

Jammu & Kashmir Update

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Hemis Festival

Every year, in the fifth month of the Tibetan calendar, which is late June, or the first half of July, the remote 16th century Hemis Monastery comes alive with the beating of drums and the chanting of Buddhist Lamas.

It is time for the Hemis Festival.

Hundreds of devotees and tourists make their way to the Hemis Monastery located 40 kilometers from Leh.

Hemis is the best known and biggest gumpa or monastery of Ladakh and was built in 1630 during the reign of Sengge Namgyal, an illustrious ruler of Ladakh.

The two-day event is one of the most important festivals for Buddhists and is celebrated to mark the birth anniversary of Guru Padmasambhava or Guru Rimpoche, who is regarded as an incarnation of Lord Buddha, and is also credited for having brought Buddhism to Ladakh and Tibet.

The main events of the festival take place in the monastery's rectangular courtyard.

During the festival, monks perform splendid masked dances to the accompaniment of cymbals, drums and long horns. The mask dances, where monks depict deities and other religious leaders, mark the victory of good over evil.

Masks representing the various faces of Guru Rimpoche are worn by worthy lamas only. To wear one of these masks, each lama has to practice continuous meditation for two to three months.

Another highlight of the festival is the unrolling of its Thangka once every twelve years. A Thangka is a painted or embroidered banner hung in a monastery or carried by lamas in ceremonial processions. In Tibetan, the word 'than' means flat and the suffix 'ka' stands for painting.

The Hemis Festival is a symbol of undeterred faith, which has been passed on for centuries now.

In recent years it has also become a major tourist attraction. It provides the faithful and the tourist with a panoramic view of the rich Ladakhi Buddhist culture.

Amarnath Yatra, a symbol of communal harmony



The Amarnath Yatra is a journey to a cave in the Himalayas located at an altitude of 3,888 meters in Jammu and Kashmir that takes place every year during the months of July and August.

The cave houses an ice formation in the shape of a phallus, symbolizing its link to Lord Shiva.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims trek through treacherous mountains, glacier-fed lakes and frozen passes to reach the cave shrine, through two different routes - one via Pahalgam in Anantnag District, and the other through Baltal in Ganderbal District.

The Amarnath Yatra is more than just a pilgrimage. It is also a shining example of communal harmony and brotherhood.

Pilgrims are welcomed with open arms by the people of Jammu and Kashmir - be it pony or mule owners, palanquin carriers, those manning community kitchens or those looking after shelter - all of them ensure that required facilities are made available.

"We are doing whatever we can to help our Hindu brothers. We are providing them tea, juice, fruits and meals. We consider it our duty," said, Mushtaq Ahmad, a volunteer.

"We feel good that we are able to serve pilgrims and help them to reach their pilgrimage site ... this is real brotherhood," said Bashir Ahmad, a pony owner.

Legend has it that a Muslim shepherd, Buta Malik, discovered the cave, which eventually became a pilgrim spot. Even today, his descendants receive a share of the cash and other offerings made at the cave.

The Amarnath Yatra perfectly reflects the spirit of acceptance and tolerance, a hallmark of the Kashmiri society.

Crop insurance brings smiles on faces of Kashmiri farmers

Farmers in the Kashmir Valley have a reason to smile. They are happy with the implementation of a crop insurance scheme that will enable them to get adequate compensation for losses incurred due to natural disasters.

"Crop insurance scheme is important, it is a protection cover given to the farmers to safeguard crops from natural calamities, disaster, flood or fire," said Mian Abdul Majeed, Director, Department of Agriculture, Kashmir.

The scheme was launched by the federal and state governments, and the Agriculture Insurance Company of India (AIC).

"This insurance scheme is good and is beneficial for farmers and cultivators. All of us will benefit from it. I would request every grower and farmer to take up this crop insurance scheme," said Abdul Ahad, a farmer.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah recently launched the scheme.

