Freedom of press must for survival of democratic society: VC

Media Education Research Centre (MERC) University of Kashmir in collaboration with Kashmir Press Association (KPA) observed World Press Freedom Day at Media House auditorium of the varsity on May 3.

The event, sponsored by J&K bank, was attended by some senior journalists of the valley, teachers, scholars, students and members from civil society. The function was presided over by Vice Chancellor, Prof. (Dr.) Riyaz Punjabi.

In his address, Prof Punjabi said budding journalists need to pay attention to social reporting. “Keep your minds open and look at facts in true bold colours,” the VC told the media students.

He said freedom of press is something which we all cherish and we have to see that it is protected by all means and not tampered.

“Power of media is increasing with every passing day. With the addition of internet in the field no technology today has the power to shape our minds and opinions more than media itself,” said Prof. Punjabi.

He also appreciated MERC in contributing towards professionalism in media and lauded its head and his staff for what he termed as “exemplary work”.

Senior journalist and chairperson Kashmir Times group of publications, Ved Bhasin paid tributes to journalists who lost their lives for “upholding free press”. He termed as “exemplary work”.

Bhasin, who was also the chief guest on the occasion, said freedom of press is essential for the survival of a democratic society.

He referred to the challenges being faced by the press “both from within and outside” in the form of curbs and constraints.

“The present ownership structure of media especially the control of corporate sector is one of the biggest challenges before the free press which is there to mobilize public opinion,” said Bhasin lamenting the way press ethics are being violated.

Senior journalist, Altaf Hussain talked about the restrictions media faced in Kashmir during the last few years of turmoil.

Sharing some of his personal experiences in journalism, Hussain urged media students never to distort facts or compromise with work.

In his address, KPA president, Ghulam Hassan Kaloo said press is there to build public opinion and guard civil liberties.

Kaloo highlighted achievements of his association in the last four years in safeguarding the rights of journalists in Kashmir.

“It is time now to work for upholding the freedom of press at all levels because press is essential for building up a democratic society,” Kaloo added.

Earlier in his welcome address, Head MERC, Dr Shahid Rasool said United Nations General Assembly declared May 3 as World Press Freedom Day to raise awareness of the importance of freedom of press and remind governments of their duty to respect and uphold right to freedom of expression enshrined under Article 19.

Dr Shahid highlighted the role of press as a watchdog of the society and said that it makes powers accountable to people. He said freedom of press is not only desired but essential.

Referring to the social responsibility of the press, Dr Shahid said power is not all about showing authority but shoulder- ing responsibility. He also talked about the emergence of citizen journalism.

Others who spoke on the occasion included Registrar, KU, Prof S Fayyaz, senior faculty MERC, Nadir Mirza and noted columnist, Aijaz-ul-Haque. Rashid Maqbool compered the proceedings while Asif Khan presented vote of thanks.
Muslims choose Pandit woman as Panch

Fazia came all the way from the other end of the village to congratulate the newly elected Panch of her village. Despite being a patient of arthritis she made it to Asha Ji’s house to wish her on her success.

Asha, a pandit woman from Wus nan village of Tangmarg, Baramulla district won the Panchayat elections, defeating her counterpart, Sara by 11 votes. Asha is the first Kashmiri pandit woman, who won the election in the ongoing panchayat elections.

“I always wanted to do something for these villagers, but I needed a platform to do that. They now gave me the stage I needed. It is my turn to serve them,” said Asha.

There were many who came to wish her and all of them were Muslims.

“I did not get any Pandit vote, because nobody is here. They have migrated from here and are living in different parts of the world. I am only getting their good wishes on phone,” she said.

When the turmoil started in 1989, most pandit families of the village left the valley.

Asha’s son, Ashok recalls the day when their Muslim neighbours pleaded with them not to leave the village.

“All our pandit neighbours and relatives left the village in the night without letting anybody know about it. We also decided to leave our motherland, but during the day. When our Muslim neighbours came to know about it, they stopped our way and some even said they will die but not let anybody harm us. We stayed back,” said Ashok.

