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LG inaugurates 400m synthetic athletic track, says sports a top priority of govt

'35 lakh youth participating in sports activities this year'



Lieutenant Governor, J&K, Shri Manoj Sinha (R), inaugurating 400 meters long synthetic athletic track in the presence of Vice Chancellor, IUST, Prof Shakil Romshoo on September 6. PHOTO: ARJUMAND WANI/IUST

FARHAT JAHAN

Stating that sports is a top priority of the government, Lieutenant Governor, Jammu and Kashmir, Shri Manoj Sinha, said, this year a record 35 lakh youth were competing in different disciplines of sports across the union territory.

Addressing athletes after inaugurating the synthetic athletic track on September 6, the LG said, around 14 lakh youth of the UT were showcasing their talent in 22 sports disciplines under 'My Youth My Pride' campaign that aims to instill self-pride and confidence among the youth.

The LG also highlighted the measures taken by the government for creating the requisite infrastructure and engaging more youth in sports activities.

"The development of sports and mentoring of sportspersons are among the top priorities of the government, for sports is the key to character building and a way to build knowledge, skills and motivation in life," the LG said.

As many as 80 athletes from eight universities of the UT participated in the two-day first J&K Chancellor's Athletic Meet organised by the Directorate of Physical Education and Sports, Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST).

The 400 meters long synthetic athletic track—the only international standard athletic track in J&K—has been built at an altitude of 1657 meters above the sea level. The track has been developed under Khelo India Scheme.

The LG, who is also Chancellor of IUST, said, the athletic meet was the first of its kind held at the University level in J&K and provided a great opportunity to young boys and girls to display their skills. He advised the athletes to give their best and also learn invaluable lessons on track.

He said an athlete is full of youth spirit, determination and energy. "Due to these qualities reflected by people

of J&K, the UT is gaining recognition, success and momentum," he opined.

Pertinently, this year, 13 national sports championships are being organised across J&K, wherein 11,000 players from different places of India are participating. "Sports associations are coming together to provide an opportunity to around four lakh youth and children in different sports events," the LG said.

He informed that in previous financial year, 126 projects were completed to develop sports infrastructure. "Today, indoor stadium facilities have been developed even in the remotest areas of J&K," he added.

Welcoming the guests, Vice Chancellor, IUST, Prof Shakil A Romshoo, emphasised on the significance of sports in students' lives for their holistic development. He further briefed about various activities and sports competitions being organised during the athletic meet.

Among others, Vice Chancellor, University of Kashmir, Prof Nilofer Hassan Khan, Divisional Commissioner Kashmir, P K Pole, Sports Secretary, Sarmad Hafeez, Inspector General of Police, Vijay Kumar, Registrar, IUST, Prof Naseer Iqbal and other officials of IUST attended the event.



PHOTO: ARJUMAND WANI/IUST

LG addresses int'l conference on Social Change

SAFA CHISTI/ SYED SHADAB ALI GILLANI

Lieutenant Governor, union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, Shri Manoj Sinha, inaugurated the international conference on 'Society, Culture and Social Change: Kashmir and Beyond' on September 6. The two-day conference was organised by Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) in collaboration with Indian Sociological Society (ISS).

Speaking on the occasion, the LG expressed his faith that the development and social changes taking place in J&K shall benefit every sector. "Efforts are being made to revive handicrafts, handloom and tourism sectors, and similar efforts are being made in every other sphere of the UT," he said. "The mainstay of



THE MAINSTAY OF SOCIAL EQUITY IS EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL"

social equity is equal opportunity for all."

In his address, Vice Chancellor, IUST, Prof Shakil A Romshoo, underlined the role of academia in transforming the society. He advocated proactive initiatives on part of academic institutions in collaboration with other stakeholders, like government and industry, in making the society strong.

Prof Romshoo suggested that extensive attempts must be made to humanize technology in the backdrop of varied modern phenomena, such as globalization and rapid technological advancements at an unprecedented rate.

President ISS, Prof Abha Chauhan, highlighted the role of ISS at the forefront of a meaningful dialogue and an insightful exchange of ideas on Sociology.

Controller Examinations, IUST, Prof Pirzada M Amin, highlighted the significance of the conference in debating social themes of global importance.

Meanwhile, researchers from across the country and other countries shared their findings in 16 technical sessions held in offline as well as online forms on varied subjects.

Craft Safari, GI tagging lend new lease of life to Kashmir handicrafts

KALEEM GEELANI/ ADEEB AHMAD INAAM

With Srinagar city making it to the UNESCO's Creative Cities Network (UCCN) in 2021, the handicrafts and handloom industry, for which it earned the coveted recognition, has seen a rapid revival process in the form of flagship initiatives launched by the government.

Since then, the Department of Handicrafts and Handloom, Jammu and Kashmir, has been reaching out to the artisan community and its stakeholders in Kashmir with flagship Craft Safari—a distinctive tour to showcase the intricate artwork, and bridge the gap between buyers and sellers.

