for timely disposal of public grievances and assured that every possible step will be taken in developing other villages of the area.

The MP was informed by the Assistant Commissioner Development Baramulla Mir Munawar Hussain that Rs 11.86 crore will be spent in various sectors for developing the basic structure of the Wagoora village.

He said the amount will be spent to upgrade the basic infrastructure of the village in Health and Medical education, PHE, PDD, R&B, Education, Flood control and other Departments.

DILAPIDATED FOOTBALL GROUND IRKS LOCALS

❖ **Asim Rajah**

GANDERBAL: Local football ground in Sindbal area of Ganderbal is in shambles for last several years, with locals alleging that authorities are solely responsible for the condition, which has been turned into a muddy field. The footballers of the area are equally aghast over the callousness of concerned authorities.

Local football players said that despite being the only venue for district football league matches, it has been forgotten by the authorities.

“A little drizzle for few minutes inundate the ground and turns it into a muddy field,” they said.

Muzamil Mohammad, State Football Academy coach from Ganderbal, said that ground was one the best venue in the entire district, but now it is losing its glory.

“It was the hub for the football activities but right now it is in poor condition,” he said.

“Football teams across valley used to play here, but now the bad condition has dampened the sporting spirit of the

players,” Muzamil said.

According to local, sports lovers used to throng the ground for football matches, “A large number of players would come here for the matches. The footballers used to love the softness of the surface,” he said.

A local coach said that despite bringing the issue in notice of the concerned department but till now no concert step has been taken in this regard.

Bashir Ahmad Dar, President Ganderbal Football Association, said that they are lacking resources and hence cannot manage the ground properly right now.

“As of now, I am helpless, if the concerned association and state sports council provide us with enough resources, then we won’t be having any hesitation in face-lifting the ground,” Dar said.

When contacted Waheed-ur-Rehman Para, Secretary J&K State Sports Council assured that problem will be solved very soon.

“I will look into the issue and the ground will be face-lifted soon,” he said.

THE GLORY OF OLD TOWN BARAMULLA YET TO BE RESTORED?



❖ **Sheikh Saman**

BARAMULLA: Old town Baramulla located on the bank of river Jhelum known as Shehr-i- Khas is densely populated. It has bedecking beauty too because the river Jhelum flows from there and due to the exhilarating and alluring mountains which adds more feathers to the cap of the town.

Unfortunately it seems to be the tocsin time for Old Town. The annoyed pollution has posed a serious threat to the existence and the ecosystem of the river Jhelum. Sewages from houses and shops in the vicinity of the river Jhelum finds its way directly into the river. Throwing heaps of garbage on the river bank, at the end adds bad

smell and irks the pedestrians’ leads to the stunned pollution.

“Municipal Cooperation doesn’t pay keen attention towards the unhygienic environment created by the lack of dustbins and poor sanitation”, said a local resident, Mohd Aslam. “There should be some kind of fine for the people who pollute the environment. I request the Municipal Cooperation to take quick and strict actions regarding this menace” he added.

“Yes we people are suffering from poor sanitation unhygienic environment but nobody care they are turning the deaf ears for our complaints.” alleged

Bashir Ahmad, a local resident.

Executive officer of Municipal Cooperation Baramulla, Mr. Intiyazul Haq Rather, said “Our sweepers clean the mess in every mohalla of Old town in every morning but when they leave the site, people come and throw the garbage on road and river bank. Earlier dust bins were installed but people didn’t take care of it properly, may be due to the lack of civic sense,” he added.

“Every month 490 tons of garbage is been collected and then dumped in jetty Khawaja bagh, where we have proper dumping system. We are trying hard to tackle the problem, I Hope people will cooperate with us and stop throwing garbage on streets and open spaces and down drain of the town,” he said.

Poor network connectivity irks subscribers



❖ FARHAD KHAN

GANDERBAL: The residents of Gutlibagh and adjoining areas complained of poor data and cellular service by Reliance Jio. The subscribers said that weak signal strength on Jio 4G network has been giving them tough time since they subscribed to the network.

“We were promised by the company that they will improve the network services in the area but they don’t seem to be serious and don’t care to provide us the standard services” they said.

“We have many times raised the issue with the company, but except the promises, nothing has been done actually to improve the services,” they added.

Meanwhile, the subscribers appealed the concerned office to look into the issue and send a team to the area to improve the services.

“In the month of April, they identified a site to construct a mobile tower. since then, nothing has been constructed” said Ishfaq, a subscriber.

When approached Zonal Telecom Manager, Ishfaq Ahmed with the problems mentioned, he assured that the grievances will be redressed at the earliest.

Reconstruction of Baghi-mehtab-rawalpura bridge in a limbo



❖ Junaid Manzoor

SRINAGAR: The connecting bridge between Baghi-Mehtab and Rawalpura which is located on the main canal of Dhood Ganga was almost damaged in 2014 deluge. Despite passing of over 2 years the construction work has not yet been completed.

The bridge has turned out to be a death trap for commuters using this particular route . They have expressed a great concern over their safety. Bridge is in deteriorating condition . In a recent incident , a biker fell into the river and was later rescued by the local.” Said a group of commuters. The movement of heavy vehicles have further damaged the bridge including school buses and vans. “The work was initially started in 2014 by the concerned department but due to lack of funds the construction work has come to a halt” said, Mr Abdul bari a local resident.

“ Despite making numerous representations

to the authorities seeking bridge repairs, nothing substantial has been done so far”, the local said adding the administration would be solely responsible for any untoward incident. The authorities have not erected any sign board cautioning the people not to walk or drive over the bridge,scores of persons and cars cross it daily as they don’t have any nearby alternative route. They further request the concerned officials to complete the pending work of the bridge as soon as possible to forestall any mishap.

While talking to the Executive Engineer Roads and Buildings, Khursheed Ganai, he said” requisite arrangements are being made for the reconstruction of the damaged bridge connecting Baghi-Mehtab Rawalpura. This project was planned out sometime ago, but I assure you soon the work will start. I know crossing the damaged bridge is a big threat to the lives of the people, so it’s on the priority list, so to avoid any untoward incident in the future.”.

