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SKIMS lacks facilities for cancer patients



❖ Madhiya Nabi

SRINAGAR: With the exponential rise of cancer patients in Jammu and Kashmir, Sheri-Kashmir Institute of Medical Science (SKIMS), the biggest institute of Kashmir, has failed to serve cancer patients with various cancer treatment facilities like completion of CT-PET scan laboratory, medicines required for bone scan test etc.

The patients have to go outside the valley for various examinations which is not done in any part of valley like PET scan - basic equipment for detection of malignancies, mammography facilities for detection of breast cancer and cyclotron particle accelerator proton therapy equipment for cancer treatment.

As per state Advisory committee of comptroller and Auditor General CAG reports of 2016, funds worth crores were provided by both State and Central Government for creating various facilities particularly cancer treatment facilities but all in fiasco. Linear Accelerator which according to technical experts, would have cost Rs 10 crores was procured for Rs 15-18 crores. After installation, found I substandard and it is reportedly dysfunctional for a few years now. We have been hearing about PET scan being installed at SKIMS. No such such facility still exists there as of September, 2017. When contacted to the concerned official of the laboratory, he said that it is under process.

"I am suffering from lung cancer and have undergone six cycles of chemotherapy. Now, doctor has recommended me to go for bone scan examination and PET scan. For PET scan, I have to move outside the valley which is not possible in current situation as my kids are too young to accompany me there. Though bone scan is available here, but because of lack of required medicines, I have to consult a private clinic which is quite expensive", said Irfan Ahmed, a patient at SKIMS.

"As per Indian Council of Medicine, there are more than 7000 cases of cancer reported per year in J&K. It is dead impossible to offer a treatment to cancer patients in absence of basic facilities. There is a desperate need for radiotherapy plants and other equipments as soon as possible and administration is doing it's part to mend the problems. As far as PET scan laboratory is concerned, it is at its last stage of completion and in sha allah all the grievances of people will be met", said Dr. Faisal, the senior Oncologist at SKIMS.

UNIQUELY DESIGNED CARS FOR SPECIALLY-ABLED STUDENTS AT KU



❖ Faisal Sidiq

SRINAGAR: As a significant measure under its CSR Programme, J&K Bank presented two eleven-seated electric cars to Kashmir University for use of differently-abled students.

Chairman and CEO J&K Bank, Parvez Ahmad handed over the keys of specially designed eco-friendly cars to Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi, Vice Chancellor Kashmir University, amid a huge round of applause and in presence of senior officials of the bank and university.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairman Parvez Ahmad said, "It gives me immense pleasure to present these vehicles as a humble contribution to ease the plying of differently-abled students within the university campus. We represent two great institutions of the state which have huge responsibility towards stakeholders. For this we need to join hands and pool our resources to bring in positive changes in the society which need broader understanding and deeper insights into the challenges we face."

"Since we are placed in a situation that is both peculiar and fragile, we require innovative solutions to meet the problems we face. Besides, we need to explore the ways and means to utilize under-services potential sectors of our economy. Unemployment is one such challenge for both of us as the state has very limited scope for employment opportunities", he added.

Chairman also highlighted important role played by

both the institutions in transforming the lives of people of J&K state. J&K Bank is a bank which acts as a catalyst in socio economic transformation of the state with special focus on empowerment of which education is the most important part. With the provision of these special vehicles, around 66 differently-abled students will be benefited who are currently enrolled in the university's main campus.

Chairman agreed that the bank would provide two more such cars for differently able besides a state-of-the-art ambulance for emergency health care of staff and students on the campus.

Furthermore, he urged the university authorities to establish an Incubation Center for experimenting innovations which can be clubbed with Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI) for upgrading the skill profile of students.

Extending his heartfelt gratitude for the Chairman on the occasion, Vice Chancellor Kashmir University Dr. Khurshid Iqbal Andrabi said, "I am extremely grateful to him for this kind gesture. The provision of these special vehicles shall further ease the movement of differently-abled students in the campus."

Pertinently, this is for the first time that such vehicles for these students have been provided to any educational institute of the state. Notably, the bank shall be entering into an institutional tie-up through a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the university to realize the aforesaid objectives.

Man Held For Robbing Tourists

Shiekh Sajidah

SRINAGAR: Police arrested a thief with stolen cash and property within eight hours after he robbed foreign tourists in Srinagar, a police spokesperson said.

In a statement the spokesperson said Bangladeshi tourists complained to the police that unknown persons broke into their hotel room Buchwara, Dalgate area of the city and robbed them.

During the investigation the spokesperson said several suspects were rounded up using human and technical intelligence.

"one of them a resident of Baramulla, identified as Fayaz Ahmad confessed (to his) involvement in the theft, he said."

Police recovered stolen cash of Rs. 8,800 and 280 Bangladeshi Takka in his disclosure, the spokesperson said. A camera and a mobile phone were also recovered from his possession.

Police said the investigation was led by its special team headed by sub-inspector Sameer Ahmad and the FIR number 85/2017, in this regard stood registered in police station Nehru Park. "Further investigation into this matter is going on."

Timber reaches Kupwara, constructional work resumes



❖ Pirzada Shakir

KUPWARA: The construction of residential houses and government buildings has resumed in North Kashmir's Kupwaradistrict after timber has been made available at the local depots by Forest department Kashmir.

The winter season is round the corner and local residents have paced up construction work to complete it before onset of the season.

In border townTanghdar, the construction work is going on at a full swing as timber has been made available at the depots by Kehmil forest division.

"The construction work was suspended in June due to non-availability of timber at local forest depot. Thankfully with the availability of timber at depot, I resumed the work last week and am hopeful to shift to

my new house next month," said Mohammad Yusuf Sheikh, from Ticker near Kupwara headquarters.

According to official data Kehmil forest division alone has dumped nearly 29000 cubic feet of timber at various depots including border town Tanghdar.

"We are trying hard to cover the target of 55000 cubic feet of timber across the Kehmil division. Since there is a huge requirement of timber, efforts are on to disburse allotted quota of timber at depots," said RiyazGul, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Kehmil.

The construction work of government buildings including schools has also resumed. "We are hopeful that the rooftops of various schools in Kupwara would be completed in next few weeks. The timber is available at local depot and the department is planning to resume work in a week," said an official of education department posted in district Kupwara.

FC Biscoe XI, Saffalo FC and JK Bank XI emerge victorious

❖ Mudasir Majeed

SRINAGAR: Three matches of the ongoing State Football League event were played at Polo Ground and Synthetic Turf TRC venues; here on Wednesday, in which FC Biscoe XI, Saffalo FC and JK Bank XI emerged as winners.

In the first A-Division match, played at Polo Ground, FC Biscoe XI defeated Royal Sports. Hanan and Shariq were the scorers for the winning team while Farooq Ahmad scored the lone goal for the losing team.

In Super-Division match played at Synthetic Turf TRC, Saffalo FC beat Lonestar KFC Blue by 2-1. Both the teams played aggressively throughout the match, but it was Saffalo XI which could sustain the pressure till the end and emerge victorious. Farman and Altaf were the scorers for the winning team while Momin was the scorer for the losing team.

In Premier-Division match also played at Synthetic Turf TRC, JK Bank XI defeated Maharaja Sports by three goals to nil. From the start of the play till the end, the Bank players maintained pressure on opposite goal post and they gave no chance to the Mahraja players to score. Danish, Preem and Toufeeq scored one goal each for the winning team. Danish was declared as footballer of the match for his performance.

Meanwhile, the State Football League, a mega event first of its kind in the history of J&K football, is going on at different venues of the state with full swing drawing huge crowds to the football venues. More than 500 football teams and clubs with over 12000 players and over 1500 team officials are participating in the mega event, the aim of which is to unearth the hidden talent across the State.

The event is being held across the 22 districts of the state these days and is being organized by the Jammu and Kashmir Football Association (JKFA) under the auspices of State Sports Council and on the directions of All India Football Federation (AIFF).

Timber Smuggling continues in Sopore

Firdous azad

SOPORE: Timber smugglers in sopore area of north Kashmir's Baramulla district are having a free hand as they chopped down hundreds of trees in Zaloora and Bombai forest ranges during past few months. Although the total number of trees cut down mercilessly by the smugglers could not be quantified but the devastating scenes of forest nearly suffice the scale of loot. Locals living near compartment numbers 29, 40 and 41 that fall under zaloora and Bombai accused forest officials of being hand-in-glove with the timber smugglers.

According to locals the smugglers cut down green trees in the broad day light and sell it to local and people of other parts of district.

"No one was able to stop them. Forest officials let everything to happen. There is a nexus between forest officials and timber smugglers," a local said, adding that the officials are using the tried and tested formula wherein they would deliberately set the forest on fire and then use forest fire as an excuse to cut trees.

"The smugglers are backed by some politicians and top police officials to loot the green gold without any hesitation."

Said Mushtaq Ahmad another Local.

The smugglers are cutting green trees on daily basis for firewood and new constructions, which possess a threat to



environment.

Locals alleged that the concerned authorities are turning blind eye towards the matter. The irony is that even not a

single man of forest protection force acts to check the timber smuggling in the area.

The inaction of chief conservator of forest and concerned Ranger has rubbed salt on the wounds. The chopping of trees on daily basis is turning dense forests into an open field.

"We have brought the complaint several times in the notice of chief conservator of forest and Ranger, but they both didn't take any action. Even they didn't bother to respond phone calls," a group of locals said.

The sanction of timber at depots also inconvenienced the local residents. The sanction of timber is only allotted to high profile people, resulted in suffering of common people.

DFO Muhammad Ayoub Said that I have already constitute a team for the visit of zaloora forests who so ever is involved will be dealt under Law and Strict action will be taken against culprits.

Minister of forests and Environment, Lal Singh told MERC TIMES that nobody would be allowed to cut the green trees. "Anyone involved will face music," he said.

Water shortage hits Noorbagh residents

❖ Sabrina Mushtaq

SRINAGAR : The residents of Baghwanpora Noorbagh in Srinagar district are up in arms against the Public Health Engineering (PHE) department on shortage of drinking water in the area.

The residents said they have to suffer lot to obtain potable water.

A water supply scheme meant for the area is unable to cater to the needs, as area is located at tail end of the supply, they said.