Ashraf Ul Hassan

References to it can be found in ‘Iliad’, a book written by Homer. In fact, in ancient Greece, it was a prominent sport, often finding mention in the legends and literature of those times. Wrestling is still a popular Olympic sport. However, it is usually related to World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) due to wide popularity.

Wrestling matches on TV are usually targeted at males in the age bracket of 12-17. However, to make the matches more appealing to older audiences the already violent content is made more graphic.

This puts the young people at a risk.

Does wrestling have more impact when seen in the context of Kashmir?

“Yes,” says Dr. Hussain, “but only because discretion is not observed while watching such content. Kashmiri parents really don’t care what their kids are watching or TV.”

Laden with all this information, I try to reason with my teenage brother. And, yes, this time he doesn’t smile. Instead, he gives me a confused look and turns back to his wrestling match on TV.

Wrestle this mania
Leading psychiatrist calls for parental discretion

Umreena Majeed

When I think wrestling, I think violence, with disgust. When my 17-year-old brother thinks or talks wrestling, he has a smile on his face. And this smile has me worried. So I did a bit of research to see if I could do anything about this smile.

Wrestling is the oldest form of combat. References to it can be found in ‘Iliad’, a book written by Homer. In fact, in ancient Greece, it was a prominent sport, often finding mention in the legends and literature of those times. Wrestling is still a popular Olympic sport. However, it is usually related to World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) due to wide popularity.

Wrestling matches on TV are usually targeted at males in the age bracket of 12-17. However, to make the matches more appealing to older audiences the already violent content is made more graphic.

This puts the young people at a risk.

“Many kids are not able to process these matches as made-up, as they actually are. For them, this violence is real and this can lead to an increased risk of aggression-related problems in later life,” says Dr. Arshid Hussain, a leading psychiatrist of the valley.

“Kids are particularly receptive to television. They make heroes out of these wrestlers, identify with them and copy whatever they see or hear.”

This behaviour among children, he said, has long-term implications

“The younger siblings usually serve as dummy opponents but that is just the immediate effect. A long-term and more dangerous implication is that they adopt this behaviour in their life,” points out Dr. Hussain.

A study conducted by Prof. Matthew J. Bernthal, United States Sports Academy, across schools in US reveals that students who watch pro-wrestling matches are physically more aggressive and get into trouble more often than non-viewers. In case of viewers, 74.4 per cent had cuts, bruises and scrapes, 10 per cent had head, neck and muscle injuries and 5.7 per cent had broken bones – all sustained during “mock” wrestling bouts.

“No just the physical injuries, wrestling also injures our moral sense of right and wrong. The lack of sportsmanship and winning at the expense of other person gives all the wrong ideas to young people,” the psychiatrist said.

He acknowledged the support by their Muslim neighbours.

“They showed their support all the way and now again by choosing my mother as their representative,” he said.

Meanwhile, the residents are hopeful that Asha will work for the betterment of the village.

“She can do better for our village. She is a literate person. She can take our problems to higher authorities so we chose her as our representative,” said Muhammad Subhan, a local resident.

Religion, he said, did not come in their way as they voted for Asha.

Asha wants to convey the message to Pandits residing outside the valley that they are safe here and should come back to their motherland.

“Government wants the pandits to come back and settle down in prisons like Sheikhpora Colony in Budgam. Why would one like to live in a colony like that? Why they can’t live on their own land as they were living in the past?” questioned Asha.
SUCCESS STORY

‘I was always sure to crack Civil Services exam’

Five candidates from the state, including three Kashmiri boys, qualified the prestigious Civil Services Examination 2020, the results of which were announced recently. This follows the good show put up by the valley aspirants last year. Gulzar Ahmad Wani (23) is among the youngest candidate to qualify the coveted examination in his maiden attempt. Hailing from Wagara area of North Kashmir’s Baramulla district, Gulzar was ranked 341 in the select list. In a conversation with MERC Times reporter Sameen Mushtaq, Gulzar talks about the efforts, the glory and the challenges ahead.

