



The Echo



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PELLET THAT BLURRED HER FUTURE

Doctors 'unsure' if youngest pellet victim's eyesight will be fully restored

Way back at her residence, Marsala, a housewife, recalls the incident that left her daughter badly injured. Hiba's father, Nisar Ahmad Bhat, was out for work, while Marsala was busy with domestic chores at home.

Though the encounter took place far away from their house, clashes had started nearby.

"Heavy tear gas shelling was taking place outside our home. I felt like grenades are exploding," recalls Marsala. "The

whole area was enveloped in smoke and pepper gas. As smoke entered our house, it became impossible for us to breathe. When I saw my children vomiting and suffocated due to tear gas shelling, I opened the door and took them out," she narrates.

As she tried to move her children to a safer place, a loud bang shook her. She pushed her son away inside the corridor and tried to shield Hiba with her hand, who, however, was shot in her right eye with a pellet, while three pellets hit Marsala's hand too.

"As we were about to move out of the corridor, I heard a bang. I had an intuition that something has been shot towards us. My intuition proved right as we were hit by pellets. When I saw blood oozing out of Hiba's eye, I fell unconscious," Marsala says.

As soon as she regained her consciousness, Marsala rushed outside and called out to people for help. The little Hiba was rushed to District Hospital Kulgam by local youth, where from she was

referred to SMHS hospital, where she was immediately operated upon.

Hiba has been operated twice till now, as she had suffered corneal perforation. She underwent her first surgery on November 26 at SMHS hospital, and was operated again on December 12. Even though the pellet has been removed from her eye, doctors are still "unsure" if she will be able to see again.

"It was a long-drawn process and we removed the pellet from her eye. We have done what we could have as of now, but we can't assure if she will regain the eye sight. The retina and lens in her right eye have been damaged," explains Dr Sabia Rashid, Professor, Ophthalmology, Government Medical College, Srinagar, who operated Hiba for the second time.

She adds that Hiba's parents need to take a lot of precautions to help her heal fast and to ensure that she does not get any complications.

Hiba's picture with a dressing pad on her right eye had gone viral on social media, evoking massive condemnation. The youngest pellet victim

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THE YOUNGEST PELLET VICTIM, HIBA NISAR, AFTER EYE SURGERY.

SURIA HAMID

Shrieks echoed the corridors of Srinagar's Shri Maharaja Hari Singh (SMHS) hospital as the youngest pellet victim, Hiba Nisar, was bought out of the operation theatre. The infant was operated upon in her right eye after being hit by a pellet at Shopian district in south Kashmir.

On November 25, the 18-month-old was injured with pellet gun fire after clashes broke out in the area following an encounter between militants and armed forces at Batagund village of Shopian.

Surrounded by people, a bandaged Hiba lies on a hospital bed writhing in pain, while her mother Marsala Jan helplessly tries to console her. As it hurts her to close the eye, little Hiba constantly refuses to close it. After numerous attempts, her mother puts her to rest. Following some medications, Hiba gets discharged from the hospital.

AUTHORITIES CLAIM THAT PELLET SHOTGUN IS NON-LETHAL, BUT THE INJURIES AND DEATHS CAUSED BY IT BEAR TESTIMONY TO HOW DANGEROUS IT IS

IUST launches in-house *Sehar* perfumes

FARHAT JAHAN

In an endeavour to promote student-founded startups, Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) launched in-house perfumes under the brand name 'Sehar' on November 28.

The perfumes have been manufactured by the students of Department of Chemistry, IUST, under the project, 'Extraction of Essential Oils from Wild Aromatic Plants.'

The exhibition of the perfume range was inaugurated by Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi, Vice-Chancellor, IUST, inside the campus. This is the first start up of Chemistry department, for which the funds of Rs four lakh were provided by Entrepreneurship Development Cell (EDC), IUST.

While speaking on the occasion, Prof Siddiqi lauded the department of Chemistry for taking up this initiative, "which shall help change the mindset of people from seeking to become an employee to become an employer."