"We want that the insurance scheme should also be implement-

ed on products like apple, saffron and for our vegetable production," said Abdullah.

While the insurance scheme will initially cover only paddy, potato and maize crops, the authorities are planning to include saffron, apple and vegetables in it as well.

Under the scheme, insurance is provided to cover the yield losses due to non-preventable risks such as natural fires, lightning, hailstorms, droughts and dry spells.

Agriculture is the main occupation for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. About 80 percent of the people are dependent on agriculture for their livelihood.

Farmers of the Kashmir Valley have been facing many problems for almost a decade, as paddy, almonds, apple and walnut crops have often been destroyed by adverse climate like excess or deficient rains. It is in such a scenario that crop insurance assumes a vital role in ensuring a stable growth of the agricultural sector.

Authorities in the state believe the crop insurance scheme will give a major boost to agriculture.



Jobs abound for students doing n Kashmir U

The Department of Geology and Geophysics at Kashmir University introduced a Masters programme in geo-informatics in the 2010-11 session.

It has attracted many Kashmiri youth who are concerned about global warming, and the threat it poses to the environment.

Shakeel A Ramshoo, programme coordinator of Kashmir University, said the goal is to enhance understanding and subsequent use of space technology, IT and GIS for socio-economic environmental-friendly development of the state.

"Geo-informatics covers space technology, information technology, geographic information systems (GIS), computer science, and with which we can solve the problem of earth resources. Using this science, we can better understand and characterize disasters, climate change, meteorological science and all the environmental problems. With the help of geo-informatics, people can better understand and solve the environmental problem," Ramshoo added.

Students say the course would help generate interest in environmental issues.

"In the last couple of years, we have been seeing in the media the impact of global warming, on the Dal Lake, shrinking of the water table, pollution...all these are involved



g masters in Geo-Informatics in r University

with nature. All these things attract us towards nature and the subject that we have taken -M.Sc in geo-informatics, so that we can try and do our bit to make things better," said Muzaffar Ahmad, a student.

The department has developed excellent infrastructure, both in men and machinery, for offering the best possible education, research and applications in geo-informatics to students from varied backgrounds.

The geo-informatics course is highly job-oriented with 100 percent job placement.

The university offered a post graduate diploma in remote sensing and GIS in 2004, and up till now, all students from previous batches have found jobs in government, academia and the private sector. However, the demand for remote sensing and GIS-trained persons is much higher than the availability of trained manpower.

In the last couple of years, the university has won national and international fame and recognition in the field of remote sensing and GIS. It has won a number of research projects from the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO), the Japan Space Agency (JAXA) and other funding agencies on the societal applications of space technology and GIS. The faculty has won two international and four national awards for cutting edge research in the field of geo-informatics.

Mughal Road Rally highlights adventure tourism

The Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Department in association with the Himalayan Motor Sports Association recently organized the Mughal Road Rally 2010 to highlight new tourist destinations in remote areas of the state.

The event was also held to promote the Mughal Road, which gets its name from the fact that Mughal emperors and their royal armies used to travel through it to Kashmir. It has been reborn as a modern engineering marvel, connecting both sides of the Himalayan region, and will act as an alternative highway between Srinagar and Jammu. The 87-km route linking Rajouri-Poonch to Shopian passes through Pir Panjal mountain range, at an altitude of 11,500 ft.

It was the first time that such a rally was held in the state. Jammu and Kashmir's Minister for Tourism and Culture, Nawang Rigzin Jora, flagged the rally off from the Royal Springs Golf Course in Srinagar.

"The development authorities are working to develop the basic infrastructure for tourism, and we wanted to kickstart tourism to these areas and, there was no better way

to do so than through this event (Mughal Rally 2010)," he said.

The state tourism department is focusing on exploring newer areas for tourism like the Dakshum-Kishtwar stretch in South Kashmir and the Bafliaz-Dobjan stretch that connects Kashmir to the Rajouri-Poonch areas in Jammu.