Grass root innovators worried for their future, blames government



Naveed Wani

SRINAGAR: The state of Jammu and Kashmir is facing a big challenge in securing the interests and futures of new innovators.

“The innovators of the state have developed different products to ease the work , hence saving time and labor” says a b tech student of Kashmir university.

“Moreover, the valley has treasure of innovators but the state government has failed to provide them a specific platform which would boost their innovative minds,” he added.

The recent innovation by the Dooru shahbad resident, Mushtaq Ahmad Dar blames state government as his innovation “walnut cracker” was not much appreciated by the government.

Mushtaq also said that he curses the day, he made such an innovative thing as he is yet to receive any sort of assistance from any government source.

G M Bhatt, Dean applied science Kashmir university and the chairman of Grassroot Innovation Argumentation Network (GIAN) when contacted told MERC TIMES that the state has only provided Rs 25000 cash to the innovators of the valley where the cost of innovation in much high.

Appreciating the Central Government Bhatt told that the centre has sectioned Rs 70 lakh for the new innovators but the state’s negligence has turned the things upside down.

Moreover, a B tech student who has made a product of “Baby Pee Telling System” which has been appreciated by the Japan based company but the government is still indifferent towards such developments ,he added.

“Till date only 57 patents have been given to state innovators out of which Kashmir has only four patents’ ,Prof Bhat added.

SARAHAH EARNS POPULARITY IN KASHMIR



❖ Adnan Hilal

SRINAGAR: The newly anonymous app “Sarahah” has been making waves in Kashmir from last 2 weeks

The app allows users to send one another messages completely anonymously, with no way of knowing who sent the message or replying to it.

“Sarahah” comes from an Arabic word which means “To be frank” or

“Open”

Introduced last year by Saudi Arabian developer Zain al-Abidin Tawfiq, Sarahah began as a website intended for employees to give anonymous, honest feedback to their employers. After its success in Arabic-speaking countries, Tawfiq rolled out an English version last month. Like many anonymous messaging apps before it, the new app has caught on rapidly with teens.

“It gives me an ultimate space to vent out my emotions while hiding my identity” said Riyaz Ahmed, A student from law college

Another student namely Arsalaan from MBA department of Kashmir university said that the app is amazing and full of fun as one can tell the truth without being noticed.

On a social networking site facebook, Tawfiq, the founder of Sarahah app wrote “This app is meant to promote honesty and frank expressions of feelings that transcend certain social restrictions.

The application has got thousands of downloads & registration from Kashmiri users

From last couple of weeks the app has become quite popular and has received both appreciation and criticism. The app has received 10,305 5-star reviews on Google Play while as it has also got 9,652 1-star reviews, showing a near 50-50 split in opinion.

Safapora residents aghast over contaminated water supply



❖ Showkat Wani

GANDERBAL. The residents of Safapora staged protest over contaminated water supply in the area. The Protesters demanded an immediate action from the concerned authorities over the issue which caused outbreak of several diseases.

According to locals, a number of people are suffering from diarrhea because of the filthy water supply, and the number increases.

According to a report prepared by the laboratory of research centre Safapora, about sixty percent of drinking water supplied within the area is impure and unfit for drinking.

“The contaminated drinking water supply has caused several diseases here, each day we admit the patients in the nearest primary

health centers.” The locals said

They added that the majority of patients admitted at the primary health centers are from the areas where the filthy water is supplied by concerned department, including Safapora, Waripora, Kulpora, Manasbal.

Arif, a resident of Safapora, Ganderbal, said, “The water supplied in our area stinks so much even

after boiling.” Mohammad Ashraf, another resident of the area said, “We reached the concerned department and complained this matter but nothing was done so far.” He further added that despite the assurances given by the concerned authorities, nothing happened.

Speaking to MERC Times, Dr. Ishtiyak Ahmad, Physician at Primary Health Centre Safapora, said, “This month we received a number of patients suffering from diarrhea, from the same areas where the contaminated water is supplied.”

The Managing Director of Water and Sewerage Department, while speaking to MERC Times, assured an immediate action to address the grievances of the residents of Safapora. He said that I will personally look into the matter to solve the issue at earliest.

Urs of Shah-e-Hamdan observed with religious fervor

❖ Ali Mohammad

ANANTNAG: The annual Urs of Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (RA), popularly known as Shah-e-Hamadan and Amir-e-Kabir, was observed across Kashmir with devotees thronging Masjids and shrines offering special prayers.

The biggest congregation was held at Khanqah-e-Moula in old Srinagar city where thousands of devotees visited the shrine to commemorate the 652nd death anniversary of their beloved saint.

The Urs of Shah-e-Hamdan is being annually observed on 6th Zil-Hijjah of Islamic calendar.

The devotees including men, women, children and the elderly thronged the shrine to participate in the congregational prayers. They also recited Quranic verses, followed by ‘Duaiya Majlis’.

Islamic scholars shed light on the life and achievements of Hazrat Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (RA). They expressed hope that the teachings of Shah-e-Hamdan (RA) shall remain alive in all times to come. Preparations for the Urs were organized by the

Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Waqaf Board.

The Urs of Shah Hamdhan (RA) was also observed at Khankah Faizpanah Tral, Jinab Sahab Soura, Aasar Sharif Kalashpora, Kabamarg and Khiram Sirhama in Anantnag, Dooru Seer Hamdan, Aham Sharif Bandipora, Budgam, Kupwara and Bandipora.

Syed Ali bin Shahab-ud-Din Hamadani Abidi (1314-1384), also known as “Shah-i-Hamdan” (King of Hamadhan) and as “Amir-i-Kabir” (the Great Commander), was a Persian Sufi and a prominent Muslim scholar. He was very influential in spreading Islam in Kashmir and had a major contribution in shaping the culture of the Kashmir valley. It was Shah-i-Hamdan (RA) who introduced

amongst the people the famed handicraft skills for which Kashmir is known all over the world. The devotees during the Urs prayed for long-lasting peace in Kashmir and sought peace, blessings and mercy from the Almighty.