"It has been a huge success so far. Artisans are being recognised and their long-pending issues resolved, as we reach out to them with our robust influencers to promote our indigenous art," Tariq Ahmad Zargar, Director, Handicrafts and Handloom Kashmir, tells *The Echo*.

Now into its 9th edition till late June, the Craft Safari—mainly aimed to create awareness about the craftsmanship—offer an inside view of the time-consuming and highly sophisticated efforts behind the manufacturing of handicrafts, world-famous for their finesse.

"Craft Safari connects customers across the world directly with manufacturers and sellers of handicrafts in Kashmir. This assures customers of the genuine products at the genuine prices," Zargar opines.

To facilitate this connection, in addition to mass



Kashmiri artisans weaving carpets in downtown Srinagar. PHOTO: ABID BHAT

social media promotions, the department has tied up with tourism players to include Craft Safari, mostly of downtown Srinagar—hub of craft activities—into the itineraries of tourists visiting Kashmir.

"The tourists have also begun to show their interest in Craft Safari. They prefer to get a first-hand experience of craft hotspots, so that they buy with a feeling of assurance thereby bypassing middlemen in the trade," says Muhammad Suhail, who owns a leading travel agency in Srinagar.

Moreover, the recent Geographical Indication (GI) certification of Kashmiri handicrafts holds a glimmer of hope for the future prospects of the industry.

"The original handmade products had fallen

victims to duplicate products available in markets, thus bringing disrepute to their noble art. But now with the GI certification, there is a hope for the value and credibility of our products," divulges Ehsaan Reshi, a 40-year-old pashmina seller, adding, however, much more needs to be done for the revival of industry.

In March, the J&K government dispatched off Valley's first-ever export consignment of GI-tagged carpets to Germany. Equipped with the Quick Response (QR) code mechanism, the recognised products entail the certification and labelling of their origin, with officials describing it as a remarkable milestone in dissuading counterfeit products and restoring the credibility of Kashmiri handicrafts.

Pertinently, over the past many years, the famed handicrafts of Kashmir had been dying a slow death with falling demands and exports, and meagre earnings, making it hard for the artisans and weavers to earn a livelihood. This forced newer generation to shun their traditional artwork for better and secure occupations.

"Our handicraft industry has had been at the brink of collapse. It has long been enduring diminishing market value and demand, forcing many of us change the profession," says Rouf Qureshi, a handicraft manufacturer.

However, inclusion of Srinagar city into UCCN in craft and folk-art category has come as a relief for the ailing handicraft industry of Kashmir. So far, only 295 places all across the world have made it to the elite club, with summer capital of J&K at sixth place in India.

Alumni bring laurels to IUST

MINZAH MEHRAJ

Even after 14 years of graduating from Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), Rouf Ahmad Zargar, 36, and Muzamil Hassan Kirmani, 37, both hailing from Srinagar, still cherish their University days.

Zargar and Kirmani belong to the first MBA batch to enroll for the programme in 2006 and graduated in 2008. Kirmani, who currently serves as Chief Manager at ICICI Bank, is all grateful to IUST for helping him develop professionally as well as personally.

"I have worked for numerous businesses, for which I am thankful to my University. The mentorship I received at IUST has helped me to be able to market myself to various employers," shares Kirmani.

IUST, Awantipora, is one of the premier institutions of Jammu and Kashmir, providing quality education to students and helping them enhance their skills to meet demands of the market. So far, scores of students have graduated from the varsity. The IUST alumni are currently working in numerous prestigious institutions across the globe. These include Asus Taiwan, Deloitte South Africa, University of East UK, Innovation Hub for Cobotics (IHFC) at Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, *Al Jazeera*, *NDTV*, *The Times of India*, *The Print*, so on and so forth.

Zargar, who is currently posted as District Development Manager in Anantnag, says, he is pleased to have realised his dream to contribute to the society



IUST alumna and Food Safety Officer, Arjumand Nisar, on duty.

in a different way.

"I have always aimed for a government job with a work culture of corporate sector, and that is what I am doing. I am connected to people from various sectors," shares Zargar.

Another IUST alumna from the Food Technology department, Arjumand Nisar, 31, who hails from Gopalpora, Budgam, is grateful to the University for having a positive impact on her life.

"The role of an educational institution where from one graduates has a significant impact on one's life, and same happened in my case. IUST's disciplined system has helped me overcome the challenges of professional life, while personally it molded me into a better person," she opines.

Arjumand, who works as Food Safety Officer for J&K government, got enrolled in the University in 2009, and completed her B.Tech in Food Technology in

2012. She believes that without good faculty, every institution is a failure. "However, IUST professors are gifted with excellent teaching abilities, and have an innate ability to inspire students. My teachers are responsible for my accomplishments," she says, adding that students should make the most of the resources offered by the University.

