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Kashmiri Boatwoman Rows Against Tide to Keep Her Family Afloat



Droving above :Parveena (name changed) rowing boat in River Jhelum to ferry passengers for cross over.

PHOTO: MOHSIN NISAR/EXCELSIOR

SHAISTA ALTAF

In the quiet hamlet of Sempora, on the outskirts of Srinagar, 60-year-old Parveena (name changed) defies gender norms by ferrying people across Jhelum River—a job traditionally dominated by men—to support her family.

Parveena has become a vital figure in the village, ferrying passengers, goods and school children across the river. She took up the oar in 2012 after her husband's death, stepping into a role few women in the region would consider.

The lack of connectivity in Sempora has made her services indispensable to the community, earning her widespread respect. "This was never my first choice," she shares, her voice heavy with emotion.

She lost her parents in her childhood

and had to raise her brothers. "Then, my husband passed away. Death surrounded me from all sides. When I saw no other way out, I decided to run this boat," she says.

The Jhelum represents more than just Parveena's livelihood; it is evidence of her fortitude, faith, and unwavering determination to keep going. She starts her day at sunrise, crossing the river to deliver people, goods, and schoolchildren. By sunset, she completes countless trips, earning an average of Rs. 300 per day.

"With this, I have to cover all household expenses, including medical bills," she laments. Her difficulties are not limited to money. Due to her severe kidney problems and diabetes, Parveena needs a lot of medical treatment, which she can hardly afford.

As she holds up a sealed packet of blood pressure medication, she says,

"I survive solely on these pills. Winters are the hardest because the number of passengers dwindle."

"This was never my first choice. When I saw no other way out, I decided to run this boat"

In the beginning, she ferried people across the river in a boat for a nearby mosque, but a tragic accident occurred when the boat capsized. Undeterred, she built her own boat and resumed her work.

Despite these obstacles, Parveena is dedicated to her job. In order to keep up with growing costs, she raised her

fares from Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 over the years. She explains this move to her clients by citing her financial difficulties.

Despite this raise, her income hardly covers her expenses. "I have just one daughter whom I married off at the tender age of 16. Now, my only purpose in life is to secure her future," she said. Parveena perseveres because of her faith despite all of her hardships. "Despite the innumerable challenges I have encountered, I have never given up hope," she states with a mixture of humility and pride.

A bridge is coming up at the place and once ready no one will need her boat for cross over, but she is not complaining. "God has been my best friend and has never failed me. I am constantly grateful for His favour. He will take care of me," she hopes.

Times Echo

Bridging Theory, Practice Indispensable Role of Media Internships

In an era where media landscapes transform at breakneck speed, internships have never been more relevant. For Journalism and Mass Communication students, internships represent not just a résumé enhancement but a fundamental component of comprehensive education that shapes future careers and the industry itself.

The value of internships extends far beyond the acquisition of technical skills. While mastering production software or learning interview techniques is important, internships provide something more profound: immersion in the professional culture and ethical framework that governs media work. When students step into newsrooms, production studios or communication firms, they absorb unwritten protocols, observe real-time decision-making and understand the practical applications of concepts.

EditorSpeaks

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India brings several changes aimed at transforming the educational landscape. It also includes how internships, especially in fields like media and communication, are structured and promoted. NEP emphasises experiential learning and mandates internships as part of the curriculum, especially for vocational and professional courses like media studies. The policy also encourages collaboration between educational institutions and media organisations

The media profession faces unprecedented challenges: dwindling trust, evolving business models and technological disruption. Internships offer students critical insight into how organisations navigate these challenges.

For media organisations, internship programmes represent an investment in their future workforce and the industry's sustainability. Fresh perspectives from students often challenge established practices and bring innovative approaches to content creation and audience engagement. This symbiotic relationship strengthens both educational institutions and media entities.

As we prepare students for careers in a field that continues to reinvent itself, internships stand as perhaps the most effective bridge between academic theory and professional practice. They transform abstract principles into lived experience, build confidence alongside competence and create the professional networks that sustain careers. The current edition of our quarterly newsmagazine, *Times Echo*, is a compilation of stories done by our students during their internships with several reputed news organisations.