Your first thoughts when you got to know about your selection?
I was always sure about qualifying civil service exam because it wasn’t a one month or a few months’ preparation. It was a long, constant process. I have been preparing for it since my college days. So I was quite confident. I have given it everything it needs. When the results were declared, I was expecting a much higher rank, but still it was a great moment for me.

How significant is this achievement for you?
It is a great achievement. It is significant because of the reason that I’m from a small village and for other states. We are capable. But unfortunately, when we go outside for pursuing some degree, we get deviated from our main goal to so called “modern culture.” We should be very humble and live to our basic needs and objectives. We shouldn’t get carried away. Kashmiri’s are intelligent but don’t put in enough efforts. Intelligence and hard work go hand in hand. We have potential, the only need is to channelize it properly.

What were your subjects in the exam?
My first option obviously was Law. My second choice was Urdu Literature. My first option was Law. My second choice was Urdu Literature.

Who would you credit with your success?
My father is a contractor and my mother is a housewife. I completed my schooling from Navodaya Vidyalaya Shakkote. Later I joined Jamia Millia Islamia and completed B.A LL.B (Honours) from there.

How did a law graduate think of going for civil services?
I went to Delhi with the goal in mind that I’ve to prepare for civil services. But I had to opt for some course first. Why not law, I thought. It was a five-year course from Jamia Millia. It proved to be a great choice, and provided me a platform to achieve my goal. The ideal atmosphere in Jamia helped me to prepare myself well.

How do you plan to use this opportunity?
I will try my best to be a public-oriented officer. Someone who will be accessible to public. Most importantly, I will try to be free from corruption because it is a big menace in our society. Personally believe that I can do it because I’m not joining this particular job for the sake of money. There are a lot of other alternatives where a person can earn money. But this is a position where people look at you with great hope and confidence. I can’t betray their trust.

Tell us something about your family and educational background.
My father is a contractor and my mother is a housewife. I completed my schooling from Navodaya Vidyalaya Shakkote. Later I joined Jamia Millia Islamia and completed B.A LL.B (Honours) from there.

Having a mobile phone is more about necessity than anything else. The world has turned into a global village. Internet just a click and you can be connected to any part of the world while sitting at home.

But is this the case for everyone?
“My son doesn’t study anything. He is always lost with his mobile phone,” said Kulsuma Akthar, a housewife.

It is not the case of her son only; but majority of today’s generation remain stuck to their mobile phones.

“The youth don’t get time for anything. All the time they are engrossed in themselves, no matter what is happening in the world around,” laments Arif Malik, a school teacher.

Today mobile phones are used mostly as a status symbol rather than an instrument of personal use. “It has many adverse effects on human body as well,” said Dawood Quadri, MBBS student.

“The radioactive radiations from the phones are very harmful, causing burns and cataracts if one is exposed to them continuously.”

Some religious bodies have reservations on the use of cell phones by youth. All India Muslim Personal Law Board doesn’t want youth to use mobile phones. A resolution passed by a faction of AIMPLB also wants parents to ensure that their wards, especially girls, do not use mobile phones as it makes them “shameless.”

But not all people agree with such views. According to Shabir Ayaz, an advocate, “It is not at all fair.”

“These religious bodies cannot pass such remarks regarding anyone. I feel regretful about their thoughts as it affects image of Muslims. Who knows in the coming days they will ask to ban other facilities as well like the internet.”
PHC Natipora, victim of vote bank politics?

Abid Nisar

Inaugurated in 2009, the Natipora Primary Health Centre is yet to get sanction with officials blaming the “vote bank politics” for leaving it unattended.

“The health centre is not even an allopathic dispensary. It is just a sub-centre. The minister and MLA fooled people for vote bank,” said Zonal Medical Officer, Dr. Shah Muammar.