MEET SANIYA LONE ; THE YOUNG AGE ENTREPRENEUR

❖ **Bintul huda**

SRINAGAR : Twenty-six-year-old Saniya Lone had many easier career options. But she rather made a more difficult choice and the tryst with entrepreneurial success for the hijab-clad management graduate turned out to be a cake walk, literally.

Lone, who graduated from the Business School in Kashmir University in 2014, was always fond of baking designer cakes and when she thought of turning her passion into a profession, her family was apprehensive.

Apprehensive because entrepreneurship continues to be an exclusive boys' club in the troubled valley of Kashmir where life is hard and women running their own businesses is still not an accepted norm.

But a determined Lone ignored all the warnings from her detractors, including her close relatives.

"Many of my family members even taunted me over my business idea of baking and selling cakes," she said.

"I was also not too sure of my success. But I got

confident only when my friends would pay me for baking their cakes."

Lone, who operates from her factory set up at her home in upscale Peerbagh neighbourhood of Srinagar, didn't want to turn it into a "run-of-the-mill" bakery venture. She mastered the art of making theme-based premium fondant cakes that she sells at Rs 1,500 a kg. Her mother works with her.

She gets online orders from her clients and usually uses social media to interact directly with her buyers.

With at least five to six cakes selling a day, her two-woman enterprise, "Some Like It Sweet", easily makes around Rs 8,000 to 10,000 a day -- a good daily turnover from the Kashmiri lifestyle point of view.

Lone now makes desserts for wedding parties and is anticipating a hectic season after Ramadan -- the month of fasting -- ends in the first week of June. It will be Eid festivities and the start of the wedding season in Kashmir.

"The success so far has been sweeter than my cakes and I hope it will remain so," Lone said.

Flowing of Jehlum and Lidder below normal level emerges water crisis in Anantnag



Danish Pathan

ANANTNAG: Many areas in Anantnag district of south Kashmir are facing water crisis following a dry summer which has led to visible depletion of water level in several water resources.

What is leading to worsening of the crisis, officials say, is non-judicious use of water by the people including car washes, irrigating 'orchards and kitchen gardens' and other avoidable practices.

The affected areas include Pushwara, Khandipahari, Harnag and several other places in and around main town Anantnag. Besides, the rural areas including dozens of villages in Kokernag belt (AhlanGadol, Larnoo, Nowgam, Shangus) have also been affected by scarcity of drinkable water. The residents of these areas are facing acute shortage of water for more than a month now.

"We have to get water from the sources, around our village, which is not fit for human consumption but we do not have any alternative," a resident of Kokernag said.

The officials at the Public Health Engineering (PHE) department acknowledge that the water sources have been depleted, in wake of a dry summer.

"At this point in time the gauge reading of Jhelum at Sangam should have been somewhere around 7 to 8 ft. but its only 2.85 ft.," a senior official said. He said that same was the case with another major water source, Lidder River.

"The gauge reading on Lidder is 0.54 ft. which should have been at least 0.8 ft. at this time of the year," the official said.

Superintendent Engineer (SE) of the Hydraulics wing in PHE, Shah Nawaz Ahmad said that the department was taking a series of measures to ensure people did not suffer.

"Apart from providing 'water on wheels' we have formed a task force to check non-judicious usage of water, which remains a major concern at this time of water crisis," the SE said.

He said that the task force will keep a check on non-judicious use of water.

"People tend to waste a lot of water by washing cars and watering their gardens and kitchen gardens. No matter how small their gardens are the watering process puts an avoidable pressure on water sources," he said.

JOURNEY FROM PLAYER TO COACH

❖ **BISMA FAROOQ**

AUGUST: From Taekwondo to Wushu, 27 year old Rameez Ahmad, a coach, has won a number of medals in sports. At the age of 10, Rameez started practicing games. Because of his interest and dedication towards sports, in the year 2002, he won bronze medal in kick boxing in Kolkata.

Despite being injured while playing in federation cup, Rameez showed his extraordinary performance and won silver medal, held at Mumbai. "I was looking for the gold medal but I got injured and I was not able to make gold in that cup," Rameez said.

Rameez Ahmad gave his 17 years to the sports. In 2012, his coach, Farooq Ahmad died at a very young age of 35. He was a student at that time. "The responsibilities came on me and my friend's shoulders, from then we started to help in training the students," Rameez added.

Rameez said that his coach's sudden death was disturbing for him. "I could have reached to the heights of success but my coach's death was not easy to cope up with," he added. "My dream now is to achieve the success heights through my students," he further added.

Rameez has recently completed a course at NIS Patiala. "After completing the course at NIS Patiala, I and my friend went to secretary sports council for the further guidance.

The result was fruitful and we were given the official order to be the coach of Wushu," Rameez said.

Sports council is proving helpful to every sports person in Kashmir. "JkSports council has helped me and my students a lot, the day is not far when we will be achieving our goals of success," he said.

"I always suggest my relatives and neighbors to join sports. My dream is that every dedicated Kashmiri youth should achieve what I somehow couldn't," he said.

"The families of my students are happy with their wards. Their children are doing well in sports and this is the happiest thing for me," he added.

Rameez believes that after joining sports, the life of every person changes. "A kind of discipline and dedication comes automatically in one's life when they join sports," he said.

He further said that education and games are equally important in everyone's life. Participating in competitions on different levels, make one to learn more and more about a particular game.

"I request young boys and girls to join sports. It is a new life here. When one sees national and international players, their will to join sports increases. I want more and more Kashmiri youth to indulge in sports as it is beneficial to psychological and physical health as well," he further added.

Nowhatta hosts creative writing workshop

❖ Hayat Manan

SRINAGAR: Director Tourism Kashmir, Mahmood A Shah inaugurated Creative Writing workshop at Cultural Centre near Jamia Masjid, Nowhatta in Downtown.

He said the workshop is aimed to help local youth gain skills in creative writing. The event is being organised by a social organisation Waruk in collaboration with Tourism department.