Tawqeer Hussain Sheikh, 38, Special Correspondent in South Asia for *The Yomiuri Shimbun* and *The Japan News*, has done his Masters in Journalism from IUST. Hailing from Doru Shahbad, Anantnag, Sheikh got enrolled at the varsity in 2009 and graduated in 2011.

Sheikh recalls the time when community radio was set up in IUST. "The fortnightly community radio programme, *Pesh Kadam*, has trained us in all aspects of radio journalism and broadcasting," he shares.

He deems that it is important to follow journalistic ethics, which he learnt in class, even in modern journalism. "Our professors literally polished our demeanor and shaped us into professional journalists," he says, adding that his batch was also a part of the first film festival organised by the University in 2010.

The alumni maintain that IUST has not only provided them a platform but shaped their personality as well. "There is no doubt that University education improves the social skills and understanding of organisational functioning, but if anyone believes that just getting into a college will guarantee employment, they are mistaken," says Zargar. Rather than focusing solely on books, he advises students to work more on developing their skills.

From 5 courses to 50, IUST has come a long way



IUST in 2022. PHOTO: ZAHOOR AHMAD GILKAR/IUST



IUST in 2005. FILE PHOTO

HUMA MASROOR

Ever since its establishment in 2005, the Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) has come a long way. From having merely two building structures, the varsity has emerged into a place high on infrastructure and top-class academics in a short span of time, thus making an indelible mark in the education sector of Jammu and Kashmir.

While it continues to touch new heights with its novel initiatives and research, the veterans including faculty, non-teaching staff and alumni of the IUST talk about the developments and experiences with the University so far.

“Initially we had begun with B.Tech and Management courses. The University then grew much faster than other universities of the union territory not only in terms of the enrolments but quality education as well with strong international collaborations,” said Dr Ruheela Hassan, Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (DJMC), IUST.

IUST is the first University to offer several innovative courses, such as Food Technology and Actuarial Mathematics. The University has also a full-fledged centre for entrepreneurship namely Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development (CIED).

Dean of Students, IUST, Dr Anisa Jan, who joined the University in 2006, recalls the time when there were only two buildings in the campus. “But now we have more than 20 buildings, while four are under construction,”

she adds.

She further says, the varsity had started off with only five courses, whereas it has now more than 50 courses to offer with a staff of around 300 members. “Every year we celebrate Foundation Day on November 7, which reminds us of our journey, achievements and accomplishments,” she shares.

Dr Jan asserts that IUST has given a tough competition to its counterparts over the years and also developed a conducive work culture. “Here every member of the system is keen to take this

University to the highest levels of academic excellence and establish it as one of the leading institutions in the country,” she opines.

The alumni of IUST are also equally upbeat with the University. “IUST has played an important role in shaping my career and today I am working with a Singapore-based media company, *NewsBytes*, as their National Writer for India. The varsity has helped me develop my abilities to enter and excel in the industry,” says Manzoor-ul-Hassan, an alumnus of DJMC, IUST.

The University’s transport department has seen a major overhauling from two buses at its inception to a huge fleet of buses at present. “Earlier we used to stay in small structures during the day, but now we have got beautiful buildings,” says an official in transport section.

He says, the non-teaching employees, be it sweepers, guards, office boys, drivers, assistants and others have played a pivotal role in shaping the future of the University. “And we all feel privileged when the students excel in different fields.”



IUST in 2007. FILE PHOTO



IUST in 2012. PHOTO: NAVEED ANJUM

J&K witnesses unprecedented tourism boom with 1.62 cr footfall, 'highest' in 7 decades

MINZAH MEHRAJ/ HUMA MASROOR

Over 1.62 crore tourists visited the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir since January 2022 till date. As per the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), this is the highest footfall recorded in the erstwhile state in the last 75 years since India's independence.

Meanwhile, as per officials, a record-breaking 20.5 lakh tourists, including 3.65 lakh pilgrims visiting Amarnath Cave, visited Kashmir in the first eight months of the year.

Government's tireless efforts to promote its culture outside the UT has contributed significantly to the rising tourist influx. "We have conducted rigorous campaigns, such as print and social media publicity, outside the UT. We also held some road shows and cultural programmes in many Indian states to attract the tourists," reveals Zeeshan Khan, Assistant Director, Jammu and Kashmir Tourism department.

Kashmir, known for its serene beauty and picturesque locations, is undoubtedly one of the most popular tourist destinations around the globe. According to officials, tourist footfall in Kashmir had reached an impressive 12,22,900 up to June 19, 2022, while in just 19 days of June the tourist footfall has been 2,32,000.

Many tourist destinations, such as Doodhpathri,



Tourists enjoying a shikara ride on Dal Lake in Srinagar.
PHOTO: NAVEED AHMAD

Bungus Valley and Doda, have been provided with good connectivity to make them more convenient for tourists. Meanwhile, new tourist destinations have been opened up in the region.

"Paragliding and hot air balloons are now also available in Kashmir, which were not earlier available here," says Khan.