The PHC was inaugurated by Minister of Health, Sham I I Sharma in presence of MLA Amira Kadal, Nasir Segami. It was said that it will be a 15-bed hospital with every kind of facility.

“We have just beds and nothing else. We have lab technician without a dispensary to PHC. The foundation stone for PHC building was laid in 2007 amid much fanfare by the minister and MLA of it,” said Dr. Muammar.

Kondabal yet to get sanctioned PHC

Malla Waseem

By the government claims about upgradation of health-care system in the valley, the construction work on Primary Health Centre at Kondabal, Ganderbal is yet to start even as five years have passed since it was sanctioned.

Kondabal is a village in the perimeter of Lar tehsil, 14 Kms from district headquarters. The village has a 40-year-old Allopathic Dispensary. In 2006, the government approved upgradation of the dispensary to PHC. The foundation stone for PHC building was laid in 2007 amid much fanfare by the then Minister for Forests and local MLA, Qazi Mohammad Afzal. But till date no work has been done on the building.

“The government is not concerned about us. They even removed the issue. Officer Lar refused to comment on the issue,” said a local student, said they are facing difficulties to reach the centre.

Seconding Dar, Fayaz Ahmed, a local teacher, said the government should have established the PHC on priority basis keeping in view the proximity of Kondbal with Mansbal tourist resort.

“Many a times, tourists suffered injuries either during trekking or boat riding. They had to be moved to Safapora which is four kilometres away for treatment,” he said.

When contacted, Block Medical Officer Lar refused to comment on the issue.

However, Chief Medical Officer Ganderbal attributed the delay in the construction to non-availability of funds. He said the work will be started in next one or two months.

Why should boys have all the fun?

Scooty riding picks up among girls

Huda Ul Nisa

Sometimes back, a young girl in Salwar Kameez and Hijab riding a coloured scooty was an unusual sight in Kashmir. But here they are, riding in all colours with an apparent sense of freedom and not letting the boys “have all the fun”.

The passion among girls of riding the scooties, many believe, is as high as obsession for bike riding among the boys.

“I have seen this craze before only in boys for the motor bikes but now I see girls coming here with the same passion. The scooty demand has increased since March this year. We sell more than 100 scooties of different models in a month,” said Talat Lalit, accountant officer, Kashmir Motors.

Meanwhile, the girls who are “proud owners” of these scooties feel a sense of liberation from the daily hassles of public transport, eve teasing and in the process save some backs too.

“It saves my time as I have to reach my tuition centre immediately after my school and I reach my destination within no time,” said a class 12 student, wishing not to be named.

With the increase in auto rickshaw and bus fares, possessing a scooty becomes a blessing. You no longer need to wait for buses andrickshaw. It also spares unnecessary male attention.

Iram, a class 12 student, finds it safe and economical.

“It saves everything for me — from time to pocket money. Yes everyone is not encouraging; there are some even tees also who never miss a chance to pass a comment but I keep my concentration on my riding rather than anything else.”

More or less our society seems to have fairly adjusted with the idea of women travelling alone in their vehicles — be it a two wheeler or a four wheeler.

“Girls riding scooties epitomises a new wave of independent women who do not need their parents or friends to accompany them every time they step out,” says Dr. Maroofa, a Sociologist.

For many working ladies, riding scooties invited “discouraging” stares on roads. But even such things are changing now.

“It is my husband who encouraged me to get a scooty. I find it more easier and safer to reach my college and back home,” said Fozia, a college lecturer.

Still there are so many girls who desire to get a scooty, but are not allowed by their parents due to one or the other reason.

“My parents find it more risky to ride a scooty all alone. They are not allowing me because of some apprehensions like eve teasing and accident kind of a thing,” said Sadia, a class 12 student.

“My parents want me to get a scooty, but it is me who doesn’t want to get it because I fear losing it,” added another student.
A Peep into Ladakhi marriage ceremony

Like in many other respects, the marriage customs in Ladakh region are unique in their own right.

