

# MERC TIMES



**MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE**  
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR



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## Students accuse landlords of charging rent during lockdown period



**Tamana Aarizoo**

When the central government announced nationwide lockdown in March, the home ministry laid down clear guidelines for the lockdown period. Among the many were explicit instructions given to landlords to not ask for any rent from the tenants for the lockdown period.

However, the students who put up at rented accommodations in the Valley's premier Kashmir University have accused landlords of charging the rent for the same period. Mohammad Amin Meer, a research scholar at University of Kashmir who was putting up at a rented place at Hazratbal area of Srinagar city said, "I had to pay full rent of three months during which I was not living at my rented accommodation. I am a student and with no source of income. My father is a farmer who earns a meagre amount of money. I had to somehow manage the expenses that too when the finances have been tight."

Students also alleged that they were forced to pay the rent while others accused the landlords of threatening to keep their belongings as mortgage.

One of the students who wished not be named said, "Even after my protestations, I was still forced to pay 70% of my rent."

However, some students said they were given 30-40% discount, but still they had to pay the rest of the charges.

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## Pushing people further into poverty: the impact of Covid-19 on lower income families



**Sabreena Mir**

The lockdown imposed in wake of COVID-19 pandemic has put the world's population face to face with an existential crisis. With finances of many people drying up and money hard to come by, sustaining families has become difficult.

Altaf Hussain, a cab driver by profession said, "Our first concern is food, not the virus."

I have a family of six who rely on my daily earnings. It is difficult for me to arrange food for the family in these circumstances. If I don't work, how am I going to feed my family?" Finances of families falling in middle income groups have been hit more disproportionately. Shabir Ahmed Magrey (29), a private school teacher has not received his salary from last three months. "The pandemic made an unexpected entry into our lives and has brought everything to a halt. I am without pay from last three months and I hardly have any savings to fall back on", he said.

While the lower strata of the society have been hit hard, the lower and middle income families have also been affected.

"Everyone has been impacted by lockdown. It is not the migrant workers only who are facing the brunt of lockdown but lower middle class families with meager

income have also been badly hit. Those categorized below the poverty line are getting some sort of assistance. An overwhelming majority of lower middle class have been left high and dry", said Shakeel Ahmed who works as a contractual lecturer at Degree College Ganderbal.

Everyone has been impacted by lockdown. It is not the migrant workers only who are facing the brunt of lockdown but lower middle class families with meager income have also been badly hit. Those categorized below the poverty line are getting some sort of assistance.



## Budgam’s only cricket stadium in ruins

Admin fails to mend potholes and remove fallen trees.

**Shagufta Rashid**

**B**udgam town’s only cricket stadium is yet to get basic facilities. Located a kilometer from main chowk, Arigam, the land spread over 16 kannals was identified by government in 2016 and subsequently inaugurated in 2018. However the lack of basic facilities and condition of the playground has been a cause of disappointment to the local sports enthusiasts. Accusing J&K Sports Council of failing to properly develop the ground, locals say the ground is not fit for any activity.

“The ground is full of potholes, rocks and broken trees. It has become a grazing ground for animals. In the absence of a proper stadium, youth play in grave yards and main roads”, said Irshad Ahmed, a local.

“The ground lacks basic facilities, there is no place for local spectators to sit and enjoy the games. We play cricket matches here but many players get injured”, said Aijaz Ahmed a local cricket player.

The ground is full of potholes, rocks and broken trees. It has become a grazing ground for animals. In the absence of a proper stadium, youth play in grave yards and main roads

Ruing the callousness of the administration to properly develop the playground, Riyaz Ahmad Paul, a cricket player from Ompora, Budgam, said “The ground needs to be leveled and maintained properly. There should be drinking water facility in the ground. Also, these potholes should be filled properly so that people here play freely.”

“Sports activities are promoted everywhere. We requested concerned officials to help us properly build and maintain this ground so that youth engage themselves in sports activities rather than getting involved in any illegal activity”, said Syed Hameed Andrabi, a local resident of Arigam.

“But our pleas seem to falling on deaf ears.”

On multiple occasions, politicians and government officials assured the locals to start the construction work on the stadium but no work has been done on the ground. Civil society and local NGO’s have appealed to the concerned authorities to start the work on stadium as soon as possible.



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## Ertugrul Striking A Big Chord In Kashmir

MUSAIB ISMAIL

The Turkish drama “Diris Ertugrul” broadcasted by Turkish state broadcaster TRT has become a rage in Kashmir valley. Spanning over five seasons with almost over 150 episodes, the show has garnered over 133 million views across countries.

Set in 12th century Anatolia, it’s a story of Turkish perseverance and resilience in the face of constant onslaught by the Crusaders and the Mongol savages that finally culminated in the establishment of the great Ottoman Empire who ruled over three continents for over 600 years.