"When an academic entity moves to business, he should be guided by more experienced people so as to set an example for aspiring entrepreneurs as well as earn profits," he said.

Advising the students, Prof Siddiqi said, employment is generated more through manufacturing rather than trade, "so budding entrepreneurs should focus on manufacturing, which would ultimately tackle the problem of unemployment in Kashmir."

He added that in addition to research

and knowledge dissemination, university has a role in entrepreneurship and innovation, for which there is EDC, MHRD project and Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP). "These programmes have created an eco-system in the university, which would shape the young minds towards entrepreneurship in addition to the studies," he said.

The project mentors include Head, Chemistry department, Dr Aabid Hussain Shalla, and Assistant Professors, Dr Manzoor Ahmad Rather and Dr Basharat.

Talking to *The Echo*, Dr Rather said the idea behind the project was to come up with products that would be affordable to all. "Thus we manufactured the perfumes, for which raw material was extracted from wild plants. Then we did some value additions as well," he said, adding that perfumes with lavender oil are anti-stress, "which has been scientifically proven."

Saima Tariq, project participant and a Chemistry student, said they extracted essential oils from



PHOTO: MUSLIM RASHID/IUST

“BUDDING ENTREPRENEURS SHOULD FOCUS ON MANUFACTURING, WHICH WOULD ULTIMATELY TACKLE THE PROBLEM OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN KASHMIR”

plants like Mint, Foeniculum and Thuja to manufacture these perfumes—roll-on and spray.

Chairperson EDC, Dr Parvaiz Ahmad Mir, said the next step would now be incubation, which would help the products to launch successfully in the commercial market.

He added that over the past month, five entrepreneurship awareness camps have been held in engineering departments of the varsity "so as to sensitize the students about entrepreneurship."

Among others present at the exhibition were Dean, Academic Affairs, Prof A M Shah, Registrar IUST, Syed Riyaz Rufai, and faculty members and students of IUST.



PHOTO: MUSLIM RASHID/IUST

FROM THE PAGE 1...

Pellet that blurred...

became the face of the horrors of the pellet guns, which have damaged the eyes of over 1500 civilians in the past three years, according to human rights groups.

Pertinently, Amnesty International India on September 13, 2017 released a report on the use of pump action pellet guns and had called on government to put an immediate ban on their use on the masses. According to the report 'Losing Sight in Kashmir: The Impact of Pellet Firing Shotguns,' pellet guns have been put in use since 2010 as non-lethal weapons against the crowd control. However, these "inherently inaccurate" shotguns fire hundreds of metal pellets, which spread over a wide area uncontrollably. Their use has blinded hundreds in both eyes and killed at least 14 people

in Kashmir till July 2016.

"Authorities claim that pellet shotgun is non-lethal, but the injuries and deaths caused by this cruel weapon bear testimony to how dangerous, inaccurate and indiscriminate it is. There is no proper way to use pellet-firing shotguns.

It is irresponsible of authorities to continue the use of these shotguns despite being aware of the damage they do," states the report.

While working at the field near his house, Nisar Ahmad Bhat assures the best treatment for his daughter, but is more concerned about her eye sight, and her changing behaviour ever since she was injured.

"Hiba's behaviour has changed after the incident took place. She is getting aggressive. She doesn't let anyone to see her eye. She has also lost appetite and doesn't eat the way she used to," la-

ments Bhat.

"I am worried about her vision. We even don't know whether she will be able to see again or not. Even though I am a labourer, I am ready to provide her the best possible treatment," he adds.

Bhat's younger brother, Fayaz Ahmad, helps him in their apple orchard, which, however, is not large enough to sustain a family of seven members. "Therefore, labour is what we depend on."

Four-year-old Shahadat, Hiba's brother, misses playing with his little sister ever since the incident took place. He fears her eye getting hurt while playing.

Hiba's mother opines that she is too young to know what injury she has received. "My heart bleeds for the pain she is suffering from. What if she doesn't regain her eye sight?" she asks. "The very thought of her future scares me."

