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MERC TIMES

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Wular Shrinks as Encroachments Continue

❖ **Gazanfar Zaki**

Srinagar: One of the Asia's largest freshwater lakes, Wular in North Kashmir, is fast losing its grandeur to extensive pollution, siltation and encroachments. The areas of the lake and the associated marshes have reduced by 45% and 70% respectively due to conversion of agriculture and plantation.

According to research it states the area of the lake in 1911 was 219Sq Km which includes 61Sq Km of associated marshes. The lake has reduced to 89.71 Sq Km. The population of Wular dwellers is increasing leading to the increase in the encroachment activities. Uncontrolled grazing in catchments area leading to excessive flow of nutrients in the lake is another factor for its shrinkage and deterioration.

Additionally, there are 25 lakhs of willow trees (1000 per hectare) while government under the Comprehensive Management Area Plan have removed about 30,000 in last four years. According to official reports forest department has so far removed 26500 tress from compartment 1,2,3,4,5 and 6 collecting revenue of about 3 crore, while Rakhs and Farms department has removed about 3500 trees.

The Chief Executive Officer of WUCMA, Abdul Razak Khan, said efforts are on to restore Wular. "It is a challenging task. We are gradually cutting the trees in the lake and started the dredging process," he said.

"During the rains the water from the lake flows out on roads and enters the localities. The problem gets worsened due to encroachments and dumping of waste," said a local resident of Kanibathi village, which saw a massive devastation in the 2014 floods as large swathes of paddy land remained under water.

The Government of India in 2011 approved the Rs 389-crore project for conservation and development of Wular. Though the Government in 2012 formed the Wular Conservation and Management Authority (WUCMA), absence of proper planning and expertise has led to failure of the execution of the project.

"Wular has lost its carrying capacity due to pollution, siltation and encroachment. Ironically, WUCMA has been undertaking the Wular Conservation project haphazardly as despite passing of two years since its formation, no improvement is visible in Wular," said Mohd Hameed Bhat, a retired environmental science lecturer.

"Ecological projects are always time-bound. To save Wular from further deterioration, all the interventions have to go simultaneously as per the plans envisaged in the project," he further added.

The role of Wular lake to regulate water flows has drastically reduced due to reclamation, siltation and interventions to enhance drainability of water for upstream mitigation. Nestled between mountains, Wular acts as a huge absorption basin for the annual floodwaters—maintaining a balance in the hydrographic system of Kashmir. The lake with its associated wetlands comprises an important habitat for migratory water birds within Central Asian Flyway and supports rich biodiversity. In recognition of its immense ecological and socio-economic importance, the Wular was designated as wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention in 1990.

It is a challenging task. We are gradually cutting the trees in the lake and started the dredging process

TAGORE HALL OPENS AFTER A DECADE OF RENOVATION

❖ **Ishan Fazili**

Srinagar: Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, inaugurated the renovated Tagore Hall here on 14 Oct. The restoration was finished by Jammu And Kashmir Projects Construction Corporation (JKPCC) in record time, after it was devastated in last year's floods.

Built in 1961, in the memory of Rabindranath Tagore, a great poet, philosopher and Nobel Laureate, Tagore Hall is a seat of cultural awakening and invites performing artists from within and outside the state to perform and enthral the audience.

Matching any modern-day auditorium, the 426-seated Tagore Hall is laced with High Voltage AC fire-fighting, air-conditioning, mini-conference hall, VIP lounge, latest gadgetry and lighting system

Hailing the contribution of noted litterateurs from J&K some of whom were present in the audience, the Chief Minister specifically mentioned Jnanpith Award winner Rahman Rahi, Farooq Nazki and Mohammad Yusuf Taing, and asked them to become torchbearers and infuse a new life in the state's cultural landscape.

"Please don't keep this auditorium idle. Make it a vibrant centre of never-ending cultural activities", he said while speaking on the occasion.

Minister of Public Works, Floriculture, Gardens & Parks: Syed Mohammad Altaf Bukhari, Minister for Finance & Culture: Dr.Haseeb A. Drabu, MLC: KhursheedAlam and Secretary, J&K Academy of Art, Culture & Languages, Aziz Hajini, were also present on the occasion.

Also present were Divisional Commissioner, Asgar Hassan Samoon; Deputy Commissioner, Srinagar: Peerzada Mushtaq; Director Archives, Archeology& Museums, S. M. Zahid, besides galaxy of people belonging to promotion of art and culture.

Tagore Hall has been part of the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (JKAACL) in the summer capital over the past more than five decades, which also looks after Abhinav Theatre for cultural and theatre activities in Jammu.

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Land Mark-Act nowhere on ground, Authorities unmoved

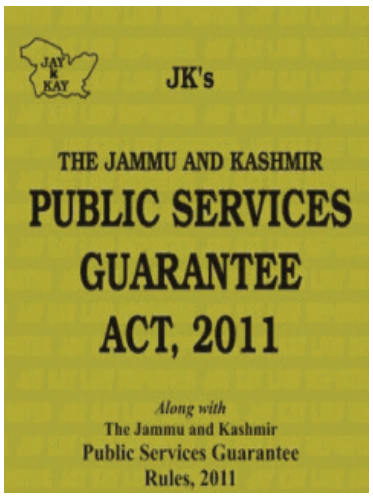
❖ **NAZIR GILLO**

Srinagar: Even after the elapse of more than four years, the Public Services Guarantee Act (PSGA) is being blatantly violated by many government offices, taking longer time than fixed in issuing essential documents to the locals.