The show features Ertugrul, son of an Oghuz Turk warrior, Suleiman Shah, and father of Ottoman founder, Osman Ghazi’s constant struggle and relentless pursuit to find a secure settlement for their nomadic Kayi tribe.

The series became popular in Kashmir amid lockdown that was imposed after the abrogation of Article 370 in August last year. With valley incommunicado for over three months and the prolonged shut down that followed, people started looking for means of entertainment. It was then the show became a rage in the valley.

“Ertugrul is one of the best serials in the recent times, which one can

watch along with family,” said Younis Ahmad, who is a PhD scholar at University of Kashmir.

In Kashmir parents are naming their kids after the protagonist of the show, Ertugrul. “Ertugrul is a frequently encountered name in my outpatient department”, said Dr Suhail Naik, consultant pediatrician and president Doctor’s association of Kashmir.

During winters, last year, Turkish caps were selling like hot cakes in the valley. The serial has made its place in the hearts of valleyites.

“I found the plot of the show very relatable and is devoid of any vulgar content. I personally recommend it to everybody”, said Talib Shah, who has become a huge fan of the show.

Ertugrul is one of the best serials in the recent times, which one can watch along with family



# Virtual vs Physical classes: a moot point amid pandemic



**Afshana Ashraf**

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic has been immense with almost every sector having taken a hit. Education has been one of the worst affected. Majority of the educational institutions have moved online in order to compensate for the loss.

According to the UNESCO report the coronavirus pandemic has adversely impacted over 290 million students across 22 countries. The UNESCO estimates that about 3.2 million students have been impacted in India alone.

The education in Kashmir valley has hit a road block, with students out of schools and colleges for almost over a year due to the circumstances prevalent in the valley. Although the classes are being conducted online, the lack of access to smart phones and a throttled 2G internet has proved to be big impediments in the smooth functioning of the online classes.

Sadifa Fatima, a school teacher from Baramulla, feels the online classes have been a welcome step. "At first, everyone was worried about classes not taking place but technology has made it easier with the help of online teaching. It has changed the way teachers and students interact in the classroom."

But adds, "Due to inadequate internet facilities the job is very challenging. Despite that, we try our best to deliver quality content in the best possible manner."

Shareen Zahoor, a 9th class student believes the disruption that the pandemic has caused has affected her mental health which has made it difficult for her to adjust to the 'new normal' of online classes.

"The anxiety and stress that I feel because of the situation around has disturbed me a lot. Attending lectures online has been cumbersome and very demanding. It has taken a lot of effort and time on my part to adjust to it."

Another teacher, Aasia Hassan who teaches at government school said the online learning may be a good working model in urban areas but students of rural areas continue to suffer. "While urban students have access to better facilities and so many apps to keep themselves entertained, many students from rural areas have no such sources of learning. They don't have stable internet connections most of the time, sometimes not even a basic smartphone. This has put them at a disadvantage."

The 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report stated that, during the height of school closures in April

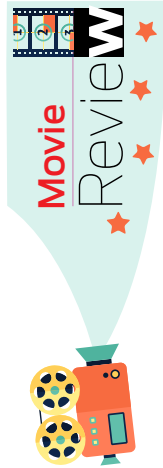
2020, almost 91% of students around the world were out of school, and about 40% of low and lower middle income countries have not supported learners at risk of exclusion during this crisis, such as the poor, linguistic minorities and learners with disabilities. This report highlighted that Covid-19 had worsened the inequalities in education system worldwide.

A normal year is something that every Kashmiri would have wished for, but the situation created by the pandemic is shattering our hopes again. Earlier it was Article 370 and now it is the virus





The director Gabriele Muccino, has used various cinematic elements to bring the movie to life. The intensity of the music ebbed and flowed with the intensity of the scenes.



# The Pursuit of Happyness

**Bisma Riyaz**

The pursuit of happiness is a 2006 American biographical drama film directed by Gabriele Muccino and written by Steven Conrad. The film features Will Smith as Chris Gardner, Smith's son, Jaden and Thandie Newton playing the role of Gardner's wife.

The movie portrays the difficulties, debts and pressures faced by a man having an unsettled family and the sacrifices made therein. A story of determination, hope and perseverance, the movie shows Chris' struggle in order to provide for his family. Chris spends his entire life savings investing in bone density scanners. However, unable to sell them quickly because of their higher price, his financial condition takes a turn for worse which badly

impacts his marriage. While Gardner is full of idealism and hope, his wife, Linda is pessimistic, unpleasant, and always furious. Gardner and his son, Christopher endure many hardships throughout the movie including living on the streets. Meanwhile, Chris's wife Linda works double shifts doing hotel laundry in order to get by. However, Linda then leaves Chris to find a better paying job in New York.

Chris then has an opportunity to become a stock broker but only after going through a grueling internship. As Gardner strives to financially support his son, he's evicted from his apartment.