NEP emphasises experiential learning and mandates internships as part of the curriculum, especially for vocational and professional courses like media studies

Sweet Treats: Baramulla Woman Redefines Personalised Gifting

MARYAM KHALIQ

Soliha Bashir, a young woman from Rafiabad, Baramulla, has transformed her hobbies into a business, becoming an inspiration for many. Soliha firstly started her hamper and craft business (sonzal) in ending 2019, which soon found success. Now, she has started another unique business of chocolate hampers and personalized gifts.

Her journey began with a passion for embroidery, creating unique designs and personalized gift hampers that quickly gained recognition. Encouraged by the appreciation for her work, Soliha decided to expand her craft into new areas.

She entered the world of chocolate crafting and home baking, launching her brand, Sweet Treats by Sonzal (@sweet_treats0) in 2023. Known for its unique chocolate hampers and beautifully designed cakes, the brand has gained a reputation for quality and creativity. Her creations have become a favorite not only locally but also among people beyond her locality.

Soliha said, "I didn't learn these from anyone, but I did it myself, without learning from anyone."

"The love for work gives a person suc-

cess in their journey. I never thought I would get this much love and response from people—not just locally but from the whole world," Soliha shares with pride.

Her family's unwavering support has played a crucial role in her success. "My family believed in me and stood by me throughout," she adds. Soliha takes pride in ensuring every order is special. "Embroidery and gift hamper orders are accepted with a 15-day advance notice, also

customers have to pay the half of total amount of their order, while chocolate and cake orders require at least 3 days. To make products more accessible, we offer home delivery and takeaway services in Baramulla," she said.

The sweets made by her have a taste so that one cannot wait to try them. Her creativity in both businesses reflects how hard work and dedication can

make even the simplest ideas extraordinary. "To everyone out there, look at your abilities and don't shy away from doing things. If Allah has written something for you, you will surely get it. Work hard. Dreams are not far away; it's just a matter of time and patience," Soliha says.

A usual girl doing creative work on her own, Soliha's story shows her passion and determination toward her work. Her creations beautifully illustrate how dedication to one's craft can lead to remarkable results.



Hi-tech electric buses prove boon for female passengers

5 CCTV cameras, GPS, help button in each bus ensures safe travel

NAZAKAT ASLAM

The recently launched state-of-the-art electric bus service is not merely a reliable mode of transport but a guardian of safety particularly for female passengers.

As the electric buses navigate the city streets, a palpable transformation unfolds, bringing relief and a heightened sense of security among female passengers during the bustling peak evening hours.

Launched under the Srinagar Smart City project, the electric buses are equipped with CCTV systems and GPS Technology making the travel se-

“That was a bad experience, but now I travel without any fear in electric buses because of CCTV surveillance,” she said.

Before the launching of electric bus service, female passengers in the summer capital faced a tough time travelling in overloaded passenger buses and cabs in peak hours. 75 electric buses ply till late evening hours on various routes in Srinagar.

Adeeba, a local resident, feels secure while travelling in the electric bus. “But my primary concern revolves around the limited number of seats available in the electric buses. Additionally, there is room for improvement in the online booking app, as it

currently does not provide the precise location of the bus.”

Key to this newfound sense of security is the hi-tech features integrated into the electric buses. With five strategically placed cameras, two monitoring the exterior and three focused on the interior. This system not only deters potential misconduct but acts as a vigilant guardian of passengers’ safety.

General Manager, Planning and Urban Development at Srinagar Smart City Limited, Atul Kumar Malhotra emphasised, “every female passenger should be aware that they are under watchful eyes in the electric buses, and we take action if we detect any problem. We have, till now, reprimanded a lot of

button is inside the bus. Even if you give out a signal, it will be seen. We encourage you to go ahead and file a complaint and assure you action,” Atul added.