“The supply of the water is such that even a glass takes several hours to get filled” said Ghulam Rasool, a local resident.

Another resident alleged that the area had expanded



over a vast land and was facing water shortage from past several areas. “It is very unfortunate that in the present age of technology where the people now think of higher standards, we are being deprived of the basic amenities of life” Shakeela Begam, another resident said.

Another water supply scheme, the residents said has been recently established on River Jhelum ironically for a particular area namely Qamarwari”.

They claimed that if it was upgraded in an appropriate manner then the problem could have been curtailed to some extent.

Locals appeal the local legislator to intervene into the matter so that our genuine grievance is redressed. However, local legislator could not be contacted after repeated calls for comment.

Lal chowk to develop on Connaught place lines



❖ Rashid Manzoor

SRINAGAR: Taking inspiration from Connaught place of Delhi, authorities in Srinagar are planning to convert Lal Chowk and Polo View area into No-vehicle zone on Sundays. This zone will extend from Hari Singh high street to Regal Chowk. Some of the nodal agencies to implement this plan are Srinagar Development Authority (SDA), Traffic Police and Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC).

Due to heavy congestion and lack of full-fledged pathways in the city centre, something extra ordinary to be implemented is inevitable, Lalchowk area being the busiest shopping street finds itself in heavy traffic and pedestrian jams, Sundays being the worst days of the week. This comes as an inconvenience to general public.

A lot has been done in this matter in the recent past, the mechanical parking at Lalchowk is one such example but still much more needs to be done, vendors have been one such obstacle in this regard but their

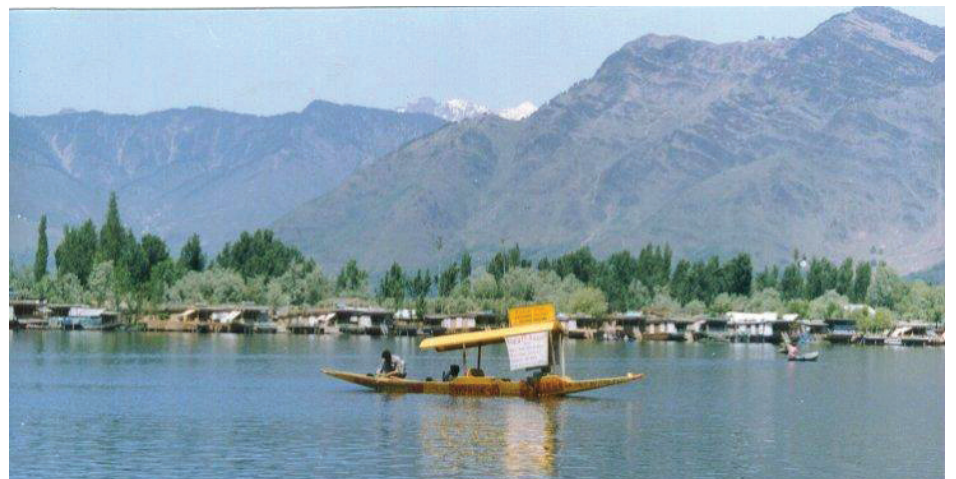
case is very sensitive because it is a matter of livelihood for them, the No-Vehicle zone concept must have a plan for them too, a well planned rehabilitation with their consent is the minimal requirement. Shifting of Batamaloo bus terminal to Parimpora is another such effort for decongestion of the city.

“No traffic will be allowed to move within No-vehicle zone area, Shopkeepers of the area have already been consulted and there has been a positive response from them”, Said Commissioner SMC, Dr Shafiqat Khan at a talk show gathering.

He further said “This will be a new beginning of a new system and it is a government decision, all stake-holders including traffic police are on-board”

This project includes laying down of tiles in the area so that people can enjoy quality street food from many food cafés there. This is a pilot based project, if successful; experimenting on rest of the days will be a next goal for authorities.

Swachhta Hi Sewa Campaign in Dal lake



Shaheen Shafique

SRINAGAR: A deweeding and cleanliness drive was launched in the Dal Lake on Tuesday under Swachhta Hi Sewa campaign announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month.

In a statement, a government spokesperson said Governor Narinder Nath Vohra flagged off the drive at Oberoi Ghat, on the banks of the lake.

Addressing the labourers and volunteers on the occasion, Vohra said the Dal Lake must be preserved and protected at all costs.

Under no circumstances must this enchanting water body be polluted or lose its visual attraction because of the profuse weed growth which has come up in large parts of the lake, the Governor said.

He said the water surface has been rapidly encompassed by Lotus and other growth because of the reduction in the pace of deweeding work, resulting in more than half of the water surface not being visible.

Vohra cautioned if the de-weeding programme is not executed on round-the-clock basis the alluvial process shall lead to a significant portion of the Lake being converted into a land mass as has happened to the Wular Lake.

He said the ongoing work shall have to be

enhanced at least twenty-fold and at least a dozen harvesters and skimmers shall be put into operation on round-the-clock basis, besides very significantly stepping up manual deweeding, for saving the Lake.

The Governor, according to the official spokesperson, observed the sewerage flow into the lake is one of the damaging factors for the alarming weed growth and suggested urgent re-alignment of houseboats along the Kohnakhan water front and connecting houseboats in Nigeen Lake to the sewerage network.

Earlier, Vice Chairman of Lakes and Waterways Development Authority, Dr Abdul Hafiz Shah, gave a presentation about various ongoing works and decisions recently taken to speed up the process for countering the adverse impact of sewage and solid waste materials flowing into the lake, alongside the efforts underway to remove the weed infestation.

Governor Vohra complimented Commissioner Housing and all concerned officers present on the occasion for the “very large scale cleanliness drive” and requested the authorities to keep him informed about the results achieved.

This drive has been launched jointly by the Lakes and Waterways Development Authority and Srinagar Municipal Corporation.

WARWAN: A PLACE NEGLECTED

❖ Shahbaz Qutub

SRINAGAR: A place far from crowd and chaos full of beauty and charm. Everything seems untouched, a beautiful place hidden from rest of Kashmir. Green mountains, clear blue sky and sound of gushing water are divine. The Valley of Warwan, falling in Kishtwar district, is situated in the upper reaches of Himalayas at an altitude of around 7000 feet above sea level. It is bound by Kashmir Valley on one side and Ladakh on the other and remains completely cut off from the rest of the world for around 7 months in a year.

Just three hours drive from the renowned tourist place of Kokernag in South Kashmir's Islamabad (Anantnag) district takes one to a place where hope is the only key for survival. A 50 kilometer bumpy drive is adventurous for a tourist but for the local residents the distance has kept them away from even the basic amenities of life.

A dog guiding a herd of sheep can be seen in the canyon below the Marwan Valley, and often nomads on horseback greet visitors.

The hustle bustle ends at Shatru, a small village of Islamabad (Anantnag) district, from where an uneven road amid eye-catching natural beauty is the only driving force which keeps one moving. Amid the rough terrain one reaches Margan top – also known as the gateway of Warwan Valley.

An overwhelming quiet welcomes you amid the sound of water flowing down the Warwan River - one of the key tributaries of river Chenab.

A place which could have been a tourist paradise, has no electricity, no hospitals and only a few schools in the scattered habitation. The lush green mountains with dense forest have been a 'curse' for the local residents.

We see very few people visiting this place and most of them are tourists. People are not aware of this place due to bad connectivity and knowledge about this place; Abdul Shahi said.

However, in eighties this Valley was said to be a hub of adventure tourism, especially for the foreign visitors. The old and historical trekking routes especially from Inshan to Zanskar were well known among the foreign tourists.

The Valley had no source of any communication till 4 years back. The police and army wireless communication system was the only way to communicate even for the government officials. The government has, however, now provided satellite phones in some of the habitations.

The people here believe that the non-connectivity with the rest of the world has severely affected them. "Most of our elders here are illiterate and those of our age group have hardly gone to schools", Nusrat Ali, a man in mid 40s claimed. He said that a few schools have been opened in the Valley but the government has hardly done anything to strengthen the standard of education.

"We have ReTs running these schools but honestly they are even not able to read properly", another local resident claimed.

Though most of the villagers have nothing to cherish about, they say it is hope which keeps them alive. "Come winter and you will see how people survive with more than 8 feet snow outside," Rahim Chacha, as he is known in the village at Afti said.

"For at least four months our movement gets restricted to our homes only", he said adding, "We eat what we produce in our fields during summer and store it for winters."

Teenager Kashmiri dreams to become International Cricketer

❖ Pardeep Singh

SRINAGAR: He is new cricketing sensation at Under 15 level in Kashmir and wants to play for the Team India in future.

Hailing from Kawoosa village of Budgam, Javid Ahmad (Jadu), a bowling all-rounder is very eager to play for the Team India.

"I want to play for Indian cricket team," Javid told The MERC Times adding "People of my village call me by the nick name Ravindra Jadeja (Jadu)"

"I am making every effort to fulfill this dream," he said.

Javid said his coaches have been supportive enough to help him to play in different tournaments.

An 11th class student at Boys Higher Secondary School Magam, Javid started playing cricket at a very young age. "So far I have played three nationals in less than 14 category, three nationals under 16 and under 16 north zone through BCCI in Bangalore," he said.

"I have also played with the players of Ranji trophy that include Manzoor Pandu, Raby Ishfaq, Umar Banday and that has been a great experience," he said adding "Last year we played under 16 with Punjab team where I scored 128 runs in 308 balls"

"The highest wickets that I have taken so far were six wickets during a match with the Himachal Pradesh team under 16," he said.

When asked about his family support, he said



that his family doesn't want me to play cricket as they think it will take me to nowhere.

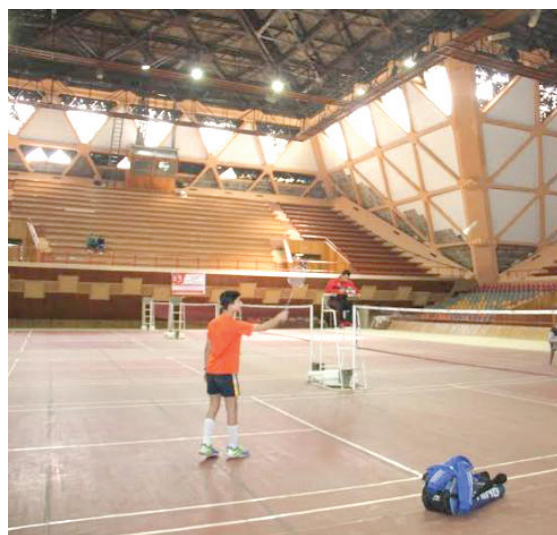
"My father says that nothing is going to come out from this cricket and you are only wasting your time. Instead he asks me to only focus on my studies," Javid said.

