

MERC TIMES



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SAKHI Participates In 'International Girl Child Day'



Sheikh Sehar

Bandipora: SAKHI, One-Stop Women Support Centre, actively participated in the 'International Girl Child Day – 2020' organized by the district administration, Bandipora, at Conference Hall, Mini Secretariat, on October 11.

Dr. Owais Ahmad (IAS), District Development Commissioner Bandipora, was the chief guest on the occasion. He hailed the role played by SAKHI in a fight against domestic violence.

Miss Ishrat Ayoub, the administrator of SAKHI, was also present on the occasion. She highlighted the importance of girl child day and stressed the rights of a girl child and need to combat gender-based violence prevalent in society.

“Let’s seize the opportunity to reimagine a better world inspired by adolescent girls – energized and recognized, counted and invested in,” she said.

She also highlighted the remarkable work of SAKHI and its role in resolving domestic violence and gender inequality

prevalent in the district. She said that several One-Stop Women Centres have been established to provide 24x7 service to the women facing any kind of violence.

“We, at SAKHI, are regularly dealing with women issues most of which constitute cases related to domestic violence, gender inequality, cybercrime and sexual assault,” she added.

International Girl Child Day is celebrated every year on October 11 to recognize girls’ rights and the unique challenges girls face around the world. This year, the theme of this celebrated day was ‘My Voice- Our Equal Future.’

The programme highlighted the various governmental schemes launched for the girl child. Schemes such as ‘Ladli Beti’ and ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’ aimed at empowering women have had a considerable impact on the ground. Mahila Shakti Kendras, have provided all possible support and guidance to the women besides other women related schemes by Central, State or UT governments.

The programme was attended by Mr. Zahoor Ahmad Mir, ADC/Member

Secretary, OSC Bandipora, Mr. Imtiyaz Ahmad, Joint Director Planning, Bandipora, DSWO Bandipora and other sectorial officers from the district. Besides, a good gathering of people especially, women and girls, was also present.

The programme was highly appreciated and lauded by all the participants who hoped that with the vision and mission of district administration women-related issues would materialize in near future.



Let’s seize the opportunity to reimagine a better world inspired by adolescent girls – energized and recognized, counted and invested in





BBFS Launches Football-Based Training App

Imran Bashir

With the COVID-19 pandemic caging all the athletes indoors, the Bhaichung Bhutia Football School (BBFS) has come up with an application ‘enJogo’ to provide training to footballers at home.

The app, launched virtually, has structured training programmes with training videos, work-out schedules and also provides nutrition plans to athletes.

“enJogo is based on the popular BBFS methodology that has helped thousands of players to improve their football skill,” said Kishore Taid, the CEO and co-founder of BBFS, while virtually briefing about the app.

“Our objective is to reach as many athletes as possible and not to make profit out of it,” he further said.

The BBFS has 84 centres and over 2,000 players are being trained

at these centres across the country. But with no sporting activity due to the pandemic, the BBFS designed the app to keep the players in touch with the game.

This is a first-of-its-kind app which will have videos, one-on-one training with coaches as well. It has crafted workouts that will help football lovers of all ages improve their technique. Players can also join three to six week training plan to help them improve in a particular area of the game.

Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, Kiren Rijiju, shared his appreciation for the innovation that enJogo has sought in the field of sports.

“Technology can revolutionize every sports in India. The football training app will enable young footballers across India to get access to proper online coaching to train remotely which can also help in identifying talent from the remotest

parts of the country,” he said.

Responding to a question from MERC Times regarding the future initiatives of Sports Ministry for development and promotion of football in J&K, Kiren Rijiju answered,

“Development of players and sports infrastructure in J&K is always my priority. Soon after the pandemic, I will be visiting Srinagar and take stock of the sports situation.”

Unlike the traditional on-field academy which is focused on children and teenagers, the app has football-based workouts for adults as well as a library of workouts with in-built videos of drills with audio instructions that accompany a user while they workout. The workouts are custom made for different ages and skill-levels, and have a built-in mechanism for users to track their performance metrics easily.

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Ganderbal Villages Get Playgrounds In Phase III of B2V



Nisar Lone

Ganderbal's rural areas- Gund, Rayil, Kullan- were granted playgrounds in phase third of B2V (Back-to-Village). The move is meant to facilitate means of recreation in the area. In addition to the newer grounds being sanctioned, directions were also passed to repair and upgrade some old playgrounds.

The third phase of B2V (Back-to-Village) began from the first week of October across J&K to promote and boost the activities in the rural areas. B2V is an initiative taken by Government of India to develop villages and provide a key platform to people living in far flung areas to obtain a grievance redressal on spot.