Students from different colleges and schools participated in the event to hone their creative writing skills during the weekends for four weeks.

On the inaugural day today, 50 students including 25 graduates and 25 students were clubbed in group so that

they learn from each other. During the program, trainers and guest lectures will be invited to provide technical skills to the students.

The organizers said the event also includes role of writing in other Arts, book reading and outdoor activities.

Speaking on the occasion, director Tourism Kashmir Mahmood A Shah said after successfully conducting calligraphy workshop at Nowhatta, the tourism department wants to highlight the potential of the youth in creative writing.

“We are happy that our calligraphy workshop went on successfully for over a week. Now, on the inaugural day of this Creative Writing workshop, we got good response from the locals and

the students from different college and schools,” said Shah

Director tourism said the department will continue to hold such activities in Cultural Centre to highlight the potential of the local youth in different fields. “This centre has been established by the department of tourism and has an important location of Nowhatta which has unfortunately being portrayed negatively. However, we have talented youth including artists, writers and poets from this place whose works go unnoticed. Our aim is to provide platform to the youth to showcase their talent,” Shah said.

He said the Cultural Centre will be abuzz with such activities in future to bring this place on tourism map.

“The activities which happen here are also associated with local culture which will also help and benefit tourism sector,” he said.

Coordinator of the event, Taha Mughal, said the program will be for a month on weekends during which experts will talk to the students and also the graduates who have skills in creative writing would help the school going children who are interested in creative writing,” said Taha.

Tazeela, a class 10 student from VB College Rainawari said she participated in the event to learn creative writing in Urdu. “I think many poets here can help me know the technicalities in poetry. I will try to get as much from this workshop,” said Tanzeela.

No School for Girls : Shanpora girls face problem

❖ M.Hussain

SRINAGAR: At a time when the government is committed to globalize the primary elementary education amid much talked “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan “ (SSA), a flagship program by Govt. of India, the Shanpora village situated at Hazratbal, Srinagar still lacks a Government school for girls.

“The Government is yet to set up a girl’s primary school in our area despite our repeated queries” said Ghulam Mohammad a resident of this village. Girls face tough time during harsh weather, as most girls prefer to get enrolled girls school at Telbal shalimar-2km distance from this place, he added.

Presently, there is only one government boys high school located in the midst of highly populated residential houses with having no semblance of school building or a proper infrastructure

Surprisingly, under the banner of boys school, girls are reportedly enrolled up to 6th class that is seen as clear blatant violation under the “Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan “ norms.

“We have no other option but to get enrolled our daughters to this school given the fact school lacks separate toilet facility”, said mother of 5th class student.

Ground reports suggest that lack of girls school emerges another unintended problem that could have serious social implications if not



addressed at the earnest. Due to lack of girls school, girl students have to pass into the interior farm lands to cut their distance before they reach Shalimar girls school where any untoward incident cannot be ruled out.

“Non availability of the girls’ school is taking heavy toll to our daughters both socially and psychologically as the rowdy boys become the major threat to us given the eve teasing our daughters are subjected to while covering distance lone farm lands”, said visibly angered parents of 7th class students.

“We have taken the matter into consideration and we will take possible steps at the earliest” said Dr Ghulam Nabi Itoo, Director of School Education, Kashmir

THE TORMENT OF HEAVY SCHOOL BAGS

Imran Ali Buth

SRINAGAR: In a special approach to address the burdening issue for students of carrying heavy school bags, State Government has constituted an expert committee to look into the matter and advice the alternative solutions. The 5-member panel is directed to submit its report within two months.

According to Secretary to Government, School Education Department, Farooq Ahmad Shah, The Department is planning a comprehensive mechanism to take all possible measures to ease-down the burden of students by reducing the weight of school bags, and as first step, an expert committee comprising of five members has been constituted to discuss the issue and submit a report to the authority.

The expert panel includes Naseema

Lankar, ex-Commissioner/Secretary School Education Department, Prof A.G. Madhosh, former Head of the Department, Department of Commerce, University of Kashmir, Prof (Dr) Nusrat Andrabi, former Principal and Member of Indian Red Cross Society, Prof Abdul Jabbar, former Principal Government Degree College Bemina and Prof Veena Pandita, Secretary J&K State Board of School Education.

School-going students of Kashmir valley are overburdened lot. An official study claims that 75% to 85% students carry bags that weigh above the recommended limit, which is 10 % of a student’s bodyweight.

According to the State education department, Kashmir zone, there are around 16 lakh students enrolled from Class I to XII, who are exposed to heavy school bags.



WARUK: A creative workshop



❖ **Mohammad Nadeem**

SRINAGAR: WARUK, a social group, in collaboration with the Department of Tourism, Kashmir and Settle light production inaugurated a 'creative writing workshop' in the cultural centre of the Jamia Masjid, in Srinagar.

The event will now continue on coming three Sundays and is scheduled to take place at Nigeen Club, on the banks of famous Nigeen Lake, where aspiring and budding writers of the valley will take part.

The workshop includes guest lectures, a session on the role of writing in other arts, public and reading sessions.

Sufi Aqib, a participant said, "it's a great initiative by the department of tourism and I feel overwhelmed to be part of this event because though this workshop I can easily express myself in the form of writing."

He further added, "In the strife-torn valley, where freedom of expression and thought is a dream, such kind of workshops would definitely boost our inner persona and we would feel free to share our thoughts."

Interestingly, the department of tourism Kashmir is organizing writing workshops for the first time in the Downtown area of Srinagar where violence is a routine.

The event was for budding calligraphers.

Akib Muslim, another participant of the event and an aspiring writer said, "I am delighted to know that such kind of writing workshops are turning effective. I came here to hunt for the literal talent of Kashmir, to make connections with budding writers through such a platform. Such workshops need to be funded properly and should be held across the state because we possess enough talent in the state."

