

5 Terrorists Killed In Overnight Encounter: Police



Observer News Service

Srinagar: Five local terrorists of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), involved in a series of attacks on Kashmir Pandits, migrant workers and security forces, were killed in an overnight encounter in South Kashmir's Kulgam district, police said Friday.

The terrorists were killed after police and army's 34 RR launched a joint cordon and search operation (CASO) in Samno village of Damhal Hanjipora area of the district on Thursday evening, a police spokesperson said.

The search team, he said, came under indiscriminate fire from the hiding terrorists when they approached the suspected spot. He said the fire was returned, setting off an encounter.

"Later on, CRPF (18BN) also joined the anti-terrorist operation. However, due to darkness the operation was kept on hold till early morning. The cordon remained intact throughout the night & with the help of additional reinforcement the cordoned area was further strengthened," he said.

With the first light today, the spokesperson said, the operation was resumed, which resulted in the elimination of five terrorists and recovery of their bodies.

He identified the slain as Yasir Bilal Bhat alias Humais of Wanpoh, Danish Hameed Thoker, Ubaid Ahmad Padder, Sameer Farooq Sheikh and Hanzal Yaqoob Shah alias Hanzilla, all residents of Shopian. He said **More on P6**

'Terrorist Killed In Rajouri Gunfight'

A terrorist was killed in an encounter between militants and a joint team of security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district on Friday, officials said. Based on specific information, an operation was launched this morning by a joint team of police, army and CRPF in the Behrote area under the Budhal police station limits, a police spokesperson said. The Cordon and Search Operation (CASO) was launched based on inputs of suspicious movement in the area, the officials said. **More on P6**

Searches Underway Along LoC In Poonch

Security forces on Friday launched a search operation after reports of suspicious movement along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district. The search operation was launched in the forward areas **More on P6**

CHEQUE BOUNCE CASE

Businessman Awarded 6 Months Jail, Fined Rs 5L

M Ahmad

Srinagar: A court here on Friday sentenced a businessman to six months imprisonment and fined him Rs 5 lakh in a cheque bounce case.

Judge Small Causes Srinagar, Ms Tabasum, found the businessman M Syed Lone guilty under section 138 of Negotiable Instruments Act. "Perused the contents of the statement of the accused recorded in terms of the provisions of section 251 Cr.PC. The accused admitted that he has to pay amount towards the complainant, however at the last of the statement he seeks one month time to make the amount, finally he has failed to make the payment towards the complainant on the listed date,"



the court observed, adding, "The accused person is found guilty for the commission of crime of offence u/s 138 NI Act. As such, the accused is convicted and is sentenced to undergo simple imprisonment for a period of six months and is also sentenced by way of fine to the tune of rupees double the cheque amount which equals to Rs.5,00,000."

The court directed the prosecution to take **More on P6**

SHORT TAKES

Arrested OGW's Property Attached

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Friday attached immovable property of a Tehreek-ul-Mujahideen over ground worker (OGW) arrested in a UAPA case in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district, officials said. The attached property includes more than seven acre land (59 kanals and 12 Marlas) of Mohammad Yaseen, the OGW active in the Balakote sector. He was booked under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and is currently lodged in the Central jail in Kote Balwal in Jammu. The officials said the property in **More on P6**

Ahmer Khan Wins Martin Adler Prize

Independent Multimedia Journalist from Kashmir, Ahmer Khan has been awarded the Martin Adler Prize in London by the Rory Peck trust. With focus on South Asia, the Emmy nominated Journalist has been awarded for his work in Social and political conflicts, Human rights, religion, Humanitarian crisis and migration in the region. Ahmer's work has received praise from the jury. "We really enjoyed the breath of Ahmer Khan's interest. He has shown a Wide range of ability in different kinds of stories coming through with humanity and compassion. **More on P6**

Will Provide 5 Marla Land To 17,000 Landless Tribals: LG

'It Is Our Topmost Priority To Safeguard Rights And Benefits Extended To All Tribal Communities'

Observer News Service

Jammu: Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha on Friday announced to provide 5 marla land to 17,000 Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (G) eligible landless tribal beneficiaries in coming days, and asserted that the topmost priority of his administration is to safeguard the rights and benefits extended to all the tribal communities.

"Community and Individual Forest Rights, SHGs for forest produce, support to new enterprises had a transformative impact in tribal areas. It is being ensured that the tribal population enjoys equitable benefits of growth," Sinha said, while addressing the 'Janjatiya Gaurav Saptah' celebration at the Convention Centre, here on Friday.