Enacted in 2011- the act aimed to bring steadfastness in document process and provide the specified services within a particular timeframe to people. However, majority of the people say, they still do not get applied documents within the time prescribed under PSGA.

"I recently applied for income certificate to avail the financial-aid-scholarship benefits from University, but till it (certificate) got completed, the last date to submit the form got expired", says Aqib Ahmad, a PG student from Kashmir University.

The previous government tried to create public awareness about PSGA, but the implementation of the Act became almost non-existent in governmental departments that fell under its ambit.



"For about three years I have been running from one official to another in CA&PD department to get my own ration card but till this time my documents are 'under process' ", says Ghulam Ahmad from Ganderbal.

"One needs to have a source or money to get work done before or within the stipulated time, otherwise you have no option other than to wait for months or even for years", says Rouf Ahmad, a local resident.

Deputy Commissioner Srinagar, Farooq Ahmad Lone says that there is no question of non-seriousness on the part of government regarding the implementation and awareness of this act.

"The act is mandatory to be followed by all the departments coming under its ambit. Moreover the departments have to submit the monthly report regarding the implementation of the aforementioned act", Lone said.

"If any violations are being done, the people should quote the official and bring in to the notice of the concerned officials and appropriate action would be taken against the violators", he said.

Jammu & Kashmir took second lead in India after Madhya Pradesh to implement PSGA which guarantees public services to people in a time bound manner.

Under SRO-224, Government has specifically mentioned several common services under PSGA's ambit in several departments, including; Department of Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution (ration card, shifting of Fair Price shop from one place to another), Power Development Department (domestic and commercial electricity connections), PHE (domestic water connection), Revenue Department (Permanent Resident Certificate, Reserved Category Certificate, Dependent Certificate, Income Certificate, extracts of FardIntikhab, Girdawari, Akas masavi/ latha, mutation, inheritance mutation, tatimashajra, chula, demarcation of land), Transport Department (Learners License, Driving License, Registration of Vehicles) and Housing & Urban Development Department (Birth Certificate, Death Certificate, NOCs for Construction of house from concerned departments, Building Permission).

Heritage Site Craves For Renovation

❖ **Suhaib Mansur**

Srinagar: The decades old prime international trade hub for the Central Asia, Yarkand caravan Sarai, also known as Safa Kadal Sarai is turning to ruins due to lack of maintenance and renovation. It is a two-storied building that stands dilapidated at Safakadal in Shahr-e-Khaas, located on the near by the banks of river Jehlum.

Since its establishment, Yarkand Caravan Sarai was used as a centre of Central Asian trade. The Dogra rulers had constructed the Sarai building but the place was known for trade since the Mughal era.It also served as a Mandi for the then neighbouring countries of India. It is now nothing more than a home of some refugee families.

Describing the glory of the building, Abdul Rasheed Rahgeer, a novelist says, "The Yarkandi traders came via the Silk Route with horses laden with Carpets, gold and many other goods". It was the only trader's point between Kashmir and Central Asia and the business was so good that all type of merchandise were available here round the year. All what Kashmir would export to Central Asia was sent to other countries through the Yarkand Sarai."

"Yarkand sarai also served as resting place for foreign traders in Kashmir". Rahgeer adds.