In Leh, boy’s family approach girl’s parents with the marriage proposal. The boy’s father and ‘ajang’ (maternal uncle) visit the girl’s house. In Buddhists they carry ‘chang’ (local beer prepared from barley) whereas in Muslims they bring ‘cha’ (tea) to the girl’s family. If the girl’s family agrees to the marriage proposal, they accept ‘chang’ or ‘cha’ as a sign of their willingness. A date is fixed for the ‘pakston’ (marriage ceremony).

Once the date is fixed, ‘pakma’ (the bride) is gifted with ‘norna’ (jewellery and cash) by the parents of ‘makpa’ (groom). The bride’s parents also gift some ‘raktak’ (dress and cash) to their daughter, but this is not compulsory.

“Earlier as ‘raktak’ the parents used to gift Ladakhi traditional kitchen set (heavy bowls made of heavy copper and brass),” says Rigzin Yangdol, a 56-year-old woman from Leh.

The bride and groom wear traditional Ladakhi dress. The groom wears ‘goncha’ (a long gown shaped dress) with ‘shkeraks’ (rope made of silk) tied at the waist in a delicate way.

The Buddhist bride wears a ‘perak’ while a Muslim bride wears ‘jugin’ and dupatta at the head. This is the only difference in the attire of Buddhist and Muslim brides. They both wear ‘soulma’ (long gown shaped), ‘tunglak’ (Ladakhi bangles), ‘sondus’ (large earring shaped that is hanged at the chest), ‘ldocha’ (same as sondus but tied at the waist), ‘seri kau’ (golden locket) and ‘pabu’ (heavy shoes made from a hard Ladakhi fabric).

“My father gifted me all silver items but with changing time and keeping in tune with the social status I would like to give gold items to my girl,” said Konchok Lamo, a 51-year-old woman from Saspol.

On the day of marriage ceremony, the ‘ajang’ and ‘nopa’ (groom’s relative and friends) and ‘nathiit’ (youngest male member of the groom’s family) go to bride’s house to get the bride.

The bride does not remove the ‘perak’ all the way till she reaches the groom’s house as it is considered as inauspicious. She is accompanied by her ‘aney’ (paternal aunt) and few friends.

The groom’s mother welcomes her with ‘cha’ and put ‘khataks’ (sacred scarf) around her shoulder as a symbol of blessing. The senior most member of the family sings Ladakhi folk songs and praises the bride. The special ‘nopa rtses’ (dance) is performed. The bride is treated with great respect and sacredness.

In Muslims instead of dancing, religious hymns are recited. The relatives welcome the bride with ‘kalchor’ (butter, tea, water, flowers) at the door and the ‘ajang’ is supposed to give some amount of money to everyone.

The sitting arrangement is made in Ladakhi style. They sit on Tibetan carpets at the floor with ‘rtsichok’ (table) painted with dragon and flowers on it.

The groom’s parents first put ‘khataks’ around the bride’s shoulder and everyone blesses the couple and present their gifts. The bride strikes her ‘tunglak’ twice and says ‘ojju lay’ (thank you). These gifts are registered carefully so that they could be returned when an event is celebrated in the giver’s family.

The ceremony lasts till late in the night. After the dinner the couple is invited for dance on music of ‘surna’ (oboe) and ‘daman’ (drum). On next day the couple and the groom’s whole family is invited for ‘pakdon’ (grand feast) at the bride’s house.

LEH DIARY
Stone crushers, macadam plants closed down

Qayoom Madni

Tuwlari, a hamlet is just two kilometers from the main town Langate in district Kupwara. Situated on the bank of Nalah Mawer, the village has all the beauty to be adored. Snow kept mountains, green meadows and fresh waters of Nalah Mawer mesmerized locals and visitors alike. However, things changed with the setting up of a macadam plant and stone crushers in the hamlet.