The local residents of the Ganderbal district expressed happiness over the setting up of new playgrounds across the rural areas.

"Earlier, we did not have facilities of playgrounds and instructors who could help us in enhancing our skills. Now, we are happy to get all of that", said Ishtiyaq Ahmad, a local resident of Gund.

"During curfews and lockdown we used to get depressed because we had no avenues of playing outdoors since the playgrounds were far from our homes", said a group of teenagers from Gund.

"But now, we can enjoy the games just outside our homes", they added.

Since many decades several kanals of land was unutilized in these rural areas and now the residents are satisfied with the decision.

"The land that has been identified was unused. It is good that government has decided to utilize the land for something productive", said Ghulam Rasool, one of the elderly inhabitants of the area.

Mohammad Shafi, another local resident said, "These barren fields were covered with bushes and stones. Now with B2V, these lands would be developed and the children can play happily without any worries."

Gurez Residents Migrate With Early Arrival Of Winter

Suhail Habib

The picturesque Gurez Valley, situated 87-kilometers from Bandipora, presents a dark and ghostly look. This year, the early advent of cold waves has forced the residents of this mesmerizing place to shift at the earliest.

As the winter steps in, most of the people either migrate to Bandipora town or Srinagar to escape the vagaries which the harsh winter brings with itself. During winters, mercury dips as low as -20°C and receives upto 15-feet of snowfall at certain places.

The Razdan top, situated at the height of over 12000-feet receives upto 20-feet of snowfall and cuts off the Gurez Valley from the rest of Kashmir for upto six months. As such, the amenities remain scarce during this period. Due to electricity outages throughout the season, diesel gen- sets supply back up for only few hours during the day. However, the lack of facilities remains the biggest challenge for the people.

Last year, Aadil Fareed of Bagtoor had to be airlifted to Srinagar after he developed medical complications which required emergency treatment.

"I developed severe chest pain during winter last year and was air lifted since we don't have proper health facilities here."

"Doctors were on leave and the Razdan top was blocked due to snow. We feel helpless during winters", he further said.

The telecom services are greatly hindered during winter in Gurez making it impossible for people to communicate. This further adds to their woes and they prefer to migrate

Naveed Khan, a resident of Achoora, Gurez, who studies in class 12 said, "It becomes impossible to study in winters. That is why I enrolled myself in Bandipora. At least, I study properly there."

The residents continuously appeal the authorities for the provision of basic amenities during winters and the upgradation of old ones. However, they seem to pay no heed.

"We have to face numerous problems during winters but the concerned authorities seem to be in deep slumber", said Abdul Yaqoob, a local resident.





Budgam Constable Loses Life After Car Skids Off Road

Mubashir Bashir

Budgam constable lost his life after his car skidded off the road last week. The incident took place on Jammu-Srinagar National Highway.

The deceased has been identified as Ashiq Hussain hailing from Namtehal village of Budgam district. He was travelling from Jammu to Banihal. However, the car skidded off midway and fell into the Chenab river.

The police discovered his body after six days near Gujjar Kothia village. The officials further clarified that the vehicle had actually slipped due to heavy rainfall which had made the narrow road very slippery near Ceftria Mohre and the vehicle lost its control and rolled down 500- metres into the Chenab river.



The Jammu-Srinagar National Highway has devoured numerous lives till now. Even though the authorities has widened it from existing two lanes to four lanes and has made efforts to make it an all-weather route, it still continues to consume lives. The road has very narrow

curves at certain points which makes it hard for a driver to manoeuvre their vehicles.

"Even after seventy years the administration has failed to upgrade the road and make it safe for travel. We keep losing our loved ones because of the administration's cold attitude towards this serious issue", said Mushtaq Ahmad, one of the relatives of the deceased.

People demand the repairing of the roads and strong action from the authorities so as to ensure the safety of those travelling on the National Highway.

"We urge the authorities to ensure that necessary steps are taken to ensure everybody's safety and no family loses their loved ones in such a tragic way", said Hamid Altaf, another relative of the deceased.

Gaming Culture Picks Up In Valley With Surge In Fiber Connections

Syed Junaid

The restriction on high-speed internet in the valley from past fourteen months had put a full-stop on online gaming. However, with the advent of various fibre connections at reasonable rates, the valley is witnessing a comeback of gaming culture.

Before internet restriction, the valley had witnessed several online gaming tournaments with a huge participation by indigenous youngsters. Various tournaments were also funded by outsiders. But, the absence of internet after the removal of Article 370, all the excitement and participation came down. And fibre connections now have come to their rescue with many gamers signing up again.

