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The Echo



April-June, 2017, Volume 08, Issue 02, Pages 08



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Communal harmony thrives in Sheikhpora Pandit colony



Pandit Colony, Sheikhpora. PHOTO: WASEEM AHMAD/IUST

WASEEM AHMAD/ SYED JUNAID

He feared that his house in Srinagar would have developed cracks. He thought, spiders would have woven web all over the walls with water dripping from leaking pipes. However, on his return to the Valley in 2010, he was surprised to see his house intact and being guarded by Kashmiri Muslims.

Pran Nath Anand, 65, is among many who are residing in a Pandit colony at Sheikhpora in district Budgam. His family returned from Jammu and got settled in the colony along with 200 other Pandit families.

During 1990s when Kashmir was volatile, Pandits migrated from the Valley in thousands of numbers, mostly to Jammu region. "We did not want to leave our beloved land, but few unscrupulous elements and some people with vested interest forced us to leave," laments Anand.

Once normalcy was restored in the Valley, many families decided to return home. Many of them, who had sold off their property, got settled at Sheikhpora and some other places in Kashmir.

All these years, Anand had an impression that his house would have been vandalized. However, to his pleasant surprise, he found his house being guarded by his old neighbours.

"As we reached home, our Muslim friends and neighbours welcomed us. They were quite happy to see us back. I was relieved that returning home was a good decision," shares Anand, and adds, "I suggest to all Pandit brothers that this is the best time for them to return back to the Valley."

In Sheikhpora colony, Kashmiri Pandits have been putting up since 2006. "During these years, we have witnessed many untoward situations in Kashmir, especially in 2008, 2010 and 2016. However, no one has ever harmed us by any means," reveals Rajesh

"We did not want to leave our beloved land, but few unscrupulous elements and some people with vested interest forced us to leave"

Kotru, secretary of the colony. His son, Suraj, studies in ninth standard in Oxford Public School at Ompora, Budgam.

Sharing his school experiences, he says, "I have made many friends at school irrespective of their religious faith. We play together and share notebooks with each other. I also visit their home and they come to mine."

President of the Pandit colony, Chunni Lal Bhat, divulges that they all live peacefully with their Muslim neighbours. "Whenever we need their help or support, we always find them around," he says.

Meenakshi Suri, who teaches at Government High School, Bemina, returned to the Valley after 22 years. "I was barely eight years old in 1991, when my family migrated to Bathindi, Jammu. It was a painful moment for me to leave Kashmir, for I loved my place and had many Kashmiri friends in school and neighbourhood," she recalls.

She further narrates as to how difficult it was for her family to survive in Jammu, for they had to start from scratch. On returning to the Valley, however, she says, she feels happy to be back to her beloved land.

Meenakshi is now married to another Kashmiri migrant Pandit, Vickey Suri, who also happens to be a teacher by profession. Both of them are living in the Pandit colony at Sheikhpora. The couple has a five year-old-daughter, who studies in a local school. The family seems to be grateful to their Kashmiri neighbours. "They have been quite

kind and helpful to us. We owe a lot to them," says Vickey Suri.

Another family belongs to Dr Sandeep Sharma, a teacher, who preferred to stay back in Kashmir. He says, his family had never received any threat from anywhere. "In fact, we are in good terms with Kashmiri Muslims since beginning. They have always expressed their affection and respect for us, that is why we never left Kashmir," says Sharma.

During the past two decades, the family says, they never experienced any kind of harassment or threat. They celebrate festivals together with their non-Pandit neighbours. They take part in weddings as well as funerals of neighbours.

Like other Pandit families, Sharma family too does not support a separate township for Kashmiri Pandits, rather advocate for a secular neighbourhood. "Separate township means that Pandits will have to live only at particular areas and shall be segregated from rest of the Kashmiri society. It will make them feel alienated in their own land," says Aasha, Dr Sharma's mother. "It will also be

"Separate township means that Pandits shall be segregated from rest of the Kashmiri society. It will make them feel alienated in their own land"

detrimental to the age-old culture and ethos of Kashmir," she warns.

On the other hand, Muslims also articulate unity with their Pandit neighbours. "We always help each other both in times of joy and grief. We have always believed in communal harmony and brotherhood between Muslims and Pandits," shares Shahbaz Ahmad, a local.

Towards the end of the conversation with him, Anand leaves a message for Kashmiri people. "We, Pandits as well as Muslims, should live together as a community like we used to live earlier." ■■■■

BEGGING MAFIA IN PULWAMA AUTHORITIES FAIL TO CURB INFLUX OF NON-LOCAL BEGGARS

JUNAID BHAT/SHOWKAT DAR

Every year, Kashmir witnesses a huge influx of non-local beggars causing much inconvenience to people. While Valley streets can be seen occupied by these beggars, district Pulwama is no exception, where authorities have failed to curb the menace.

Owing to official negligence, Pulwama has become one of the favourite destinations for the beggars from all over India. Ironically, there is no implementation of the laws governing abolition of begging in the state, such as J&K Prevention of Beggary Act, 1960.

Outside women and kids in particular can be spotted outside schools, colleges and shrines, and near bus yards and traffic signals. The menace gets aggravated multifold in the sacred month of Ramadan.

Non-local beggars are believed to be governed by begging

it to our boss, who in return pays us on monthly-basis," said Ashok, non-local beggar.



Non-local beggars at Pulwama district in South Kashmir.
PHOTO: SHOWKAT DAR / IUST

Talking to *The Echo*, Executive Officer, Municipal Committee, Pulwama, Mushtaq Ahmad Wani, said, they did not have any

official data about the non-local beggars.

"It is a scam and needs to be checked. Police can play a key role in controlling this growing menace," said Wani, adding that police, however, seems to have failed to maintain record of non-local beggars.