He claims that fixed prices for tourist accommodation have already been notified to all the stakeholders, including *Shikara walas*, houseboat owners, hoteliers and food sellers, "so that tourists are not overcharged anywhere."

"The Tourist Wing of J&K Police is 24x7 available to ensure the safety of tourists," divulges Khan, adding that despite pandemic challenges, tourist footfall in Kashmir reached 6,65,814 during the last fiscal.

Mohammad Suhail, a travel advisor says, tourism has been growing steadily in Kashmir over the last three years. "One of the reasons as to why people in India have been turning more towards the Valley is because of the ban on international flights post pandemic," he observes.

A Lucknow-based couple, Rameez and Eena, are on their first trip to Kashmir. They share that they had always been hearing that Kashmir is paradise on earth, which they are experiencing now.

"Kashmiri people are very nice and loving. Kashmir's greenery is amazing and resembles that of Switzerland," says Rameez.

His wife adores Kashmiri *Wazwan* like anything. "*Wazwan* is delicious. I especially enjoyed the *Rogunjosh*," says Eena. "My favourite memory of Kashmir so far has been *shikara* ride with my husband. We would definitely love to come here again," she adds.

Gajendra, 50, from Delhi, who is on his second visit to Kashmir, says, the peace he finds in Kashmir is unlike anywhere else. "I came here to enjoy the cool weather. I always enjoy the *shikara* rides," he shares. "I feel as if I am in heaven."

Nature lovers find solace in trekking



QURRAT-UL-EIN/TAZEEM NAZIR

Taking a break from life's chores, Mehraj-ul-din was here to excavate serenity, which he has yearned for life. Exhaustion was not weakening him as he was in a state of tranquillity. The flowing streams were bestowing liveliness in him.

A Computer Applications student at Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), Mehraj was recently on a trek of Lidderwat, Pahalgam. Trekking has been his routine and now IUST is furnishing him with trekking opportunities.

Mehraj covered over four-hour long journey to top with the same enthusiasm throughout. He knows travel lends a different perspective to life, as one gets to embrace nature's grace that daily life does not offer.

Lidderwat trekking was organised by Directorate of Physical Education and Sports of IUST and its Alpine Club that was inaugurated in June under the leadership of Prof Shakil A Romshoo, Vice Chancellor, IUST. The club has been set up for sports activities on campus.

Alpine Club has seven members with Mehraj as president, Marehah Secretary, Mehvish Joint secretary and



A group of IUST students at Lidderwat trek. IUST PHOTO

Imad as accountant.

Assistant Director, Physical Education and Sports, IUST, Dr Hilal Ahmad Rather, divulges that they resumed sports activities in campus after two years to help students come out from the trauma of past few years post Covid-19 outbreak. "Through Alpine Club, we strive to help students build their health," says Dr Rather.

Dr Rather-led team has organised two treks in less than two months—one at Wasturwan on May 14, which lies in proximity to IUST, and another at Lidderwat on June 11. Around 100 students participated in Wasturwan trek, along with the IUST Vice Chancellor and staff of Sports department.

"Lidderwat was a 15-kilometre-long hike to the top—Alpine Club's first

biggest event. Some 450 students were interested in this trek, of which 30 students were selected," says Dr Rather, adding that the emergency kits and all the requirements were taken care of.

Imad, another member of the club, has been into trekking from the age of 16. His school used to take the students on regular treks. Now even in University, sports activities continue for him. "When you go out on trekking, you isolate yourself from the outside world as your phone connection is lost. You get to understand yourself more in silence," shares Imad.

For Imad, trekking brings gratitude and makes people count their blessings as one gets to witness hardships rural people come across.

The officials have noticed growing interest in trekking among students including girls. "We selected 15 girls and 15 boys for Lidderwat trek, thus maintaining an equal ratio," says Dr Rather.

Officials reckon that Kashmir's geographical location is suitable for trekking and thus can make a good career option for trekking lovers. "One of our ex-students has set up a private trekking company, thus earning a good livelihood," says Dr Rather.

Bait ul Meeras: Housing centuries-old heritage



Interiors of Bait ul Meeras located in old Srinagar city.
 PHOTO: SYED SHADAB ALI GILLANI/IUST

SYED SHADAB ALI GILLANI

To resuscitate and educate youngsters about the rich heritage of Kashmir Valley, a centuries-old house has been transformed into a heritage museum. Situated near the banks of River Jhelum in Aali Kadal area of *Shaher-e-Khaas*—the famed downtown of Srinagar city—the heritage building has been named as Bait-ul-Meeras, which means ‘the house of heritage.’

The four-storied structure showcases the Valley’s unique architectural style. Numerous antique objects

that are over a century old are on display in the art gallery, which include jewellery, traditional apparel, crafts, clay pots, wooden utensils, copperware, musical instruments, so on and so forth. Besides, there are dozens of paintings—landscape photographs, portraits of women in traditional attires and sketches of old Srinagar—hung on parrot-green coloured walls.