He says that lack of facilities in his village was hampering him to fulfill his dreams.

"There is no playground in my village where I can practice with others. I have to travel to JKCA Stadium in Sonwar on daily basis which is hectic," he said.

From next year Javid says that he will be playing under 19 for Jammu & Kashmir Cricket Association.

INTER-COLLEGE BADMINTON CHAMPIONSHIP BEGINS



Farheen Qureshi

SRINAGAR: The Inter-college women's Badminton championship began at women's college Nawakadal. The championship is being organized by the Directorate of Physical Education and Sports, University of Kashmir. It is scheduled for a period of 12 days and will conclude on 7th of October.

On the very first day, two matches were played at Nawakadal's newly reconstructed Badminton Hall. The two matches were played between Kashmir University and Degree College Bijbehara. Kashmir university students turned out victorious in both matches.

"The victory of two female players from Kashmir University on the inaugural day was a moment of pride for the sports fraternity of Physical Education Department, KU," an official from KU physical education department said.

Talking to MERC Times, Hakeem Rameez, who is officiating the tournament at Nawakadal and is also the member of the Badminton association of Baramulla said,

"This year we have received a huge response from players especially girls from all over the districts of our state. The players are full of enthusiasm and talent. Giving proper practice and guidance to them can bring laurels to the state."

"It feels great to represent Kashmir University on a higher level while fulfilling my own passion for it. I have won many championships before and I would love to win it again this time." Safia, one of the players said.

Doctors Association Kashmir urges use of Human Papilloma-Virus (HPV)

❖ Ather Shah

SRINAGAR: Doctors Association Kashmir (DAK) today urged parents to get their children vaccinated against Human Papilloma-Virus (HPV) that would prevent several types of cancers.

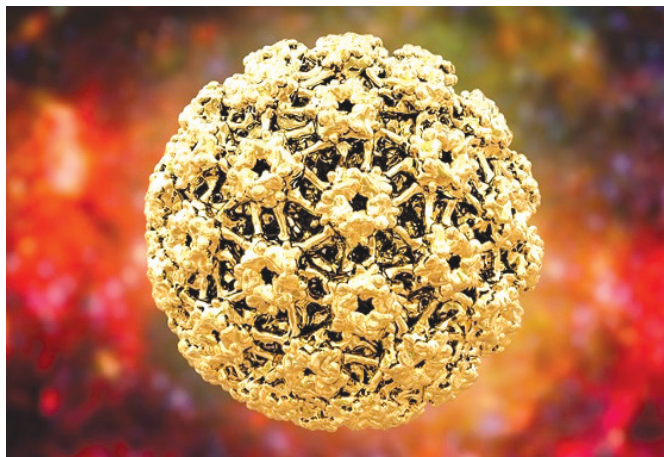
With cancer cases on rise in Jammu and Kashmir, President DAK Dr Nisarul Hassan in a statement said “we have an amazing opportunity to prevent certain types of cancers in future generations through HPV vaccination.”

HPV infection is known to cause almost all cases of cervical cancer and is also related to several other anogenital cancers.

About 70 to 80 percent of Oropharyngeal cancers, which mostly occur in men, are linked to HPV infection.

In a study published in “JAMA Oncology”, it was found that people who were detected to have oral HPV had a sevenfold increase in the risk of subsequent head and neck cancers.

Use of HPV vaccine would prevent a lot of these



cancers and save lives.

In Australia, where the vaccine is mandatory there is a huge drop in cancer cases.

CDC recommends that both boys and girls should get two doses of vaccine, at least six months apart, when they are 11 or 12 years of age.

For adults who have not been vaccinated, they can still be given the vaccine up until age 26.

You need to get the vaccine, before you are exposed to the virus.

WHO recommends that routine HPV vaccination should be included in national immunization program

Despite recommendations, HPV vaccine is not offered to children putting them at risk of preventable cancers.

There is an urgent necessity to educate people and make healthcare providers aware about the importance of vaccine.

Around 630 million people worldwide are infected with HPV and approximately 6 million people being infected each year.

Of the 12.7 million new cancer cases in 2008 worldwide, 610,000 were attributed to HPV infection.

HPV infection is known to cause almost all cases of cervical cancer and is also related to several other anogenital cancers.

Govt to restore Brari Nambal Lagoon



❖ Syed Burhan

SRINAGAR: The Government is keen to restore Brari Nambal Lagoon, which is a vital water body in Shahr e Khaas. The condition of Lagoon has deteriorated since last many years. The authorities have finally given a nod to the officials of Lakes and Waterways Development Authority to come up with a draft to clean the Lagoon. The lagoon once a source of fresh water has become a hub of dirt and dust. The residents of Baba Demb and its adjacent areas have long complained about the pungent smell and pollution which arouses from this water body but till now it has fallen to deaf ears.

“We can’t keep the windows of our

homes open as all pungent smell comes inside our homes. Nobody is ready to marry our daughters and sisters because of this menace”, said Mutahar, a resident of Khanyar.

Vice Chairman Lakes and Waterways Development Authority Abdul Hafiz Shah said, “We have listened to the concerns of the people and we are keen to restore Shahr e Khaas to its natural beauty”.

He further added that he has directed the officials and engineers of LAWDA to ensure the timely completion of the project so that they could achieve the targets in a time bound manner. He also stated that he has stressed the concerned to clean the embankments of the lagoon on daily basis.

Jashn-e-Dal and Shikara Race organised by Police concludes

Farooz Ahmad

SRINAGAR: Three day long water sports festival Jashn-E-Dal and Shikara Race – 2017 organized by J&K Police concluded on Wednesday Dal Lake, Srinagar.

Education Minister Altaf Bukhari was the chief guest who distributed the prizes among the winners of different competitions.

while speaking on the occasion, Bukhari complemented J&K Police for organizing the competition and said that such competitions showcase Kashmir and Kashmiriyat to the outside world.

He said “such type of programmes cultivate positive vibes and energy in the youth”.

He further added that the government will continue to provide more and more opportunities by the way of organizing sports events to the youth.

ADGP Armed L. Mohanti in his welcome address said that about 900 players participated in different competitions in three day water sports festival which was inaugurated on Monday.

He also said that under Civic Action Programme (CAP) J&K Police has been organizing number of activities which includes sports tournaments, distribution of computers, books, stationery etc.

He added that this is the second major event on a large scale after the successful organization of “Run for Peace”.

Inspector General of Police Armed and Chairman of the Organizing Committee Syed Aftab ul Mujtaba presented the vote of thanks.

He thanked the Chief Guest and different departments that provided assistance in organizing such a mega event.

Later the Chief Guest distributed prizes and trophies among the winners of different categories.

MUHARRAM, THE MONTH TO REMINISCENT THE MARTYRS OF KARBALA



❖ **Aneesa Ashraf**

SRINAGAR: Muharram (Arabic:) is the first month of the Islamic calendar. It is one of the four sacred months of the year. It is considered as the second holiest month, following Ramadan. The word “Muharram” means “forbidden”. Since the Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar, Muharram moves from year to year when compared with the Gregorian calendar.

The tenth day of Muharram is the Day of Ashura, which to Shia Muslims is part of the Mourning. Even Sunni Muslims fast during this day, because it is recorded in the hadith that Musa and his people obtained a victory over the Egyptian Pharaoh on the 10th day of Muharram, Muhammad (pbuh) asked Muslims to fast on 9th and 10th of Muharram.

Abdul qayoom, a local resident of Mirgund, Budgam said “Muharram is the month of mourning and remembering the martyrs of Karbala. They gave their lives for sake of Allah and Islam. We should follow their path of truth and courage”.

Shia Muslims observe and respect

Muharram as the month in which Imam Hussein (a.s), the grandson of Muhammad (pduh) and son of Ali (a.s), was martyred in the Battlefield of Karbala. They mourn and refrain from all joyous events. In addition there is an important booklet called ‘Ziyarat Ashura’. In the Shia sect it is popular to read this ziyarat on the “Day of Ashura, although most of the Shias try to read Ziyarat Ashura every day and they send salutations to Hussein ibn Ali.

Muharram is a month of remembrance and modern Shia meditation that is often considered synonymous with Ashura. Ashura, which literally means the “Tenth” in Arabic, refers to the tenth day of Muharram. It is well-known because of historical significance and mourning for the murder of Hussein ibn Ali, the grandson of Muhammad.

on speaking to MERC times Prof Shaad Ramzan, a prominent poet said, “Karbala is the lesson of patience, truth, honesty and bravery. Hussain (as) is a role model for every individual who should be followed by all”.

Tourism department to maintain ecology of tourist destinations



❖ **Musaib Hafiz**

SRINAGAR: In order to keep tourist destinations clean and pollution free, tourism department of Kashmir is mulling to procure high-end machinery to dispose of non-bio degradable garbage.

Director Tourism Kashmir, Mahmood Ahmad Shah (KAS) said, “Within few months we are introducing new machinery to overcome huge problems in dumping garbage which is a matter of concern for us to maintain ecology.

“Biodigester and disintegrating garbage machinery will help us for disposing of garbage especially in major tourist spots like Gulamarg Pahalgam, Sonamarg,” he said

Tourist places are going in extreme bad shape with the garbage like polythene and

plastic water bottles. It is the real challenge for us to make places pollution free and maintain ecology.”

Speaking on the World Environment Day Shah said “The sanitation and resources are very strict, the bearing capacity of dumping garbage at Gulamarg is only 3500 and in Pahalgam its 4500, now it’s beyond the bearing capacity.”

Shah said we can’t control these visitors to litter, besides, it needs moral education, and it’s up to them to keep places neat and clean wherever they go.

“Don’t blame the government always. It’s also the responsibility of every person to make environment eco-friendly.” He said

“We have another concern of deforestation in Kashmir; forest cover is going worse day by day”, he added.