Athar Ellahi, a professional gamer from Harwan, Srinagar, who is a veteran of many local and national online gaming competition said, "I participated in a gaming competition in Bangalore last year and enjoyed every part of it."

"However, I missed several gaming

opportunities after the snapping of internet", he added.

"I happy to join the online tournaments again with the help of recently installed fibre connection", he further said.

Multiplayer online videogames like League of Legends, PUBG, Counter-Strike, FIFA, Street Fighter, and StarCraft



are the some of the online games popular among the youngsters.

"I am playing FIFA since 2011 and have participated in many competitions and tournaments in Kashmir. I have fetched a good amount by winning these tournaments", said Adnan Mir, a football

gamer from Hazratbal, Srinagar.

"Thanks to fibre service providers, I'm back again to defeat everyone", Adnan added.

The reasonable cost of the fibre connection is also one of the reasons that many gamers are able to make a comeback in the online gaming world.

"It's due the affordable package that I have installed a fibre connection at my home. I'm happy to step in to the online battleground again", said Safiya Tariq, a passionate gamer residing in Srinagar.

According to a report by 'The Power of Mobile Gaming in India' released by the Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) and Kantar IMRB in association POKKT, India

features among the five biggest mobile gaming markets in the world. The mobile gaming industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the world especially in India. And the COVID-19 lockdown has witnessed a rapid increase in the online gaming culture.



Born With A Cleft Lip, Anzar Clinches Seat In IIT

Aaqib Naseem

A 19-year-old boy, Anzar Nazir, hailing from Kralgund area of North Kashmir's Kupwara district, has become the first person from his area to make it to an IIT.

A labourer's son, Anzar could hardly pay for his education. But, his hard work and determination landed him into the prestigious IIT.

Born with a cleft lip, Anzar faced complications with eating, speaking and hearing. He had to undergo multiple surgeries to rectify the problems that he faced.

"Having born with a birth defect, some old members of my family didn't want me to survive. They considered me useless and burden", said Anzar while talking about his low self-esteem issues.

"But, I proved them wrong. I worked hard day and night to achieve my goals", he added. Having surmounted all odds, Anzar is now a student of India's one of the most reputed institution, IIT Roorkee. He had attained AIR 188.

The JEE-Advanced result 2020 was declared by the IIT Delhi on October 05, 2020. More than 43,204 students qualified the test. The news of his selection reached Anzar through his friends. "My friends notified me about my selection."

After matriculation, Anzar opted for non-medical stream as it was his childhood dream to be an engineer. Anzar credits his teachers and parents for his success.

Sajad Ahmad Lone, Anzar's chemistry teacher said, "He was always ahead of every other student in my class. He used to answer every question that I used to ask him. I was sure he was destined for something great."

Anzar said that his parents couldn't even understand or differentiate between the subjects but they always backed him.

"I proudly say that I am Anzar's father. He is a child with few complications but also with lot of abilities", said Anzar's father.

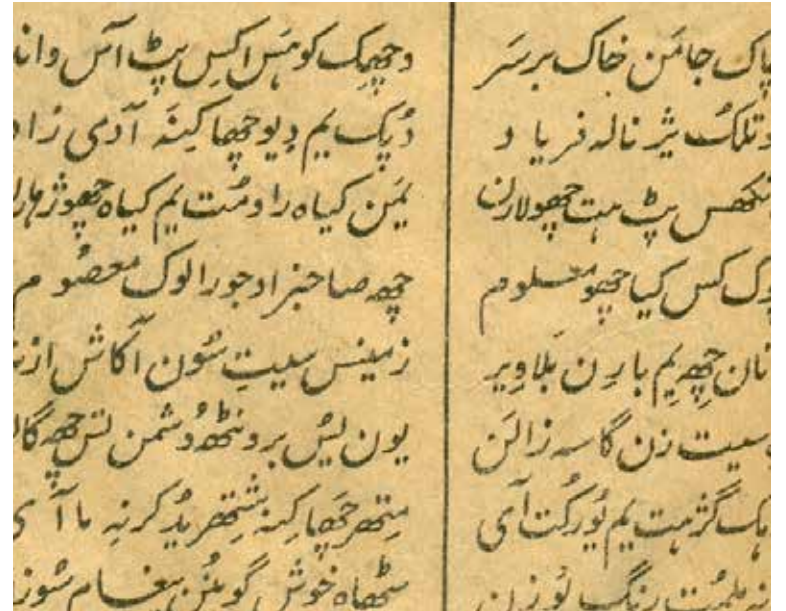
"He maintained consistency and determination and worked hard without bothering about the issue he was facing. He was only focused on his dream", said Anzar's brother.