ASPIRANTS AGGRIEVED; CAREER IN JEOPARDY

❖ **Muazzam Bhat**

SRINAGAR: Since 2014, Jammu and Kashmir Public Service Commission (JKPSC) has not completed any competitive civil service exam leaving the aspirants in lurch. The delay, the aggrieved youth say, is now threatening their career.

The commission notified Kashmir Administrative Service (KAS) exams in 2014 but it is yet to complete the process despite the passage of over three years, a bunch of candidates said.

"After issuing public notification, PSC delayed preliminary exams by one year which was conducted in 2015," they said.

The candidates said the preliminary results were declared in the same year but many candidates challenged it in the court of law complaining discrepancies in it.

"The issue remained in the high court for

about a year as the PSC didn't follow it properly. Finally, the case was disposed off in November 2016 and PSC conducted KAS (Mains) exams in February 2017. But results are still awaited despite the passage of over five months which is telling upon our career," said one of the aspirants.

The candidates said only 1275 aspirants had qualified preliminary exam but PSC is unnecessarily delaying the declaration of Mains result.

"Government claims to have a full-fledged commission in place for the purpose of conducting the competitive exams but the outcome is dismal. The delay by PSC has ruined the career of scores of candidates," said another aspirant.

The aspirants slammed PSC for its incompetence saying the delay was proving detrimental as the government has reduced the age limit from 37 years to 35 years.

In other states, the process of civil service exams is completed within one year but PSC consumes more than two years for such exams. The result announced by PSC for KAS 2016 Preliminary exams has also been challenged due to some discrepancies in it.

First the PSC issued one list which was challenged by the candidates forcing the commission to revise the list but it failed to satisfy the dropped out candidates following which the issue again landed in the court of law.

"It's a shame for the commission as well as the government that from 4 years no KAS exam was conducted properly. Our 5 years have gone waste. We could've prepared for some other exam during this time," an aggrieved aspirant said.

After repeated attempts, No official could be reached for comments.

Kashmir loses 42,000 hectare agricultural land in six decades



Muneem Farooq

SRINAGAR: In six decades, Kashmir has lost 42,000 hectares of agricultural land to non-agricultural purposes and conversion is taking at fast place due to multiple factors including "least priority" given to the agriculture sector by successive governments of the State.

The officials of the Agricultural Department warn of "catastrophic situation" if steps are not taken to preserve agricultural land in the Valley. According to official data, Kashmir had 1, 63,000 hectare agricultural land in year 1952 when its population was only 18 lakh. In the following years, the conversion of land began at fast speed and in 2012, the land shrunk to 141,740 hectares. Similarly, the land under maize was 1, 00,000 hectares in year 2003 and by 2012, it shrunk to 80,014 hectares.

The Kashmir is also losing its Saffron land to conversions into non-agricultural purposes. The data prepared by Agricultural Department reveals that 2000 hectares of land of prized Saffron has shrunk in just 16 years. The officials of the Agricultural Department

list various reasons for land conversion in Kashmir and that include disinterest shown by people and government towards this sector.

According to officials, the highest conversion has taken place in Srinagar district and the lowest in Kupwara district. They said that people have constructed residential houses, shopping complexes, farms and other establishments to earn revenue while the governments also did not interfere to stop these conversions.

"What has happened is that the agricultural sector has not been remunerative. As a result, the people and the successive governments showed least interest towards it. Unlike other sectors, the governments did not spend sufficient money on the agricultural sector which is why no one is interested in keeping this land," said the

agriculture officials.

Director Agriculture, Altaf Aijaz Andrabi said the conversion of agricultural land into non-agricultural purpose will prove "catastrophic to the existence of the people of Kashmir".

"People have no idea about the outcome of the agricultural land conversion. In worst times of 90s when everything had come to standstill, the agricultural sector saved us but we are converting same agricultural land without thinking about our future," he said.

"We have to understand that paddy won't fetch us revenue but potatoes, tomatoes (which scientifically falls in fruit category) and other vegetables can. So, they should be prioritized and we can export them at that period of year when they are not available outside and it can fetch us huge revenue," he added.

The officials suggest "huge subsidy" in agricultural sector so that people desist from converting land.

"The Government should woo people towards this sector because right now we have our land and it should be preserved. Huge subsidies can discourage people from conversions and they will show interest in this sector again," they said.

Pahroo water plant an alarming concern

❖ Saba Gul

Srinagar: People living around Check Pahroo filtration plant, situated in the city outskirts of Chadoora are drinking unsafe water. According to locals, the filtration plant lies defunct and the administration is not paying any heed towards their grievances.

“This filtration plant is lying defunct from over two years now, but unfortunately administration is in slumber” said Rafiq Illahi a resident of Pahroo

“We are forced to drink contaminated water and the government is having no concerns for us. They are starving us to death with this slow poison” said another

resident Gulzaar Wani

The locals also said that they lodged many complaints regarding the issue to Public Health Engineering Department but they failed to act over the issue.

Meanwhile a group of woman said that the water filled pots at their homes only show silt and impurities.

They demanded an immediate action in order to improve the defunct machinery lying there from a long period of time.

Block Medical Officer Chattergam said that the department will collect the random sample from any consumer points to testify the water quality.

Assistant Engineer, PHE Lal Nagar, Zubair Ahmad Naqash said “We test the

water taken from consumer points at least thrice in a week in order to check the balance of its Residual Chlorine and Turbidity and in case something wrong is found the department takes immediate action,” he said.

Naqash added it is true that there is some fault in the machinery and department is trying to overcome that problem, rather the machinery is defunct the department is doing the manual bleaching in order to maintain the balance of ‘turbidity and Residual Chlorine’ to the water, which is compulsory to make it suitable for drinking. He claimed there is no compromise of water quality in manual or technical bleaching.

Hospital: heaven for unlawful petrol-sellers

Sabeeha shaheen

SRINAGAR: Locals in North Kashmir’s Bandipora district are up in arms against the Ambulance drivers of the district hospital accused of being hand in glove with the local petrol pumps and selling them petrol in illicit manner.