Scientific Training for cultivation of mushroom held at Khudwani Kulgam

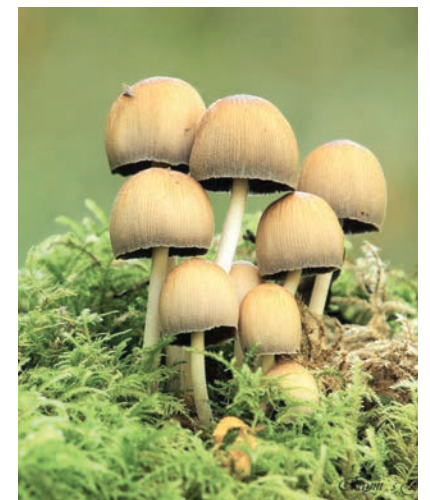
❖ **Hikmatyar**

SRINAGAR: Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) in collaboration with ‘We Care Society’ (NGO) organized a training programme on ‘Scientific Mushroom Cultivation’ at its Khudwani campus in Kulgam.

The programme was organized under the guidance of Associate Director Extension (ADE) with SKUAST. Farmers from the different locality of Khudwani village in Kulgam participated in this program and were given detailed view on scientific mushroom cultivation.

Vice chancellor of the university (SKUAST) said that mushroom cultivation is gaining momentum in the whole district of Kulgam, while as more farmers are coming forward for reaping its benefits of nutritional security and subsidiary income through this venture.

Manzoor Naik Director, Rural Self-Employment Training Institute (RSETI), Kulgam, shared some light over various employment schemes for the



unemployed youths in the district.

B.L Kotwal, Financial Counselor, SBI (State Bank of India) elaborated how Panchayati Raj Scheme and Panchayati Raj Scheme urge farmers to insure their crops as early as possible.

The chief guest for this Programme were Arvinder Kumar and Manhor Lal. Jugal Magotra, Chairman of We Care Society offered the vote of thanks in the end.

Kashmir gets its first architecture school



❖ **AAQIB HYDER**

SRINAGAR: Minister for Education, Syed Mohammad Altaf Bukhari along with other administrative officers inaugurated

the first architecture school in Kashmir at Abdul Ahad Azad Memorial Degree College, Bemina on Friday. On the occasion, the Minister also announced an auditorium for the Degree College and macadamization of

its roads.

According to a statement issued by the government, the Minister interacted with the first batch of 40 students who secured admission in the architecture course. He asked the students to avail all the opportunities available in the institution and to bring laurels for themselves in the field of architecture.

Praising the capabilities of the students, the Minister said, "The students of Jammu and Kashmir are next to none and they have proved their intellectual acumen at various levels on different platforms."

NAYEEM AKHTER INAUGURATED MALPORA-AUDORA BRIDGE



Mohammad Imran

BARAMULLA: Minister for R&B, Floriculture, Gardens & Parks, Nayeem Akhter, on Wednesday inaugurated Audora-Malpura bridge in district Baramulla.

"The Audora-Malpura Bridge, which will serve as a bypass for the traffic through Baramulla town, has been completed at a cost of 3.3 crore," a government spokesperson said. The bridge will ensure shortened journey between Audora and Narwaw areas, he added.

Addressing a public gathering on this occasion, the Minister announced construction of Wahdin bridge to be completed at a cost of Rs 13 lakh. The Minister ensured that the widening of road from Sheeri to Nowgam Kandi will be taken up for execution very soon.

Earlier the Minister, during his day long visit to various areas of Baramulla constituency, addressed public gatherings at Audora, Malpura, Chandoosa and Nowgam.

The Minister, on the demand of people, announced many projects of public importance. He also announced to construct a motorable bridge at Kalantrapayan, a foot bridge near graveyard Banji kandi and a recreation park at Chandoosa kandi Baramulla.

The Minister announced to magdamize the road from Sheeri to Laridora. He also assured the residents of Dangarpora, Naradari and Taripora who are facing problems due to unavailability of Health Care and play ground that all possibilities would be explored to the area.

"We hope the said visit of our MLA and R&B minister jinab Nayeem Akhter in our area after very long time ll be fruitful and they look at our problems and issue's very keenly. This visit give us hope regarding the welfare of the people of Narwaw area and Kandi as well." Residents of Narwaw area said.

On this occasion, MLA Baraumulla Javid Hassan Beigh announced funds of worth 13lakh for dispensary at Halqa Dangarpora.

Netherlands to assist JK to develop hi-tech horticulture infrastructure



YAWAR SHAFI

SRINAGAR : To inspect demonstration projects of High Density Apple orchards established by Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology (SKUAST) Kashmir in collaboration with companies from Netherlands, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Holland), Alphonsus Stoelinga, took a stock of various projects in Kashmir.

The projects have been established under International Business Programme of the Netherlands Government to showcase the advanced technology and high quality virus free Apple and other fruit plant materials offered by the Dutch companies.

The Ambassador was accompanied by Agriculture Counsellor, Wouter Verhey, Deputy Agriculture Counsellor, Anand Krishnan, Liaison PIB Fruits, Amit Parashar and Technical Director, Verbeek Nurseries Holland Arie van den Berg.

Vice Chancellor SKUAST, Prof Nazeer

Ahmed informed the Ambassador that Apple trees from Netherlands which were planted in April 2017 had produced quality fruit during current season.

The Vice Chancellor said that farmers from across the State are visiting the campus for demonstration of orchard plants invariably and are showing keen interest in adapting these orchard techniques in particular Apple plants from Netherlands.

The VC further emphasized to work in close coordination with the Netherland Government to have sustainable assistance in plant trees besides shall collaborate in transferring technology apart from plantation of apples to take benefit of latest technological changes from the world's largest exporter of food products and leader in Horticulture sector.

The Ambassador also visited two cold storage plants, Fruit Master Agro Fresh and H.N. Agri-Serve, using technology imported from Netherlands at Lassipora Pulwama.

Managing Director J&K Horticulture Produce Marketing and Processing

Corporation (JKHPMC), Jawaid Ahmad Shah, briefed the Ambassador about the Horticulture scenario of the State and efforts of the Government in boosting horticulture trade of the State.

The Managing Director briefed about the efforts of the Government to create Post Infrastructural Facilities across the State in the shape of Integrated Apple Grading and Packing facilities along with Cold Storage facilities for overall benefit of the Farming Community of the State to have better returns of their produce.

He sought the special intervention of the Ambassador in collaborating to adopt Netherlands technology for establishment of Cold Storage facilities in the State with their assistance and guidance.

The Ambassador assured all possible help and assistance from Netherland Government and said that the Government of Netherlands looks forward to collaborating with the Government and farmers of J&K in hi-tech Horticulture infrastructure development.

“HUSSAIN
(A.S), INFLICT
OF SALVATION
FOR SHALT
(UMMAH)”.
SHAHID BADGAMI

❖ MAHDEESA ALTAF

BUDGAM: The State-level 47th 1439 (AH) Annual Hussaini Mushaira was held in Budgam town of central Kashmir, at the home of host and founder Shahid Badgami.

Commemorating the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain (A.S) and the martyrs of Karbala, 20 prominent poets of different languages irrespective of region and religion paid tribute to the martyrs of Karbala.

The event was presided over by the Ex-Vice Chancellor Kashmir University and Central University, Prof. Abdul Wahid Qureshi, proceedings of the event were conducted by renowned academician and poet Shahbaz Hakbari and host of a prominent show of DR Kashmir ‘Good morning J&K’ Mohammad Amin Bhat.

In his welcome address, founder and host of the event, Shahid Badgami highlighted the significance of this historical annual event and stressed that event of Karbala serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration for every oppressed nation irrespective of their beliefs

Budgami highlighted the role of non-Muslim poets and writers, whose elegies and writings have transformed Imam Hussain(AS) into a global phenomenon.

“The martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain (AS) is commemorated across the globe not only by Muslims but Non-Muslims as well. The contribution (of non-Muslim poets and writers) has been significant in paying homage to the martyrs of Karbala, Imam Hussain (AS) and is loved by every community across the universe

Moreover he said that He (AS) does not belong to any one sect or religion but to the



entire universe. Muharram is a universal phenomenon” Badgami asserted.

Besides major poets of the state, known media personalities, writers, intellectuals and devotees of Hazrat Imam Hussain (AS) also attended the event.

Prominent among those who recited their Kalaam at the event included, Prof. Shad Ramzan, Prof. Majruh Rashid, Manshur Banihali, Dr. Wali Mohd. Mehboob Sopori, Punjabi poet Sardar

Suraj Singh Suraj, Shahbaz Hakbari, Nohakhwan Mir Shabbir Ahmad Gojri, poet Mohd Sharif Kamar, noted artist Nazir Josh, vocalist Nisar Budgami, Raheem Rahbar, Mohd. Azeem Pahari and Prof. Rashid Kanaspori were present at the event.

Later, the Ashura Number of Urdu weekly “BUDSHAH” was released by Editor Srinagar Times Sahil Yusuf Sofi, Station director Radio Kashmir Syed Humayun Qaiser, Prof. Abdul Wahid Qureshi and the host Shahid Badgami.

On speaking to the MERC Times, Shahid Budgami said, ‘this is a delightful moment for me that i get a chance to serve the lovers of Imam Hussain (A.s), My father and grandfather used to organise this mushaira later my elder brother fareq Budgami a prominent poet did it . After his death im organizing

and hosting event like this

He added that Hussain (AS), The inflict of salvation for ummah and we should follow his path of life.

“This is a proud moment for us to be invited by Nisar Budgami sahib. We feel honored for being part of this ‘. Said prof showkat shafi.

Karbala is a message of victory of truth, it teaches us to follow the path of honesty and authenticity. He added.

Dark clouds loom over Kashmir’s famous silk industry

❖ Nausheen Naseer

SRINAGAR:. Kashmir’s once-famed silk industry is slowly dying as low production of silk cocoons, changing regulations and regional political tensions over the years have been hampering its growth and development. According to official estimates, the cocoon production has decreased from 15 lakh kilograms in 1940s to just three lakh kilograms in 2000s.

“Mulberry silk comes from the silkworm that solely feeds on mulberry plant. Therefore, the production of silk depends on mulberry cultivation, which itself is under threat,” said Ghulam Ahmad, a cocoon reaper from Kashmir’s Tral. “The alarming decline of mulberry trees has made cocoon rearing difficult in the valley,” said Ahmad.