The brick house was built way back in 1850. It served as a perfect spot for the Help Foundation—a registered society involved in several social works including preserving Kashmir’s heritage—which was looking for a place to set up a heritage museum.

In August 2021, Help Foundation started renovating the building under a special project. The team has spent over a year assembling the antique artifacts for the art gallery.

The museum was thrown open to the public in February, this year.

“Bait ul Meeras aims to educate younger generation about our rich legacy and heritage. We intend to show our children who we were and what we had, for they hardly know anything about our roots,” opines Nazir Ahmad, Craft Consultant.

The Bait ul Meeras Art and Culture Center welcomes anyone, who wishes to donate or display their heritage artifact collections. The team at Bait ul Meeras is constantly on the lookout for artifacts to

display in the gallery.

“We don’t just display historical artifacts here, we also provide space to Kashmiri artisans, who manufacture carpets, shawls and pottery. We have a huge network of craftsmen working with us, particularly women, who weave pashmina shawls and other goods that we eventually offer at our retail shop, Shehjar,” says Rumaisa Malik, Coordinator at the art gallery. She adds that they are trying their best to do away with the middleman system.

Locals are all praise for this innovative step of Help Foundation to preserve Kashmir’s heritage. “Not just our youngsters, tourists can also learn a lot about the history and culture of the Valley,” says Mushtaq Ahmad Aga, 62, a local.

All the rooms of Bait ul Meeras are brightly lit. Books rest on some old wooden shelves in one of the rooms. Narrow wooden stairs from the ground floor with heritage pictures on sidewalls lead up to upper floors giving a whiff of the heritage treasure in store ahead.



BAIT UL MEERAS AIMS TO EDUCATE YOUNGER GENERATION ABOUT OUR RICH LEGACY AND HERITAGE”

Iranian variants hit Kashmir apple industry

ADEEB AHMAD

With entry of foreign apples into Indian markets, the Kashmir apple industry has been hit hard this year. Prices too have plunged to half against preceding years much to the distress of the local growers.

Since previous year, indigenous Kashmiri apple has seen a major rival in Indian market in the form of Iranian apple creeping into the country through Wagah Border in Punjab and some sea routes. As per data gathered from the Department of Commerce, Government of India, 1.1 million quintals of Iranian apples have been imported between April, 2021 and June, 2022.

Consequently, local apple growers of Kashmir have raised alarm bells seeing the situation as an imminent threat to the local industry and its market space. The local apple industry, as per growers, is crumbling under the pressure of foreign produce.

“It is giving us all sleepless nights. We had a bumper crop this year, but markets receiving glut of foreign fruit has affected our trade badly,” rues Ghulam Mohiuddin, a 55-year-old apple grower of Shopian district.

Mohiuddin, who had hoped for handsome returns owing to the bumper apple crop, has been left to struggle even for earning a decent return, which could compensate the cost incurred on his crop production. “Leave profits alone, we are toiling to recover our expenses on fertilizers, pesticides and

A fruit grower plucking apples in an orchard at Shopian. PHOTO: ADEEB AHMAD/IUST



other things,” he adds.

Many others like him are lingering in the same worry. During the peak season, farmers say, a box of apple would cost around 1200 to 1300 rupees. “However, this year, the situation has taken a major shift. A box fetches us barely 600 to 700 rupees now,” says Amir Ahmad, a young apple grower from Anantnag.

With harvesting of apples currently going on in Kashmir, the transportation of its supply to outside fruit mandis, including Azadpur Fruit Mandi in Delhi—Asia’s largest fruit market—has been facing hiccups. This, as per growers, is due to what they say “unnecessary halting” of fruit laden trucks on

Srinagar-Jammu National Highway, which damage the fresh produce. However, coming to their rescue, the government has called for the streamlining of traffic for fruit laden trucks on the highway to ensure hassle-free movement of the vehicles.



WE HAD A BUMPER CROP THIS YEAR, BUT MARKETS RECEIVING GLUT OF FOREIGN PRODUCE HAS AFFECTED OUR TRADE BADLY”

Working mothers juggle between child, job, everything else...

QURRAT-UL-EIN

After getting her hard-earned job, life brought her to the most demanding phase a few years later. She was physically weak all of a sudden, yet full of responsibilities. Nonetheless, she showed courage and survived the tough period.

Dr Zahida Rasool, a mother of three, and Medical Officer at Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), learnt the art of handling numerous tasks simultaneously.

"I had to leave my six-month-old baby at kindergarten and another child at parental home, which was quite difficult as well as disturbing for me. But, being a doctor, I had no choice," she recalls.

Dr Zahida had to face criticism as well. Today her kids are all grown up and have tuned with their mother's timings. She is now blooming as mother even after enduring tough times. Dr Zahida stresses on striking a balance between work and family.

Sociologists lament that Kashmir is a patriarchal society, wherein a woman is expected to work round the clock. "Even when both the partners are working, it is the woman who has to get ready for another job shortly after she is back from work, which is household chores," says Dr Manzoor Hussain, Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Kashmir.