Google News Initiative workshop held at IUST

IQRA QADRI

As part of Google News Initiative, a day-long workshop on ‘Fact-Checking, Online Verification and Digital Hygiene’ was held at Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) on December 31. The workshop was organised by Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (DJMC), IUST.

The workshop focussed on honing the skills of journalism students in verifying the authenticity of news. The training was conducted by Google-certified trainer and Associate Editor, *Rising Kashmir*, Faisal Yaseen, who is part of this mission to train journalists and journalism students in various tools available to detect fake news and verify news sources.

“Fake news stories actually appeal to the emotions of readers, which is why it

is easy for people to believe them. Hence, we have come up with these skills, which will equip you in differentiating between information, disinformation and misinformation,” Yaseen told students.

For checking authenticity of news, he said, smart keywords, thumbnails and reverse image search can be used. “This can help us to check whether the images and videos are real or not.”



Google-certified trainer, Faisal Yaseen, delivering a lecture to Journalism students in Media Lab at IUST on December 31. PHOTO/IUST

Workshop coordinator, Monisa Qadri, highlighted the requirement for incorporation of such hands-on training in the journalism curriculum to better equip students for the challenges ahead.

“The workshop has been useful in training the students in photo verification, video verification, source checking and geolocation that assist a journalist,” she said.

The workshop was attended by first and third

“FAKE NEWS STORIES ACTUALLY APPEAL TO THE EMOTIONS OF READERS, WHICH IS WHY IT IS EASY FOR PEOPLE TO BELIEVE THEM”

semester students of the department and first semester journalism students of B.A Honours. The students expressed their desire of joining this initiative of Google.

“We being at the initial stage of our journalistic career are in need of such workshops. This will help us to excel in journalism in future,” said Zubair Lone, third semester student.

Islamic Studies hosts 2-day int’l conference on women in Islam

Department of Islamic Studies, Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), organised two-day international conference on ‘Contemporary Discourse on Women in Islam’ on December 19-20.

The conference comprised of five technical sessions, in which 60 papers were presented on various topics related to the theme.

The keynote speaker, Prof Obaidullah Fahad, Head, Department of Islamic Studies, Aligarh Muslim University, deliberated on ‘Contemporary Thought on Women in Islam.’ He dealt at length with diverse narratives revolving around women within Muslim as well as non-Muslim societies. He also discussed the gender roles in Islam.

Speaking on the occasion, Vice Chancellor, IUST, Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi, underlined the universal challenges faced by Muslims and humanity across the globe. He emphasised on shaping the moral frame-

work of Islam.

“Islam is not only a religion of past, but a religion for future too, and has a scope to play a substantial role in shaping the discourse of ethico-moral framework vis-à-vis dignity of women both on social and spiritual level,” he said.

“ISLAM CAN PLAY A SUBSTANTIAL ROLE IN SHAPING THE DISCOURSE OF ETHICO-MORAL FRAMEWORK VIS-À-VIS DIGNITY OF WOMEN”

Dean, School of Humanities and Social Science, IUST, Prof Abdul Salam Bhat dealt with the rights of women



PHOTO/IUST

in Islam as well as misinformation about the place of women in Islam. He also stressed upon the condition of women in Muslim societies and the debates revolving around women specific issues. He suggested to look for alternate narratives to respond to those issues.

Dean Academic Affairs, IUST, Prof A M Shah, highlighted the “wide gap” between the textual approach to women and the contextualized real-

ity of women in the Muslim world.

Welcoming the guests, Head, Department of Islamic Studies, Dr Afroz Ahmad Bisati talked about how both philosophical, cultural and religious traditions have undermined the place of women in the world. “It is only Islam that has emancipated women, and shaped a positive space for socio-economic and intellectual engagement of women in Islamic societies,” he said.

IUST CELEBRATES FOUNDATION DAY

Varsity's growth a collective effort: Prof Siddiqi

IQRA QADRI



Vice Chancellor, Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi, addressing IUST fraternity on the eve of the university's foundation day. PHOTO: MUSLIM RASHID/IUST

Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) celebrated its 13th Foundation Day with much fervor on November 8. The event that had multiple sessions and performances was organised by Islamic University Faculty Association (IUFA), which also unveiled its official logo on the occasion.