Further, low market prices of cocoons have also put the industry in shambles. The inability of sericulture department to offer good prices to farmers against graded cocoon force local producers to sell it to outsiders. Reports suggest that only about 30% of the silkworm cocoons produced in the valley during the past few decades have been used



locally to produce silk. The rest is exported to other regions in India and neighboring countries, which convert cocoons into silk

more cheaply and efficiently.

“Outside traders lure cocoon reapers with quite high prices to sell their produce to them

leaving very little raw material for locals,” said Iqbal Hassan, another reaper from Anantnag district. “The cost of cocoon was not increased for almost two decades, which was one of the reasons why famers stopped working in this sector. The Sericulture department used to offer just Rs 180 for one kilogram of cocoon till 2009 while in open markets the rates touched Rs 600 or Rs 800 per kg,” said Hassan.

He blames the government for not doing enough to help the silk industry survive. “The government should invest in high yielding varieties of Kashmiri silkworm. It would not only yield us more cocoons per ounce but later also help us cover our production costs,” said Amin Kaboo, a Pulwama based silk worm reaper.

The Department of Sericulture said that it has taken various initiatives for uplifting this vital sector so that the silk industry is developed on sustainable basis. “This year has witnessed an increase in silk cocoon production by 3 per cent. We still have a long way to go but we are taking steps to develop the industry,” said Dr Malik Farooq, Director of Department of Sericulture.

Muharram, a platform for Shia-Sunni Unity

❖ Ali Saffudin

SRINAGAR : Hassanabad is one of the oldest Shia localities in the Rainawari region which houses one of the oldest Imam Bara of Srinagar and hosts one of the largest Muharram gatherings on 7th of Muharram. Young residents of this mohalla chose to express themselves through numerous flex banners and graffiti art with messages of dissent, protest and importance of unity amongst the Muslim community. Right at the beginning of the Mohalla is a large Israeli flag painted on the road registering a strong protest against the Zionist state and adjacent to this flag is a board which protests the innocent killing of Muslims in Burma.

“Muslims are brothers and will not be segregated by the pseudo-propaganda sponsored by corrupt elements. The source of this matter that Shites should be on one hand and Sunnis on the other is the one hand ignorance and on the other hand propaganda of foreigners” reads one of the banners. “We placed this banner right outside the masjid of the sunni brothers of our mohalla so that we collectively feel the importance of unity and work towards that goal as one unified family” said one of the young volunteers from the Hassanabad who helped in placing these banners.

Syed Shahriyar who is a renowned

photojournalist said that “these Muharram processions have two aspects; one is to mourn on the tragedies of Karbala and remember them and second is the political context of these processions, through these processions we empathize with all the oppressed communities of the current world and register a protest against the oppressors”.

Saajid Ali a young medical representative from Hassanabad said that “this year went one step ahead from the traditional hand painted black banners, we wanted colorful flex banners which could attract people’s attention and we specifically used quotes which addressed the contemporary issues”.

“We did everything on our own, from the first stages of gathering the money to selecting the messages to getting them printed and placing them at significant places all around our Rainawari” said Waseem in a proud and accomplished voice. The young residents were able to gather around rupees 40k all voluntarily. “The elders were also supportive and respected this idea of ours” he added.

Each year in the month of Muharram the lovers of Imam Hussain (as) remember the sacrifices and tragedies which He and his companions went through during The Battle of Karbala which took place on Muharram 10, in the year 61 AH of the Islamic calendar (October 10, 680 AD) in Karbala, in present-day Iraq.

SMC launches Android App to address public grievances

Shahjhan Mughal

SRINAGAR: Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) today launched an Android App which is aimed at the redressal of daily issues of people in the city limits.

The App was launched by SMC Commissioner Dr Shafqat Khan. “The Corporation is very serious in establishing and maintaining a very close connection with all the citizens of Srinagar. The main focus of this App is comprehensive complaint management system.” he said.

“The App has some salient features designed after considering various factors of the complaint management system.” Dr Khan added. The App has been designed, developed and maintained by IT service provider AKSA Group of Companies.

The App has GIS maps of all wards embedded and linked to enable the complainant to automatically detect the complaint ward. The complaint will automatically get assigned to the concerned ward officer or

the authority concerned as per his location.

The complainant can also send a live picture as a proof or supporting material to his complaint, which will be automatically captured by his mobile phone and geo-tagged and assigned to the concerned officer for quick response.

Dr Khan said in case of delay by the officers to act on a complaint, it will get escalated to the higher authorities for non-action. “Only a complainant can close the complaint as per satisfaction. SMS-based notifications and OTP generation are features of this system,” he said.

“Around 96 officers have been enrolled to the App both within the Corporation and the concerned other wings who will be able to keep a close eye on the time taken to address the grievance and the effectiveness of the complaint management by the officers,” said an SMC spokesperson.

“Residents of Srinagar can download the App by visiting the official website of the Corporation.” the spokesperson added.

Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt enjoys Kehwa at Chai Jaai



❖ IDREES BUKHTIYAR

SRINAGAR: Before leaving for tourist destination Pahalgam on Sunday morning, Bollywood actress Alia Bhatt visited Chai Jaai- a heritage tea room on the banks of Jehlum bund at Lal Chowk for a cup of Kashmiri Kehwa.

The management of the Chai Jaai told MERC Times that the actress came there at around 10:00 am.

“An hour before, our HR Manager was informed about

the Alia’s visit to our tea room so, we have already arranged everything for her,” said Imtiaz Ahmad, who heads the management team.

“We served her with Kashmiri Roti and Kashmiri sweets. But the reason she visited here was for a cup of Kashmiri Kehwa,” Ahmad said adding ‘she loves it’

“We also provided her with the delicious English food that include scrambled eggs, hash browns, grilled tomatoes, butter toast, chicken souse hedges, grilled mushrooms and

mosaic cake- a Turkish desert food,” he said.

“It was a complementary meal for the actress as she has visited the Chai Jaai for the first time. But interestingly, she loved our food and the tea room designing,” Ahmad said.

“We were really shocked to see her at our tea room. Later, she interacted with us and stayed for around one hour with us,” Ahmad added.

When asked how did Alia came to know about Chai Jaai, he said: “Alia said that she has read much about Chai Jaai on social media and have heard much in Mumbai”

However, Alia was accompanied by her mother Soni Razdan to the tea room.

Chai Jaai is a niche market conceptualized and implanted by Roohi Nazki, a former administrator and a TCS executive.

Housed atop iconic Mahatta & Co, Kashmir’s historic photography studio, Chai Jaai offers a breathtaking view of the Bund, the Jehlum and beyond. Blend of culture and heritage, its interiors are designed in such way that visitors are taken decades back into the Victorian England. The premises have the original British architecture.

After leaving from there, actress Alia Bhatt directly heads toward Pahalgam resort to complete the shooting of director Meghna Gulzar’s upcoming film Raazi with his co-star Vicky Kaushal.

14 years Old Thang Ta Player

❖ Adil Amin

SRINAGAR: Zakariya Yaseen, hailing from Srinagar's Bemina locality began his tryst with Thang Ta in 2009 at the age of seven. This 14-year-old boy has earned State award (given for the excellence in particular field). Zakariya credits his Uncle for his success who played a major role in honing his athletic skills. "I got inspired from him and started my sports journey", he said.

Zakariya has played two international matches in 2013 both held in Korea. He has also bagged two Gold medals and one Silver medal in Federation cup and played numerous nationals during initial stage.

Zakariya's daily schedule includes practise sessions with his coach and mentor in indoor stadium during evenings. His coach has taught him how to be focused in game and committed with goals. "My coach and sports council has important role in shaping up my skills and in making me disciplined



sports person. Sports Council always pampers players and provides equipment and support whenever we need" he said.

Focusing on studies and practising Thang Ta simultaneously, was a major challenge for Zakariya.

To strike a balance between the two, the young athlete has scheduled timetable to avoid a clash.

"Self-study and my mother's help in studies, keeps me focused on studies. During the federation cup I had kept with me study material and immediately after playing match, my routine was self-study," he said

Zakariya is a fitness enthusiast and follows a strict daily regimen. "We have to take care of our diet, because diet is as important as our practice. I do not eat same as normal person; you cannot eat everything if you are taking sports seriously. To be something in your life, you have to make sacrifices" he added.

Zakariya aims to inspire others through his versatility, "If we are focusing on studies, we should also focus on sports. We should not make our priority studies only but sports also. If we are giving lot of time to studies, we should also free our time for sports also. There are equal opportunities in both sports and studies" he further added

Department of PMR proves to be a Non starter in SKIMS



❖ Arif Nazir

SRINAGAR: The Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PMR) Department of Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences (SKIMS), has been rendered to no less than a physiotherapy centre not performing the tasks that the department is required to do.

The administration has been neglecting other major sections of the department by pouring more money into the physiotherapy and turning a blind eye towards other basic requirements, sources said.

There are two consultants working in the department who are MD Medicine, which is a grave violation of norms, The matter was taken to the court which quashed the appointment of these two consultants but even After the court order, there has so far been no replacement for the same, nor have they been vacated from their post,

sources said.

With the dearth of proper faculty in the department, no postgraduates—apart from technical course trainees—are eventually coming out of the department as of now, raising serious questions over the functioning of the department.

There is a wide range of patients that are visiting the hospital who are suffering from different disabilities like cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, neuropathy, head injury, stroke and spinal cord injury.

The hospital administration spent 3 crore rupees for the renovation of physiotherapy section but the department is still lacking Orthotics, Prosthetics, Occupational Therapist, Vocational Therapist, Rehabilitation Psychologist and Speech Therapist.

Abdul Rahim, whose son was in the need of an artificial limb, was forced to get it from the market, which eventually cost him around fifty thousand rupees.

"I am a poor person; he (his son) lost his leg in an accident, the hospital should have provided this, not free, but on subsidized rates, but they did not," he said.

The department is witnessing numerous patients like those who have undergone amputations, patients with rheumatologic disorders, deformities of bones and joints, but what seems to be lacking is the comprehensive rehabilitation of such patients, which is not happening due to the scarcity of staff.