He adds that it puts a surplus burden on women and affect their well-being. "There should be an equal distribution of work among spouses."

Iqra Zargar, a librarian at IUST, got her job when her first baby was 18 months old. The support of her



family is what helped her pass that difficult phase. Today she is a mother of two and her second baby is one a half year old, whom she carries along to University.

"I know my kids need me more at this stage. So, I am trying my best to strike a balance between my work and children," she shares.

Fabiha, pursuing Master's at IUST, credits her mother's difficulties in making what she and her elder sister are today. Fabiha claims that she can do

anything to pay her back.

Fabiha has been seeing her mother waking up at 4 am, doing all household work, hustling to work, reaching back home and working again.

"My mother is a single parent. She has to deal with multiple things all together to bring food to table and smile on our faces," shares Fabiha, adding that if work-culture would allow mothers to avail more leaves, it could make a huge difference.

Hyfa, another student, has a similar story to narrate. Her mother goes through a lot of stress every day. "Many a time she skips dinner. That is the kind of exhaustion she has," she says.

Experts believe that it is wrong upbringing of children that later leads to gender inequality. "Sisters are often asked to serve food to their brothers, whereas boys are discouraged to do any household help. Later in life, as husbands, they feel ashamed to aid their wives," observes a sociologist.

Dr Manzoor points out that people in the West have arrangements for child development, society clubs and centres, "but in Kashmir, we don't have any such system, which is unfortunate." "Kashmir has been witnessing a rapid growth in the nuclear family system, which puts working mothers at disadvantage," he adds.

Dr Manzoor further explains the social stigma over working mothers. "People gossip about them for not being punctual, for taking kids to workplace and so on, which is so wrong and insensitive."

Sociologists urge for mass awareness, where hardships of working women could be discussed and strategies could be chalked out by society itself.

Mental illness 'prevalent' among Kashmiri people

60% patients suffer from clinical depression: Psychiatrist



TAZEEM NAZIR

It took him six years to understand and recognise his depression, and come to terms with it. He has had no one by his side all these years, who would listen to him without seeking an explanation and understand without a condition. Today he is proud of overcoming his depression on his own.

Aatif Ahmad (name changed) had been suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for past six years after one of his loved ones passed away. He has had no knowledge about complex PTSD and its

symptoms earlier. "Had I been aware of my situation, I might have avoided a lot of emotional turbulence and mental agony by simply sharing my grief with my friends and family," shares Ahmad.

"What made the situation worse was my disconnection with myself. I was not willing to accept that I was a broken man," he adds.

Mental illness is a taboo in the society even in the 21st century. People still find it difficult to discuss their mental issues. Experts stress that person suffering from a mental illness must be heard without prejudice. They require reassurance and a proper care, they suggest.

Psychiatrists lament that depression, and especially clinical depression, is quite prevalent in the Valley. "There has been a tremendous increase in the number of patients visiting Outpatient Departments (OPD) complaining about depression," says Dr Yasir Rather, noted psychiatrist.

As per hospital stats, he adds, during past only 10 to 20 patients would suffer from mental illness. "However, nowadays 60 percent of the patients visiting our OPD for check-up are suffering from clinical depression. Their normal activities are badly affected," he reveals.

Dr Rather cites socio-political instability, financial

disruption, social disruption, cultural disruption, economic disruption, school closure among others as major factors responsible for depression. Covid-19 pandemic, he says, has further aggravated the mental health issues. "The recovery of such cases varies from patient to patient. Sometimes it takes days, sometimes weeks and sometimes months to cure them through medicines and therapy."

As per a research study titled 'Prevalence of Anxiety, Depression and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the Kashmir Valley' published in *BMJ Glob Health* in 2017, 45 percent of Kashmir's adult population (1.8 million) has been suffering from some form of mental distress. "There is a high prevalence of depression (41 percent), anxiety (26 percent), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (19 percent), and 47 percent have had experienced some sort of trauma," the study reads.

Anxiety and depressive disorders are examples of common mental disorders. As per research studies, 4.4 percent of the global population suffers from a depressive disorder and 3.6 percent from an anxiety disorder. Brock Chisholm, the first Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), in 1954, had stated that "without mental health, there can be no true physical health."

ASSETS OF IUST

Rumi Library: Imparting knowledge in nature's lap



Front view of Rumi Library. PHOTO: ZAHOOR AHMAD GILKAR/IUST

ZOYA MALIK

As you step into this state-of-the-art building, you are greeted by striking octagonal walls and a pleasant aroma of books. Surrounded by the picturesque Wasturwan hills, Rumi Library of Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) is a blend of information and aesthetics.

Inaugurated through virtual mode by Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, on October 25, 2021, the library has been named after a famous Persian poet and Islamic scholar, Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi.