The soaring ridership averaging 1200 passengers per bus on an average in a day, underscores the system’s acceptance and its direct positive impact on the city’s economy. While the electric bus service in Srinagar has undoubtedly brought about positive transformations, it is essential to acknowledge the existing concerns to ensure a comprehensive understanding.

The concern about the limited number of seats and the App’s need for improvement reflects the need for



cure. Offering vigilant monitoring and enhanced accountability, the system in electric buses evolves to ensure a dependable and efficient public transport network for passengers. For most of the female passengers, travelling in the electric buses has provided them a safe environment.

Saba Qayoom, a university student, shared an incident, saying, “Once I was traveling home from university at 7 pm in a local bus, somebody stole my wallet.”

“I travel without any fear in electric buses because of CCTV surveillance”

people inside the crew, and they have either lost their job or they have been heavily penalised.”

The electric bus service not only pledges a secure commute but actively encourages women to come forward with any concerns. Whether through official channels, direct visits to the office or via calls and messages on WhatsApp, the administration assures a responsive approach to every reported incident.

“So, for the females of the city, in case there is any issue of any kind, the help

ongoing enhancements. “As the system evolves, a balanced approach that acknowledges both achievements and areas for growth will contribute to creating a truly secure and efficient public transport system in Srinagar,” a female commuter said.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha in November last year launched 100 electric buses in Srinagar, 75 of which will operate within Srinagar and 25 between Srinagar and other districts.

Burzahom's call for help: Kashmir's oldest Archaeological site faces neglect, apathy

SUALIHA ZUBAIR

Burzahom, an ancient Neolithic archaeological site near Srinagar, is rapidly deteriorating, sparking urgent concerns about its preservation. A pivotal settlement in 3000 BCE and a testament to Kashmir's rich history, it now suffers from severe neglect and mismanagement. Despite its immense significance, Burzahom's current state stands as a stark reminder of the lack of protection offered to the region's invaluable heritage.

According to historians and archaeologists, Burzahom has provided crucial insights into the lives of Kashmir's first inhabitants, showcasing the evolution of agriculture, animal husbandry, pottery and jewellery making in the region. Over years, findings from this site have been instrumental for anthropologists studying the development of Neolithic societies and practices in this part of the world.

The site is located on a plateau, locally known as a Karewa, at a height of 5,900 ft above sea level. Burzahom is a protected monument under Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), declared of national importance under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (24 of 1958). It is also a part of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) tentative world heritage sites list. Yet, its condition hardly reflects its esteemed status.

The large standing stones that characterize the site, locally known as menhirs have either collapsed or are in disrepair. The surrounding area, which should be a cultural treasure, has been transformed into a grazing land for local cattle. Visitors are greeted by an overwhelming stench of cow dung, with only a few damaged historic structures left exposed.

Gaurav, a resident of Jalandhar, Punjab along with his colleagues Jasmeet and Bhupinder came to explore the site after somebody recommended the place to them. Photographers by profession, the three men had come to Kashmir to shoot a wedding.

"I have been visiting Srinagar from past 15 years. However, it took me many years to know that such a historic place exists in Kashmir," said Gaurav, referring to the lack of awareness about this place.



Hopes of finding something interesting had faded away for the three men, when they arrived at the site. "It took us half an hour to find the place and upon reaching, I felt like I have come into a lawn. Nothing belonging to historical site has been preserved. There is no guide to give information about the place. There is no office," complained Gaurav.

Apart from negligence, environmental factors such as weathering, encroachment, and insufficient funding contribute to the deterioration of this place. Moreover, presence of several cows at the site intrigues visitors. Apparently, the site is used by the locals as a grazing land for their cows and is lined by cow dung making the whole site odorous. Gaurav and his colleagues were guided on the site by the locals.

According to locals, a government team that had visited the site in 2019 only to blame the locals for damaging signboards and structures built around

the pits. "Then in 2020, authorities started fencing this place and today the excavated areas and menhirs have been fenced completely," they said.