While congratulating the IUST fraternity, Vice Chancellor IUST, Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi, who was the chief guest for the event, lauded the efforts put forward by everyone involved with the university right from its inception.

Prof Siddiqi put on record the contribution of his predecessors towards the development of the varsity. "Within just 12 years, IUST has made its mark in the field of higher education and is recognised on the map of academic excellence by various eminent platforms. This has been a collective effort of the entire IUST fraternity," he said.

Prof Siddiqi also talked about his vision for the varsity and called on the faculty to keep on improving the research profile of the univer-



IUST's former and current Vice Chancellors, Prof Prof Siddiqi Wahid and Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi, unveiling the official logo of Islamic University Faculty Association on November 8. PHOTO: MUSLIM RASHID/IUST

sity, which was established under the Act no XVIII passed by J&K legislature on November 7, 2005.

Former Vice Chancellor, Prof Siddiq Wahid, who was the guest of honour, shared his experiences as the founder Vice Chancellor of IUST. He talked about the paradigm under which the university worked during his tenure. "The focus was always on student-teacher dialogue and to make the university a garden for dialogue," said Prof Wahid. He also acknowledged the active support received by him from the teaching and non-teaching staff of the varsity during its infancy.

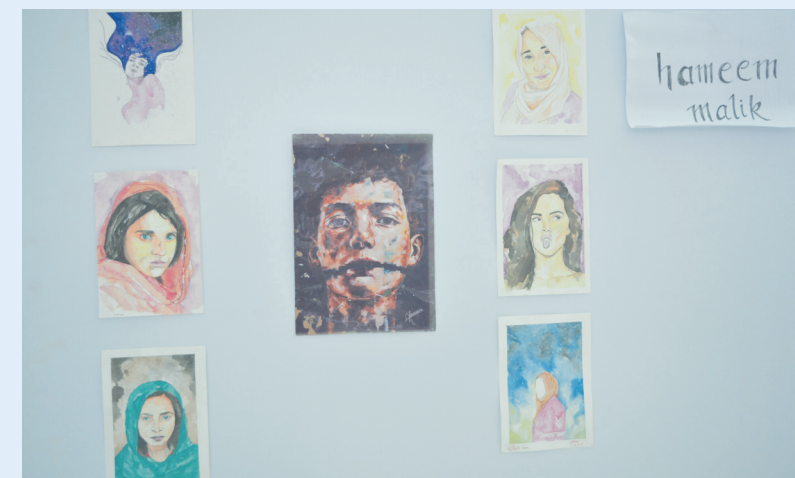
Earlier, welcoming the guests, president IUFA, Muhammad Ashraf Parray, elaborated on the journey of the university and its work culture. He mentioned contributions made by the three Vice Chancellors and the staff towards consolidating the position of IUST in higher education.

Speaking on the occasion, Dean Academic Affairs, Prof A M Shah, said, the university needs to focus upon some parameters by which it can excel in every field. "Internal quality as-

urance, interface quality assurance and future quality assurance need to be the agenda of this institution, by which excellent researches can be produced," he said.

Deans of various schools, Prof A H Moon, Prof Abdul Salam Bhat and Prof G M Rather gave presentations on achievements and vision of different departments. Meanwhile, various cultural performances by Tul Kul Cultural Group, and university students—Aamir Yousuf, Aman Shabir, Hameem Malik and Manan Khan—were presented. Besides, IUFA's official logo designed by a B.Tech Student Sahil Shoukat and Sr. Asst Prof. Journalism Monisa Qadri, was unveiled on the occasion.

The proceedings of the sessions were conducted by Dr Abdul Majeed Andrabi, Head, Arabic department. Among others, Registrar IUST, Syed Reyaz Rufai, former Dean School of Business Studies, Prof A R Mattoo, former Chief Librarian Prof W A Alvi, Deans of various schools, heads of all departments, officers, present and former faculty members, and IUST students were present on the occasion.