Director SKIMS prof. A. G Ahanger could not be reached for his comments on this issue, despite talking to the MERC TIMES reporter, he didn't respond to the queries.

KU ,GMC organize blood donation camp



Ayadullah Dar

SRINAGAR: Department of Students Welfare (DSW) Kashmir University in collaboration with Government Medical College Srinagar on Saturday organized a blood donation camp in the premises of Gandhi Bhavan KU. Professor Nilofer Khan Dean college development KU inaugurated the donation camp on 10.30 am.

Speaking on the occasion, Professor G.N. Khaki Dean Students Welfare KU said, "the camp has been organized to encourage more and more youth to donate blood for the noble cause of saving human lives and to inculcate a sense of social responsibility among them"

"I donated blood with the spirit of saving lives. Every healthy person should donate blood", said Mohammad Moosa, a student from Biotechnology Department.

The camp concluded on 3.30pm .50 units of blood were collected. The arrangements of providing refreshment to the students who donated blood were also being made in the camp.

Kashmiri Educator bags “Teachathon 2017”



❖ Ikhlaq ul Rehman

SRINAGAR: Young Minds of Kashmir have always proved that nothing is impossible for them despite various challenges posed by the conflict zone. Dr. Farhat Umar Paul, a young professional from Central Kashmir’s hamlet called Kaitech Razgir has sets his record in an online teaching competition organized by India’s chief online educational platform-Unacademy namely “Teachathon” in its 2017 year’s gathering.

Unacademy provides free educational material to students through its website and video tutorials shared over YouTube and Facebook. Unacademy has various educators who are specialist in their subjects.

Public figures like Kiran Bedi, Shashi Tharoor, and Tina Dabi etc make regular appearances on the platform; Gaurav Munjal, Hemesh Singh and Sachin Gupta are Co-founders of Unacademy.

Farhat’s course was titled ‘Mastering public Speaking’. His Live Sessions on the platform have been receiving an unprecedented response with over 4 lac hits in the last month alone.

Dr. Farhat Umar Paul is a Molecular Geneticist, a Veterinarian, a Teacher, a Public Speaker, a Motivator, a Debator, a Poet, a Columnist, an Anchor, and a Social Activist to name some of his endeavors. He has conducted many personality development workshops at national and state level for the kids, youth and aged, without exception.

He has hosted many international and national science events and has been widely appreciated and celebrated for his interpersonal skills training and motivation. He is an alumni of India’s top Animal Research Institute, NDRI Karnal. Expressing happiness, Dr. Farhat Umar Paul said the win would encourage him to work more for realizing his cherished dream of making quality education free and accessible to everyone.

‘Chount Koul’ is dying

❖ Hirra Azmat

SRINAGAR: The residents of Bar Bar Shah here are aghast over the authorities’ failure in cleaning the Chount Koul—the Jhelum tributary flowing through the neighbourhood.

They said the polluted water body has become a constant source of foul smell and a dumping yard for the local residents and shopkeepers. Locals blame the lack of political will and lackadaisical function of LAWDA for poor state of the rivulet.

“Government is only interested in eye-washes. They only make promises but nothing changes on ground. The frequent transfer of the chairpersons proves this,” the locals complain.

The peripheries of the rivulet give way to many concrete structures and make-shift sheds. The local residents also blame the lack of trash bins in their area compels them to dump waste in the water body.

“LAWDA takes no action against this practise. Even the shopkeepers from our side throw the waste material in it. The rivulet is now breathing its last moments,” said Wasim Ahmad, a local resident.



On contacting the Vice Chairman of LAWDA, Masood Hafiz Shah on the contamination of the tributary, he responds,

“I have taken the reins one month back. The cleaning process of the rivulet is in the pipe line. It will most probably materialize in the first month of October,” said Hafiz.

LAWDA is delaying it to next month as their entire focus has shifted to the removal of mini beds which has covered the vast expanse of Dal.

“Because our machinery and equipment

is being moved in that area, the cleaning process of Chount Koul has deferred,” he added

LAWDA is planning to start with weeding process and selective dredging done in a manual manner.

“Mechanical dredging is not possible but manually we shall first remove the weed. Machinery can’t be deployed in an area where the water level is shallow. We need to know the exact depth of the water body first,” said LAWDA Vice Chairman.

Eye Donation in Kashmir

Peer Furqan

SRINAGAR: The concept of eye donation is gradually finding takers in Kashmir, with doctors claiming that volunteers register their names at Government Medical College Srinagar.

As per the Ophthalmology Department at the Government Medical College, almost 11 eye donation surgeries have been performed in the last two weeks.

The eye donation drive is a part of the centrally-sponsored “National Programme for Control of Blindness” (NPCB).

Under this programme, the state so far has zero per cent results in achieving the annual target of performing eye donation surgeries.

In 2016, 2015, 2014 and 2013, the state health department, as per the documents, has not collected a single donated eye against the annual targets of receiving 200 donated eyes.

As per the head Department of Ophthalmology, Tariq Qureshi, the GMC currently was receiving almost eight calls

on average daily from volunteers willing to donate their eyes.

“So far 11 people have donated eye during last two weeks and we are expecting some more to come and help these sightless people. Moreover some three operations would be performed on Saturday,” he told The Kashmir Monitor.

Qureshi said that the department as a part of NPCB was holding a month long eye donation drive once in a year at GMC from August 30.

“People are coming in good number to register themselves and we are trying to motivate more through seminars and other programmes.”

He said that mostly the young people are registering themselves to donate their eye to the patients who are blinded by both eyes.

“The volunteers are mostly college and university students, who donate their one eye. We hope the number of volunteers would

increase ahead as gradually awareness is being spread through our programmes,” Qureshi said.

The noted Ophthalmogits however, said that department has not received any pellet victim to undergo eye transplant surgery. “So far we haven’t any such surgery to the pellet victims.”

Meanwhile, sources said that since its inception in 1975, the programme has been mostly concentrating on curing of the eye related ailments and distributing of spectacle.

“When none turns up to donate an eye the programme here meant to just cure the eye related ailments. Under this

programme diseases mostly Diabetic Retinopathy, Glaucoma, Squint, ROP are treated. Further some other treatment like cataract operations and free spectacles are donated,” sources in the health department said.

This year, Bilqees, a 25 year old woman from Srinagar, expressed willingness to donate her eye at the upcoming eye bank at Government Medical College (GMC) Srinagar, thereby becoming the first person in Kashmir to do so.



Fist Helicopter Service from Rajouri to Jammu



❖ **Hassina Khan**

POONCH/ RAJOURI: Minister for Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Law and Justice Haq Khan flagged off the much awaited Jammu-Poonch Helicopter service while at Rajouri the first chopper flight was flagged off by the Minister for Food, Civil Supplies, Consumer Affairs and Information, Ch Zulfkar today.

The helicopter service will connect the people of the area with rest of the

State especially during adverse weather conditions besides giving flip to the tourism in the twin districts of Poonch and Rajouri.

The first flight that was flagged off today from DPL Poonch carried five passengers to Jammu.

MLA Haveli (Poonch) Shah Mohammad Tantray, MLC Pradeep Sharma, DC Poonch Tariq Ahmad Zargar, SSP Poonch Rajiv Panday, ADC Basharat Hussain, ACR Ashraf Chaudhary and other senior officers and senior citizens of

the district.

Speaking on the occasion, minister said with the start of the helicopter, the long pending demand of the people have been fulfilled by the personal efforts of Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti.

He said the current dispensation is committed to develop Poonch district on modern lines and increase job avenues in the district by giving flip to the tourism sector in the district.

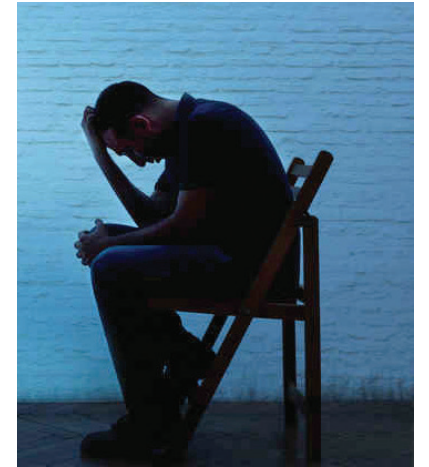
He instructed the district administration to make the public aware about scheduled dates and times of take so as to avoid any inconvenience to the passengers.

Meanwhile, in Rajouri the first flight of chopper carrying passengers landed here today marking the start of much awaited air service between Jammu and this border town.

Minister for Food Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs and Information, Chowdhary Zulfkar Ali launched the chopper service carrying 5 passengers here at Sports Stadium in presence of large number of civil society members, local legislators and senior functionaries of district administration.

Describing it as a historical moment for them, the Minister congratulated the people for fulfillment of this demand after a long wait.

Kashmir's Mental Health and Its Resources



❖ **MujeebUIFeroz**

SRINAGAR: The Government Psychiatric Diseases Hospital Srinagar is the only Hospital for Mental health in the whole of Kashmir. Being the main referral institution for all patients suffering from any Psychiatric Disease from all over the state, it has just 150 beds for patients, making it almost impossible to operate. The decline in psychological health has led to an increase in substance use and suicide in Kashmir. Over the years, the number of patients seeking help at the Srinagar facility has increased rapidly. According to doctors, around 1,700 patients visited the hospital in 1989, compared to more than 100,000 last year.

In May 2016, Medicine Sans Frontier (MSF) that is an international medical humanitarian organisation, revealed a shocking detail. It suggested that one out of every two adults was mentally disturbed due to the violent conflict of more than two decades. The Valley's "first comprehensive mental health survey" also revealed that one in every five adults in Kashmir was living with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The MSF study had found that 41 per cent adults (1.6 million) in Kashmir Valley were living with significant symptoms of depression. Depression was the most prevalent disorder in the Valley. The MSF report stated that Approximately 1.6 million adults (41 percent) in the Valley were found to be living with significant symptoms of depression. A majority of people had experienced or witnessed conflict-related trauma.

The wide-ranging MSF survey had found that the most-reported problems faced by Kashmiris were financial challenges, poor health and unemployment. It had advocated a comprehensive and integrated de-centralised prevention, care and treatment program for the Valley

Maiden Mock Drill on Disaster awareness held at Kargil

❖ **Zakir Hussain**

KARGIL: The Jammu & Kashmir State Disaster Management Authority SDMA in collaboration with the district Disaster Management authority Kargil organised an impressive mock drill at Tourist Facilitation Center Kargil which was attended by hundreds of stakeholders including the district level Officer SDRF, Police, NCC/NSS Scouts & guides, students, IKMT Basijey Imam, Youth wing, Islamia School Kargil and the general public.