He further said, in some cases, while males attend to their routine work, women and children go for begging, "for it is more profitable and less hardworking for them".

A senior officer at Pulwama police station, pleading anonymity, said, they do not have any identity proof or legal document of non-local beggars, "which is what is restricting us to take any action against them".

Non-local beggars have turned out to be a nuisance for locals. Most of the people cannot resist giving alms to poor crying children, who invoke every deity and every lesson of humanity while begging.

Afreen, a University student, said, she cannot travel comfortably or go to market without being surrounded by these beggars.

"I fail to understand why begging has become so widespread in Kashmir. Who is allowing this bizarre business to flourish? Why is government not taking any step to curb this menace?" she asked.

It has been seen that many of the beggars are healthy and capable of earning. A non-local beggar, Bholu (32) said, he moves to Kashmir every year during the holy month of Ramadan.

"We reach Kashmir via train in *Chaalu Dabba*, a compartment reserved for poor people. We do not need to register ourselves anywhere for the same," he added.

Sociologists lamented that rampant begging on streets has posed a serious threat to the socio-economic, political and cultural diversity of the society. "Besides, these beggars are spreading pollution here, as they live in unhygienic conditions," said Shabir Ahmad, Sociology lecturer, Government Degree College, Pulwama, adding that there must be a permanent solution to eradicate this social evil. ■■■■

"Whatever amount we collect during the day, we handover it to our boss, who in return pays us on monthly-basis"

mafia in the Valley. They are being assigned different spots in Pulwama and other places to collect the money.

"Whatever amount we collect during the day, we handover

KASHMIR ATTRACTS BOLLYWOOD AGAIN

JUNAID DAR

Ever since unrest broke out in Kashmir during 1990s, Bollywood industry was believed to have bid a final farewell to the picturesque locales of the Valley. However, for past some years, the film industry has once again been flocking to Kashmir for shooting films.

Kashmir Valley has again become the first preference for Bollywood filmmakers instead of abroad locations. Many production houses have been working for the revival of Bollywood in Kashmir.

"We try to promote filmmaking in Kashmir so as to be able to tell our story ourselves," says Khawar Jamsheed, owner of KJ Productions, a prominent production house in Kashmir.

He opines that Kashmir has been able to preserve its beauty over the past many decades unlike other places of India. "Clean environs of the Valley make it look more beautiful on screen," he says.

Kashmir has caught Bollywood's attention way back in early 1960s after the Eastman colour was introduced in India. Earlier, a very few black and white films had been shot in Kashmir. The introduction of colour in films provided the filmmakers a chance to shoot their films on scenic locations of Kashmir rather than dusty plains of India.

Till 1990, more than 90 Hindi films had been shot in the Valley. The films including *Roti*, *Noorie*, *Boby*, *Kashmir Ki Kali* and *Jungle* did a great business on box-office, while people showed a good response towards them.

Bollywood filmmakers are now again showing a keen interest in Kashmir. Various locations like Pahalgam, Gulmarg, Yousmarg, Sonamarg and famous Mughal gardens have become eye catchers

"We try to promote filmmaking in Kashmir so as to be able to tell our story ourselves"

for the filmmakers. Prominent among the films that have been shot in Kashmir during past five years are *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*, *Haider*, *Jab Tak Hain Jaan*, *Highway* and

Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani.

Bollywood has not only become a source of employment for many locals, it is also believed to give a boost to Kashmir tourism. The Jammu and Kashmir Tourism gives approval for about 30 to 40 films to be shot in the state in a year.

"Film is an easier way to do publicity of a place. Besides, it also

helps in generating employment as many locals work with the crew of the film," says Jamsheed.

Many Kashmiri artists have played some significant roles in Bollywood films rather than that of *shikara wala* or tourist guide. "I am happy to get a chance to work in Bollywood and a play a serious character," says Syed Aaqib, a Kashmir-based artist.

Bollywood's love for Kashmir seems to be never-ending. From Shammii Kapoor to Shah Rukh Khan, various Bollywood



stars have showcased their art in the beautiful backdrop of Kashmir. Despite obstacles, this love is believed to only grow with time. ■■■■

'I WANT GIRLS TO BE SELF-RELIANT'

She has always endeavored to work for the women folk of Kashmir, highlight their issues and find reprisal for them. As a journalist, she did not aim at being neutral, but truthful. She believes in reporting facts, no matter what. In an exclusive interview with The Echo reporter, Sherfun Nisa, Chairperson, State Commission for Women and former producer, BBC Urdu Service, Nayeema Ahmad Mehjoor, deliberates at length on her role as a journalist and later as social worker.



Nayeema Ahmad Mehjoor

Q. You have been a Law graduate. You could have served as a lawyer at a time when not many girls in the Valley would even pursue higher education. But then you landed in media and worked with BBC for over two decades. Why so?

Law was never my passion, but journalism was. It is not that I have not worked in law department. I used to work in the High Court for sometime. But there was a problem that most of my relatives were in law profession, who were not happy about my decision to take up law. I thought if I have to surrender law profession, I will go for journalism. I asked my relatives and my father not to object to my decision. Then I got associated with radio because it was inside me to highlight the issues and get reprisal of the problems. Here in Kashmir, people are engulfed in so many problems. It was my passion to get connected with people and find solution for their problems.

Q. The decade of 1990s is believed to be the peak militancy period in Kashmir. How easy or difficult was it for you to work in the field being a woman?

I have talked at length about this subject in my latest book 'Lost in Terror', which is based on how Kashmiri women would deal with various situations in 1990s, and I am no exception. It is about how women coped with the situation in 1990s and how they came out of it. The book talks about their miseries and struggle during the peak militancy period.