The library, which is situated near the entrance of the campus, is spread over 1,500 square metres. A beautiful staircase leads one to the first floor of the four-storied library with a basement serving as an art

gallery.

"It is a learning, inquisitiveness and exploration centre. It has a modern outlook equipped with access to national and international consortiums, technological facilities and database," says Dr Afroz Ahmad Bisati, In charge Librarian, IUST.

The library comprises of multiple sections including spacious reading rooms, reference sections and browsing centres. There is a career corner offering resources to the students for competitive exams. Besides, there is a book bank equipped with around 700 books available for specially-abled students, students coming from humble background and meritorious students. There is a special section for visually impaired as well.

Rumi library encompasses a broad spectrum of services that makes the library a complete centre of learning. It houses electronic books, journals and references as well as digital repository. The library provides rich resources in the form of e-books that gives access to Sage e-vidya, Cambridge Core, Bentham Science Publishers, McGraw Hill Education India, Edward Elgar Online, New Age International Publisher and others. E-journals of Oxford University Press and STM Journals are also available for research and study purposes.

"To access international high-quality journals, the library reinforces its network and collaborations with E-ShodhSindhu giving institutional access to

Taylor and Francis JSTOR, American Chemistry Society, Springer, Economic and Political Weekly and many e-books," says Mir Suhail Hamid, Senior Assistant at the library.

Moreover, the library is equipped with computer terminals with high-speed internet and wi-fi facility at browsing centre with separate space for students and faculty. To keep teachers, scholars and students up-to-date with developments and advancements, Current Literature Bulletin (CLB) has also been set up.

"Rumi library offers its facilities to even outsiders. Another notable facility of the library is that it is open for whole week," says Dr Bisati.

Students are all praise for the facilities and design of the library. "This is the most beautiful library I have visited so far," says a student of English Language and Literature. "Besides, here we get almost all the books related to every subject."



IT IS A LEARNING, INQUISITIVENESS AND EXPLORATION CENTRE"

CAMPUS TALENT

DJMC student shines in Kashmiri poetry

KALEEM GEELANI

Even as Kashmir's mother tongue has been struggling to survive amid popularity of English and Urdu languages among locals, some, however, are toiling hard to preserve the language.

Junaid Rasheed, 24, pursuing his Masters in Journalism and Mass Communication at Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST), has amazed many for his contribution to Kashmiri language by writing and publishing hundreds of poems on varied subjects.

Not since childhood, but his deep love for poetry began after a personal setback in 2016 when he was barely 17 years old. "Something heartbreaking happened in my life that brought me closer to poetry," recalls Junaid, who writes under sobriquet 'Talha'.

Since then, Talha's writings have not touched many hearts, but also helped him earn a recognition in Kashmiri literature. In current times of social media, his poetic posts attract several comments and reactions.

"I receive a lot of love and positive reviews from a large number of poetry lovers as well as experts. Being a knowledge seeker, it helps me to learn, improve and keep moving ahead," says Talha.

Born and brought up in an academically sound



Junaid Rasheed

family, Talha hails from Awneera area of Shopian in South Kashmir. He has done his initial schooling from a local private institution and later studied at Government Higher Secondary, Yaripora, at Kulgam, a few kilometers away from his home.

Quite expected, his staunch dedication towards writing eventually landed him into Mass Communication undergraduate degree at Cluster University, Srinagar in 2018, which in its proximity has the popular Press Enclave.

"Witnessing a daily hustle and bustle of media hub in Kashmir was worth it. It strengthened my passion for writing so as to contribute to the society. My teachers have been encouraging in this regard," shares Talha.

Talha has got his poetry published in several Kashmiri and Urdu publications of Kashmir. His poetry mostly revolves around Sufism, spiritualism and nuances of love. He has written hundreds of poems so far on varied subjects.

However, all this has not been a cakewalk. He has faced some rejections too. "But the only thing that kept me wading through the challenges is my unwavering determination for the cause of Kashmiri language," says Talha. "In fact, rejections have shaped me into whatever little I am today."

Having presented his poetry at some big literary seminars, Talha aims to publish a book in future, which would be compilation of all his writings over past six years.



FEEDBACK HELPS ME TO LEARN, IMPROVE AND KEEP MOVING AHEAD"

Peer Vaer: Exploring Shrines of Kashmir

The Valley of Kashmir is famously known as *Peer Vaer*, which means the Valley of saints, and has been rightly named so. The place has been visited by several Sufi saints over the years to spread Islamic teachings, whose tombs are revered shrines now. Besides, the famous Hazratbal shrine of Srinagar city is an epitome of love and respect for Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). **Photo-feature By INAYAT ULLAH/IUST**



Dargah Shareef, Hazratbal Srinagar

On the left bank of Dal Lake lies the **Dargah Hazratbal shrine**, which houses the highly revered relic *Moi-e-Muqaddas*, sacred hair of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It took around 11 years to complete the Mosque and it is the only domed shrine in Srinagar.