The number of macadam plants and stone crushers grew from few to a dozen. The locals say they were unaware about their hazardous effect. “We gave our land on rental basis to these plants and crushers to generate better income for our family and employment for the youth of our village,” locals said. “However it proved contrary. Instead of gaining we losing from all the sides,” they added.

The dust and smoke which is produced by macadam plants and stone crushers have eaten up the beauty of village. The most affected is Nalah Mawer. “These macadam plants put extracted chemicals into water which has turned blackish and is not safe for drinking,” said Nazir Ahmad Bhat, a local resident.

“The intoxicating chemicals in water have led to extinction of fishes which were once famous all over Kashmir,” he said.

The macadam and crusher pollution has its impact on agricultural land and orchards as well. “Our crops get rotten in the harvesting season. There are layers of dust on paddy plants and fruits, which affects their quality,” said Muahmmad Akbar, a local fruit dealer.

The pollution has not even spared humans. The locals say most of the people suffer from lung and chest diseases. “The local residents along with people of adjoining areas staged a dharna at main chowk Langate and blocked the Baramulla-Handwara National Highway for many hours demanding closure of the macadam plants and stone crushers. “We approached the government number of times, but each time they showed poor response towards our demands,” said the angry protesters.

“This time we will show them public power.” Fearing public anger, a team led by Assistant Commissioner Handwara, Barooq Ahmad Mir visited the spot. He ordered sealing of the macadam plants and stone crushers. “It was done on the instructions of higher authorities,” Rather said. “We want to maintain law and order in the area.” The people of Tuwlari have been suffering for the last ten years owing to the pollution caused by these units. They expressed hope that the government action does not turn out to be mere eyewash, but a job done in true spirit.

Soura Dumath: A neglected monument

Mukeet

600-year-old monument situated in Soura area of Srinagar, popularly called as Dumath, is lying in ruins for the lack of maintenance by the concerned authorities.

The tomb has been built by 15th century king, Zain-ul-Abidin, popularly known as Badshah. According to a blue-coloured iron signboard erected outside the tomb by Department of Archives, Archaeology and Museums, it is a protected site. But no work has been initiated so far for its renovation.

This tomb was among many other tombs built by Badshah throughout Kashmir during the 15th century. Small bricks were used to build the dome (Soura Dumath) like the similar structure built by the king at Zaina Kadal.

The tomb, built as a resting place for tired travelers, lies in dilapidated state. Its walls have developed cracks.

The residents blame the government for the current state of the monument. The residents say while other such monuments are being looked after, Soura Dumath is being ignored. “Other historical monuments have been renovated or rebuilt like Aali Masjid, this tomb has been neglected,” Hakim said. When contacted, Deputy Director of Archaeology, Archives and Museums, Za-hid Ahmad said, “At the moment we have shortage of funds but when funds will be available we will definitely renovate this monument.”

The residents of the area complained that a large chunk of land was available around Dumath, which has been encroached upon by people by constructing houses and shops. “In order to safeguard the monument, Archaeology Department needs to take immediate steps for its renovation and construction of path leading to Dumath so that tourists can visit the site and it can be developed as a tourist destination,” said Muhammad Shaban, a local resident.

“Once a resting place for travelers, the tomb lies in shambles.”
When selection in 6 PG courses goes vain

Wasim Ahmad Khanday, a computer science graduate, was selected for six post graduate programmes in Kashmir University, but all in vain, as his father wanted him to look after the family business.

A resident of downtown Srinagar, Wasim qualified the entrance in Masters in Library and Information Sciences and Master of Journalism in Kashmir University, but all in vain, as his father wanted him to look after the family business. “I definitely wanted to study but the father wanted him to look after the family business,” Wasim said.

His father is a contractor and runs a software park in Kashmir. “Though I had sacrificed my studies but I will be a successful business man in future. I am still focussed on my ideas though I am a contractor now,” Wasim said.