According to locals, the ambulance drivers sell allotted petrol to various petrol pumps of the district at very cheap rates. “They sell the petrol to local pumps on low rates, so to fill their own pockets,” said locals.

Locals lamented that due to the wrong

doings of these drivers, common people are the ones to suffer badly and also accused the department of acting as mute spectator.

“We at regular intervals had brought the issue in the notice of the department but our representation paid no heed,” they added. A group of senior citizens alleged that these drivers are inventing new techniques of lotting people and filling their own pockets by blackmailing desperate patients at desperate times.

“Most of them have been appointed on the political backings that has added to the suffering of apolitical or people of

opposite party,” they said.

It is not the new thing in the district hospital, as hospital has been making headlines for all wrong doings either illegal appointments or shortage of life saving drugs.

“last year CMO was removed for mismanagement in the hospital,” said a local.

Medical Superintendent Bandipora Masrat Iqbal said to Merc times that proper action will be taken against those found guilty. He told that enquiry committee will be framed to investigate this matter.

Sparrow Population declines claims expert

Saba Khan

SRINAGAR: The concrete houses replacing traditional ones have resulted in the decline of sparrow population in Kashmir, experts said.

“The major reason for the decline in the traditional household bird’s population is that its nesting spaces have been destroyed with more concrete houses replacing traditional houses,” Dr Asad Rahmani, ex-Director Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), a pan-India wildlife research organization said.

The sparrows used to build nests in the crevices of traditional houses. Now the houses have gone concrete, leaving no space for the sparrows. This is one of the biggest reasons for the decrease in its population, he added.

Although the impact cannot be ruled out, Rahmani said that there was “not a

direct correlation” between the radiations emitted by mobile towers and the declining sparrow population.



There had been a decline in the population of “soft-bodied worms”, which the sparrows feed to their chicks, resulting in less chances of their survival.

Rahmani said that the decline in the sparrow population was being “reported from everywhere”.

A survey named ‘Citizen Sparrow’ carried out by the BNHS in 2012 across India, has said in its findings, “the common sparrow is not so common anymore”.

According to the survey, sparrows are seen in fewer places now than they were before 2005. “Where they are still found, the numbers are lower than earlier and fewer nests are seen as well,” reads the survey report.

Ashfaq Zarri, Coordinator Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) Jammu and Kashmir said, “Unless a comprehensive study is carried out on the declining population of sparrows in the valley, it would not be wise to draw conclusions”

“Employment succumbs to entrepreneurship”



❖ Saher Iqbal

Srinagar: At a time when Kashmiri youth are facing the brunt of unemployment, a Kashmiri born young entrepreneur has become a lone importer of Dubai based manufacturing company (Aujan Industry), after taking an initiative to start his own business.

Aujan Industry is a Saudi based company which manufactures Juice products with this Kashmiri young man as a lone importer from India.

Imtiyaz Bhat a BSC student was born in Nowgam area of Srinagar. Bhat wanted to become a businessman from his early childhood and wanted to do something different than the environs around him.

“From my early childhood I wanted to become an entrepreneur. Initially I started as a distributor from Budgam district. Then in 2010, I started importing for Jammu and Kashmir and in 2012 I started importing for India,” he said

Everyone was choosing MBBS and Engineering. For the sake of parents I entered into the entrance. I was not willing to go for entrance for MBBS. But since childhood I wanted to become a businessman and thanks to Almighty Allah I did that.

Rani is one of the leading Juice Brands in the Middle East and North Africa. Yearly they are having 1.2 billion cases in Dubai plant only. And Indian contribution is 2 million cases. Rani is the biggest beverage importer in India in juice. From 2012 Rani is largest importer in Pan India. It is the biggest seller. It is a quality product across India. We have an office in Hyderabad, Srinagar and brand offices are in Delhi, Mumbai and Gujarat

What was the role of parents in it?

My parents from my childhood expected me to go for MBBS but I was unable to express myself to them in the early age then after 5 years I somehow managed to tell them what I actually want to do and then they realised what I was thinking from my childhood.

Govt fully committed to empower its consumers



❖ WAJAHAT SHABIR

SRINAGAR: Emphasizing on the need of consumers having more information about their rights, awareness programme organized by FCS&CA Department to observe “State Consumer Day” at Srinagar.

Every year, consumer day is celebrated on 15th March, August 29 and December 24.

Government officials said, “From manufacturers to service providers, everyone builds their business model keeping the interests of consumers in mind. It means the real power rests with a consumer who can make a strong society and help in building and driving a strong economy provided he is aware of his rights

He said business community should ask themselves if it is reasonable to do illegal profiteering on festivals, which teach us spirit of sacrifice, brotherhood and spread joy and happiness. He said such mal-practices take over the sheen from the markets.

Higher official further informed that the Government is fully committed for empowering its consumers. He said the present Government reconstituted the state level body “Jammu and Kashmir State Consumer Protection Council (SCPC)” and established “District Consumer Forms” in 14 districts of the State to address the issues of consumers.

Government could make laws and would deploy enforcement agencies to execute these laws; however, all this would be a futile exercise if the society is not willing to change for better, said Mushtaq Ahmed.

Jhelum River water transport evokes less response

❖ Waseem Ahmad

SRINAGAR: Despite subsidized fare of just Rs 25, very few people turn up for River Jhelum cruise started by Government from Zero Bridge to Khankah-e-Moulla in summer capital here which has caused disappointment among stakeholders.

The cruise service on historic Jhelum River was started after conduct of over month-long trial by Tourism Department from July 11, 2017 for the promotion of the water transport. The promotional service of the Jhelum cruise was operated successfully for one-and-a-half month and no one was charged for the ride. The officials said that earlier the rate for ride from Zero Bridge to Khankah-e-Moulla in downtown city was proposed at Rs 100 but later after suggestions from various stakeholders, it was fixed Rs 25 only per person from one side.

“It was subsidized so that this initiative

will become successful and more people will avail this facility,” the officials said, however, to the utter disappointment of Government and other stakeholders, only few persons turn up for the ride.