Hazrat Zain-ud-Din Wali (RA), Ashmuqam Anantnag

This shrine in Lidder Valley is situated atop a 100 meters high hillock in Aishmuqam village of Anantnag district. The shrine is valued by the Muslims as it belongs to the famous saint, **Hazrat Sheikh Zain-ud-Din Wali**.



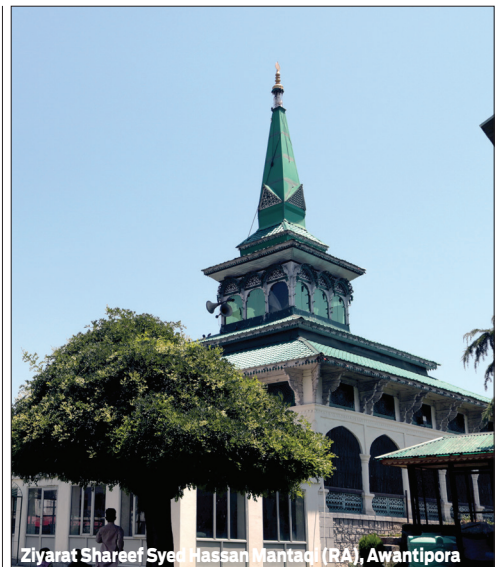
Hazrat Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani (RA), Charar-e-shareef Budgam

The tomb of **Hazrat Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Noorani (RA)**, located 28 kilometers from Srinagar at Charar-e-Sharif, is popular as *Alamdar-e-Kashmir*, which means flag-bearer of Kashmir. Coins were issued in his name after his death by Atta Mohammad Khan, the governor of Afghan.



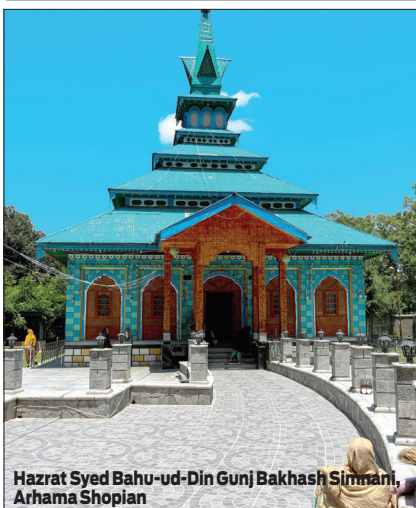
Hazrat Syed Ali Aali Balkhi, Pakharpora Budgam

The shrine is situated at a distance of around 15 kilometers from Yousmarg, and is famous for the shrine of **Hazrat Syed Ali Aali Balkhi (RA)**, who came from Balkh, Afghanistan to Kashmir at the beginning of the 15th century.



Ziyarat Shareef Syed Hassan Mantaqi (RA), Awantipora

The shrine is situated on the National Highway at a distance of nearly 28 kilometers from Srinagar. **Hazrat Syed Hassan Mantaqi (RA)** was a kind and generous person, and a great spiritual saint.



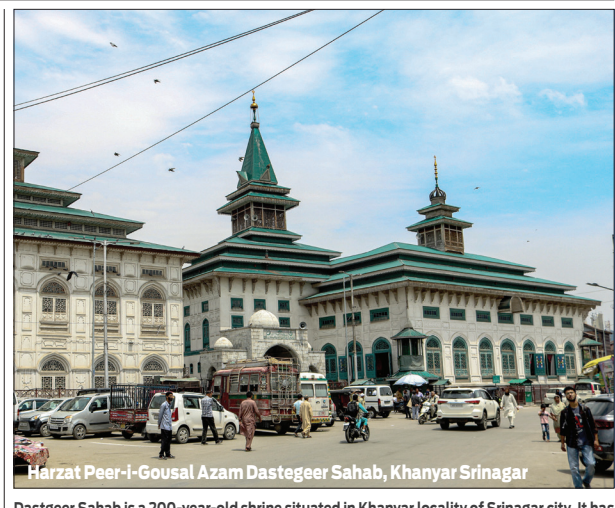
Hazrat Syed Bahu-ud-Din Gunj Bakhash Simmani, Arhama Shopian

Shrine of Sufi Saint **Hazrat Syed Bahu-ud-Din Gunj Bakhash Simmani (RA)** is situated at Arhama, Shopian.



Hazrat Syed Rakun Deen Bagdadi (RA), Rangmoola Pulwama

This shrine is situated in Rangmoola hamlet of Pulwama town. An annual *Urs* is held every year on the birth anniversary of the saint, **Hazrat Syed Rakun Deen Bagdadi (RA)**.



Hazrat Peer-i-Gousal Azam Dastgeer Sahab, Khanyar Srinagar

Dastgeer Sahab is a 200-year-old shrine situated in Khanyar locality of Srinagar city. It has an old Quran written by Ali Ibn Abi Talib (A.S) and the relic in the form of a hair strand of **Hazrat Sheikh Syed Abdul Qadir Jeelani (RA)**.