The rally passed through Kishtwar, Patnitop, Mansar, Suransar, Jammu, Rajouri, Bafliaz, Peer-ki-Gali and ended at Srinagar.

Forty national level motorists were among the 66 participants from across the country. They thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

"It was a unique experience and I feel privileged. It makes you feel very special and it is going to be memorable for a long time," said Ravi Prabhakar, a participant.

"This event will help in boosting the tourism potential of the region and, we are fortunate to have participated in it," said Hari Singh, another participant.

Tourism authorities hope the event will give a tremendous fillip to tourism, trade and commerce in the state.



Kashmir's trout farming sector all set for impressive growth

The Jammu and Kashmir Government is promoting trout fish farming in the private sector for the first time. Steps are also being taken to support trout fish culture among farmers and increase the production of the fish.

The main objective of the initiative is to create job opportunities for unemployed youth under the Prime Minister's Rashtriya Kendra Vikas Yojna (RKVY).

"The Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojna (employment scheme) came up with this scheme and privatised it for the first time under the department of fisheries and trout," said Asifa Khan, a project officer with the fisheries department.

The department is organizing a variety of awareness programs in a number of districts, including Srinagar and Budgam.

Cheques have been distributed and eighteen fish farmers were selected for the Rs.200, 000 cash award for construction purposes (150,000) and (Rs.50, 000) for feed, nets and other equipment.

Farmers believe trout fish farming will enhance their sources of earning.

"The Kashmir Valley is famous for various reasons around the world. Trout fish is also one of them. It's a very good step that the fisheries department has introduced this world

famous fish in the private sector. It is good for us. With this, a number of unemployed youth will be able to earn their livelihood easily," said a fish farmer.

"The most important part of this is that where there is more unemployment...it will go down by fifty percent. Everybody will benefit, even if they are not in the fish business," said Majid, a jobless youth.

Kashmiri trout is regarded by some gourmets as one of the most delicious fish in the world.

Trout is a highly nutritious diet. An average-sized trout contains about 1.8 grams of Omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acid that is needed for the development of brain and retina in infants. Trout also contains 20 percent protein, Vitamin A, B, B1, C2 and D and forms the basis of healthy, low fat and fibre-rich diet.

In 1984, a trout fish-farming project was set up at Kokernag, 79 kilometres south of Srinagar with the assistance of the European Economic Community (EEC). The project was successful and emerged as Asia's largest trout farm.

A British officer introduced trout fish in the Kashmir Valley for angling when the country was under colonial rule. Subsequently the first trout hatchery was established at Harwan situated on the outskirts of Srinagar in 1901.



Awantipora's community radio especially a

The community radio in Awantipora in Jammu and Kashmir has gained popularity with more Kashmiri people turning to it to highlight issues and problems that concern them.

Community radio, although taking on diverse forms, remains a type of radio that encourages expression, participation and values local culture. Its purpose is to broadcast content which is popular to a local audience, but which may be overlooked by commercial or mainstream radio to communities far from large urban centres, where the population is too small to attract them.

A community radio programme, "Pesh Kadam", broadcast by Radio Kashmir is a joint initiative of the Islamic University of Science and Technology (IUST) and the Panos Institute, a non-profit organization. It aims to raise local issues that range from culture and traditions to public health and civic amenities, in the public sphere through the media.

The community radio aims to create a space for development of youth in the area. It aims to permit local people to express and communicate their issues and opinions to the rest of the community.

"The aim of community radio club is very unique. It is different from other



Community radio gains popularity, among youth

Community radio stations because here, we have introduced the voice of the common man to rest of the state of Kashmir. Our main aim is that people should not feel that just because they are not experts or political officials, they have no right to speak or express themselves. Our main aim is that every person has a right to speak and express their view points and we are providing them a platform to speak and share,” said Sana Beigh, the coordinator of community radio.