Anzar got a lot of attention from the media and authorities. Mehbooba Mufti, the former Chief Minister of erstwhile state, retweeted Anzar's video on Twitter and wrote,

"What a heartwarming video. We are proud of you and may Allah always protect you." Former Bollywood star, Zaira Wasim also took to twitter and wrote, "May Allah protect this brother and his heart and grant him all the success of this world and hereafter."

Having born with a birth defect, some old members of my family didn't want me to survive. They considered me useless and burden

Kashmiri Language Breathing Its Last



Afshana Ashraf

With young generation preferring to speak in Urdu or English, the melodious mother tongue of Kashmir is facing a slow death. Kashmiri language, the first and indigenous language of Kashmir has become secondary now.

The government of Jammu & Kashmir in 2008, made Kashmiri language a compulsory subject in government schools upto secondary level to promote the development of mother tongue. But, it's impact is yet to be seen.

Wasim Akram, a government teacher at Harwan School said, "Not only as a teacher but as a Kashmiri, I have always felt that this language should be my first priority. To learn or not to learn, to speak or not to speak is a choice that everyone can make. But, no one has the right to impose their choices on us."

"Sadly, there are many parents who force their children to not speak in Kashmiri", he said further.

Another teacher working at a private school in Srinagar said, "The young generation doesn't know how to speak proper Kashmiri. They sometimes fail to utter a simple Kashmiri word."

"Parents don't encourage their children to converse in Kashmiri. They consider it inferior", he added.

As said by Dottie LeBeau "Losing the language means losing the culture. We need to know who we are because it makes a difference in who our children are."

While talking to MERC times, Bashir Ahmad, a senior citizen from Pampore, said that his grandson is four-years-old and they have taught him 'chaste' Kashmiri as they believe mother tongue is something that comes naturally to a child.

"However, today schools give more preference to other languages such as English or Urdu and that is why it has become a barrier for our children to communicate with their peers", he said. According to the 2001 census, India has about 5,554,496 Kashmiri speakers. Even about 105,000 Kashmiri speakers in Pakistan are mostly the immigrants from the Kashmir Valley.

Kashmiri language basically belongs to the geographical linguistic sub-grouping called the Dardic part of the Indo-European Language family. It is also one of the 22 scheduled languages of India and was also recently made one of the official languages of Jammu and Kashmir.

"I fear that a time will come when our mother tongue would be vanished completely," said Zahoor Ahmad, a resident of Srinagar.



Kashmiri Apples Badly Hit Due To Scab

Musaib Ismail

After the abrogation of Article 370, the apple trees were badly hit by black plague and scab due to the delay caused in spraying of pesticides as the strict restrictions were imposed across the valley.

Now with the arrival of deadly COVID-19 pandemic and the country-wide lockdown, the apple growers are facing a tough time.

To add to the woes, more than 50% of apples were damaged due to scab this year. The August lockdown of last year was followed by another lockdown in March this year to curtail and arrest the spread of the virus. Critical time was lost and, pesticides and other fertilizers couldn't reach the plants on time. It allowed for the diseases to take hold and destroy the crop.

"The produce this year was very dismal.

Apples were very short in size and diseases like black plague and scab destroyed whatever was left", said Mohammad Iqbal lone, an apple grower from Harwan area.

"Before abrogation of article 370, the



available pesticides in the market were fresh but after the year long lockdown the pesticides were outdated and of low quality",

Said Bashir Ahmad, an apple distributor from Telbal area of Srinagar.

To facilitate the transportation of apples outside the UT, the growers have also been demanding a market intervention scheme like last year. The administration headed by LG Manoj Sinha has dispatched the MIS to encourage partners by giving significant showcasing stage and guaranteeing ideal costs to the apple cultivators. The scheme will clear path for the obtainment of 12 lakh metric tonnes of apple.

"We hope that the authorities would understand our grim situation and come up with some effective solution", said another apple grower.

Apples form the bulk of the Kashmir's horticulture trade. The variety in the produce and good taste has ensured a good market for the Kashmiri apple orchardists. In Kashmir, around

19 lakh metric tons of apple are delivered every year and around seven lakh families are associated with the sector.

LAWDA Plans To Shift Dal Dwellers, Residents Aghast

Aadil Farooq

The residents of Hawran, Srinagar are in anguish as the Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LAWDA) has planned to rehabilitate Dal dwellers on a land identified as a playground.

"LAWDA has demarcated the sports land for settlement of people from Dal Lake. The fate of the sports ground hangs in balance", said Ghulam Mohammad, a senior resident who routinely visits the ground to watch the games.