Q. Being a Kashmiri, one often feels inclined towards Pakistan for various reasons. How have you managed to do away with your personal interests, if any, while working in an organisation that gets broadcast in India as well as Pakistan?

As a journalist, I always tried to be truthful, not neutral. When a journalist is performing his or her duty, he or she has to report facts in real situation. I also believe in that. When I was working in All India Radio (AIR), Srinagar, I had to abide by certain rules and regulations. But still I managed to highlight the problems in right perspective. A journalist should always be independent, which, however, is no more a case now. Nowadays, some journalists have become party to the agencies. But in BBC, I got this opportunity that if I had to highlight the situation where Pakistan and India had either been pro or anti-Kashmir, I highlighted it. We don't care about India and Pakistan.

Q. You are currently serving as Chairperson of SCW. What steps have you been taking for the upliftment of Kashmiri women, who are otherwise trapped into gender stereotyping? How do you help them open up and speak for themselves?

Last year when I joined this organisation, my aim was to make I believe in a well-knit society where a man is head of the respect women. That will break the shackles and stereotypes. it is about the career of their children, or about building a that, she builds her confidence and feels that she is being should be respected in offices as well. Women should be society, part of the state and part of every institution.

"Women should be made part of every activity, so that they feel to be a part of the society"

people respect women. I am a traditional woman myself. family. I want those men, fathers, husbands and others to Women should be a part of every household decision, whether property. Women should have at least a say in families. With valued in the family and outside as well. Working women made part of every activity, so that they feel to be a part of the

Q. What kind of cases reach you mostly—marital

Mostly we receive marital disputes, children custody cases also been receiving harassment cases at work places, which we are dealing with strongly. We have tried to build an understanding between the parties. We also receive rape cases from all the three regions of the state. We deal with them along with the police.

issues or violence-related cases?

and maintenance issues after the custody is given. We have

Q. What measures do you take to tackle violence against women? How far you have succeeded?

We have succeeded in the sense that many women come to me and share their problems to seek solutions. They need help, support and counselling that we provide them. Women are aware now that they should come out and talk about the violence. But I think there is not any quick solution that will stop violence. It takes time. However, we have been conducting awareness programmes in rural and urban areas so as to sensitize our society that violence is not the solution for everything. It leads to other problems also, which can be chronic that disturb family as well as society. As a journalist, I had done a radio series on it so as to aware people about it. See, in case there is any violence happening against women at home, they should seek help. If there is no elder in the family, they should talk in neighbourhood. They should contact Women's Commission or women's police stations. Then District Social Welfare officers are there. They have so many platforms where they can go.

Q. According to the recent reports by the government, there were 595 rape cases in two years, 213 of which were reported in Kashmir and Ladakh regions, while 382 cases were registered in Jammu province. What steps would you take to prevent such incidents in future?

Here in Kashmir, we don't have a proper definition of what is sexual harassment. It happens at home as well. We have been receiving cases where a family member is involved in sexual harassment. We have to aware these young girls about what is actually sexual harassment. Because sometimes at home we are unaware about such intentions. We have to make them understand that if they see something like this they have to be alert. For that purpose, we have started visiting schools, where we aware youngsters about sexual harassment.

Q. In contemporary times, child abuse in schools and other places is widespread in Kashmir. What kind of programmes do you organise to generate awareness among children and their parents in this regard?

I have not got the actual figures about child abuse in Kashmir, because nobody talks about it. Nobody comes out. Sometimes I try hard to get information but unfortunately nobody is ready to provide that. No doubt these things happen here but everybody wants to cover it. But we have to be very cautious about child abuse. Parents should talk to their kids about if any such thing is happening to them.

Q. A child artist, a noted journalist and a social worker. What next for Nayeema Mehjoor?

Yes, it has been a long journey. I never knew that it will begin from being a child artist. Future is all upto God, I cannot predict. So let's keep it open what is next for Nayeema Mehjoor.

Q. What would you suggest to Kashmiri girls to be self-reliant?

Whenever I interact with girls, I always ask them to build their confidence. I from everybody. If somebody is talking wrong about them, it should not matter every society that one should not cross. I would suggest girls to be self-reliant the best tool and a weapon to fight against any war in the world. ■■■■

"It was my passion to get connected with people and find solution to their problems"

emphasise on them not to try to take certificates much. But yes, there are certain boundaries in and not to give upon education. Education is

IUST CELEBRATES INT'L NURSES DAY

UFAQ FATIMA

Eminent psychiatrist, Prof (Dr) Mushtaq Ahmad Margoob, said, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is on rise in Kashmir, engulfing several lives each year. He said, there is a dire need of creating awareness among people about the disorder and its cure. Speaking on International Nurses Day at Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) on May 12, Dr Margoob said Kashmiri people are living under tremendous pressure owing to political unrest, "hence cases of PTSD are piling up". Highlighting the role of nurses in a conflict region, Dr Margoob, who was guest of honour on the occasion, said, the nurses have many a time gone out of way to help the patients. He recalled an incident of how a nurse once took the pellets out of a man's body with her nails. "Not merely medicines, but empathy towards patients can make a difference in their lives, and "help them come out of a deep pit of depression," said Dr Margoob, who serves as Head, Post Graduate Department of Psychiatry, Government Medical College, and Director, Institute of Mental Health and Neuroscience, Srinagar. Pertinently, it was for the first time that nurses' day was celebrated at IUST, which was organised by Alamdar Memorial College of Nursing and Medical Technology (AMC/NMT), Charer-

e-Sharief, and Syed Mantaqi Memorial College of Nursing and Medical Technology (SMMCNMT), Awantipora.

The day-long event that was held to highlight the role of nurses in the society was dedicated to Florence Nightingale—the founder of modern nursing—on her birth anniversary for her pioneering contribution towards the profession.