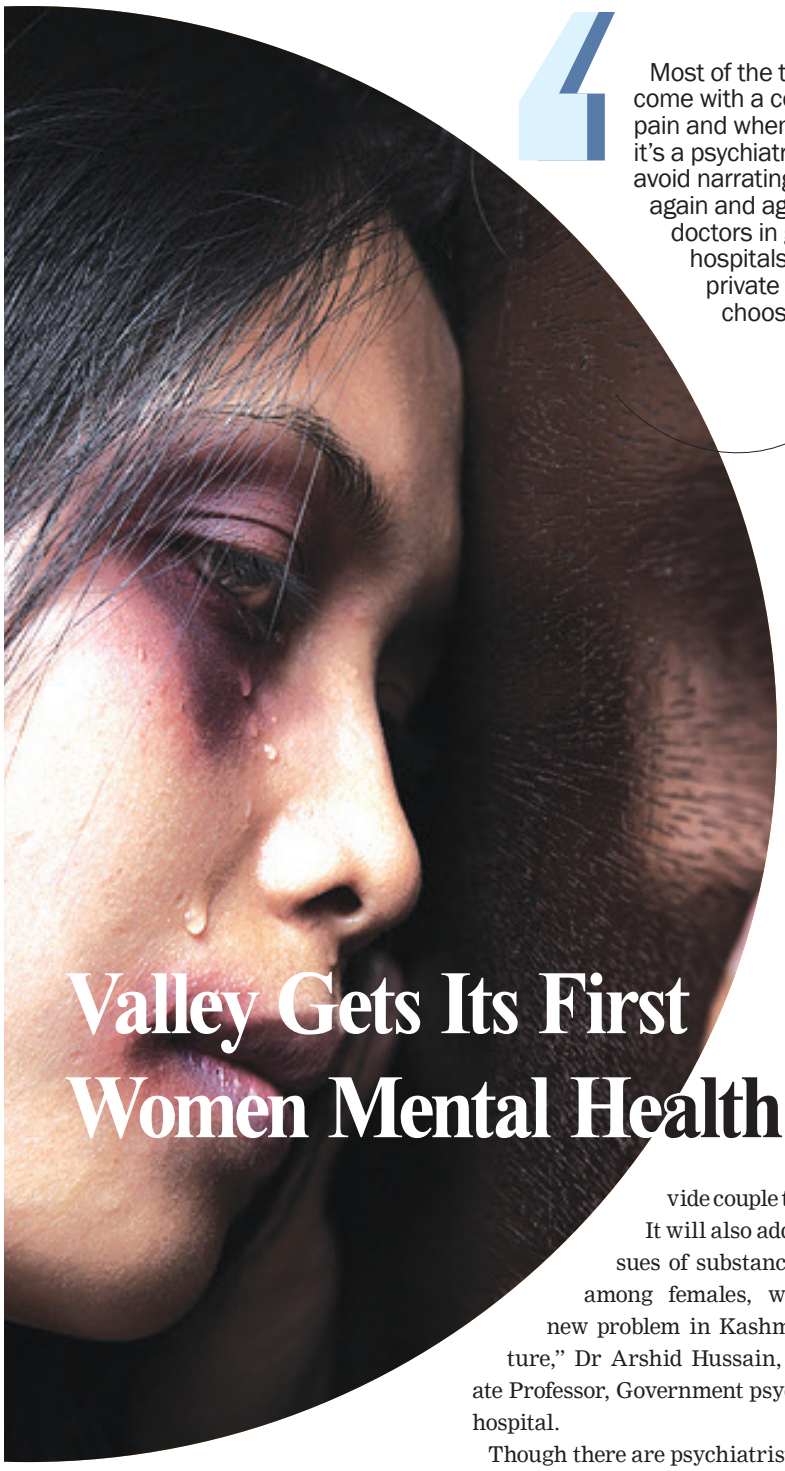
Sharing the anecdotes, Ajaz Munshi a scholar of Ladakh Studies from Kargil says, "My family was involved in Central Asian trade as Kargil used to be a hub on the historic silk route .My grandfather, Aziz Munshi , who had a shop at old batlti bazar said that those days it used to be a fashion statement to own a Yarkand horse and people used to buy these horses from an open field near the Saraj."

Even though after 1947 crisis, there was a decline on Silk Route trade with Kashmir, the business activities continued to some extent for two more years when the historic route was finally closed.

Apart from the general lack of maintenance, the building was degraded and the river side wall of the building was completely cracked during floods in Sep 2014. Shoib Ahmad, a local, briefs about destruction that the flood and several other events that were the root cause of the degradation of the caravan Sarai.

"In ninety's the construction of Safa kadal affected the foundations of the building , then after the 2005 earth quake and the 2014 flood have further affected this historic building's infrastructure" he says.

Shoib further alleges that this building is under the control of divisional Kashmir but no such care is being taken from the said department. "No work has been done to restore the building and this is a big concern for us as it will turn into a ruined site and also our safety is on stake."



Valley Gets Its First Women Mental Health Clinic

> Most of the times women come with a complaint of pain and when we dig deeper, it's a psychiatric disorder. To avoid narrating their story again and again to different doctors in governmental hospitals, they chose private clinics, if they choose at all"

❖ **Marouf Gazi**

Srinagar: In a bid to encourage women to open up about their mental ailments, the Government Medical College (GMC) has started an exclusive mental health clinic dedicated to female patients. The establishment of the clinic aims to make it easy for women to discuss their personal issues and ailments with female psychiatrists. The clinic began functioning from October 10, 2015.

The clinic has an all-female staff which includes two psychiatrists: Dr. Sabreena Qadri and Dr. Yuman Kawosa, one clinical psychologist: Dr. Asiya Niyaz, and two counselors: Mrs Shabnam and Miss Rehana.

"Along with menstrual dysphasia, postmenopausal symptoms, and psychiatric illness, the clinic would provide couple therapy. It will also address issues of substance abuse among females, which is new problem in Kashmiri culture," Dr Arshid Hussain, Associate Professor, Government psychiatric hospital.

Though there are psychiatrists available in hospitals but due to the 'change in duty', the patients consider it hectic to explain their issues repeatedly. Dr. Syed Arif Magribi, a Pain management specialist explained, "Most of the times women come with a complaint of pain and when we dig deeper, it's a psychiatric disorder. To avoid narrating their story again and again to different doctors in governmental hospitals, they chose private clinics, if they choose at all".

A female patient, 23, said, "It's comparatively inexpensive and we can talk to one lady doctor with feeling uncomfortable. There's nothing wrong with a male psychiatrist but an explanation without hesitation makes diagnose and treatment easy". At present the psychiatric disease hospital treats about 120,000 to 130,000 patients a year, and 70 percent among them are women.

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KU Holds Seminar On Financial Education

❖ **Tasir Khan**

Srinagar: The Business School of the University of Kashmir held a daylong seminar on 'Economic Empowerment through Financial Education' on Monday.

Dean Academic Affairs, Prof Mohammad Ashraf Wani, inaugurated the seminar organized in collaboration with the National Stock Exchange (NSET) and Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and Jammu & Kashmir Bank Limited.