Meanwhile, Wasim’s friends are disappointed over his decision to leave studies. "He is very lucky to get admission in so many courses, but he has made a mess of it. It is a blunder,” said his friend, Amir.

Wasim’s mother seems to be the most upset. “He has ruined his life. What kind of honour will he get as a contractor? This regret will remain with me throughout my life,” said his mother.

His teachers seem equally baffled. Wasim is born genius. His innovative ideas always used to leave a good impression on others in the class. But I fail to understand why he has skipped studies,” said his teacher.

Presently working as a contractor, Wasim is aiming high. His dream is to establish software park in Kashmir. “I had sacrificed my studies but I will be a successful business man in future. I am still focussed on my ideas though I will not be a contractor now. I was so much jubilant when I saw my results. Everybody was congratulating me but I didn’t know I had to leave my studies midway,” he said.

Wasim is also good at sports. He has played two national level chess championship in 2005.

Unabated pollution endangers Kashmir's aquatic life

Tale of Trout

Kashmir's water bodies have a large variety of fishes including Schizothorax, Cyprinus, Salmo Trutta (commonly called Trout). These fishes have been providing livelihood to a large number of people.

"Trout, a popular breed, was imported from Europe in the 17th century. Frank Mitchell (Father of Trout Fisheries) in 1899 introduced the breed in Kashmir for the first time. Almost six species of Trout were imported in Kashmir, but only two species could adapt to waters of Kashmir- Brown Trout (Salmo Trutta Fario) and Rainbow Trout (Salmo Gairdneri Richardson). These fishes prefer to live in crystal clear waters. They have high nutritive value and it is the only fish which can withstand artificial fertilization, incubation and flat-tening."

Trouts are big game and exotic fishes which are often used for recreational purposes. Its large scale production in our state has lifted our economy considerably. Trout is the only fish to be exported from the valley.

Traffic Dept launches drive against violators

Amir Ashraf

Traffic Department has launched a valley wide drive against untied cars and use of mobile phones while driving. Special squads have been deputed to remove black coatings and fine the offenders.

SP Traffic (South), Ghulam Ahmad Bhat said traffic police has handed over 422,179 challans collecting over Rs 6 crore in its drive against violators.

"The main causes of accidents are mobile usage while driving, bad roads, overload and the drivers state of mind besides some other factors like inadequate maintenance of roads," he said.

He said the department was taking preventive measures to bring down the number of accidents.

"We are adopting safety measures, invoking challans to mobile phone users while driving, recommending widening and macadamization of roads, erecting crash barriers and parapets," said Bhat.

The officer pointed out that roads were insufficient for the ever increasing number of vehicles, adding that Jammu and Kashmir is the only state in the country that does not have traffic signal lights.

"The drive seems to be proving effective and we are hoping for the best in future," Bhat said.
Located on the banks of Nigeen Lake, Kashmir’s lone leprosy hospital was founded by Britishers in 1882. The patients live in the same mud house blocks which were built 129 years back. No serious attention has been paid so far towards the renovation of the existing hospital.

At present about 100 patients live along with their families in the hospital run by the government.

The hospital is facing official apathy, complain the patients.

“The condition of my living room is not good. It is made up of mud which creates lot of problems in summers. And also we don’t have proper sanitation,” said Ghulam Muhammad Dar, a leprosy patient.

The lepers also complain lack of proper medical facilities.

“It is very hard for a person with amputated hands and feet to do basic day-to-day activities. The doctors, washermen, barbers are supposed to come here. Instead I have to go to them. The scheme of things here has never changed,” said Altaf Ahmad, a leper patient.

The patients seek attention from orthopedicians, nurses and barbers. “Besides, special assistance for better sanitation should be made available for the patients by the municipal authorities,” Lal Din, a leper said.

When contacted, Director Health Services, Saleem-ur-rahman admitted lack of facilities at the hospital. He assured that necessary steps will be taken to ensure better functioning of the hospital.