The iconic week event is dedicated to the memory of Bhagwan Birsa Munda, brave



tribal freedom fighters and to celebrate and commemorate the glorious history of tribal communities, culture and achievements.

"It is our topmost priority to safeguard the rights and benefits extended to all the tribal communities. The administration is committed to ensure that the tribal population in Jammu Kashmir enjoys equitable benefits of growth," he said.

At the event, the LG highlighted the efforts of his

administration for welfare and development of tribal communities over the past few years.

"Community and Individual Forest Rights, Self Help Groups for forest produce, support to new enterprises had transformative impact in tribal areas. J&K Administration has taken concrete steps for economic empowerment of tribal communities through Sheep farms, Dairy units and Tri-Wool Project," he said.

"We have expanded and

made educational opportunities accessible to all tribal communities including the migratory population. Construction of new tribal hostels, smart schools, Eklayva, coaching facilities for competitive exams, and skill development programmes have started showing results in overall development," he added.

The LG also reiterated his administration's commitment to achieve saturation of government flagship schemes and reach out to all targeted beneficiaries in a time-bound manner.

"Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra, under the guidance of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, will ensure no tribal family is left out of the journey of development and progress," he said.

He also appreciated the artists for promoting the rich cultural heritage of tribal communities.

Earlier, the **More on P6**

Visits Survivors Of Deadly Doda Accident

The Union Territory Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha on Friday visited the Government Medical College (GMC) here to inquire about the health of civilians who miraculously survived in the deadly bus accident in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir on Wednesday. 39 passengers were killed and over a dozen others injured when the bus they were travelling in, skidded off the road and rolled down into a 300-foot gorge in Doda district on Wednesday. Sinha, according to officials, met the accident survivors and inquired about their well being. He assured them of all the help from the administration. The LG also met the team of doctors and medical staff **More on P6**

Firefighters Buckle Up To Tackle Winter Blazes

70 Fire Tenders, Quick Response Vehicle; Fire Hydrants Ready For Use Incase Of Emergency: Director F&ES

Auqib Javed

Srinagar: Fraught with the dangerous challenge of tackling frequent fire incidents in the winter season, the Fire and Emergency Services department has geared up its men and machinery and has put over 70 fire tenders on alert to meet any emergency situation in this capital city.

"We are fully prepared to meet any eventuality. Our firefighters are in a state of alertness," Auqib Hussain Mir, Assistant Director, Fire & Emergency Services Department told Kashmir Observer Friday.

Mir said that over 50 fire tenders have been put on alert in Srinagar city only while over 20 small fire tenders are also at the disposal of the firefighters. Besides, he said, small size fire tenders have been introduced to enable access to congested parts of the city where normal-size tenders faced difficulties in reaching.

He said the department has procured Quick Response Vehicles (QRV), fire hydrants



and mini water tanks to face any challenge in those areas which are congested.

"The main problem is people don't call us on time. And when we reach the location, they try to douse fire themselves, thereby hindering our work," he added.

Typically, the Valley experiences a surge in fire incidents during autumn season and the onset of winters due to dry weather conditions, coinciding with massive usage of electric

devices, including heaters, oil filled radiators, electric blankets, besides gas heaters to combat the cold.

Last week, three tourists died and over five houseboats were gutted in an overnight fire incident inside the iconic Dal Lake. Prior to that, fire damaged a residential house in Bagh-e-Mehtab on November 9 which later engulfed another house and several shops leaving them in ashes. On the same day, another **More on P6**

HC Quashes 3 PSA Orders On 'Vague, Stale Grounds'

M Ahmad

Srinagar: The High Court of J&K and Ladakh on Friday quashed three detention orders under Public Safety Act and ordered their release from custody if not required in any other case.

A bench of Justice Sanjay Dhar quashed the detention orders against Umar Ul Islam, booked under PSA order (No.38/DMK/PSA/2022) dated 20 June 2022 and Suhail Ahmad Malla, booked under order (17/DMK/PSA/2022) dated 8 April 2022 by District Magistrate Kulgam and Wani Adil Yousuf booked vide order (No.34/DMP/PSA/22) on 13 May last year by District Magistrate, Pulwama.

"A perusal of the grounds of detention would show that there is no mention of the particulars of the places, period and the identity of the persons from whom the petitioner (Adil Yousuf) is alleged to be received Hawala consignments," the court said.

