

Jammu & Kashmir Update



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A 'MACHINE MELA' IN BARAMULLA



The Department of Agriculture recently organised a machine mela (fair) in Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir in order to raise awareness about the latest agriculture-related technologies.

“We have invited all principle or registered dealers related to machinery. We have facilitated farmers so that those who need equipment like irrigation pumps, full sprayer pumps, tillers or tractors, or whatever machinery is used in the agricultural sector, can get them here,” said Hilal Ahmed, Chief Agricultural Officer, Baramulla district.

It was for the first time that the de-

partment had organised such an event.

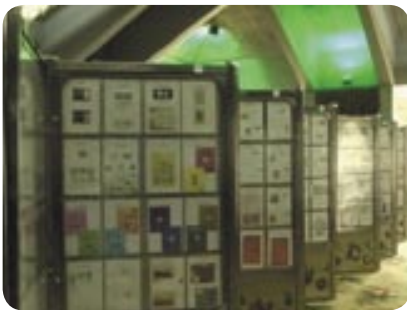
A large number of farmers thronged the fair to find out more about new technologies, which could help them boost agricultural production and the quality of their produce.

“This mela by the agricultural department has made things very easy for us. We are able to purchase motors of our choice for irrigation and tilling. Initially, we will have to pay the full price for the machines, but later, we will get a subsidy of 50 percent from the department,” said Mohammad Maqbool, a farmer.

A number of well-known companies participated in the fair.

Farmers said the authorities should organise more such fairs in the near future, as it would give an impetus to agricultural production and keep them updated about new developments that take place in the agriculture sector.

Kashmir is mainly an agrarian-based economy and agriculture and its allied sectors contribute a significant share to the state's GDP, with 70 percent population directly or indirectly relying on agriculture for their livelihoods.



KASHMIR HOSTS A STAMP EXHIBITION

The postal department of Jammu and Kashmir recently organized a four-day-long Philatelic Exhibition and Post Office Festival 'Chinar-2011' to showcase numerous valuable stamps, spanning decades, from all over the world.

The exhibition, held at the Sher-e-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC) in Srinagar, was inaugurated by Governor N.N. Vohra. He said stamps were an important source for learning about the geography, history, culture, national personalities and other important aspects of a country.

Postal stamps from countries, including America, England, Germany, Pakistan and India were displayed at the exhibition.

The world's first stamp named 'Penny Black' of Britain, drew a lot of people to the exhibition, especially college and school students.

“The whole concept is that the post office should come closer to the people. We felt that the post office is an institution that establishes links with people. So why should we not connect with them? So, this is basically a part of the people-connect programme,” said

A SIGN OF CHANGING TIMES

Aegis BPO Services Limited, India's leading business process outsourcing (BPO) services provider and an Essar Group company, has set up two BPO centers in Jammu and Kashmir with an investment of about Rs.100 crore.

Located on the outskirts of Srinagar, the 230-seat center boasts of state-of-the-art facilities and the latest technology.

It is the first of its kind in the region.

Zahoor Ahmad Malik, who hails from remote Dooru village in Anantnag district, heads the center. He earlier worked with Reliance as a manager and with Bharti Airtel Communications as a consultant.

Malik says he wants to make it the number one call centre in the world. He believes that the return of normalcy to the Kashmir Valley will make this possible.

He adds that Aegis Srinagar will offer direct and indirect employment opportunities to over 2000 youth from the valley.



About 95 percent of the people handling operations, HR and administration at the Srinagar centre are Kashmiris who have moved back, while only five to ten percent of the agents and freshers are outsiders.

Its executives, many of them Kashmiris who have worked in Indian towns and abroad, say it is only the beginning, given the opportunities exploding in one of the world's fastest growing economies.

There is a steady stream of 25 to 30 youth who show up at the office each day looking for jobs. The HR team has been inundated with applications; sometimes five times as many as the number of posi-

tions available.

A brief training session follows, including in the dialect of Hindi spoken in the eastern Indian countryside, and those hired, are soon ready to take the first call.

Some of the callers are not even literate, such as a street-side vegetable seller in a small town in eastern India, part of the country's massive mobile phone market, which adds more than 15 million subscribers a month.

It is still too early to take a call. But the signs are clear that India's rapidly growing economy is slowly but surely exerting a pull on the Kashmir Valley.

John Samuel, Chief Post Master General, Jammu and Kashmir Circle.

The stamps symbolised the era that they came from and displayed images of the protagonist of the British novel series, Harry Potter, and also the late Princess Diana of Britain. Other stamps were inspired by a variety of themes, from automobiles to railways. There were also stamps with images of renowned Hollywood actors.

Praising the initiative, some visitors said the exhibition would benefit the younger generation who are fast becoming tech-savvy, but were not acquainted with stamps and traditional postal services.

"I think the exhibition is good and will encourage children who do not devote their time in enhancing their skills and hobbies because of all the multimedia and cell phones (mobile phones) and Internet. But personally, I believe, letter writing is a skill which children must continue and specially through stamps, they learn so much about history and also about current events and happenings all over the world," said Grace Paljor, a visitor.