In his address, Prof Wani appreciated the initiatives taken by The Business School in developing collaborations with prestigious institutions like NSE, SEBI and J&K Bank."The institutions like SEBI and NSE should actively collaborate with academic institutions like Kashmir University in areas like education and capacity building," he said.

Prof S Mufeed Ahmad, Director of The Business School, said organizations and institutions cannot grow in isolation in today's world. "The School has taken series of initiatives to enhance competences

and capabilities of students and strengthen its relationship with the corporate world" he said. He also provided a brief outline of areas where the Business School and NSE can collaborate for benefit of the student community and society.

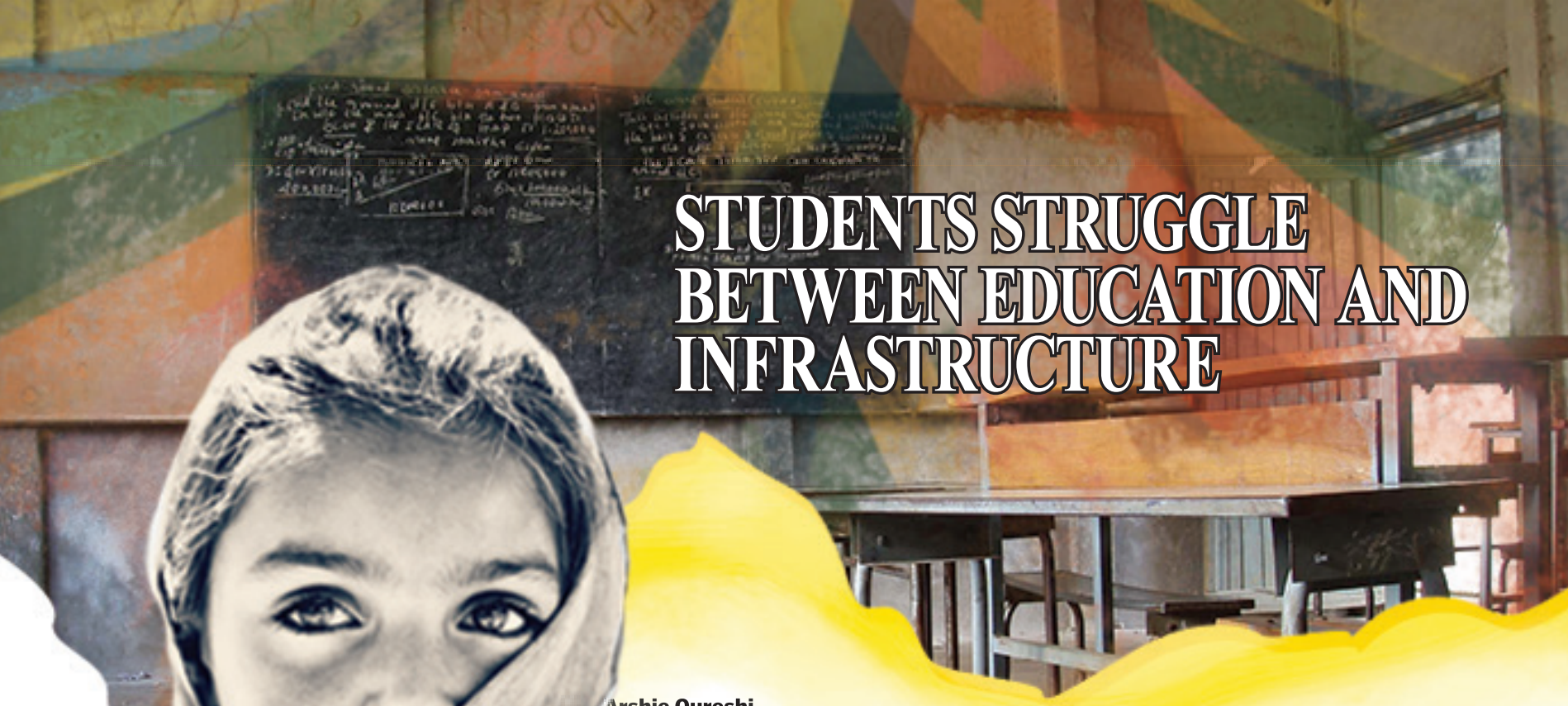
N Hari Haran, Chief General Manager of SEBI highlighted the role of the organization in overall economic development of the country.

Abdul Rouf Bhat, Executive President, J&K Bank, highlighted initiatives taken by them with regard to investor education and awareness."Since J&K Bank has wide reach within and outside the state, there is a need to collaborate with other institutions of the country to develop effective financial literacy programs," he said.

Rana Usman, Senior Assistant Vice-President at NSE highlighted the role of NSE in providing platform to develop capital markets of the country.

"The NSE has finalized a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Kashmir with regard to curriculum development and training programs," she said.

STUDENTS STRUGGLE BETWEEN EDUCATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



Arshie Qureshi

Srinagar: Despite spending 'huge amount of money' under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)-a centrally sponsored scheme for basic elementary education, the schools in valley continue to function without basic amenities.

The data from the state's Unified District Information System for Education (DISE) reveals a grey picture of schools; which says out of 29047 schools, 6352 schools don't have girl's toilet facilities and similarly 8110 schools have no toilet facilities for boys functioning in the state.