Abdul Ghani Bhat, an expert on the site highlighted the site's remarkable history, noting that it spans the Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic periods, with artefacts showing early trade links with Central Asia and Southwest Asia. "Yet, this wealth of history is slowly vanishing, thanks to neglect," he noted.

He added that upon earliest excavations, pits, tools made of bones and stone, harpoons were found at Burzahom. "The architecture of the site in-

"The burial practices and type of tools recovered from the site were inferred as having close resemblance to those found in the North Chinese Neolithic culture"

dedicated that the prehistoric people of the Burzahom established contact with Central Asia and South West Asia. Pottery found in Burzahom showed close affinity to those found in the Swat valley in present-day Pakistan. The burial practices and type of tools recovered from the site were inferred

as having close resemblance to those found in the North Chinese Neolithic culture," he added.

Speaking about menhirs, Bhat said that earliest photographs show 11 menhirs at the site while today only seven menhirs remain there. "Others collapsed one by one," concluded Bhat, sadly.

Among seven, only one menhir stands upright while others lay down. 'T20' has been written in bold white letters on the menhir, implying the famous 'Burzahoma Premiere League' that used to take place on this archaeological site every year but now the tournament is no longer allowed here.

According to documents, the artefacts and other material collected from here were transported to Kolkata for carbon dating and then were never returned back. After five decades, they still remain at Purana Qila storehouse of the ASI in New Delhi and in the Kolkata office of the Anthropological Survey of India.

The Neolithic site of Burzahom appeared in the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2014 and still remains there. UNESCO's website mentions about the site- "The entire site retains its physical integrity and is still set in a landscape that is reminiscent to the natural setting of the Neolithic men approximately in 4th millennium B.C. Each pit is protected and retains its physical stability, demonstrating types of spaces devised by Neolithic society'.

Things have changed since 2014 and the above-mentioned information does not remain true to this day. The site may face a delisting from UNESCO if the situation remains same. Although, several steps towards betterment have been taken, a lot more needs to be done on a faster pace because the site is on verge of extinction.

Navigating Digital Era

United, divided by mobile phones

NAZAKAT ASLAM

Echoes of diverse lives filled the air of parks. Children would burst into laughter, teenagers went hell for leather playing cricket, a health-conscious professional burned calories while jogging, and grandparents went down memory lane sharing cherished tales.

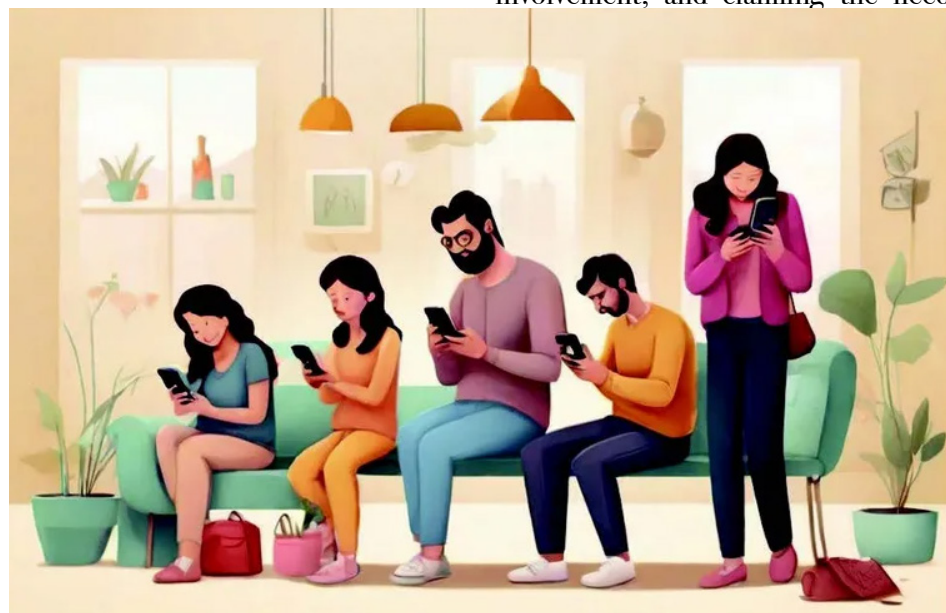
Suddenly, a paradigm shift occurred transforming the bustling parks. Now the solitude of homes has replaced their vibrant parks. Now children are seen watching videos on YouTube, teenagers are captivated by online games, and professionals are busy composing emails and working from home while grandparents scroll through family photos.