IUST DAY CELEBRATIONS

PHOTOS: MUSLIM RASHID/IUST

'Holy Qura'n has enlightened humankind'

Arabic deptt holds int'l conference; Arabic language a must for Muslims: Prof Siddiqi

FARHAT JAHAN/ NAEIM KHAN/ GOWHAR BASHIR

Eminent Arabic scholars underlined the role of Holy Qura'n in spreading knowledge and enlightening the humankind. Deliberating at two-day international conference on 'Major Trends in Rhetorical and Stylistic Exegesis of Quran' on October 16-17, the scholars maintained that the holy book is the finest of all texts that have ever existed.

Speaking at the conference organised by the department of Arabic Language and Literature, Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), Dr Shams Kamal Anjum, Head, department of Arabic, Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, said, Qura'n holds the highest place in all books and stands much above prose and poetry. "Whenever you listen to the verses of the Holy Qura'n, you feel mesmerized, especially during *Taraweeh* prayers," he said.

Dr Anjum, who has authored 19 books and numerous research papers, said no author could ever claim that his book contains no errors, however, "the Holy Qura'n can not only claim but also challenge that it is free of errors of any sort."

In his key-note address, Prof Abdul Majid Qazi, from department of Arabic, Jamia Millia Islamia, gave a detailed presentation of his research paper on 'Quranic Discourse: A Literary, Linguistic and Intellectual Perspective.' His paper focussed on three major components, viz., Arabs' response to Qura'n, brief survey of Qura'nic literature, and the connection of Qura'n with the Arabic language.

He said before the Holy Qura'n was revealed, the Arabs were an isolated lot of tribes, "living on the periphery in their desert, far from the arena of the history." "It is the Holy Qura'n that breathed into them the spirit of human instinct," said Prof Qazi, who was bestowed with presidential award in 2005 for his contribution towards Arabic language and literature.

He deliberated at length upon the surrender of the ancient Arabs to the power of Holy Qura'n. "The literary and artistic appeal of Qura'n was

so magnetic that Arabs had to surrender despite their extreme opposition towards the holy book," he said, and added, "It was evident that Qura'n was supreme and miraculous."



PHOTO: MUSLIM RASHID/IUST

Vice Chancellor, IUST, Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi felicitating Dr Shams Kamal Anjum, Head, department of Arabic, Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, on October 16.

Vice Chancellor, IUST, Prof Mushtaq A Siddiqi, who was chief guest on the occasion, said since the Holy Qura'n was revealed in Arabic, "there must be something special about this language."

He said, it was important for Muslims to learn the Arabic language properly, so as to have a correct interpretation of Holy Qura'n as well Islam. "Besides, it can also help us understand each other's culture and interact with each other in a better way," he said.

Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prof Abdul Salam Bhat, said Qura'n has inimitable features and the scholars need to come forward to unfold them.

He dealt with the differences between Qura'n and other books. "The holy book follows all-together a different methodology than rest of the books. And then, no other book has taken as long as 23 years to be written," he said, adding that only Qura'n has oaths, which have been taken to sensitize the readers about something big to happen.

He further said Qura'n offers narratives about the previous prophets, the objective of which was

to convince the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that the path he has been given is the same as given to the previous prophets. "Besides, these also aimed to let people know about the consequences of disobeying Allah and his prophet," he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Dean Academic Affairs, IUST, Prof A M Shah, said there is a need to address the queries of youth regarding Islam in a stylistic manner. He cited some examples as to how to make people understand the teachings of Qura'n.

Earlier, welcoming the guests, Head, department of Arabic, Dr Abdul Majeed Andrabi said the purpose of organising the conference was to explore the rhetorical and stylistic dimensions of the Holy Qura'n. The session began with paying tributes to late Dr Arif Qazi, former Head, department of Arabic, IUST. Meanwhile, Dr Irfani Rahim, Sr. Assistant Professor, department of Arabic, conducted the proceedings of the conference.

“THE HOLY QURA'N CAN NOT ONLY CLAIM BUT ALSO CHALLENGE THAT IT IS FREE OF ERRORS OF ANY SORT”

Later, a presentation on 'Al Taa al Mabsoutah of Holy Qura'n: A Pragmatic and Social Study' was delivered by Dr Manal (Msh) Najjar, Associate Professor, University of Tabuk, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, through video-conferencing.