The particulars of the newly recruited militants for whom

Adil Yousuf was alleged to have been managing weapons were not mentioned in the grounds of detention, he said.

"These grounds, being vague and lacking in material particulars, the detenu (Adil Yousuf) could not have made an effective representation against his detention. Thus, there has been violation of constitutional guarantees envisaged under Article 22(5) of the Constitution. Therefore, the detention order is illegal and unsustainable."

In the case of Malla, the court observed that "there has to be a live and proximate link between the past conduct of the detenu and the activities alleged to be prejudicial to the maintenance of security of the state." Malla had contended that the grounds of detention mentioned incidents pertained to 2019, more than four years prior to the passing of the order of detention.

"There is no reference to any recent incident involving the petitioner (Malla) in the grounds of **More on P6**



KO
NEWS & UPDATES

BEYOND THE HEADLINES

Dr Sameer Kaul
Senior Surgical Oncologist

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smLAZqDjptU&t=3s>



DAL LAKE BLAZE

Affected Families Seek 'Soft-Loans' To Rebuild Their Houseboats

Srinagar: The fire affected families, who lost their luxurious houseboats worth crores to the devastating blaze in Dal Lake last week, today made a fervent appeal to the Lieutenant Governor administration for the soft loans necessary to reconstruct their houseboats.

ought to assist them rebuild their houseboats as the prices of Cedar (deodar) have skyrocketed, besides labor and other expenses makes it a herculean task. "We appeal to the government to lend us money at no interest so that we are able to rebuild our houseboats. Given the skyrocketing cost of imperial wood, it's a monumental undertaking for us," Ghulam Rasool Kanna, who lost his opulent houseboat to the tragic fire, told Kashmir Observer.

a luxurious houseboat at Mir Mohalla, Dal Lake near Ghat No 09 lost their lives in a tragic fire incident on Saturday last. Five luxurious houseboats, an equal number of wooden dwellings and a few nearby structures were also razed to the ashes in the devastating blaze that created total chaos and confusion in Dal Lake, an iconic tourist attraction in Srinagar.

Our whole possessions were lost in the terrible fire. Not even our clothing could be saved. We lost shelters as well and are currently residing at our relatives' houses," he added. The five houseboats, Kanna said have a present market value of about 30crore and that building new ones would be near impossible under present circumstances.

Autumn Craft Mela' Begins At Boulevard Road Srinagar

Observer News Service

Srinagar: World Famous Boulevard Road Dal Lake, Srinagar is to play host to 'Autumn Craft Mela', a unique handicraft and handloom exhibition showcasing the exquisite art and crafts of Kashmir. The exhibition has been put together by the Directorate of Handicrafts & Handlooms Kashmir.

Speaking on the occasion, Director H&H Kashmir said that the Exhibition will give artisans, weavers and Cooperative societies a vibrant marketing platform to sell their products directly both to the tourists and buyers, and in turn it will give tourists visiting the Valley an opportunity to get a glimpse of the rich art and craft of Kashmir especially on the onset of Autumn season.

and the consumer alike as our skilled artisans have been giving creative expression to their rich folklore through this medium for centuries. The special attraction of the ongoing and upcoming exhibition is the variety of craft products presenting the rich culture of the valley that are on display and sale including Pashmina, Kani and other crafts. On the other front, the department is expected to get GI certifications of furthermore 7 crafts like Namdha, Gubba, Crewel, Chain Stitch Crafts; proposal of which stands already submitted to GI Registrar Chennai which will help to increase the sale of genuine handmade products not only at regional but at national as well as global level.

FESTIVAL SPECIAL TRAINS-2023

In order to clear extra rush of passengers during Chhath Puja Festival, Northern Railway, in association with other zonal railway, has planned to run the following Festival Special Trains as per schedule given below:-

Table with columns: Spl. Train No., Station From, Dept. Time, Station to, Arr. Time, Frequency / Day, Period. Lists various festival special train routes and schedules.

Table with columns: Train No., Station From, Dept. Time, Station to, Arr. Time, Frequency / Day, Period. Continuation of festival special train schedules.

LIST OF FESTIVAL SPECIAL TRAINS PASSING THROUGH NORTHERN RAILWAY NETWORK

Table with columns: Train No., Station From, Dept. Time, Station to, Arr. Time, Frequency / Day, Period. Lists festival special trains passing through the network.