Everyone is united yet divided by the omnipresent mobile phones. This reveals how mobile phones have seamlessly intertwined with life, transcending generational boundaries. The once-united park now experiences a subtle division with screens illuminating faces and conversations becoming virtual. The profound ubiquity of mobile phones shapes a modern narrative of connections, disconnections, and the dance between the tangible and the digital in life's intricate ballet. The world is full of smartphones, and kids are growing up around them.

Kids are now being exposed to screens at younger ages, and those who spend significant time on mobile devices are more prone to developing behavioural issues like depression and anxiety, which is alarming. The prevalence of random video reels and cartoons on mobile phones, akin to mobile game addiction – officially recognised by the World Health Organisation as a mental health condition – is emerging as a significant concern.

The impact of excessive exposure to these elements poses a notable challenge, particularly among children.

Mobile phones have evolved into modern babysitters, yet their impact on babies and toddlers goes beyond the commonly discussed concerns. Excessive screen time, although a brief reprieve for parents, is linked to potential risks, including the development of atypical sensory-processing behaviours among children.



Shedding light on the detrimental effects and the crucial role parents play in mitigating this issue, Consultant Clinical Psychologist at the Center for Mental Health Services at Rambagh, Wasim Kakroo says, “The escalating dependency on mobile phones manifests withdrawal symptoms similar to those observed in various addictions, resulting in heightened anxiety, mood swings, and irritability when access is restricted. As mobile addiction deepens, we witness a concerning rise in impulsivity, adversely affecting the delicate fabric of interpersonal relationships among the children.”

The parental role in averting or addressing mobile phone addiction is pivotal, with infants introduced to phones early, risking harmful screen time exposure. The research emphasises the significance of limiting toddler screen time to one hour within 24 hours for optimal development.

Regrettably, contemporary parenting often relies on mobiles to appease tantrums, inadvertently subjecting

children to excessive screen exposure, hindering brain development, and fostering potential links to autism. Responsible parenting necessitates recognising these risks.

“Parents should actively engage in their child’s life and step out of their comfort zone. Parenthood demands involvement, and claiming the need

for personal space is untenable. Establishing a profound connection with the child is imperative for fostering self-understanding,” he said.

Communication strategies for parents to curb the potential harms of excessive mobile phone use involve leading by example, recognising that children absorb actions more than verbal guidance. Encouraging outdoor activities

“Parents should actively engage in their child’s life and step out of their comfort zone. Parenthood demands involvement”

and offering constructive alternatives to combat boredom effectively a possible way out. Short reels, known to disrupt attention spans and induce

frustration, should be replaced with longer, content-regulated activities. Prioritising such activities mitigates negative effects associated with prolonged screen time, ensuring a healthier digital environment for children.

Shabnum, a mother of two, shares valuable insights into her strategic approach to managing screen time for her children. While maintaining reservations about excessive mobile phone use, she pragmatically acknowledges the practicality of limited periods when necessary, recognising mobile phones as convenient distractions.

“I’m against excessive phone use, but sometimes practicality takes precedence, and mobile phones become a handy distraction,” Shabnum says. She employs the art of storytelling, skillfully fostering engagement without resorting to screens.

A conscious effort to combat boredom involves introducing her children to traditional games like tic-tac-toe and Chor Sipahi, actively promoting a reduction in reliance on screens. When it comes to achieving a balanced screen time, she advocates limited educational use aligned with school requirements. This underscores her commitment to a holistic and mindful approach, ensuring her children’s digital engagement aligns with their overall well-being.