Syed Qasim Sports Stadium named after a Sufi saint, in Harwan area of Srinagar, is already lying in deplorable condition. Spread over vast swathes of land at Chandpora, Harwan, the ground has been neglected from past many years.

As such, the upkeep of the ground has fallen on the shoulders of the locals who dish out money from their own pockets for maintenance of the ground.

"The sports ground has been ignored by the authorities. The maintenance and supporting costs are borne by the local people", said Tehseen Gul, a sports coordinator of tournaments that take place in the area.

"The expenses of various sports tournaments are covered by the local residents since the authorities have taken it for granted", he said further.

The locals also allege the encroachment of land by the people from other areas who often visit here.

"Some people even tried to encroach the land. Fights ensue here on a daily basis", said Altaf Ahmad, a local resident.

Some locals are also been accused of

polluting the playground by dumping the household garbage there.

"Household waste is dumped here and trash is littered everywhere. Because of this, at multiple occasions there have been scuffles between locals and sports enthusiasts from the area."

The sports ground is encircled by wonderful mountains, and a stream flows downstream on its periphery.

Despite the preservation attempts by both locals and the sports enthusiasts, LAWDA has put them in grim situation because of its recently issued rehabilitation notification. The people demand the withdrawal of the order.

"We urge the authorities to withdraw the notification and also demade the upgradation of the ground and provide facilities to the players", said Ghulam Rasool, the resident of Harwan.



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Eid-i-Milad Celebrated With Religious Fervour Across The Valley

Ifra Hassan

Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi (SAW) was celebrated with religious fervour across Jammu and Kashmir amid COVID-19 pandemic with largest day-long religious gatherings held at the revered shrine of Hazratbal where the Holy Relic of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was displayed for the devotees after every prayer of the day.

Due to COVID, the people could not gather in large numbers. Vendors and shopkeepers also did not witness the

rush like they used to.

“I have a small time business of selling street food at Hazratbal. Earlier, people used to come and buy snacks during Fridays and on special occasions. But, due to the fear of COVID, very few people buy from us”, said Ghulam Nabi.

“I run a small shop which caters to ladies’ wear. I used to witness a huge rush on this day. But

this year, sales have been really somber”, said Irfan Ahmad who runs a hosiery shop.

One of the devotees who had gathered

to pray at the shrine, said, “The number of people at Dargah, today was very small. We had to maintain distance while praying due to the ongoing pandemic. The arrangements were very good”.

The official said that special arrangements were put in place for the devotees to celebrate the day and special attention was paid to COVID-19 protocols to ensure social distancing and other SOPs at various shrines including Hazratbal and other revered shrines across Jammu and Kashmir.

Ganderbal’s Sister Duo Inspire Other Young Women

Sayima Ahmad

“I was still in middle school when I stepped into the world of sports”, says Sabrina. “It was only for pastime then, a play no more serious to us than a toy is to a toddler.”

Sabrina Mir is a physical education student currently pursuing a bachelor’s degree in the subject, outside J&K. She has not only excelled in the academic aspect of the subject but has actively participated in all its practical endeavours.

As she herself explains, “My proper exposure to the sporting life was through Abdul Majeed Dar, our venerable teacher. Initially, we were all in for play, oblivious to the proper methods of playing different games and the rules specific to each of them. Although, at the time, we were involved in a number of contests at inter-school or zonal levels but to no avail as we were unaware of the professional practices and goals that go with them.”

“With the mentorship of our teacher we started improving our game, and the more competitions we participated in, the more we realized our potential. Playing



at the district level and the inter-district level we became confident and started accomplishing more. This strengthened our resolve to better ourselves and participate in even more events”, she added enthusiastically.

“It wasn’t easy, though. Since, at the time, a lot of negativity was ascribed to the field. There was always a sort of shame attached to a girl doing sports publicly and that too out of state. But, thanks to Almighty, we didn’t stop, we kept on

playing, against all odds and here we are today.” “From a personal point of view”, she starts warmly, a sense of accomplishment visible on her face, “against everything, against every stereotype in our society I achieved much of what I can now cherish.

It was due to God’s help and my own persistence, as well as to the support of my family that I can proudly say I am a Gold Medalist in Martial Arts, a Volleyball and Snow-Skiing champion.

Regarding the girls she has inspired, she said, “A lot of my friends have looked upon me as an idol and themselves struggled in the field to make a place for themselves.” she proclaims with a sense of gratitude.

“My sister had such an influence over me,” says Zoya, her younger sister. “When someone in your family does something memorable it sets a bar in the house. My sister did it for me. And today, following in her footsteps I have even surpassed her – at least in Volleyball”, she adds with a chuckle.

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