The community radio also provides technical training to students of IUST and youth in Awantipora.

“It is for the people of the community so that we can give common people a platform to speak and share. We are journalism students and we have learned so many things here. We do everything ourselves including script writing, editing and recording. And the best part is that it is based in Awantipora,” said Noureen, a student.

Since it began, the community radio has witnessed a steady increase in the involvement of the local community with the Awantipora town committee organizing listening and discussion sessions and also promising financial support to the project.

White water rafting continues to be popular

Kashmir is famous for its picturesque lakes and rivers. These water bodies of Kashmir not only delight the eyes, but also form the hub for a number of activity-oriented leisure sports.

River rafting, an alternate way of spending vacations and an upcoming sport, has become an attractive option to complement sightseeing and features on the itinerary of most visitors.

Getting soaked and experiencing the adrenaline rush is an experience not to be forgotten claim domestic as well as international tourists who throng Pahalgam to enjoy the experience.

Pahalgam is surrounded by lofty mountain ranges and is washed by gushing streams and rivulets, which provide ample opportunities for adventure sports like white water rafting.

“I have come here for the first time. People say that this place is like heaven, and actually, it is heaven. I enjoyed river rafting. It is my first time. I am happy that I have done rafting here,” said Kirti Gupta, a tourist.

“White water-rafting is the most at-

tractive adventure sport here and since last year, some private agencies have been operating it,” said Syed Talha, a tourist officer.

Pahalgam used to have only 10-13 boats in the ice-cold white waters of the Lidder, but now their number has touched 40-45 to cater to the needs of tourists interested in this adventure sport.

Rafting is done on rapids which is a white patch of foam on a flowing river caused by a sudden gradient or by the river breadth getting constricted while flowing through a gorge between rocks or by a sudden increase or decrease in the volume of the water.

Rapids are graded from 1 to 6 depending on the ease with which they can be negotiated, with 1 being the easiest. Class 6: rapids are virtually un-runable, and only attempted by professional racing teams.

Rafting is usually done on white-water or different degrees of rough water, in order to thrill and excite raft passengers. The development of this activity as a leisure sport has become popular since the mid-1970s.



Professor Shabir A. Bhat, transforming business education in Kashmir



Professor Shabir A. Bhat, a widely respected academician, has taken over recently as the Director of the Business School, University of Kashmir, Srinagar.

It is his dream to see it as one of the best B Schools in India.

“Let the world know there is a business school in Kashmir engaged in producing business leaders not only for the state, but for the entire country,” says Professor Bhat.

He believes that in a rapidly changing world, economic issues have become increasingly complex and unpredictable. Students need to be equipped with skills, techniques and appropriate knowledge to face these challenges.

“We continuously re-design our curriculum keeping in view the industry requirements. I am very excited about the future of business education. There is tremendous opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our students here at the business school, he said.”

Bhat was born in Srinagar and graduated from Islamia College of Science and Commerce. He did his post graduation and doctorate from the University of Kashmir.

He has twenty years of teaching and research experience and has written extensively on various areas of management. His research papers, articles and books have appeared in reputed journals and magazines.

He has made presentations in various universities and research institutions worldwide and attended a number of advanced courses/workshops/ seminars in the most prestigious universities of America, including the Gonzaga University of Washington, Harvard University and Eastern Washington University.

He has been a consultant to some top companies and government organizations.

He also attended the ‘Negotiation Program’ at Harvard University, studied international human resource management at Eastern Washington University and attended the ‘International Management Educators Conference’ in San Francisco.

He has been actively involved in conducting management development programs and workshops both for academia, and for managers in the private and public sectors in Jammu and Kashmir. He has coordinated various programs on ‘Strategic Negotiations’ with the world renowned Consultancy Organization CM Partners, Cambridge, MA.

Bhat passionately believes the university can play a critical role in generating new ideas and provide encouragement to students in terms of boosting their abilities and competence to make a difference to society.

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