Director Tourism Kashmir, Mehmood Ahmad Shah confirmed that only few passengers use water transport for traveling. “The services were scheduled to operate twice a day at 10 am and at 4 pm at Rs 25 per head. But no one is coming for the ride and boats often remain locked,” he said.

The Director said that it was disappointing that the initiative got zero response from common people. “Earlier when we were running services on trial basis at free of cost, 15 to 18 people were turning up on an average. We were expecting that now people will turn up but there wasn’t anyone,” he said

According to the Director, the service

will boost the tourism as there are many heritage sites on the banks of river Jhelum which tourists want to see. “But it depends on the response of people and visitors. We hope to see it becoming successful,” Mehmood Shah said.

The Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation (JKTDC) has already roped in Shikara owners for their involvement in the initiative and employment generation.

Officials said that Kashmir Motors will train the Shikara owners and provide them motors. “Ultimately, they can run the services and that is why they need to be involved in this. They are being given 50 percent subsidy,” said JKTDC officials

Managing Director, JKTDC, Sarmad Hafeez, hoped that the project will become a success. “People including tourists will get chance to know other side of Srinagar and of course historical and heritage sites,” he said

Peoples’ eye on crop production assessment

Munawar Hussain

SRINAGAR: In its first, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare released the assessment of production of different crops is based on the feedback received from States and validated with information available from other sources.

The cumulative rainfall in the country during the monsoon season i.e. 01st June to 06th September, 2017 has been 05% lower than Long Period Average (LPA). Thus, monsoon rainfall conditions have been normal in the country. The estimated production of most of the crops during current Kharif season is estimated to be higher as compared to their normal production of last five years. However, these are preliminary estimates and would undergo revision based on further feedback from the States.

As per the First Advance Estimates, total production of Kharif Food grains during 2017-18 is estimated at 134.67 million tonnes. This is lower by 3.86 million tonnes as compared to last year’s Kharif food grains record production of 138.52 million tonnes (4th Advance Estimates). However, kharif food grain production is 6.43 million tonnes more than the average production of five years (2011-12 to 2015-16) of 128.24 million tonnes.

Total production of Kharif rice is estimated at 94.48 million tonnes. This is lower by 1.91 million tonnes than the last year’s record production of 96.39 million tonnes. However, it is higher by 2.59 million tonnes over the average production of Kharif rice during the last five years.

The total production of coarse cereals in the country has decreased to 31.49 million tonnes as compared to 32.71 million tonnes during 2016-17 (4th Advance Estimates). Production of Maize is expected to be 18.73 million tonnes which is marginally lower by 0.52 million tonnes than that of last year’s record production. Further, this is higher by 2.15 million tonnes than the average production of maize during the last five years.

The total production of Kharif pulses is estimated at 8.71 million tonnes which is lower by 0.72 million tonnes than the last year’s record production of 9.42 million tonnes. However, Kharif pulses estimated production is 2.86 million tonnes more than the last five years average production.

The total production of Kharif oil seeds in the country is estimated at 20.68 million tonnes as compared to 22.40 million tonnes during 2016-17, i.e., a decrease of 1.72 million tonnes. However, it is higher by 0.69 million tonnes than the average production of last five years.



Dilapidated Bakura road irks residents

❖ Sajad Bashir

Ganderbal: The residents of Bakura area in Ganderbal district are up in arms against the Roads and Building Department for dilapidated condition of Bakura main and link roads.

The locals said that the road which connects Bakura to the rest of world is in shambles and dotted with potholes causing immense trouble to the local residents who decry political and official apathy and step-motherly treatment to the Phaq area especially

Bakura. The people of the area said that the road in the area is bumpy and dotted due to which the commuters are facing hardships.

“The road has been dug at several places and left unattended. Even the garbage and water is on the road that causing more trouble to commuters particularly the students” javid bakhuri a local resident said.

The inhabitants of the area have sought intervention of R&B Minister Nayeem Akhter and demanded immediate macdamization of the road for the convenience of the locals.

Students take classes under open sky

Iqra Akhoun

SRINAGAR:- In yet another bizarre example of poor education system in the state, the students of middle school Palpora area in Central Kashmir’s Srinagr district have to take classes under open sky as the school functions in a three room ramshackle building in murky surroundings.

Established in 1970 as primary school Palpora and upgraded to middle school in 2008, the school here reflects a grim picture vis-à-vis providing learning to the students. To the surprise of locals, another nearby primary school was last year clubbed with this school which runs in three rooms of a dilapidated building.

Two Hundred students with nine teachers have just three classrooms to sit in, forcing the teachers to take most of the classes under open sky. “We have to take three classes at the same time in one room as there are only three rooms for the school. The school has high enrollment and we cannot manage to take classes in just three rooms, we take some classes under the open sky provided the weather is fair. Otherwise, during rains, we are forced to ask students to remain at home owing to space constraints in the school,” said a teacher posted in the school.

The school having Five female and Four male teacher

doesn’t even have an office and staff room. “Some classes have to be taken on the veranda of the building.”

Locals said that the education department is making fun of the poor students as they are being forced to take education under the open sky and in the murky surroundings. “Who would want to send his ward to such a school where classes are taken under the open sky and where even animals would hesitate to sit,” he rued. The locals said that some years ago the land was acquired and a new building was constructed after spending lakhs of rupees on it but the school was never shifted there as the contractor left the work mid-way.

“The school building has now become a safe haven for gamblers and junkies as the education department as well the local administration has abandoned it, speaking volumes about their concern towards the poor students,” the locals said.

Chief Education Officer Farooq Ahmad Dar, said the construction work has been allotted to a new contractor as the earlier one had some issues there. “New building would be completed this year and the school would be shifted to the new building this year only. Furthermore, we have sought additional two rooms for the present school building,” he added.

Meet Iqra a budding fashion designer



❖ Tanzeela Rahat

Srinagar When we explore the amount variety and vitality of talent and art exhibits staged performance few people have been the influential personalities to continue the golden tradition.