During the exhibition, Jammu and Kashmir became the first state in the country to launch the "My Stamp", which allows people to get stamps with their photographs on it.



FORMER NASA ASTRONAUT INTERACTS WITH STUDENTS



Former National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) astronaut Mary Ellen Weber recently interacted with school students in Kashmir and shared and discussed her travels in space with them.

“The students asked incredible questions, they have a great deal of insight. They obviously are very bright, have worked very hard and are very confident. So, I was very impressed with the questions, but the question about whether or not they can be astronauts, I guarantee you, anybody can be an astronaut and, every one of them has a chance to be an astronaut,” said Weber.

Her lecture dealt with the experience of her journeys into space

and was thoroughly enjoyed by students from several schools of Srinagar.

“It was a very good experience. We learnt which subjects we should take, and how we should prepare to become an astronaut at NASA. She (Weber) told us how she struggled to become an astronaut at NASA and what problems she faced. We have been greatly inspired as she came all the way from the US to talk to us. We are very happy after meeting her,” said Faika Bhat, a student.

Weber was visiting Kashmir as part of a US-India cultural exchange programme.

“You can learn a lot from books, you can learn a lot in a classroom

but, it pales in comparison to getting to talk to scientists and people who have been there and done it in person. And I think our intention was to bring somebody out here, who would be able to share the first hand experience of being in space. All the students here have learnt about science and this is a great opportunity,” said Usman Ahmad, Director of Mercy Corps, a U.S. based non-profit organisation.

Weber went to space in 1992 and later in 2000. Her 10-year long career with one of the foremost space agencies in the world, came to an end after she retired in 2002. When NASA selected Weber, she was of the youngest astronauts at the space agency.



SAIMA IQBAL: ARCHITECT ON A MISSION

Thirty-five-year-old Saima Iqbal has made a significant contribution towards preserving the Kashmir Valley’s rich heritage, which is an integral part of its identity.

The architecture of the region is as diverse as its cultural influences. Over the years, developmental pressures and instability in the area have affected it.

For Iqbal, conserving the state’s cultural heritage is a mission. She believes that preserving historical

buildings is a way of honouring the past and defining the future and, is determined to document and restore the diverse architectural history of the state.

She did her schooling from Presentation Convent High School, Srinagar, graduated in architecture from MSIA Bijapur in 1999, and has an M.Sc in Historic Conservation from the School of Built Environment, Oxford Brookes University and Department of Continuing Education, Oxford University.

A NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BIOSCIENCES HELD IN SRINAGAR



A national level conference on “Recent Trends in Biosciences” was held at Srinagar’s S.P. College recently. The seminar was the first of its kind to be hosted in the valley.

“It’s main objective is to spread awareness among the people, firstly regarding bioscience, development of bioscience in the country and in the world, and simultaneously, to provide information to people and researchers working in India and abroad, what we are doing and what others are doing, and how we can collaborate with each other for optimisation of science and technology in the world, so that mankind benefits from the research,” said Prof. Zahoor Ahmad Chatt, the principal of S. P. College.

Experts and scientists from differ-

ent parts of the country attended the event and discussed several issues related to the theme of the conference.

“It’s great step forward because this makes it a platform to get researchers from different fields that are working in Kashmir. This gives them a common platform to discuss their ideas, to see what work is going on, to help each other and to bring out the usable and a very beautiful outcome of their works. So, these things should happen. This should take place at regular intervals so that everyone knows what is happening, where the lacunae are, what more do they need to help the state progress further more into the scientific era,” said Haider Ali, a research scholar.

Experts said that such events allowed budding scientists to interact with senior research scholars from within and outside the state and provided an opportunity for sharing knowledge and the latest research findings.

It is hoped that the conference would help in the development of science education and research in the state, and provide a platform for students, researchers and scientists to address common scientific concerns.

The function was organized by the Department of Biochemistry and Biotechnology, S.P College in collaboration with department of Science and Technology, SKIMS, Soura and SKUAST (K).

She joined Indian National Trust For Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) in 2004 and has worked on the cultural mapping of Srinagar, especially its downtown areas, which contain 250 historical monuments within a 3 km area.

She has also worked on the conservation of the 15th century Aali Masjid, a predominantly timber structure and the second largest mosque in Srinagar after the Jamia Mosque, that was constructed in 1471 A.D. It has now been restored to its old glory and is one of the best examples of Kashmir’s vernacular wooden architecture.

Currently, Iqbal is working to include the Valley’s six Mughal Gardens — Nishat, Shalimar, Achabal, Chashma Shahi, Pari Mahal and Verinag — in UNESCO’s list of World Heritage Sites.

She is completely committed to the cause of conserving Kashmir’s heritage and passing it to the next generation, so they never forget where they came from.

She says that as an architect, there may be better opportunities for her outside and a lot more money, but moving out is not an option.



FARMERS TAKE UP ALOE VERA CULTIVATION IN KATHUA



The Jammu and Kashmir Government is encouraging farmers to look beyond traditional agriculture and is providing them with incentives to make the switch.

This has prompted farmers of Kandi, a dry belt of Kathua district in the state, to start growing medicinal plants such as Aloe Vera.