In his address, Vice Chancellor IUST, Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi said, nursing is one of the noblest professions in the world. "This profession sets one apart from the rest, for it is all about serving humanity," he said.

He also advised nursing students to focus more on prevention strategies than curative measures, "so that not many people need to undergo advanced and costly treatments".

Prof Siddiqi, who was chief guest on the occasion, said IUST aspires to produce the world's best nurses, "who are loyal to the society as well their profession".

Speaking on the occasion, Dean Academic Affairs, IUST, Prof Mushtaq A Qureshi, said, the university does not merely aim to produce nurses with good technical skills "but also those who can serve humanity in a better way".

"Students of both the nursing institutions should be trained in such a way that



PHOTO: MUDASIR BHAT/IUST

they would become role models for generations to come," he said. Principal SMMCNMT, Asmat Parveen, said, nurses have a vital role to play in a society and "we should encourage more and more youth towards this profession in order to serve the humanity".

"Not merely medicines, but empathy towards patients can make a difference in their lives"

Earlier, two mental health counselling centres were inaugurated at IUST. Besides, documentaries based on PTSD cases in Kashmir were screened on the occasion. A lamp lighting ceremony was also held in honour of Florence Nightingale, who is also known as the lady with the lamp.

Later, a student seminar was held on the theme, 'Nurses: A Voice to Lead- Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals', in which students from the two nursing colleges participated.

Among others, Muneema Parveen, Assistant Professor AMC/NMT, Hassina Wani, Principal AMC/NMT, Anjum Khurshid, Assistant Professor SMMCNMT, and heads of various departments, deans, faculty members and students of IUST were also present on the occasion.



"The work of photographers in the book suggests a narrative, which audience has to understand," he said, adding that the book is not just a product but an experience of the photographers. He further said, *Witness* was based on the trust between him and the photographers. Dean Academy affairs, Prof Mushtaq A Qureshi said the workshop has familiarized the students with the contemporary challenges in the photojournalism both at national and international level. "The experts in a field have inculcated lot of inspiration amongst all the participants, be it students or faculty," he said.

Meanwhile, photographers, present in the session, shared their experiences with the students and also talked about their contribution in the book.

"I wanted to dig stories deeper as a documentary photographer, for a documentary photographer does not merely *witness* the things but has a point of view as well," said Nanda.

Sharing his experiences, Dar said the editor of the book had an insight to understand the narrative of the pictures. "I looked for the best photographs of mine for the book, but the editor selected some forgotten pictures, which, however, were admired later," he said.

Earlier, welcoming the guests, Head of the Department, DJMC, Dr Ruheela Hassan said, the session aimed to provide an opportunity to Journalism students to *witness* the history through the lenses of the photojournalists. "The book portrays several important aspects of Kashmir in a very creative and impressive manner. The students are fortunate to get an opportunity to interact with the team of *Witness*," she said.

Later, a question-answer session was held, wherein students and faculty posed various questions to the guests regarding the book and their work.

Other contributors of the book, Sumit Dayal and Syed Shahriyar, and faculty members of DJMC including Monisa Qadri, Dr Rabia Noor, Shazia Yousuf, Isra Amin Bhat and Dr Mujeeb Liyakat were also present on the occasion. ■■■■

DJMC HOSTS 2-DAY WORKSHOP ON PEACE BUILDING

UFAQ FATIMA

A two-day workshop on 'Journalism and Peace Building' was held at Islamic University and Science and Technology (IUST) on May 22-23. The workshop was organised by Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (DJMC), IUST, in collaboration with Kargil Development Project (KDP) and Centre for Law and Development Policy (CLD).

Speaking on the occasion, Vice chancellor, IUST, Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi said in a conflict region, journalists should work towards peace building rather than doing sensational journalism, which is common nowadays.

"IUST aspires to produce journalists who can make difference by producing factual and objective stories that can initiate the change on ground," he said.

Deliberating on conflict resolution and peace building, workshop coordinator and Senior Editor, *Greater Kashmir*, Mehmood ur Rashid, said everyone in Kashmir faces conflict in one way or the other, "so everybody has a role to play in peace building".

"War is easy to start, but peace building takes more knowledge, courage and empathy. Thus, there is a need to initiate a process of understanding the root-cause of conflict and creating a space for dialogue to bring peace," he said.

Meanwhile, a 15-minute video, '*Danger of Single Story*'—based on



PHOTO: AAQIB NAIK/IUST

a talk by a Nigerian novelist—was screened on the occasion. The video highlighted the issue of presenting only one side of a story in media.

"Single stories build stereotypes, which are hard to break," said Shafat Naseem Ahmad, Executive Director, CLD.

He further said the organisation has extensively worked on peace building measures in Kashmir, which includes cross-LoC trade and cross-LoC education, "through which we connect people to understand each other that can help in minimizing the conflict".

Later, students were divided in groups to identify major problems existing in Kashmir due to conflict. Faculty members of DJMC also participated in the group discussion. Among various problems identified by the participants, human rights violations emerged as the key issue. Earlier, welcoming the guests and participants, Head DJMC, Dr Ruheela Hassan, said the purpose of the workshop is to help students identify the problems in the society they live in and come up with solutions. ■■■■

WITNESS TEAM INTERACTS WITH DJMC STUDENTS, FACULTY

SHERFUN NISA

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (DJMC), Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), organised a day-long workshop-cum-interaction session, '*Meet the Witness(es)*' for its students with the editor and contributors of the book, '*Witness: Kashmir 1986-2016/ Nine Photographers*' on April 27. The book comprises over 200 photographs—of which 20 to 25 have been contributed by nine Kashmir-based photographers each—and text written by noted documentary film maker, Sanjay Kak. The nine photographers include Mehraj-ud-Din, Showkat Nanda, Javed Dar, Sumit Dayal, Javaid Shah, Dar Yasin, Altaf Qadri, Syed Shahriyar and Azaan Shah.