The extremely talented renewed fashion designer 25 year old Iqra Ahmad from kashmir is an example and hope to inform and inspire young generation of kashmir. She entered the fashion industry striving hard to keep the kashmiri tradition alive. She is working with the determination to revive kashmiri art, Culture and heritage to prevent its extinction. Her practical designs and innovative thoughts made her an influential figure in 21th century fashion.

She has always been interested in fashion designing but never imagined opting for career in the field as such. She had many other career plans as well but none have worked out as well as palav.

“I started palav because I thought this is something I really wanted to do after giving a lot of thought on career options.it turned out to be an online store because I didn’t have resources enough to invest in a physical store” said Iqra Ahmed.

Receiving recognition for her vibrant sense of style and her taste in fashion.The owner of tulpalav aspires to establish her own designer studio in the near future. Palav today, is not just about clothing trend that she is working on,Rather it is a personal initiative to represent the culture she belong to. “I wanted that my work should reflect the “kashmiriyat” in what people wear and how they wear it” she says.

Her designs are dedicated to all those women who find pride in who they are and believe in what they can become.

BLOOD DONATION CAMP HELD AT KASHMIR UNIVERSITY

Tahir Bhat

SRINAGAR: Saaya, a Kashmir based NGO in collaboration with the Red Ribbon club Department of Students Welfare(DSW) university of Kashmir and Jawhar Lal Memorial Hospital (JLNM) Rainawari Srinagar on Monday organized blood donation camp at the Lawns Of Gandhi Bhawan, University Of Kashmir.

Students from various departments, Professors and many other volunteers from outside university participated in the event. There were almost students across different departments who participated in the event. Both male and females students donated blood at the camp.

Meanwhile, the Members of the organization also donated blood in the event.

The organizer of the event said that the aim of organizing the blood donation was to create the habit among of people for donating the blood for the good cause.



He said that it was not necessary to donate the blood here only; they can donate the blood at SMHS or SKIMS Soura as well for its good use.

We should donate our blood every year for those who have dire need of it and are unable to buy it from the market.

Syed Bilal, Donor for the event said that people should come in huge numbers to donate their blood and the hope is that the turnover would increase in future.

“It has been a routine since last five years for me to donate blood as it gives me a wonderful feeling”

The students who donated their blood at the camp expressed their happiness over the initiative taken by the SAAYA.

The donation camp started at 10:30 am and concluded at 03:00 pm.

The Dean Student Welfare Kashmir University G N Khaki was the chief guest on the occasion who inaugurated the event.

The Dean Student welfare appreciated the students to hold more such events in near future.

The Camp Incharge, Dr Nadeem Medical Superintendent said, 100 points of blood have been collected from students as well as outsiders.

The sponsors of the event were J&K Bank, Red Cross society, Sajid Iqbal Foundation and JKAPCS.

Football academies launched at Bandipora and Ganderbal

❖ **Kaisar Majeed**

SRINAGAR: State Football Academy of J&K State Sports Council launched its District Academies at Bandipora and Ganderbal today by chief guest of the occasion, Waheed-Ur-Rehman Parra, Secretary J&K State Sports Council in a simple function here.

State Football Academy which was launched on May 25 by Minister for Sports, IT and Technical Education, Imran Raza Ansari, aims to establish Academy Units of SFA in every District in three age groups of Under-13, Under-15 and Under-18 years. So far 250 players have been selected and trained at these three Districts and the SFA intends to targets

5000 players across the State by the end of the playing season, who will be professionally trained by Head of the Academy and Star Footballer, Mehraj-Ud-Din Wadoo and International Coach, Sajid Dar.

Recently State Football Academy was awarded 2 star rating by All India Football Federation (AIFF) which provides them berth to participate in major tournaments of National Level like Junior I-League, Youth League, IFA Shield Durand Cup etc.

Later in his speech Waheed Ur Rehman said “We want to see players from every part of the State performing at highest level and the platform has already been set by SFA”.



GIRLS CONTINUE TO FACE HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC BUSES



FAHMEEDA RASHEED

GANDERBAL: The overcrowded buses are becoming safe haven for Monsters to harass the girls by touching them. Girls continue to experience varied forms of harassment as they board the daily buses. Often due to crowd girls are subjected to groping.

Farzana a 3rd year student of degree college Gander bal who has experienced harassment said” Public buses are reported as spaces where women and girls face high level of sexual harassment with the most common form of harassment being

verbal (Passing comments) and visual (Staring and leering) and Physical (Touching and leaning over.”

While few days back girls talked to DC Gander bal about the issue and he said “This issue will be resolved as soon as possible and we will launch a lady special bus for college and university going girls but nothing has started yet.

After all a woman being harassed is somebody’s mother daughter or sister. Both genders need to work together to eliminate the monsters of harassment specifically in public buses.

Sports festival inaugurated in north Kashmir



SYED IRSHAD

BARAMULLA : The Jammu and Kashmir police (JKAP) IN Collaboration With J&K Sports Council and Nehru Kendra organized a three day District level sports and athletics festival which was inaugurated by police senior officer at professor showkat Ali stadium Baramulla in North Kashmir on Thursday. Hundreds of young sportsperson and athletics hailing from three districts of north Kashmir including Baramulla, Bandipora, Kupwara are participating in the sports meet. Besides athletic competition in games like Hockey ,volleyball, Handball, Kabbadi, Table Tennis, Kho -kho, Tug of war and other games will be part of the three day festival. A Colorful cultural program was presented by school children and other cultural tropes on the occasion.

Kabbadi match was also played between

Gulshan Kabbadi club Trumbgund and sultania club Tujjarsharief and was won by sultania club.” Organizing such type of sports activities provides platform to the youth to excel in various sports activities said one Participant.”

Senior police officer while speaking on the occasion said J&K police in its endeavor to strengthen the police public relations and to channelize the talent of budding youth of the state towards the positive direction. He further said “that the main aim to organize such programs is to provide platform to the talented youth to advocate sports curriculum in the district and to outreach the areas where avenues are not available but talent is visible. He also assured the participants that such programs shall be organized in future too to capitalize the talent of youth at state and National level