Creating a balanced digital lifestyle involves setting clear boundaries and fostering healthy habits. For children with mobile phone addiction, gradual screen time reduction, engaging in alternative activities, and encouraging face-to-face interactions are key. For all children, emphasising a mix of screen and non-screen activities, monitoring content, and promoting outdoor play contribute to a well-rounded and balanced digital lifestyle.

Women-Centric Cancer Care in Kashmir

'Breaking silence on cancer is first step to saving lives'

SHAISTA ALTAF

For Dr Shabnam Bashir, a leading surgeon specializing in breast and colorectal cancers, the lack of accessible, women-centric cancer care in Kashmir has always been a cause for concern. The social stigma, financial burden, and late diagnosis of breast and colorectal cancers have cost too many lives. Determined to change this, she established the Center for Breast and Colorectal Cancers and Non-Cancer Disorders—a first-of-its-kind initiative in Kashmir aimed at providing comprehensive, accessible, and stigma-free cancer care for women.

"The biggest problem we face is that women hesitate to seek help," Dr. Bashir said. "Breast and colorectal cancers are still taboo topics in our society. Women are either too shy or too scared to get themselves examined. By the time they come to us, it is often too late."

Her center, located in Karan Nagar, Srinagar, offers a holistic approach to cancer care. It integrates awareness, diagnosis, post-surgical rehabilitation, physiotherapy, and stoma care—all under one roof.

A Growing Threat in Kashmir

Breast cancer is now the leading cancer among women globally, and Kashmir is witnessing a worrying rise in cases. Unlike Western countries, where breast cancer typically develops after age 50, data shows that in Kashmir, the risk increases from age 40—a decade earlier.

"In Western Europe, the average age for breast cancer diagnosis is above 50," Dr. Bashir explained. "In Kashmir, we are seeing cases as early as 40 or even younger. This means we are dealing with more aggressive cancers at an earlier age."

One of the biggest barriers to treatment, she said, is the stigma attached to cancer. Many women delay seeking

help because they fear social judgment.

"I have had mothers tell me they can't start chemotherapy because if they lose their hair, people will find out they have cancer, and their daughters might not get married," she revealed. "That's how deeply entrenched these social fears are. We have to change this mindset."

One-Stop Care for Cancer Patients

Dr. Bashir's centre is designed to



eliminate unnecessary hurdles for patients. "Often, a woman with breast or colorectal cancer has to run from one clinic to another—from a surgeon to a physiotherapist to a nutritionist," she said. "For someone already battling cancer, this process is exhausting. That's why we are bringing all these services under one roof."

A key focus of the centre is stoma care—an area often overlooked in Kashmir. "Many colorectal cancer patients require a stoma, a surgical opening on the abdomen to pass stool. But there is no dedicated stoma care center in Kashmir," she said. "Patients are left to figure it out on their own. Many suffer from severe infections, pain, and skin damage because they don't have access to proper guidance. We have trained specialist stoma nurses to fill this critical gap."

The center also provides lymphedema management—a condition where a patient's arm swells up after breast cancer surgery due to lymph node removal.

"In many cases, breast cancer surgery

removes all axillary lymph nodes, leading to chronic swelling and pain," she explained. "These patients require specialized physiotherapy and arm care, which most hospitals don't provide. Here, we ensure they receive proper rehabilitation to regain function and prevent complications."

Financial Burden of Cancer Care

Cancer treatment is not just emotionally and physically draining—it is financially devastating. Every year,

thousands of Kashmiri cancer patients travel to Delhi and Punjab, spending lakhs of rupees on treatment that could have been provided locally.

"Regional cancer centers are overloaded, and private hospitals are expensive," Dr. Bashir said. "Many patients leave Kashmir for treatment, but what they don't realize is that 50-60% of what they seek outside can be done here—at a lower cost and with equal expertise."

While her center currently does not perform surgeries, partnerships with NGOs and philanthropists help patients access financial aid.