The report says that more than 70% of schools have no wash-basins or taps available near toilets and around 10% of schools have no drinking water available in state of J&K. The schools include both- the ones which operate from Government's own building and those which run from the rented ones. According to the report, at least 3,792 schools operating from Government buildings are without toilet facilities.

Under the SSA scheme, Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) had made mandatory provision of eight basic facilities in schools, like playground, boys' toilets, girls' toilets, electricity, ramps, library, compound wall and drinking water facility. However, number of schools in the state lacks most of them.

The report further says that about 21381 schools have no access to electricity, while as many as 2356 schools are operating from single classrooms. Moreover, around 11,490 Schools are functioning with less than three teachers.

About 21381 schools have no access to electricity, while as many as 2356 schools are operating from single classrooms. Moreover, around 11,490 Schools are functioning with less than three teachers.

The students in a government school at Rainawari listed lack of toilets and hygiene as one of the primary reason for the dropout of girls in their school.

"Many children have left the education mid-way due to the lack of toilet facility and uncleanness in & around our school," said Aqib,, a student of a government school in Rainawari.

"For girls it becomes even more difficult to go to a school where you don't have separate toilet facilities-left with only option either to left studies or switch over to some private institution; the ones we can't afford," Tabish, another student said.

The teachers, while calling the students demands a genuine one, said, "since its (Governments) formation, it has been giving tall lectures on rationalization of education system, but we see nothing of that thing on the ground."

"Without improving the infrastructure, we cannot compete with private institutions" held the teachers at one of the government school in Illahi Bagh.

However, the parents feel that the efforts are "half hearted", adding "If schools do not have toilets, water facility and lack other basic amenities; how are they supposed to increase the enrolment of students or enhance the quality of education in the government schools."

Kashmiri scholar shines, discover's TB Cure

❖ **Omer Malik**

Srinagar: Imtiyaaz Yaseen, 29, a young Kashmiri discovered protein RV 1988, which is a crucial protein secreted by Mycobacterium Tuberculosis, which if targeted by specific drugs will provide faster diagnosis and possible cure for tuberculosis. He has been working on the project as a part of his PhD thesis since 2011.

"It was my professor who gave me the idea about the existence of a possible protein at the heart of tuberculosis infection", said Imtiyaz who is doing his PhD at centre for DNA finger printing and diagnostics (CDFD) Hyderabad.

He did extensive research and ultimately found a protein RV1988, which has been hiding before our eyes while affecting millions of TB patients."

While describing the significance of this discovery Imtiyaz said that the protein secreted by Mycobacterium tuberculosis helps it to suppress human immune system and thrive in the body.

The bacterium produces protein which enters nucleus of the host cell where it represses specific sequences in a gene which are related to immune function. The research has been published in the prestigious journal "Nature Communications".

"In simpler terms the infecting organism not only causes tuberculosis but also releases a protein which reduces body's capacity to respond to that infection", said Imtiyaz. He further said by targeting this particular protein we can produce drugs which can cure the disease. It can also become a potential diagnostic biomarker for active tuberculosis.

The discovery has been hailed by the scientific community with immense response coming from all round the world. CDFD has already filed a patent for the discovery naming Imtiyaz as an applicant along with his professor Sanjeev Khosla.

The center is now initiating talks with major drug companies which can produce drugs to cure tuberculosis based on the research. Future the drug would inhibit this protein or bind an enzyme which can reverse what this protein does thus providing a cure to the disease.

People protest 'Unfair' distribution of gas cylinders

❖ **Zafar Aafaq**

Kupwara: Residents of Handwara on Oct 8th held demonstrations against the alleged inequitable distribution of the gas stock by dealers.

Locals allege that the gas distributing agencies are deliberately creating the shortage of gas in the district by inequitable distribution of the stock. they said that they are facing severe problems due to the shortage of gas stock in the area.

People also held sit-in and blocked the Baramullah-Handwara road while raising the slogans against the authorities, suspending the traffic for several hours.

"When the vehicle of local gas agency reached the village with only limited number of cylinders, the ones who were left empty handed assembled at the market and started chanting slogans against the dealers and the administration," a local said.

Some locals wishing not to be identified claimed that the owner of local gas agency sells some gas cylinders to a private dealer for minting money illegally.

"His illegal practice brings lot of miseries to the people of the area'" says one of the locals.

As per the recent announcement of central government each household should get 12 gas cylinders for a year.

With winter season knocking on the door, the people of the area demand attention of the government toward the issue. "We want authorities to take action against such dealers for ensuring right, equal and timely distribution of gas and other necessary items, so that no problem occurs during winter season," demanded Abdul Gani, an elderly resident of the village.

Leopard presence causes panic in Rangreth

❖ **Sarvat Nabi**

Srinagar: The presence of a leopard has caused panic among the inhabitants of Rangreth, who say a leopard was spotted in residential colony of Rangreth a few days ago.

The locals say that the fear of leopard's presence has engulfed the whole locality, who prefer to sit inside their homes.

"On Sunday evening, my neighbor informed me a presence of leopard outside my house, I rushed out and had a narrow escape as I spotted a fully grown leopard roaming outside my compound. Since then I have kept myself along with my family indoors," says Zubair Rashid, a resident of Hill View Colony, Rangreth.