The two days' event started on 23th of September, 2017 with the sensitization on the concept of coordination and table top Exercise. The Coordination and Table Top Exercise was inaugurated and Chaired by the Deputy commissioner Kargil Haji Gulzar Hussain which was attended by a host of stakeholders including the Officers from the Army, Air force and Border Road Organization. After the inaugural ceremony the program review was highlighted by the Mr Amir Ali Mir Director, Disaster Management (J&K) where he emphasized upon the need to organize such event frequently in order to ensure that the Administration is in a state of readiness in order to meet any eventuality.

This was followed by a detailed power point presentation

by Dr. A. M. Dar, Head of the center for disaster Management and Environmental students in the J&K institute of Management, public Administration & Rural development (J&K IMPA) on this occasion a documentary on Ladakh Flash flood of 20110 was also Bereaved by Dr A.M. Dar which again highlighted the need to work in coordination during any disaster event.

Mr. Amir. Director DM said, "the search and plume equipment is available with different agencies including the SDRF, Fire & Emergency Services Police etc. which we are displaying so that more and more people get to know and sensitized about the resources available and the resources needed in a disaster situation."

Speaking on the occasion, Kacho Ahmad Ali khan, Chief Executive Councilor LAHDC Kargil said, "Far Flung areas like Kargil requires trainings and sensitization related to disaster. As during any natural disaster these are the local people first who become the first helping hand."

The organizers thanked different stakeholders including Army and the Media persons as well as the support given by Bansi Lal Under Secretary in the department of Disaster management relief Rehabilitation and Reconstruction for choosing district headquarter Kargil as a venue for the event.

Kashmir swollen with pride in India's "Swachta He Seva"



❖ **ABID RASHID**

SRINAGAR: It earned little civic ambassador admirers across Indian mainland as Prime Minister Narendar Modi mentioned Bilal Dar in his maiden Mann Ki Baat on Septembers' Sunday morning. Bilal who hails from North Kashmirs' Bandipora is a rag-picker who earns his living by cleaning eminent Wular Lake.

Not only Bilal, But in South Kashmir, a group of boys busy in cleanliness drives lead by Majid Attar. Far from this media glare, this 23 year old Pahalgam youth and his friends and acquaintances joined and vowed to clean the track leading to Amarnath route. On September 20, Majid along with his peer group left for Chandanwari to collect the non-biodegradable waste along the route trekked by the Yatris.

Braving the chill of woods, the group of 11 boys, all students, collected tonnes of trash left by the pilgrims who visit the holy shrine. They spent some sixty hours cleaning the "stinky and dirty" route.

Majid who is working as an Intern with Jammu and Kashmir Government Grievance cell says that it would not have been possible without Arastha Foundation, an NGO, who provided them equipment, food and other financial support.

"I was sell-shocked to see the heaps of garbage scattered along the road. We pulled our socks up and cleaned it," Majid said. He and his tem collected some 200 bags of waste which will be taken to Ganeshbal, a dumping site located in the outskirts of Pahalgam. According to Majid, Wrappers, polythene, plastic bags etc was thrown on the road.

As Swatch Bharat Abhiyan is gaining momentum, Majid is busy in his own cleanliness drives. "During Yatra days, government must gear up to have cleanliness drives otherwise it will doom Lidder River," Says Majid adding "We need hundreds of volunteers to and bins."

In the 2nd week of August, on the directions of Tasaduq Mufti coordinator CM's Grievance cell, a team visited the Aliabad sarai site and initiated a cleanup campaign. Within hours, volunteers removed the carcasses, debris and weeds to make it beautiful.

Likewise, a group of school-going boys installed cleaning kits and dustbins at Evening point of Shopian which marks the beginning of Mughal Road. In a same manner, playground in Handwara and a canal in Pulwama were made dirt-free.

"Such attempts are wonderful examples of showing that with strong will and determination; we possess the capability to inspire others," Comments Aniket Choudhry, head of the Research Wing at Chief Minister's Grievance Cell.

"Younger generation of Kashmir must come forward to help clean their homeland."

DIALYSIS PROGRAMME OF STATE IN LIMBO

❖ **Ubeer Naqshbandi**

SRINAGAR: As scores of people die every year of chronic kidney diseases (CKD) in Jammu and Kashmir, the priority of the state government in the health sector is lying somewhere else, thalassaemia – a hereditary disease caused by faulty haemoglobin synthesis.

Despite the implementation of the Prime Minister's Dialysis Programme in 27 states of the country, the J&K Government failed to submit its proposal to the Union Health Ministry to procure dialysis machines for running the programme. The delay has been attributed by National Health Mission (NHM) officials to the failure of Health Department in prioritising the kidney diseases.

"Prevention and cure of kidney diseases were never a priority with the Health Department despite several hundred kidney patients

dying every year," said an NHM official.

The government in 2013 prioritised thalassaemia as a special category disease for getting funding from the Centre under the Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK) – a child health screening programme under the NHM. At least 178 thalassaemia patients are registered with the Health Department, with 30 in Kashmir. Last year, the government provided Rs 15,57,500 as financial assistance to thalassaemia patients of the state, with Rs 8,750 per patient. On contrary, nearly 4,000 kidney patients are being admitted to the SK Institute of Medical Science (SKIMS) annually, with a majority of them suffering from the CKD. "Nearly 20-30 per cent CKD patients die every year due to lack of treatment or infection in Kashmir," Associate Professor, Nephrology, SKIMS,

Dr Muzaffar Wani said. On an average, a person with advanced CKD had to shell out Rs 30,000-40,000 per month for dialysis and medication, Dr Wani said.

Given the burden of the CKD in the country, the Prime Minister during last year's Budget speech announced the programme for providing dialysis free of cost to the BPL patients, with each district hospital having one dialysis unit.

The Central government will provide dialysis machines, while state governments have to provide space for establishing the unit under the PPP mode. "In a couple of days tenders will be invited for selecting the service provider," the Mission Director, NHM, Dr Mohan Singh, said. Dr Mohan Singh has asked the Chief Medical Officers of the districts to identify the space in district hospitals before procuring the machines for establishing dialysis units there.

LAWDA TO USE MANPOWER TO CLEAN DAL

Syed Sharyaar

SRINAGAR: Cleaning out lily pads from Dal Lake with machines is not foolproof, the J&K Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LAWDA) will clear the area under the plant with the help of "skilled labourers" by November.

Lamenting that there was no organised movement against the lily pads so far, Vice Chairman LAWDA, Dr Abdul Hafiz Shah, told that they had deployed 500 "skilled labourers" for the task since August 7.

Although the LAWDA has acquired weed harvesters and water masters for the dewatering purpose, however dewatering by harvesters "is not foolproof" besides the water masters being too slow, Shah said.

Out of the 5 sq km area of the Dal occupied by the lily pads, Shah claimed that 1.2 sq km area had been cleared so far.

The 500 labourers, Shah said, were working in 42 sections of the infested area.

"We are going for manual dewatering because that is the scientific method. We have speeded up the work since August 7. The operation will be carried out till the desired results are achieved," he added.

Shah claimed that it was for the first time "in the entire history" of the LAWDA that "such a major operation" had been undertaken.

"The skilled labourers are extracting it by traditional methods. It is not a simple labour work. It is rather a skilled one."

Professor Shakil Romsho, Head Department of Earth Sciences, Kashmir University, who is also part of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) on the



Dal conservation, said that the only solution to the exponential growth of lily pads lied in the manual dewatering.

Romsho however said that the manual dewatering faced problems as the labourers were not readily available.

"There is hardly anybody who wants to do the job," he added.

To mention, the J&K High Court recently gave the LAWDA three months' time to wipe out the lily pads from the lake.

Hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) on the conservation of the Dal and Nigeen lakes, the HC had observed that no further time would be granted to the LAWDA, adding that from time to time, the authorities had not been following the court orders.

The SAC on the Dal Lake in its report recently had also highlighted the need to remove the lilies

Srinagar childhood friends out to ease daily chores for you

❖ Irfan Trambo

SRINAGAR: Instead of wailing about unemployment in the state, two youngsters, after getting through their B.Tech Degrees from NIT Srinagar, and Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), Awantipora, Ubaid Manzoor (24) and Yamin Mukhtar (24) have started a venture known as Al-Birra Services, which is aimed at providing almost all the essential services to the masses. Both childhood friends, Ubaid and Yamin, after they were done with their degrees thought of doing something different, and thus came the idea of 'Al-Birra Services.' Application named Al-Birra Services is available on the Google Play Store, where anyone looking for any services ranging from plumbing, electricity repairs, fixing inverters, washing machines, and refrigerators. The service provider can also hire carpenters, masons, tailors and painters for those who are in need. Apart from daily chorus, there are some professional services that are also provided by the newly established start-up. If needed, they can hire a photographer to capture beautiful moments and app developers to design the any application for the clients.



Al-Birra services are currently operational in Srinagar and Budgam only.

In addition to all the services provided, Al - Birra is also delivering required medicines to people. The client is

supposed to upload a slip of prescription after registering on the application.

"This is a first sort of application that has come up in Kashmir," said Ubaid Manzoor, CEO and Founder, adding that they are eyeing at many more things that will be added to the services.

The start-up is also aiming at creating a database of skilled man power who are, as of now, unemployed, "we will be gathering all the skilled persons and will be assigning them jobs as per the request that we will get from those who are in need of any service," said Ubaid.

The idea and the work that has been done so far for materializing it, is surely providing a ray of hope for these two friends, to aim high; and for others, who are looking for jobs. "It is our aim to provide employment to those who are unemployed, through our start up," he said. So far, people are not that much aware of the application that has got the potential to change the outlook of youngsters, and can change the process of getting domestic chores done in the society like that of Kashmir.

Al-Birra Services, in future will also take on providing a platform to purchase books on varied subjects, including, advertisement services, printing and design services.

The application is available for download on Google App Store, and has got a presence online at: www.albirra.com

Striking the strings of Rabab lands this boy in the bygone era ,where he gets connected to his ancestors.