"My long-term plan is to establish the Breast and Colorectal Cancer Foundation of Kashmir, which will provide active financial assistance for treatment, screenings, and diagnostics," she said.

Bigger Battle: Cancer Prevention

While treatment is essential, prevention is key. According to Dr. Bashir, 30-50% of cancers are preventable through lifestyle modifications and early detection. But in Kashmir,

awareness remains shockingly low.

"People don't realize that simple lifestyle changes can drastically reduce their cancer risk," she said. "Smoking, high salt intake, deep-fried foods, and sedentary lifestyles are all major contributors. But convincing people to change their habits is the hardest part."

One concerning factor in Kashmir, she noted, is the prevalence of consanguineous marriages (marriages within the family).

"We see a high rate of early-age cancers in Kashmir," she said. "One reason could be genetic amplification due to repeated intra-family marriages. We need genetic research labs to study this link and help identify at-risk individuals before cancer develops."

Breaking the Silence Around Cancer

Perhaps the biggest challenge in Kashmir is not just medical—it is cultural.

"In our society, people avoid talking about cancer as if saying the word itself might bring the disease upon them," Dr. Bashir said. "This silence is dangerous. If we don't talk about it, we don't detect it early. And if we don't detect it early, we lose lives."

She emphasized the importance of changing public perception about cancer. "People see cancer as a death sentence, but it is not," she said firmly. "It is a bend in the road, not the end of the road. With early detection and the right treatment, cancers are conquerable."

Through her center, Dr. Bashir is determined to reshape the narrative around cancer care in Kashmir. "This is just the beginning," she said. "With time, we hope to expand into a full-fledged hospital with inpatient facilities and advanced research. But for now, if we can save even one woman from delaying her diagnosis, then this journey is worth it."

Young Engineer Develops Life-Saving Suffocation Alert Technology

SUALIHA ZUBAIR

Zahid Bashir, a young engineer from Anantnag, Kashmir, has developed an innovative automatic alert system designed to prevent suffocation caused by toxic gases in enclosed spaces. This life-saving invention was inspired by a recent tragedy in which five family members in the Pandrethan area of Srinagar lost their lives due to suffocation caused by a heating gadget.

Development (CIED) at IUST. Though the device is still in its early stages, he is optimistic about its future and plans to launch it within the next month. “The commercial product will be available in the market soon,” he adds.

“We lose so many lives every year due to accidents. Then I realized I could use my knowledge and skills to come up with a solution”

comprehensive approach. In addition to detecting toxic gases, the device also measures temperature in the confined space. “If dangerous conditions are detected, the system activates a central alarm

ing areas. Furthermore, the system automatically adjusts ventilation to restore oxygen levels, ensuring immediate relief. Users can also receive notifications on their smartphones, providing real-time updates on the situation,” explains Bashir.

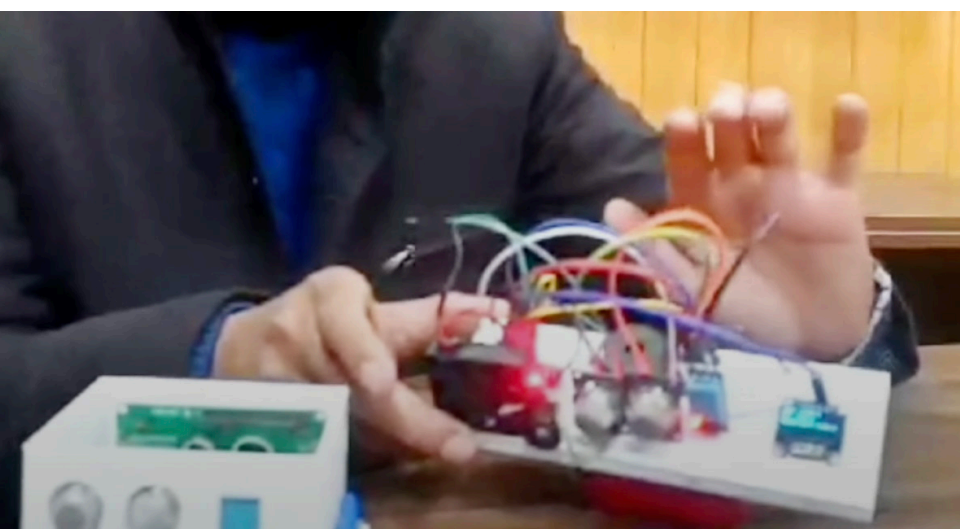
While Bashir is confident in the device’s potential, he faces several challenges, particularly financial constraints. “To make the device accurate and efficient, there are many resources required,” he explains.