Speaking on the occasion, Kak said the book is a way of understanding the truth of Kashmir and then sharing it with rest of the world. He said the book is rich in three elements, viz., photographs, photographers and the description.



PHOTO: UFAQ FATIMA/IUST

ASSETS OF IUST

IUST ONLY VARSITY IN STATE OFFERING IR COURSE

NAHIDA SHAFI

The Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), Awantipora, holds the distinction of being the only university in the state to offer a post-graduation course in International Relations with a specialisation in Peace and Conflict Studies. The Centre of International Relation (CIR) falls under the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. The centre was established in 2008 after an MoU was signed between IUST and United Nations-mandated University for Peace, Costa Rica, Central America. "Initially, it was Centre for International Peace and Conflict Studies offering a Master's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies. However, in 2012, it was renamed as Centre for International Relations, while the degree offered now is MA in International Relations (Peace and Conflict Studies)," said Shazana Andrabi, Head, CIR. The centre is looking forward to offer research programmes and other short-term courses in future. Introduction of new courses shall also increase the number of faculty members in the centre, which is five at present.



"Before starting PhD programme, we are planning to offer short-term or diploma courses for mid-career professionals on conflict resolution and peace studies," said Shazana, adding that it is often easy for mid-career professionals to take up these courses, "for this way they gain experience in conflict resolution as well as in their own fields."

CIR promises good scope for students at national as well as international levels. "One of our students has delivered a talk at the United Nations office in Geneva. Some pass-out students deliver online lectures to students of foreign universities, while others work with international non-governmental and media organisations," said Shazana.

Assistant Professor, CIR, Dr Shanawaz Mantoo, said the scope of International Relations would increase if it is introduced in other universities, colleges and at higher secondary level in the state.

He opined that the centre of the society, "as we find solutions to socio-other major concerns."

The CIR has international renowned universities University for Peace, Foreign Studies and four universities. This is students are exposed to parts of the world.

"Experts and professors universities deliver our students. Besides, deliver lectures to the universities," said such activities act both as teachers and exposure enhance their communication skills with global audience". ■■■■

"The centre works for larger benefit of the society, as we help our students find solutions to socio-economic issues and other major concerns"

works for larger benefit help our students economic issues and

linkages with world-like UN-mandated Tokyo University of other international to ensure that the expertise from different

of these international online lectures to our faculty members students of these Shazana, adding that training exercise for students, "for they

CAMPUS TALENT

HIS PASSION YEARNs TO BECOME PROFESSION

IRFANA KUCHAY

He was barely 12 when he dreamed to become a footballer. His parents, however, opposed his wish tooth and nail. But it was his deep passion for the game that saw him making it to the nationals.

Furqan Zargar, a budding footballer, is currently pursuing B.Tech in Electrical Engineering at Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), Awantipora. He is a popular striker of the IUST football team that recently won the State University Sports Championship by defeating Jammu University.

Zargar has struggled hard to live his passion. "I admire football since my childhood. I have practiced the game tirelessly on my own with no family support," shares Zargar. "But I never lost hope and continued playing football while continuing my studies," he adds.

Zargar took football career seriously in his seventh standard, when he was selected for an inter-school football match. Later he got selected for an inter-district tournament, in which he scored five goals. When he was in 9th standard, he got selected for state-level championship.

"Even when I was selected for nationals, my parents did not support me at all to take up sports as career. Their preference was always my studies," recalls Zargar, adding that he will follow football as a career even after completing his B.Tech.

While playing for IUST team, he has played two matches against Desh Bhagat University, four matches against Amity University and three matches against Jammu University. He also bagged gold medal for his individual performance.

Talking to *The Echo*, IUST football team captain, Abrar Ahmad, says, Zargar is a true footballer in every aspect. "When I first saw him in basketball court, I noticed that his speed and agility was incredible. Now he is playing in our team for the past three years and there is no other player in he says.

Zargar's struggle has not his pocket money goes Awantipora to Srinagar practice. "Every day it rupees to travel between Srinagar to practice amounts for Rs 3000 Zargar. "Doing so, I have classes as well," he He asserts that provide financial support aspire to pursue career has got tremendous However, due to lack of a proper platform, not are able to excel in the Zargar has a message students. "You should dreams and passion. At may have to struggle, will end up cherishing achieved." ■■■■

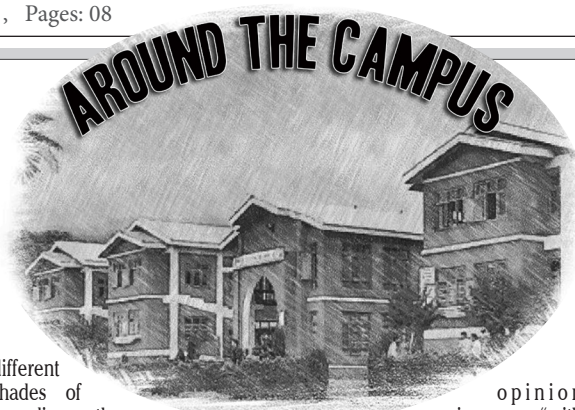


Furqan Zargar

"Kashmir has got tremendous talent in sports. However, due to lack of infrastructure and a proper platform, not many youngsters are able to excel in the field"

ended yet. Most of in travelling from daily for football costs me Rs 100 Awantipora and the game, which per month," says to skip my morning adds.

government should to students, who in sports. "Kashmir talent in sports. infrastructure and many youngsters field," he laments. to convey to other always follow your the beginning, you but at the end, you what you have



IUST HOLDS ORIENTATION PROGRAM

Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) organised an orientation workshop on spoken tutorial project of IIT Bombay on April 7. The team from IIT Bombay was led by Shyma Iyer who is the National Coordinator for this project.