❖ Syed Humara

SRINAGAR: Yawar Nazir Bhat, 22, is from the Kreeri village of Baramulla, who developed a love for music from an early age.

Belonging to a family of musicians, Yawar started learning Rabab at the age of 8. says "it was in my blood, I had got to know about my grandfather- who was one of the famous players of this instrument in the entire J&K, and my desire for learning this instrument increased," says Yawar

At 22, he has already made his name and has performed at various stage shows and concerts across India. "My inspiration was my grandfather but I didn't get support from my family. But then my uncle Ghulam Nabi Bhat who is himself a famous Rabab player supported me and gifted me a Rabab," Yawar adds.

Yawar, who is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Arts (BA) from Baramulla Degree College, wants to take forward the art of his grandfather to the next generation. "New generation is alien to the richness of our own Kashmiri Music ,I want people to know about this music," says Yawar.

Yawar's grandfather, Ustaaad Sonullah Bhat was among the first rabab players from Jammu and Kashmir. He played Rabab for almost 30 years and represented Kashmir at national and international platforms. Sonullah Bhat himself learned Rabab from his father but it was

during Radio Kashmir years from 1932 to 1962, Sonnullah's work got noticed. He went on playing Rabab in countries like the US, Russia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan

Yawar shuttles between college and the recording studio where he learns the technicalities of Rabab from his cousin-brother, Abdul Hamid Bhat.. "New generation is more inclined towards modern instruments. But I feel we should not forget our history and our culture. It is easy to learn Guitar or Piano than to learn Rabab. I chose this because it's what my grandfather has left behind," says Yawar.

Yawar's cousin, Abdul Hamid Bhat, 42, another grandson of Sonnullah Bhat and the instructor of Yawar, from the age of 10.. After Sonullah, he is the only one from the family who has kept this dying art alive and is performing at various forums and is associated with Radio Kashmir

Besides, that he is running the "Sonnullah Bhat Folk Music School" in Kreeri along with Yawar. "We started this school with help of Ministry of culture so that dying art of rabab will be revived. And secondly we won't let it disappear as it is our Miras," Hamid said. He said that tough they have few students in the school but the number is growing day by day. Hamid believes that Kashmiri culture is incomplete without Rabab. " It's very important component in ghazals, Sufi classic, Indian classic," he adds.

Three inaugurations fail to augment status of health centre

❖ Shahroz Khushal

SRINAGAR: Despite being inaugurated thrice, the Public Health Centre (PHC), Chanapora, which was meant to function as a Sub District Hospital, is still waiting for formal orders from the government for its up gradation to an SDH.

The multi storey building constructed by Jammu and Kashmir Housing Board with the whopping cost of 20.32 crore, is still not put to use as the government is turning a deaf to the issues and failing to provide the basic requirement of equipments and staff to the hospital.

It took four long years to construct the building with the sole aim to upgrade it to the SDH level. The newly constructed building was partially handed over a year ago, to yet again operate as the health centre, raising eye brows over the expenditure that, as of now, has bore no fruits.

Currently, only the ground floor is functioning and rest of the three floors are of no use. "The government constructed this huge building, and we were expecting that it would be upgraded to SDH, as there was a need to cater to the flow of patients," said Muhammad Latief, a local resident, "even after spending huge money, we have been provided with the same PHC

with no up gradation," he added.

As of now, the hospital opens at 10 in the morning and closes at around 4 in the evening, forcing patients, in case of emergency, to avail the facilities at SHMS, JVC or SKIMS, adding to the already high patient rush to these hospitals.

"There is a need of upgrade this hospital to the SDH level, as it can cater to the large area, and can eventually lower down the referral rate to the other hospitals," said Medical Officer, PHC Chanapora Dr Muneeb-ur-Rehman.

Even functioning as a PHC, the hospital is facing scarcity of specialist doctors such as Orthopedician and Ophthalmologist, "there is a general physician and some lady gynaecologist on duty in the hospital, rest there is no one available around," said a local.

The hospital is facing a huge rush of patients from different adjoining areas, and with limited presence of doctors the hospital is hardly managing to get the things working.

As per the official figures, initially the hospital used to cater to the needs of almost 1000-1500 patients per month, but now after the construction of new building, the patient influx has increased manifold, with over 5000 patients visiting the hospital for treatment per month, however, the staff strength remains the same.

Private sector making headway in Kashmir

❖ Peer Viqar

SRINAGAR: In Kashmir, where a majority of the inhabitants seek their career in Government departments, and where private sector is still in its infancy, the idea of structuring and developing one's own business would seem eerie to many.

Unlike majoritarian view about procuring a job or getting settled in the public sector, two recent University pass-outs have embarked upon different path: to chase their entrepreneurial dreams and generate employment.

Suhail Zargar and Muzammil Zargar first graduated in commerce from Islamia College of Science and Commerce and then completed their master's degree in business administration from Islamic University

of Science & Technology, Awantipora.

Suhail specialized in finance and marketing and his friend Muzammil did his specialization in HR making the two classmates potent enough to launch tax consulting services.

The desire to utilize their knowledge in tax management received impetus after Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced note ban last year. This led to the foundation of Scion Project Management and Tax Solutions.

After completing their MBAs, like many other graduates they started looking for jobs. But to their dismay, they found the job market in Kashmir is totally different as compared to what wastaught to them in business school.

"We experienced frustration like every inexperienced candidate goes through. Eventually, we started our career with

an entry level job and decided to grow with time," said Suhail while recalling his first face-off with the outside world after graduating from the University

"We worked at Bisleri International, Delhi as internee for their premium product Vedica, in HDFC Bank and then joined FOREX as financial analysts. Basically, we always wanted to start our own business," he added.

After two years of working with many employers like chartered accountants, hoteliers and project managers, they decided to start their own business.

"Our field of work is related to project management, income tax and accounting services. Currently, we provide our clients with accounting/ book keeping services, chartered accountant services, company secretary services and project management," said

Muzammil.

Their Clients range from small to large business houses in and outside valley, government departments and salaried government employees as well.

Scion Project Management and Tax Solutions Pvt. Ltd. was incorporated on Dec 21, 2016.

Every entrepreneur in Kashmir has to face hurdles like: internet blockade, power cuts, and other disturbances. For smooth functioning of any business in this era of competition where we talk of competitive advantage, electricity and internet is most important.

"When Government is busy providing subsidies for new entrepreneurs, I believe they should rather focus on providing business enablers like internet facility and 24x7 electricity supplies," Suhail added.

Revival of Crocheting Fashion

❖ Shaheen Rahim

SRINAGAR: Binish and Omaira, the proud owners of Craft World Kashmir are two young girls who talk about how they are trying to revive a traditional art form of Kashmir and are striving hard for its global recognition.

"Till now we have heard of Pakistani style, but now we want to introduce this as Kashmiri style," opine Omaira and Binish who didn't run after government jobs or civil services, in turn they made their hobby into a full time profession.

After completing their masters they both worked for a while in private sector but that wasn't what they had in mind. They wanted a more flexible, creative and above all recognition for what they do.

These girls had an inclination towards art and craft and hence they decided to take it and experiment with it.

"I used to knit for my relatives, family and there I got the idea that it can be one on a larger scale with some twist," says Binish Bashir, 29 from Chanapora.

Binish Bashir and Omaira Qayoom made their 6 year long friendship into a partnership in Craft World Kashmir- An online ordering shop of crochet bootees, key chains, rubber bands, wall hangings, suits and bridal packages.

They knit wool or other material with the help of a special needle or technique called

Crochet.

Last year in October 2015, Binish had too many orders pouring in, so she insisted Omaira to join her. That is where this journey began.

"It's all handmade stuff from a single stitch to painting a wall, we do everything ourselves," says Omaira proudly pointing out at the wall hanging in their room.

"We take orders and divide our work, she does the first half and I do the rest," says Binish.

"We have not been trained anywhere, we learn new styles and designs from internet and we also work as per demand," says Omaira.

The initial orders were mostly restricted to friends and family but now they have got customers from many places.

"We recently got an order of bookmarks from Bangalore, we posted it to him and the customer seemed very happy," says Binish.

Craft World Kashmir will be a year old this September and it has already made a name for itself. It doesn't run in an office, with a number of workers or a big set up, instead it runs through orders and social networking like Facebook and Instagram.

"We made a Facebook and Instagram page and uploaded our work, and it did get some good comments and response in the first week. This kind of encouragement helped us, and it increased our influx of orders," says Omaira.

PADDY THRESHING IN TANGMARG OF BARAMULLA

Qulsoom

BARAMULLA: Amid the pleasant weather conditions, the paddy threshing season began in most of the villages in Tangmarg a few days ago. Farmers are now busy threshing paddy crop. Women are also helping men in the hectic threshing operations to complete it at the earliest.

Rice is the staple food for the farmers and the entire harvesting operation from reaping, threshing and milling of the crop depends upon the dry weather conditions. In most parts of the Valley, farmers are able to grow just one crop during the entire year.

"The only worry is that of the weather. It should remain dry for at least another two weeks so that we are able to harvest and stock the paddy. I expect the prevailing dry weather conditions to continue," said Nazir, a farmer from Kunzar.

Incessant rains in the last week of August had created panic among the farmers as rains during this period usually delay the ripening of the crop. "Had the rains continued for another week, our yearly yield would have been wasted. Dry weather conditions are necessary for ripening and harvesting the paddy crop," said Mohammad Ashraf (40), a farmer in Kunzar of Baramulla.

Harvesting and thrashing of crop also offers seasonal jobs to many locals. The labourers charge Rs 400 to Rs 450 each day the job. "Almost every year, I put in about a month of work in harvesting threshing paddy. After the harvesting is over, I work as a labourer and thrash the paddy. I am able to earn about Rs 20,000 for my work during the season," said Javid Ahmad, a daily labourer.

Farmers in Kunzar area and a few of its adjoining villages in Tanmarg tehsil have complained that their crops were hit by the "paddy blast", locally called 'rai'. They said unlike last year, the agriculture department had not sprayed fungicide on the affected crop.

"We appeal to the department to spray fungicides on the affected crops so that we are saved from the damage. The incessant rains have already damaged crops over a vast area in kunzar," said Mohd Ashraf Mir from Kunzar.



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