Each 'kanal' for the cultivation of the plant is funded partially by the central and partially by the state government.

"A special kind of incentive is being provided. If the central government provides Rs.425 for a kanal, then the state government gives an amount of Rs.1, 825. So, in total, we are providing around Rs.2,250 as subsidy per kanal which works out to around Rs.45,000 per hectare," said J.N. Sharma, Joint Director, Horticulture Department, Jammu and Kashmir.

Farmers cultivating Aloe Vera can earn around Rs.15,000-Rs.20,000 per 'kanal', annually.

Around 1,000 farmers in Kathua have taken up Aloe Vera cultivation for better earnings.

Aloe Vera is well suited to the drier regions of the country like Kathua due to its low water re-

quirement. It has the capacity to withstand dry conditions and provides an income to farmers when other crops fail due to drought.

"I attended an agricultural lecture and developed an interest in this kind of farming. So, I started cultivating Aloe Vera in my field. It is not just hard work, but there are benefits as well. Kandi doesn't have enough water. Our crops depend on rainfall and if rains are delayed, there is a crop failure. So, we stand to benefit from growing Aloe Vera," said Phooli Singh, a farmer.

Aloe Vera has fast become one of the most commonly used plants in the herbal cosmetics and the medicine industry, which produce a number of creams, gels, lotions, shower gels and juice based on plant extracts.



YOUTH FESTIVAL PROMOTES INTEGRATION



Hundreds of college students participated in a two-day youth festival (Together for Peace) held in Srinagar recently.

It provided them with an opportunity to showcase their creative side and interact with each other.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, and the National Service Scheme jointly organized the festival at the Sher-e-Kashmir International Conference Centre.

Over 600 participants, including residents from the region, and artistes from other states participated in it.

Sports and Youth Affairs Minister

Ajay Maken said the festival was a pilot project and added that from next year it would be organized as an annual festival.

“We have organized the Kashmir Youth Festival. It is a pilot project for 500-600 youngsters. However, from next year, we will make it as an annual affair and we will invite around 5000-6000 youngsters from across the country. Cultural activities will be held, including career counselling and seminars on different topics will also be conducted. This is a pilot project and from next year, we will organize it on a large scale,” said Maken.

Social activist and Bollywood ac-

trix Shabana Azmi said the festival promoted principles of integration, communal harmony and spread a message of peace and unity in the country.

“Organizing the youth festival is an important initiative as youth from across the nation come and interact and exchange talks. They make friends and this friendship is long lasting. People come together and this is a very nice initiative,” said Azmi.

The cultural extravaganza was an endeavour to facilitate interaction between Kashmiri youth with those from other states.

From the desk of Editor

Jammu and Kashmir Update is a unique initiative of Ministry of Home Affairs to showcase the positive developments taking place in the State. The ambit of the magazine covers all the three regions of the state with focus on the achievements of people.

To make it participatory, the magazine invites success stories/ unique achievements, along with photographs in the field of sports, adventure sports, studies, business, art, culture, posi-

tive welfare initiatives, social change, religious harmony, education etc. The selected articles/stories will be published in the web version of the magazine and the best among them would be suitably rewarded. Decision of the Selectors in the regard would be final.

Interested person may send soft copy of their articles/ stories along with their name, father's name, complete address, telephone number with STD code, email address to Jammuandkashmirupdate@gmail.com

SHIKARA FESTIVAL HELD TO PROMOTE TOURISM



The tourism sector is a major revenue earner for Jammu and Kashmir and many people depend on it for their livelihood.

The state government organizes events regularly to attract both domestic and foreign tourists to the region.

Recently, a two-day Shikara festival was held that attracted many tourists and residents to the banks of Srinagar's Dal Lake, which came alive with 'Chakri' or traditional music, echoing from the colourful Shikaras (wooden boats).

"It is a very good initiative by the tourism department of the state

to promote Shikaras. It is the first time that such a festival is taking place here. So you (tourism department) make it a tradition. This year, this was organized on a modest scale, next year, try to expand it further, so that in future one might be able to internationalise it," said Union Tourism Secretary R H Khwaja.

Tourists attending the festival said such events should be held frequently as they showcase the state's tradition and culture.

"We come from different parts of the country, and, if we get to see the traditions, customs and culture of Kashmir on a platform like this one, it is wonderful. We

should have more events like this and more publicity should be given to the Shikara festival," said Mukesh Kumar, a tourist.

Residents appreciated the initiative and vouched for the serene beauty of the picturesque Dal Lake.

"Its main aim is to promote tourism and tourists want to see the natural beauty of this place. The infrastructure of cities like Delhi and Mumbai is far better in comparison to Kashmir, but the main attraction for tourists is natural beauty. This festival aims at promoting tourism. Particularly, the Dal Lake, which fascinates tourists. Their main objective is to see this lake," said Parvez Ahmad, the owner of a houseboat.

Kashmir is regarded as one of Asia's top tourism destinations, and is particularly popular with honeymooners, skiers, trekkers and anglers. The region attracts many tourists annually, both for its beauty and pleasant weather.



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