The orientation programme was attended by faculty and students of the varsity and representatives from some local colleges.

Spoken tutorial is an initiative of National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT) of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India aimed at promoting Information Technology literacy through Open Source Software.

Under the project, short-term courses prepared by IIT Bombay are taught through audio-visual tutorials and certificates are given to those who successfully complete these short courses. All such courses are free of cost. The team also interacted with Vice Chancellor IUST, Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi and discussed the possibilities for further cooperation between IUST and IIT Bombay's spoken tutorial programme. ■■■■

IUST CLINCHES FOOTBALL TITLE

Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) won the Football Title in the First State Sports Championship in a nail-biting finish in Jammu on April 8. The team defeated the host team, University of Jammu, by 1-0.

The maiden and winning goal for IUST was scored by its defender, Mohsin Mir, who is pursuing B.Tech in Computer Science Engineering. The final played at the football ground of University of Jammu witnessed large number of spectators.

The event was organised by Directorate of Physical Education and Sports, University of Jammu in which 8 teams from the universities of J&K state participated.

In his message to the team, Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi, Vice Chancellor IUST, mentioned that the university was committed to provide support to its students to explore their talents in extracurricular and co-curricular activities. Thanking the University of Jammu for organising the event, he stressed that more of such events should be organised by universities in state.

Earlier, IUST made their way to the finals by defeating University of Kashmir by 6-1 in the semi-finals. Besides Prof Siddiqi, Deans of various schools and teaching as well as non-teaching staff applauded the team for their achievement. ■■■■

PLACEMENT CELL HOSTS DIGITAL MARKETING WORKSHOP

To explore business avenues in digital marketing, Career Counselling and Placement Cell, Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), organised a day-long workshop on Digital Marketing Training on March 8.

The workshop was organised in association with Centre for Youth Development Private Limited, a Delhi-based company, and Digital Vidya, Asia's largest and leading digital marketing training company.

"The aim of this programme was to impart marketing knowledge and skills to students to help them absorb in various organisations in the field of digital marketing and simultaneously set up their own business units," said Zahid G Khaki, Assistant Professor, Department of Electronics and Communication Engineering, IUST.

The workshop was attended by faculty and students from various departments. Nahida Shafi, a student of IUST said it was a rich experience to attend the workshop. "Such workshops should be conducted for Business Management students, who want to take up business as their profession. Entrepreneurs can also learn a lot from workshops on Digital Marketing," she further said. ■■■■

PROF SUMANTRA BOSE VISITS IUST, INTERACTS WITH STUDENTS, FACULTY

Noted author and academic, Prof Sumantra Bose, interacted with students and faculty of Centre of International Relations (CIR), and Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (DJMC), Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), on May 3. The interaction session was jointly organised by CIR and DJMC, IUST.

Bose, who serves as professor of International and Comparative Politics at London School of Economics, deliberated on nature of conflict of various kinds.



Talking about Indo-Pak dispute over divided parts of Kashmir, he said there are

different shades of opinion regarding the issue, "with some people supporting India or Pakistan, while the rest demanding independence".

"A survey was carried out in 2009 by an international organisation on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC). The findings were quite interesting, that is 70 to 90 percent of people from Indian-administered Kashmir wanted independence, whereas 50 percent people of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir too wanted independence," said Prof Bose, who has written extensively about the conflicts of Indian sub-continent.

Prof Bose also compared the Kashmir conflict with that of Northern Ireland. He talked about how power sharing between two parties solved the conflict in Northern Ireland.

"Like Northern Ireland, Kashmir too holds two opposite policies in coalition government, which can prove fruitful only if the power is shared with good faith. But if that does not happen, then it is useless to have such a government," he said.

Earlier, welcoming the guest, Head CIR, Shezana Andrabi, said every conflict is unique and the solution of Kashmir conflict lies within Kashmir only. Later, a question-answer session was held, in which students and faculty members cleared their queries. ■■■■

ANANDO BAKHTO DELIVERS LECTURE AT IUST

Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (DJMC), Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), organised an interaction session for its students with noted journalist, Anando Bakhto on May 9. Bakhto, who serves as Assistant Editor with The Sunday Guardian, provided the students with guidelines and tricks to cover political beat. He said politics is a sensitive beat, "so one must act in a smart way to gather information".

"You may come across a variety of people with different points of view. In order to extract information from them, you ought to be neutral and not reveal your side," Bakhto told students.

He shared with students some tips to enhance their news writing skills and be able to write for global media. He also guided them on developing contacts and circulating work.

Head of DJMC, Dr Ruheela Hassan said the session was useful for the



students. "Interacting with the experts from the field always helps students to learn from their experiences," she said. ■■■■

DJMC HOLDS VIDEO EDITING WORKSHOP

A week-long workshop on Video Editing was organised by Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (DJMC), Islamic University of Science and Technology, for its Television Specialisation students from May 1 to 7.

The aim of the workshop was to provide students with the know-how of editing software and teach them how to create as well as edit video products.

Muhammad Faheem-ul-Islam, Production Assistant, Educational Multimedia Research Centre (EMMRC), University of Kashmir, who was the resource person for the workshop, guided the student about technicalities of the editing software, Final Cut Pro (FCP).

Faheem, who dealt at length with various segments of the software, said, editing cannot be taught in just seven days, "but the brief I gave to students can hopefully lay a firm base for advanced editing process".

Sharing his experience at the DJMC, he said, the positive thing about the workshop was that students were active and inquisitive while attending lectures on editing.