A recent graduate with a B.Tech in Computer Science from Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), Awantipora, Bashir was deeply disturbed by the incident. “We lose so many lives every year due to such accidents. I was profoundly affected by this tragic event, and that night, I realized I could use my knowledge and skills to come up with a solution,” he says.

Bashir is currently developing the project with the support of the Centre for Innovation and Entrepre-

neurship Development (CIED) at IUST. Though the device is still in its early stages, he is optimistic about its future and plans to launch it within the next month. “The commercial product will be available in the market soon,” he adds.



What sets Bashir’s device apart from existing safety technologies, such as LPG gas detection systems, is its ability to alert people not only in the affected room but also in the surround-

“I am hopeful that the government will offer support, as this technology could significantly improve safety and welfare in Kashmir.”

Looking ahead, Bashir has plans to expand the device’s use to larger spaces such as hospitals, schools, and other institutions. He also envisions integrating the system with existing appliances, such as gas heaters, to ensure that people do not need to purchase it separately.

From adversity to triumph: Bilal Dar's inspiring journey to 38th National Games

MARYAM KHALIQ

After losing his father, Bilal Ahmad Dar a 20-year-old from Khosapora Khansahab, Budgam, the eldest in his family, had to drop out of school. He after completing his 10th grade had to support his aged mother, younger brother, and sister.

These responsibilities, however, did not stop him from achieving his dream. Bilal has been selected for the 38th National Games in 2025. He is a five-time gold medallist and holds six national certificates. "I had to leave my studies to work and help my family. It wasn't easy, but I had no choice," he says.

Bilal further says, "I loved games since childhood and always dreamed of representing my country in the Olym-



pics. Living in a remote village, 45 km from Srinagar, I often faced many

difficulties in traveling to events. Many times, I missed tournaments because I couldn't afford the bus fare. But my passion for sports kept me going."

Bilal credits his family, school teachers, and especially his mentor, Shabir Ahmad, for supporting him throughout his journey. "They always encouraged me and believed in my potential. Without their help, I wouldn't have come this far," he shares.

Today, his achievements are a source of pride not only for his family but for whole Budgam, Kashmir. "My family, friends, and teachers are so happy to see my success. Their joy motivates me to do even better," he adds.

Bilal's ultimate dream is to represent India in the Olympics. "I request everyone to pray for me so that I can make my country proud," he says.

Tral's Firdoos earns spot in 38th National Games after six golds

MARYAM KHALIQ

Kashmiri youth are talented, but they need the right support," states Firdoos Ahmad Lone, a six-time gold medalist from Shahpora, Tral, who has been selected for the 38th National Games in 2025. His achievement highlights the talent present among the youth in Kashmir.

Firdoos has been passionate about sports since his school days. He recently participated in a Yogasana event in Karnataka, where he finished in the top ten. His excellent performance led to his selection for the upcoming National Games.

"I have won six gold medals in different events, and my goal is to reach the Olympics," says Firdoos. He thanked the J&K Sports Council, his parents, coach and friends for their constant



support.

Firdoos is proud to be the first senior national player from Pulwama in Yogasana. He believes the youth of Jam-

mu and Kashmir are full of talent, "but they need proper support to succeed."

"We need to encourage young people to take part in various sports. Today's

youth are aware of the challenges they face, and joining sports can help them stay away from bad habits," opines Firdoos. "With the right opportunities, they can achieve great things."