The mounting fear is forcing people to migrate safer areas as they feel unsafe in such "frightening situation."

"Presence of leopard poses risk to my family as yesterday we saw blood on the streets and since then we have not stepped out of our homes. The pugmarks are also visible near our house," said Jahangir Quyoom, a local resident of Rangreth.

With the leopard still at large people have stopped moving out in morning and evenings, and it has caused more panic among the inhabitants.

Blaming the Wildlife department for the mess, people want the matter to be resolved as early as possible.

Wildlife Warden Dachigam, Abdur Rouf Zargar said measures have been taken to capture the leopard.

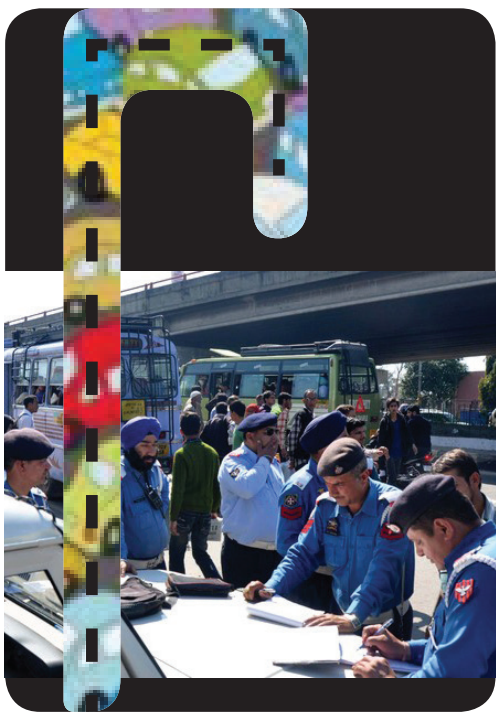
"Two days ago, we had received information about spotting of a leopard that might have come from Pir Panjal range. It is difficult to capture the leopard in residential areas. Nevertheless, our team is camping in the area and tracking the pug marks. They will set up cages at vulnerable spots to capture the leopard. We are making all efforts to trace movement of the leopard for tranquilizing it.

According to the locals, Leopard presence was also reported in Kralapora and Humhama areas.

Traffic police launches drive against voilaters

❖ **Muneer Ahmed Dar**

Srinagar: Over the last few years, there has been a tremendous increase of transport in Kashmir Valley. Consequently, the frequency of traffic movement and pressure at vital intersections has inflated to an extent that every passing day, the mobility to the city centre is affected badly. In this context, traffic police of the state recently launched a drive against the traffic violators who drive without proper documentation.



"We had directions from the higher authorities to seize vehicles without proper documents, and two wheelers without helmet", said traffic cop Manzoor Parray stationed at police beat TRC.

Over the last year, there have been frequent accidents in Kashmir Valley and the only reason people cite is violation of traffic rules. Adding to this, Abdul Raheem Rather, a doctor living abroad said, "One who violates traffic rules in a country where I live, the challan reaches the violator's home because of the sophisticated CCTV camera's at different traffic junctions. But here in Kashmir everything runs vice versa. "

Traffic violators are booked and rebooked but with its management system, the locals are pointing fingers towards Regional Transport Office (RTO).

"It is the fault of government and RTO which issues license to people who don't know the basics of driving and most of the times to the students who are below 18.", said Peer Nazir, a commuter.

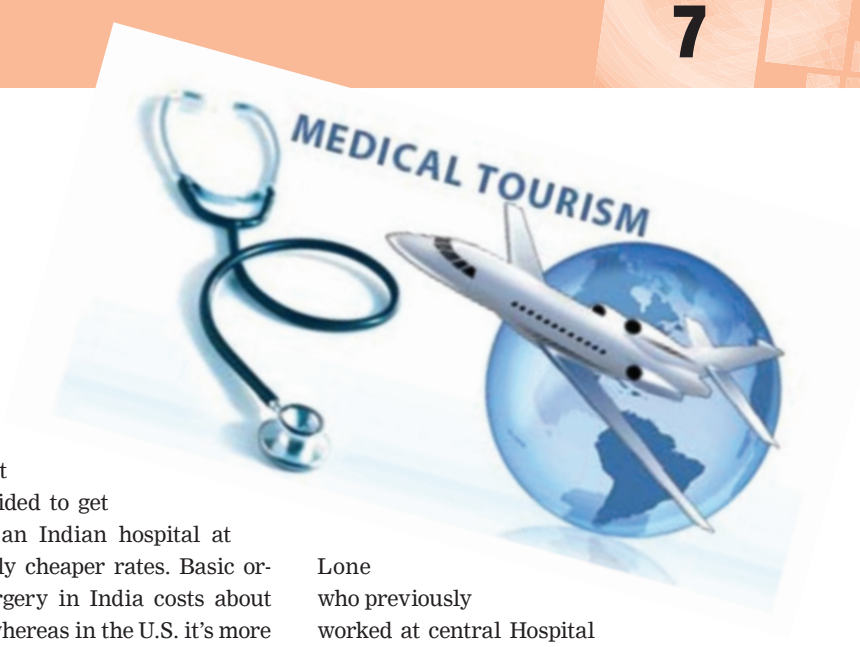
Defending the management of his department, Jamsheed Ahmed, a trail conductor at RTO said, "We are not issuing any license without undergoing trial. The ones who fail the test then drive vehicles without getting proper licensing documents. People should know what would happen if they drive without license. But this is happening and people are responsible for this mess."