Position as on 17.11.2023 For any kind of information such as arrival/departure timings and stoppages enroute etc., passengers are requested to contact RailMadad Helpline No. 139 or may visit Indian Railways website https://enquiry.indianrail.gov.in or NTESS App. SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

Unraveling the Enrollment Enigma at Kashmir University

Ummar Jamal

Kashmir University, a once most preferred institution, is grappling with an unprecedented challenge as it struggles to fill numerous vacant seats across its campuses. The statistics available paint a worrisome picture, with 124 seats vacant at the main campus, 45 at the Zakura campus, 32 at the North Kashmir campus, and a staggering 111 at the South Kashmir campus. The Government Degree College's MSc Mathematics program also faces the predicament of five unclaimed seats. This surge in unoccupied seats has compelled the university to extend the admissions window for an unusual five months, sparking concerns among stakeholders.

A brief examination of enrollment figures for certain colleges also reveals a notable decline. For instance, the Government Degree College in Ganderbal experienced a substantial decrease, dropping from 1700 admissions in 2022 to approximately 700 in 2023. Similarly, Beerwa College witnessed a decline from 493 to 311, while Sogam (Kupwara) College recorded 513 enrollments, down from 689 in 2022. Khanshab College in Budgam observed a reduction in enrollment from 300 to 167. Handwara College experienced a sharp decline from 963 to 577, and the Women's College in Srinagar saw a decrease from 220 in 2022 to 145 in 2023.

Traditionally, Kashmir University has held a prestigious position, drawing students from various regions due to its A+ grade recognition and consistent placement within the top 50 institutions in the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF). Students eagerly anticipated their selection into postgraduate departments, making the university a coveted choice for higher education. However, the present scenario starkly contrasts with historical trends, as the university grapples with a significant decline in admissions. To comprehend the underlying reasons behind this enrollment downturn, it is imperative to examine a confluence of factors that seem to be contributing to Kashmir University's struggles.

Delayed Exams and Results

One of the most pressing issues Kashmir university has been grappling with for a long time now is the issue of delayed exams and delayed results. Kashmir university students often hit streets because of the increasing trend of delayed examinations and prolonged result announcements. The students often complain that the academic calendar is not followed. The academic calendar plays a pivotal role in attracting students, and any disruptions have cascading effects. The increasing trend of delayed examinations and prolonged result announcements in Kashmir University create uncertainty among Kashmiri students, forcing them to explore alternative educational avenues. The extended waiting period for examination results creates apprehension and frustration among applicants, potentially dissuading them from choosing Kashmir Uni-



versity for their academic pursuits.

Every student prefers to opt for institutions with more streamlined and timely examination processes to ensure a smoother progression through their academic journey. Moreover, the prolonged uncertainty has impacted the overall reputation of Kashmir University, potentially deterring potential applicants who prioritize institutions with a reputation for efficient and well-managed academic processes. Therefore, addressing and improving the timeliness of exams and result announcements can play a pivotal role in maintaining and even enhancing enrollment figures at Kashmir University.

Lack of placements and lower employability prospects

The decline in admissions at Kashmir University can be attributed, in part, to concerns surrounding lower employability prospects for its graduates and post-graduates and the lack of placements in professional and technical courses. As students increasingly prioritize tangible career outcomes and professional opportunities, the university's perceived shortcomings in facilitating successful placements acts as a deterrent for potential applicants.

In an era where employability is a key metric for assessing the value of higher education, universities that are perceived to fall short in this regard face challenges in attracting and retaining students. To reverse this trend, Kashmir University should consider implementing and highlighting initiatives that enhance students' employability skills, foster industry connections, and improve overall placement rates.

Antiquated Pedagogy

The methods of teaching and learning employed by an institution greatly influence its appeal to modern students. Kashmir University's pedagogical approaches are perceived as outdated or incompatible with contemporary educational expectations, therefore, students prefer to opt for institutions offering more progressive and innovative teaching methodologies. In a rapidly changing world, adaptability and in-

“The journey towards reclaiming its status as a premier institution necessitates not only addressing immediate concerns but also envisioning a future where adaptability, innovation, and student-centric policies define its identity.”

novation in teaching strategies are essential. Students today are accustomed to diverse learning environments, and a university's failure to innovate in its teaching methods has rendered it less appealing in comparison to institutions that embrace progressive approaches.

Additionally, though it may sound something novel, there is the scarcity of competent faculty in Kashmir University. The perceived inadequacy of the academic staff has eroded the university's academic reputation, resulting in a diminished learning experience for students. The absence of experienced mentors for research and limited professional networks further deters prospective students. This deficiency not only hampers program accreditation but also undermines the overall appeal of the institution.