Among others, Dr Naseem Akhtar from department of Arabic, Jamia Millia Islamia, Syed Riyaz Rufai, Registrar IUST, Arabic scholars from various parts of India, deans of various schools of IUST, and heads, faculty and students from various departments of IUST were present on the occasion.

Awareness program held at IUST

J&K State Women's Development Corporation (J&KSWDC) organised awareness programme at Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) on November 1. The main objective of the programme was to create awareness among female students of IUST regarding various schemes offered by J&KSWDC.

Tahir Parvez, District Manager J&KSWDC, Pulwama and Shopian, deliberated on various schemes offered by National Minorities Development and

Finance Corporation, National Backward Classes Finance, National Handicapped Finance, Women's Entrepreneurship programme and educational loans for women empowerment. He elaborated on as to how these schemes could benefit the women folk from various sections of the society.

An interactive session was later held, during which students clarified their queries. Students from various departments and nursing college of the university participated in the programme.

Hakbara students suffer as schools turn into 'hub for miscreants'

SURIA HAMID

With seven government schools on records, Hakbara village in north Kashmir's Bandipora district could appear to be a 'village of schools' to an outsider. On taking a closer look though, one would be contradicted by the hollow edifice of government schools across Kashmir.

The infrastructure in these schools is in shambles since years if not completely lacking. While students are many, teachers are handful.

Of seven government schools, four are primary, two middle and one is high school. All of these have one thing in common—dilapidated buildings. Although some new buildings have been sanctioned to schools, their charge has not been handed over to the schools even after seven years of construction.

"The buildings haven't been handed over to the school administration by the Roads and Buildings department, Sumbal division," complained Abdur Rehman Mir, headmaster of the high school.

Since they lie unused, the buildings under construction have turned into dens for "miscreants." "They use the classrooms for smoking, alcoholism and other immoral activi-



PHOTO: SURIA HAMID/IUST
Students sitting on mat in the classroom in a government school of Hakbara village.

ties," said Mir.

This was confirmed by Sheikh Tanveer, who teaches at one of the middle schools. "Miscreants enter the school building through the broken fence and indulge in gambling, alcoholism and drugs," he claimed. "We often get the Sarpanch to make announcements from the mosque on Fridays, telling people that schools are their property and they are for their social and moral benefit. But they don't listen."

For want of adequate space, one of the middle schools is currently housed in a building of the high school. The middle school has 175

students but only five teachers, and has been without a headmaster for three years. "We suffer a lot due to the lack of accommodation and adequate staff," said Abdul Ahad Wagay, a teacher who also functions as the headmaster.

The other middle school functions in the ground floor and floods even at the hint of rain. Besides, since it is not fenced, stray dogs roam around the school, while groups of youth gather to smoke there even when classes are going on. "Once, the headmaster asked them to leave. In response, they tried to hit him," said Tanveer.

The Roads and Buildings department is constructing a new two-storeyed building for the school. "However, since the construction has taken more time than usual, it has also become a hub of wrongdoers and smokers," rued the headmaster, Ghulam Mohammad Dar.

“ MISCREANTS ENTER THE SCHOOL BUILDING THROUGH THE BROKEN FENCE AND INDULGE IN GAMBLING, ALCOHOLISM AND DRUGS ”

When contacted, Zonal Education Officer, Hajin, Nisar Ahmad Lone said the concerned contractor was a defaulter, hence the buildings could not be completed and they were forced to move students into buildings without doors or window panes. "Such classrooms are not safe for the students," he said, adding that several officials have visited Hakbara's schools and made vowed to upgrade them, but to no avail.

Students seek subsidised rates in canteens

MUSLIM RASHID

Kashmir-based college and university students have urged the authorities to ensure that the canteens of educational institutes follow subsidised rates.

Students from low and moderate-income families face financial challenges. With huge expenses incurred on college/university fee, books and transport charges, the students expect nominal charges in the canteens.