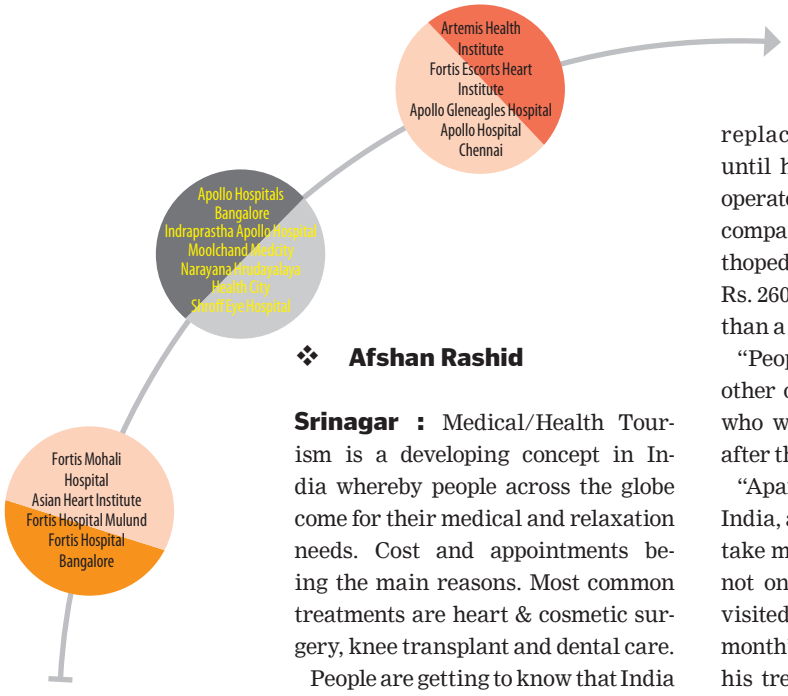
According to the traffic police department nearly 4000 two wheelers, 3500 sumo's and 700 passenger vehicles have been challaned. Most of the challaned vehicles have been seized by the department.

"Some civic sense is to be needed in order to decrease the traffic mess because it is the responsibility of each and every citizen. We have launched a drive against the traffic defaulters particularly the two wheelers riding without helmet because it is for their safety." Said SSP Traffic Police Masood Ul Zamaan.

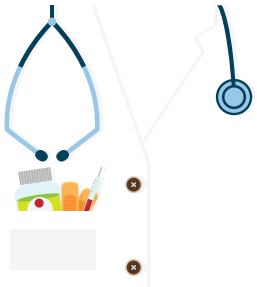
"Parents need to take into considerations certain things before giving bikes or cars to their children," he added.

India, an emerging medical tourism destination





India: 13 JCI accredited hospitals are listed



❖ **Afshan Rashid**

Srinagar : Medical/Health Tourism is a developing concept in India whereby people across the globe come for their medical and relaxation needs. Cost and appointments being the main reasons. Most common treatments are heart & cosmetic surgery, knee transplant and dental care.

People are getting to know that India offers world class medical treatment and facilities at extremely low rates as compared to developed countries. Earlier most people, who came to India seeking medical treatment, came from neighboring countries, today patients from across the globe prefer it.

As per a Wall Street Journal report, Terry Salo, Canadian, faced an unbearably painful and long wait for hip replacement until he decided to get operated at an Indian hospital at comparatively cheaper rates. Basic orthopedic surgery in India costs about Rs. 260000, whereas in the U.S. it's more than a Lakh.

"People need to know that there are other options out there," says Salo, 54, who was swinging golf clubs a month after the operation.

"Apart from the affordable rates, in India, appointment with doctors doesn't take much time" Henry David, London, not only got himself treated, but also visited a few places like Goa in his 2 month's visit. When David tried to get his treatment done in London, he was asked to wait six months under the National Health Service (NHS) said.

"Even in the U.S., the waiting period would have been 9 -12 months. Treatment under the U.K. Government's NHS is highly subsidized, but the waiting period is between 6 months to a year. Private health care is very expensive in these countries and there, too, appointments take time," explains Dr. Rashid Lone who previously worked at central Hospital Buraida Saudia.

Max Healthcare, a provider of standardized and integrated world class health care services, has foreign patients coming through corporate tie-ups with embassies and multinational corporations.

Some Indian hospitals have information centers in neighboring countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh. Appointments can be fixed from across the world through their website. All these hospitals take considerable effort to make sure that their foreign patients enjoy a trouble-free stay. Some of them also have special cells to take care of international patients and they provide all kinds of services from pick and drop from and to the airport to arranging accommodation for the attendants.

Technology taking over book reading culture in Kashmir

❖ **Junaid Rafiq**

Srinagar: For centuries books were the most reliable source of information all over the world but that has changed with the advent of internet, as it is easier to find information online than to look through several books. With a single click on the computer one can access material from any part of the world.

But on the flipside, it has also given rise to concerns over its impact on book reading habits. The advent of digital age has resulted in an immense collection of written work being converted in the digital form. Some people fear the computers and digital books will eventually wipe book shelves clear.