Neglect of Extracurricular Activities

A holistic education encompasses not only academic pursuits but also extracurricular activities that nurture a well-rounded individual. Kashmir University is perceived as lacking in opportunities for students to engage in sports, cultural activities, or community service and other extracurricular activities. Therefore, it has lost its appeal. Emphasizing and enhancing extracurricular offerings could contribute to a more vibrant campus life.

Red-Tapism and Administrative Bottlenecks

Last but not least, the encroachment of red-tapism within Kashmir University has erected formidable barriers that deter prospective students from choosing the institu-

tion. The labyrinthine admissions process, delays in awarding degree certificates, faulty re-evaluation system, lack of grievance redressal mechanism and inefficiencies in timely allotment of hostel accommodations for students from far off places creates additional challenges for students seeking a supportive living environment. The cumulative impact of red-tapism not only hampers the academic journey but also fosters a sense of disillusionment and frustration.

Tail piece

As Kashmir University confronts the intricate challenge of declining admissions, the road to renewal demands a collective commitment to transformation. The multifaceted issues, encompassing delayed exams, antiquated pedagogy, a dearth of extracurricular activities, and administrative red-tapism, underscore the imperative for comprehensive reform. In charting a course for renewal, it is pivotal for university administrators, faculty, and policymakers to embark on a concerted effort. Recognizing the gravity of the situation and acknowledging the need for strategic changes is the first step. The extended admissions window signals an opportunity for reflection, adaptation, and innovation.

The journey towards reclaiming its status as a premier institution necessitates not only addressing immediate concerns but also envisioning a future where adaptability, innovation, and student-centric policies define its identity. Through a comprehensive and strategic effort, Kashmir University can aspire to rekindle the trust and interest of prospective students, once again becoming a beacon of academic excellence in the region.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer
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The WEEK That Was

KO Web Desk

Dal Lake Inferno: Survivor Tourists Returning Home Soon

By Majid Nabi
for Kashmir Observer

The tourists, who escaped miraculously in a houseboat blaze last week, are likely to return to their native places soon.

Five luxury houseboats, an equal number of wooden dwellings and a few concrete structures were reduced to ashes in a devastating blaze at Mir Mohalla near Ghat number 09 at Dal Lake on Saturday last. Three Bangladeshi nationals on a trip to iconic tourist attraction-Dal Lake in Srinagar also lost their lives in the tragic fire incident. The deceased tourists were identified as Anindya Kawshal, Das Gupta and Mohammad Moinud, all residents of Bangladesh.

Iconic Kashmiri Houseboats In Peril; Only 750 Left

By KNO

Tourists visiting Kashmir may not be able to see and enjoy their stays in the iconic houseboats after a decade from now as the number of "floating palaces" has recorded a drastic decline from 2000 to just 750. Courtesy: blanket ban on construction and non-availability of master craftsmen.

The number of houseboats, one of the huge attractions for the tourists, is dwindling at a great pace due to the blanket ban on construction. Another major reason for the diminishing number of houseboats is that there are only master craftsmen left, who too are in the later part of their life, not able to work much.

India March Into World Cup Final With 70-Run Win Over New Zealand

By PTI

Virat Kohli's world record 50th ODI hundred and a scintillating century by Shreyas Iyer powered India into the final of the World Cup with a 70-run victory over New Zealand in their last-four clash here on Wednesday.

Rohit Sharma's (47 off 29 balls) pyrotechnics, tons by Kohli (117 off 113) and Iyer (105 off 70), and a fluent 66-ball 80 by Shubman Gill, who retired hurt due to cramps, propelled India to an imposing 397 for four after the skipper won a good toss.

New Zealand were stopped at 327 in 48.5 overs as Mohammed Shami finished with incredible figures of 7/57.

Big Court Order: Dog Bite Victims To Get 10k For 'Each Teeth Mark'

By Observer News Service

In a landmark judgment that is likely to trigger a major debate in the country, the Punjab and Haryana High Court has ruled that in cases involving dog bites, financial assistance shall be at a minimum of Rs 10,000 per tooth mark and a minimum of Rs 20,000 per 0.2 cm of wound, holding state "primarily responsible" to pay compensation to the victims.