Talking to The Echo, Dr Ruheela Hasaan, Head DJMC said, "Software editing training is a regular feature of DJMC, where we try to provide the students

with the best training by the experts available in the field."

NITASHA KAUL INTERACTS WITH IUST STUDENTS

Kashmir's first woman novelist, Dr Nitasha Kaul, interacted with the students of Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) on May 9. The interaction session was organised by Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (DJMC), IUST.

Delivering a lecture on 'Politics, Democracy and Kashmir', Dr Nitasha talked about her first novel 'Residue', which is based on Kashmiri people living outside Kashmir. 'Residue' had been shortlisted for Man Asian Literary Prize in 2009.

Talking about the Kashmir conflict, she said, even though guns and stones are a part of Kashmir struggle, there is a lot more about the issue.



Responding to a question about use of narratives in writing, she said, "narratives are an important edge tool to persuade people".

The session was attended by students and faculty of DJMC, English Language and Literature, and Centre of International Relations, IUST.

IUST HOSTS WORKSHOP ON CYBER COMM

To aware students and faculty about security and laws governing cyber communication, Department of Electronics and Communication Engineering, Islamic University of Science and Technology, organised a day-long workshop on Cyber Communication: Security and Laws on May 9. In his inaugural address, Dean Academic Affairs IUST, Prof Mushtaq Qureshi called for an informed and technologically-sound society "that is ready to take on the challenges posed by abuses and misuse of cyber communication".

"He also identified a scope for including tailor-made courses on Cyber Laws, Cyber Communication, and Cyber Crimes in the recently introduced Choice Based Credit System implemented in the university.

During his special lecture on Cyber Communication: Legal challenges and Implications, associate fellow at Malaysian Scientific Association, K Pathmanathan deliberated upon the challenges that cyber users were faced with due to ever-widening cyber technology.

Besides others, Chief Librarian IUST, Prof Riyaz Ruffai, Deans of different faculties, HoDs, and faculty members from various departments of IUST were present on the occasion. ■■■■

IUST ORGANISES BLOOD DONATION CAMP

Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) organised a blood donation camp in collaboration with the Humanity Welfare Organisation Helpline (HWOH), Bijbehara, on May 24.

"To overcome blood scarcity in the society, this camp has been organised here. We have held this camp for a noble cause, which can give a new life to many patients," said Sajad Ahmad, a volunteer.

Pertinently, under the chairmanship of Javed Ahmad Tak, HWOH aims at saving lives that are lost through accidents and diseases like cancer.

"Cancer is common in Kashmir now-a-days and the need of blood is increasing with each passing day. So far we have collected 65 points of blood, including 13 points from female students," said Ahmad.

Students who actively participated in blood donation camp expressed their pleasure and hoped that such camps are frequently organised in the



"Donating blood is an act of humanity. It gives me a pleasure thinking that my blood can save a precious life," said Junaid Dar, a Journalism student. ■■■■

Compiled by
UFAQ FATIMA and SHERFUN NISA
Photo-Credit:
AAQIB NAIK

PULWAMA SCHOOLS LACK STAFF, INFRASTRUCTURE; DEPUTY CEO PASSES THE BUCK

SHABNAM JAVAID/ ZAHID CHAT

Notwithstanding the tall claims by state government to upgrade education system in Kashmir, government schools in rural areas continue to suffer due to lack of infrastructure and manpower.

Like anywhere else in the Valley, in South Kashmir's Pulwama district too, the dearth of basic amenities and staff has hampered functioning of the schools.

"For 50 students, the school has only two teachers. One of us remains busy with office work. It is difficult for us to manage the school affairs," said Riyaz Ahmad Mir, who teaches at Government Primary School Danger Mohalla CB Nath, Pulwama.

He said, they have to combine classes due to lack of space. "The school doesn't have lavatories and drinking water facility either. The students are forced to use toilets of nearby neighbours," said Mir.

He added that the school is situated on the main road, but lies without fencing. "We have raised all the issues with ZEO Shadimarg, but to no avail," he said. The condition of Government Middle School is no different. There are only 10 teachers for 205 students—100 boys and 105 girls.

One of the teachers, Mushtaq Ahmad, said, due to lack of proper space, they had to conduct classes in tent. "Besides, there are no lavatories and drinking water facility for students."

The girl students of the school demanded that they should have female teachers, so that they could share their problems with them more easily.

There are many other such schools in the district, where students have been suffering because of lack of adequate infrastructure and teaching staff. These include Government High School, Achogozo, Government Girls School, Abhama, and Government High School, Sangerwani.

Talking to *The Echo*, Deputy Chief Education Officer (CEO), Pulwama, Fayaz Ahmad Sheikh, passed



Govt Primary School, Chak Badrinath, Pulwama. PHOTO: ZAHID CHAT/IUST

the buck when apprised about various problems confronted by students.

"Accommodation depends upon the land provided by the locals. Road problem is not ours; it pertains to Roads and Buildings department. Similarly, water issue is for Public Health Engineering department to take care of," said Sheikh, adding that there are 128 schools falling under the Shadimarg zone.

He added that school transfers are done by Director Education, while staff is sanctioned as per 30:1 student:teacher ratio.

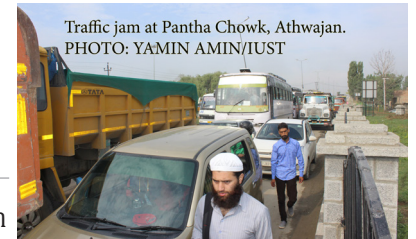
The Deputy CEO also blamed teachers, especially females, saying they were not willing to work in far-flung areas. "Therefore, we prefer the staff from local areas, but there is shortage of teachers in these areas, so things have to be managed this way," Shiekh said. He added that the school heads should communicate to the in writing if they faced any problem, "and we will mark the letters accordingly to the concerned departments".