However, many people still believe that books cannot be rendered obsolete. "Although internet and e-books have become popular, it is unlikely that it will wipe out book reading culture. Radio survived despite TV, people still talk on telephone despite email. Similarly, people who like paper books will continue to read them," said Jeelani, a post graduate student.

With so much of information, hyperlinked text, videos alongside words available on the internet serious reading is also taking a hit from online scanning and skimming. A lot of people who read on internet just scan through the lines looking for some exciting words and images, and then grows restless, scampering off to the next page.

Reading from books provides an in-depth knowledge of the subject that sitting in front of a computer monitor cannot provide. One can download text from an Internet source, but the aesthetic quality of sheets of downloaded text leave much to be desired. Also a well-designed book enhances the reading experience. The Internet is very much like television in that it takes time away from other pursuits, provides entertainment and information, but in no way can compare with the warm, personal experience of reading a good book.

For centuries books were the most reliable source of information all over the world but that has changed with the advent of internet,

Unhygienic Lal Ded Hospital giving hard time to patients

❖ **Sibtain Hyder**

Srinagar: Valley's only government maternity hospital is adding to the miseries of patients due to its unhygienic conditions.

Scores of patients who talked to MERC Times said that there is need for quick intervention of higher authorities to change the situation and prevent them from acquiring hospital borne infections.

"The unhygienic conditions are harmful for mothers as well as the babies who are prone to infections" said Riyaz Ahmed, an attendant.

The Post Operative Wards and toilets at the hospital are clogged with filth causing immense inconvenience to the patients and their attendants.

Ghulam Mohammad from Budgam, who was accompanying her daughter for treatment, said that the poor sanitation at the hospital was exacerbated by filthy toilets.

"Situation is worse in the flush toilets which remain always blocked due to lack of water. It is terrible to be here. One can contract dangerous diseases on visiting here for the treatment," he said and added, each time he visits the toilet he vomits because of the heavy stench emanating from human feces.

Mehmooda, attending her daughter who has given birth to a baby girl, is worried that her daughter may acquire infection due to poor hygiene at the hospital. "Service delivery at the hospital is poor. It takes hours for a patient to be attended by doctors. It is indeed heart breaking that cries of patients have for long gone unanswered," she said.

Medical Superintendent of the Hospital Dr Mushtaq said that the rush of attendants causes the problem.

"If people cooperate with the authorities, everything will be all right," he said.

City hospitals in mess

Lack of ambulances, rats among other complaints.

❖ **Sumaiya Yousuf**

Srinagar: The non-avaliability of basic facilities in city ospitals giving tough time to visitor's. At SKIMS Soura and SMHS Hospital, attendants complain about non-availability of ambulances to ferry patients and in some cases even dead bodies. "Hospital authorities refused to provide us the ambulance to ferry the body of my aunt even after pleading before the Causality Medical Officer and Medical Superintendent," Shehreyar Ahmad from Avantipora told MERC Times.

He said his aunt died this afternoon in SMHS hospital and the family members had to wait with the body for more than three hours amid biting cold till one of his relatives reached there with a vehicle.

"I approached the hospital authorities for providing me the ambulance to ferry her body back home, but they refused to provide us the service saying that the ambulance can't be send to such a long distance," Ahmad said.

In SKIMS Soura attendants staged protest in the afternoon against the non-availability of doctors and paramedical staff at SKIMS.The protest erupted after a patient from Budgam died in the hospital. A doctor wishing anonymity said the shortage of paramedical staff and doctors had delayed discharge of around 30 patients from valley's lone maternity specialty—Lal Ded.

Dilshada from Kupwara who was leading the women protest alleged that her husband was supposed to be discharged today."I have been searching for the concerned doctor but couldn't find him. Even I asked at reception about him, I have also been searching ward to ward but he is nowhere," she said.

"The wards in the hospital received inadequate water supply causing problems to the patients. The unhygienic condition in bathrooms and wards is outing the patients at the risk of contracting infection," one of the attendants Farhaan Nazir said.

The attendants, who accompanied patients to LD hospital, alleged that no doctor visited the wards during evening hours.

"After 12 noon, all doctors disappear from the wards. In case any complication occurs or patients need consultation, we have to carry them to the casualty section," alleged Sayeda begum of Bandipora, whose daughter is undergoing treatment in the hospital.

Attendants in most of the hospitals expressed satisfaction over the heating system and electricity supply. However, in SMHS Hospital the heating system remained shut for most part of the day.

Medical Superintendents of SMHS, Dr Nazir Ahmad Choudhary when asked about the issue said,"The hospital has limited funds to run the heating system.

"That is why we don't run the heating system for 24 hours," Dr Choudhary said.

"There was disruption in the main electricity supply line for few hours. However, we have backup system in place that was running non-stop till the main supply was restored in the afternoon," Medical Superintendent L D hospital, Dr Mushtaq said.

Medical Superintendent of GB Pant hospital, Dr Shafkat Khan said last years flood had caused massive damage to hospital but he is trying his best to revive everthing to normal.

Head, Department of Hospital Administration, SKIMS, Dr Farooq Jan said: "Hospital functioned normally. Though we have put all our ambulances and other vehicles in action, we couldn't provide ambulance service to all."

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