Concluding his six month long internship, Gardner is called into a meeting where he's given a full time position. An emotional Gardner, rushes back to his son's daycare centre to hug and embrace him. The

epilogue at the end of the movie said that Gardner eventually hit big. Despite, Chris's financial risk, the tenacity with which he works, the unflinching faith that he has, stand out in the movie. Gardner is a great example of a man sacrificing all his time and effort into securing a better life for himself and his son.

The director Gabriele Muccino, has used various cinematic elements to bring the movie to life. The intensity of the music ebbed and flowed with the intensity of the scenes. Additionally, Muccino used various framing shots in many emotional scenes in the movie. In Chris's monologue to his son on motivation, the camera catches a close-up shot of both their faces in order to display emotions of sincerity and depth. Will Smith and his kid have done a tremendous job playing their roles. Their chemistry is evident throughout the movie.



## Meet Ishrat, first woman to represent India in Wheelchair Basketball

**Ishrat Rashid** from Baramulla is the first woman to have represented India in Wheelchair Basketball at the international level. A spinal cord injury changed her life forever. **Aaqib Naseem** interviews her to know more about her journey.



### **Tell us about your journey as a basketball player?**

I had a very normal childhood. But in 2016, police while chasing stone throwers entered into our house. Panicking, I jumped from the first floor and broke my back. I had a spine injury and was bed ridden for almost a year. Thereafter, I got into rehabilitation centre at Bemina, Srinagar where I saw a few boys playing basketball on a wheel chair. I was fascinated and joined them. The opportunities presented themselves and I haven't look back since.

### **How did you get a national call up?**

There was a camp which was conducted at Indoor Stadium, Srinagar. I was selected for the national wheelchair basketball team. I debuted with another girl from Jammu. We both played for Delhi at the start.

### **How do you practice and where?**

The wheelchair is fundamental to our practice. Very few can actually afford a sports wheelchair. I earlier used to practice with a simple wheelchair but when I was selected for international games, sports minister Kiren Rajjju gifted me, one. When I'm home, I usually practice at Srinagar.

### **You toured Bangkok in 2019. Tell us about more about that.**

I was selected in the Indian team in 2019 and our team went to Bangkok to play in a tournament. Even though we didn't win, we still bagged the 4Th position

### **What do you plan for future?**

Right now, I'm focused on paralympics. That's the only thing on my mind. I'm practising very hard. Let's hope for the best.



Last year, after Article 370 was abolished, we were very worried about our produce but the scheme helped us. Our losses were less but hope this year they approve this scheme again and we don't face further problems

## COVID-19 Lockdown Adds to Woes of Apple Growers

**Shagufta Rashid**

The COVID-19 pandemic has induced changes in the human attitudes and behaviours which has in turn caused structural changes in the consumer goods industry.

After the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, and the lockdown that followed, several apple growers and businessmen had stored their harvest from last season in the hope of receiving better rates this year. However, their hopes were dashed when the COVID-19 pandemic gripped the world.

Farooq Ahmad Bhat, 45, an apple orchard owner from Khan Sahib Village in Budgam says he is going through harsh times. Last year, Bhat put nine hundred boxes of apple in Controlled Atmosphere Storage (CAS) at Chadoora, Budgam.

"Every month I have to pay Rs 40 per box as charges for retaining the texture and the taste of the stored apples," said Bhat. "For the past seven months, I have had to pay Rs 300 per box. The returns are very low. I have incurred huge losses", says Bhat.

Mohammad Amin Ganaie, a 52 year old orchardist from Budgam says he had stored 2000 boxes at the storage. "Earlier it was curfews and shutdowns after the abrogation of Article 370 that disrupted our trade and now the virus has hampered our business."

Jammu and Kashmir apple growers had exported 4.50 lakh metric tons of fruit last year, compared

to 5.79 lakh metric tons of apple exported in 2018 in the same time period. The apple export has witnessed a dip of around 1.35 lakh metric tonnes in the past one year in wake of restrictions that were imposed post the abrogation.

Last year, the Centre had introduced the Market Intervention Scheme for apples for the 2019 season and farmers are urging the authorities to do the same this year. The move had played an important role in stabilizing prices and preventing distress sales. The then, Lt Governor of Jammu and Kashmir GC Murmu had written to the Ministry of Home Affairs, demanding extension of the Market Intervention Scheme under which the government procures the produce. Apple growers say the scheme helped them a great deal last year, when the former state remained shut after the revocation of its special status.

"This scheme is very good for us. Last year, after Article 370 was abolished, we were very worried about our produce but the scheme helped us. Our losses were less but hope this year they approve this scheme again and we don't face further problems," Muhammad Ramzan, a local Apple grower from Budgam area said.

The horticulture industry in Kashmir is worth around 8000 to 9000 crore including the employment it generates and a significant contributor to the local economy with livelihood of lakhs dependent on it. Having witnessed a decline last year, a similar trend this year could prove to be disastrous for the sector and the local economy.

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