Regarding the issue of fencing, he cited dearth of funds, saying that since last year district Pulwama was not provided the requisite funds.

He, further, informed that under Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), which is a centrally sponsored scheme for development of secondary school education, Rs 15,000 are provided per year for water and electricity facilities, while Rs 75,000 are given for telephone facility and Science equipments ■■■■

REGULAR TRAFFIC JAM ON HIGHWAY IRKS COMMUTERS

SURAYA HAMID/ YAMIN AMIN



Traffic jam at Pantha Chowk, Athwajan. PHOTO: YAMIN AMIN/IUST

With incessant increase in the number of vehicles on Srinagar-Jammu national highway, traffic jam has become a routine affair. The jams that last for hours irk drivers and passengers equally.

The most jam-packed areas on the highway are Pantha Chowk, Sempora, Pampore, Main Town Pulwama, Awantipora and Lal Chowk, Anantnag. The huge traffic jams are a concern for everyone, who has to pass by these roads daily, be it students, employees or bus drivers.

"Traffic jams cause a huge hindrance for emergency services as well, besides wasting time and energy of people," said Hilal Ahmad, a local.

The shopkeepers alongside the highway too have to bear with the nuisance. "It is very difficult to breathe as the entire area remains engulfed in billows of dust that enters our houses and shops," said Muhammad Shah, shopkeeper at Pampore.

Another shopkeeper, Ghulam Rasool, who owns a pharmaceutical shop said, blames ignorance about traffic rules for regular jams.

Over the past many years, the number of vehicles registered in Kashmir division has increased manifold. Till date, 5,88,026 vehicles have been registered with Regional Transport Office, Srinagar. Besides, the vehicles that travel from other places have added to noise and air pollution in the Valley.

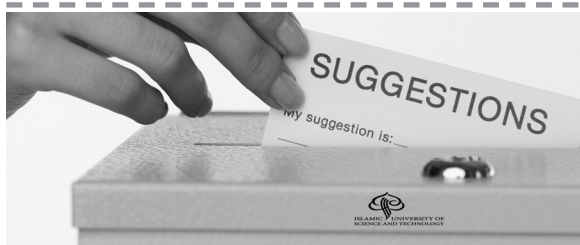
During the past two decades, hardly any road widening has been done on the highway, while roads continue to be in dilapidated condition. "The roads are same as they were 20 years ago. The government should have widened them at least for easy movement of traffic," said Nasrullah Mir, a constable, managing traffic near Islamic University of Science and Technology, Awantipora.

When contacted, Work Supervisor, Public Works Department (R&B), Sheikh Ghulam Qadir, said, the most difficult task in road widening is to convince people whose shops are situated on the proposed road. "They often complain about low compensation, no other source of income and non-availability of market place," he said.

Traffic mess often leads to road accidents. As per Kashmir Road Safety Foundation—Kashmir-based non-governmental organisation—most of the accidents occur by jumping a red signal, which results in collision of two vehicles. "Most of these drivers often don't wear seat belts, resulting in serious injuries and sometimes casualties," said a social activist.

According to data available with Traffic Police, more than 24,564 compound challan and 3,632 court challan have been filed over the past one year against the traffic norm violators. Despite this, 120 accidents have occurred on the highway resulting in 24 deaths and injuries to 106 people between April 2016 and March 2017.

Meanwhile, the ambitious road widening projects launched by the government from time to time are still awaiting their completion. These include proposals like road widening from Sempora to Pampore and from Pampore to Galandar, Ring Road Project, and Srinagar Metro Project that was proposed to be extended to Pantha Chowk. ■■■■



SUGGESTION BOX

Industrial tours should be conducted regularly for students of School of Technology, as they provide much useful exposure to them. ■■■■

Mehvish Wani, Student,
Food Technology

There must be increment in the salary of contractual faculty of IUST on the lines of Central University of Kashmir. ■■■■

Dr Shah Nawaz Mantoo,
Assistant Professor, Centre for International Relations

AC9J is accessible to students only in the afternoon, due to which we are sometimes compelled to miss our classes for getting our issues resolved. Therefore, AC9J should be accessible for whole day. ■■■■

Afaq Amin, Student,
Journalism and Mass Communication

The health centre of the university needs to be upgraded. There must be a consulting room and two separate observation rooms for males and females. ■■■■

Ishfaq Malik, Student,
Actuarial and Financial Mathematics

Frequent combining of buses should be stopped, as it causes inconvenience to the boarders. ■■■■

Shazia Yousuf, Assistant Professor,
Journalism and Mass Communication

University should prepare exhaustive repository of student details. This will facilitate activities like proper career counselling and will help us understand what are the thrust areas to pay attention to. This practice is in vogue in most of the universities in developed

world ■■■■

Muzafar Rasool, Senior
Assistant Professor,
Department of Computer Sciences

This is perhaps the only university, where you won't find the main gate. The university administration must see to it. ■■■■

A group of students

The university should organise badminton tournament for female students, for sports are important for both boys and girls. ■■■■

Farheen Mustafa,
Student, Business Studies

As Told To Nahida Shafi And
Irfana Kuchay

Lonely Leper

The leper colony in Kashmir is situated on 312 canals of land on the banks of Nigeen Lake, Srinagar. The colony was established in 1880s during the time of British rule in India. The social stigma attached with the disease threw Kashmiri lepers in isolation. However, as the disease almost reached to its end and social awareness has eradicated the misconceptions, people have begun to accept the lepers as normal people. The wall between the colony and the outside world has begun to break. Slowly. Photo-story by AABID BHAT