"The authorities should intervene and subsidize the rates for us. They should also take into account hygiene of the canteen and its ventilation," said Ishfaq Ahmad, a university student.

A cursory survey of canteen rates at universities reveals that the students pay more than the employees of Civil Secretariat and J&K High Court

EMPLOYEES OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS EARN AND STILL PAY LESS FOR THEIR MEALS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE STUDENTS, WHO ARE OFTEN TOUTED AS FUTURE OF A COUNTRY, ARE MADE TO PAY MORE EVEN WHEN THEY ARE NOT EARNING

in their respective canteens.

For instance, where a slice of bread at Civil Secretariat and High Court canteens costs just Rs 2, it costs Rs 6.50 at IUST. Similarly, Chicken Biryani costs Rs 80 at High Court, however it costs Rs 90 and 110 at

University of Kashmir and IUST, respectively.

"Employees of government departments earn and still pay less for their meals. On the other hand, the students, who are often touted as future of a country, are made to pay more even when they are not earning," said Junaid, a student.

The students rued that while the government is talking about youth and their future, the reality is that students face inequality.

"Government has introduced many schemes for students like *Udaan*, *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, *Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat*, *Rasthriya Avishkar Abhiyan*, *Unnat Bharat Abhiyan* and *Global Initiative for Academic Network (GIAN)*. Then why is there this disparity? Why do canteens of government departments only follow subsidised rates and not educational institutions?" asked Wajid, another student.

Margan Top emerging as favourite trek in Kashmir



PHOTO: MUZAFFAR LONE/IUST

MUZAFFAR LONE

Located at a distance of around 73 kilometers from district Anantnag in south Kashmir and 12,125 feet above the sea level lies a breathtaking Valley known as Margan Top. The Valley is emerging as one of the favourite destinations for trekking enthusiasts and nature explorers.

Margan Top is surrounded by lush green meadows and huge mountains. It is the only route that connects sub-division Marwah in district Kishtwar to rest of the Kashmir Valley.

Owing to its natural scenic beauty, several schools of Warwan and Kokernag areas bring their students to Margan Top for picnic in sum-

mers. Many local as well as foreign tourists visit the Valley for trekking as well as sightseeing.

Although people do not reside in this part of the world, in summers, however, the nomadic Gujjar-Bakkarwal tribe visits the Valley to graze their cattle and hence stay there for three to four months. This is the time when the tourists also visit the place.

“I have been to hundreds of trekking spots in Kashmir and elsewhere, but this place has some unique charm,” says Olaf Snajder, a tourist from Czech Republic, who was on a 15-day visit to Warwan Valley and visited Margan Top as well. His partner, Hilanka, adds that the snow-clad mountains of Margan have attracted him so much that he plans to revisit the place in future.

Khan Nisar-ul-Haq, who teaches at Government Middle School, Bonmatihindoo Kokernag, and has visited Margan along with the school, is all praises for the weather and water of the place. “It felt like natural air conditioners and water purifiers have been set-up in the Valley,” he says.

While on one side Margan is a tourist attraction, on the other it becomes an obstacle for the residents of Marwah-Warwan in the winter season. Due to heavy snowfall, the area remains cut-off from the rest of the world from December to May.

Criticizing the authorities for their “apathetic attitude” towards their issues, the locals demand construction of a tunnel. “The tunnel can be the only solution to the problem and is a long-pending demand of the residents of Marwah and Warwan, who face huge problems during winters in the absence of road connectivity,” says Khursheed Alam, a local.

Responding to this, Tehsildar Warwan, Ghulam Nabi Lone, says, “We are putting all man and machine power available to us in the road clearance process, which, however, is time-consuming. Moreover, it is impossible for us to clear the road on daily basis.”

I HAVE BEEN TO HUNDREDS OF TREKKING SPOTS IN KASHMIR AND ELSEWHERE, BUT THIS PLACE HAS SOME UNIQUE CHARM



Some views of Margan Top during summer season.



PHOTOS: MUZAFFAR LONE/IUST