"The State shall be primarily responsible to pay compensation with a right to recover the same from the defaulting Agencies/ Instrumentalities of the State and/or the private person, if any," the High Court said in its order on a petition seeking compensation in a dogbite case.

Scapegoating: On Afghan Refugees in Pakistan

By The Hindu

"The Pakistan government's order to all undocumented migrants to leave the country by October 31 has thrown the lives of hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees in jeopardy. The interim government in Islamabad says its decision is not targeted at any particular nationality. But given the numbers of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, it is evident who is being targeted. Over the decades, millions of Afghans have taken refuge in Pakistan, mostly fleeing violence in their civil war-stricken country. According to the United Nations, about 1.3 million Afghans have been registered as refugees, while another 8.80,000 have legal status to stay. But Pakistan's Interior Ministry says some 1.7 million people are staying "illegally", a vast majority of them Afghans."

Cartoons that Kill

By Zarrar Khuroo for Al Jazeera

"Coming back to cartoons, Arabs are not the only ones to get this treatment - far from it. Nazi Germany was replete with images (they're just a Google search away) which depicted Jews in much the same way: Their eyes are beady and their noses are hooked or bulbous, sometimes both. All precisely calculated to produce revulsion in the viewer, to separate the righteous "us" from the bestial "them".

India is in Peak Form, Playing its Best Cricket in Memory

By Live Mint

"India's big wins have been huge, some with three-digit run margins on

the scoreboard, and our bowlers have bowled out—i.e., taken all 10 wickets of—every other team participating in this premier tournament. As befits a spectacle of such supremacy on the field, and we saw some impressive fielding too, records were smashed with spirited abandon along the way. Dramatically, Kohli broke Sachin Tendulkar's 49-ton world record of most centuries in the one-day format by hitting his 50th ton in the semi-final. A World Cup title,

therefore, has never appeared so close within grasp."

Tendulkar Made Centuries a Celebration. Virat Kohli has Normalised Them

By Venkata Krishna B for The Indian Express

"For a generation that suffered many a heartbreaks in Tendulkar's

era, Kohli has ensured such instances are a thing of the past. There is a reason, why even before he matched Tendulkar's tally, Kohli was regarded a GOAT. Unlike Tendulkar, especially after that hurricane innings in Hobart, Kohli turned into this mean machine, who showed the cutting edge, finishing off matches. Once he got his eyes in a chase, and target was locked, he seldom misfired."

OPINIONS

The Pick Of The Bunch

KO Web Desk

A Year of Silent Houseboats



UNDER THIS POLICY, MAKING OF NEW HOUSEBOATS IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED. It encourages houseboat owners to surrender their boats for a meagre compensation. This policy comes at a time when houseboat community is most vulnerable. The policy seeks to relocate houseboats; to where? — Only God knows

Muneeza Rafiq

It has been a year since I have heard anyone speak in German or in Siamese or even in Marathi. It has been a year of longing, a year of waiting, a year of reverie and a year of silent houseboats — quiet and empty.

At my home, mornings would always be full of activity. Most mornings I would wake up to the smell of omelettes and gentle clatter of knives and forks against china. I would hear my mother talking in broken English, desperately searching for English counterparts of Kashmiri words.

One could see the excitement of heading to Gulmarg or Sonamarg in the early morning rush. Boilers at the back of houseboats would billow smoke; warming the cold water. The roaring engines of Royal Enfields were another hallmark. "Madam main flower wala, flower lega?"

I never knew life would take a drastic turn and take away the only way of life we have ever known.

Over the years, the number of tourists that come to stay in houseboats has been nothing but dwindling. Beeline of agents and cheap hotels are among the factors responsible for the decline. Nothing can replace the exotic experience that a houseboat offers and maintaining its delicacy is not an easy task. Huge investments go into maintaining a boat. The workers skilled in repairing a houseboat are limited, demanding high wages. Additionally, since a houseboat is solely made of deodar, it becomes a very expensive and cumbersome affair to buy timbre when it is needed.

With all the expenses, the price per room of a houseboat has still stayed more or less the same during recent years making it less and less profitable to run a boat. There have been many in-

serve them.

It's been more than a year now without any business. To top it off, the government recently announced the New Houseboat Policy which requires houseboat owners to re-register their boats after fulfilling certain conditions such as having a digester, a sophisticated menu and a modern kitchen. Under this policy, making of new houseboats is strictly prohibited. It encourages houseboat owners to surrender their boats for a meagre compensation. This policy comes at a time when houseboat community is most vulnerable. The policy seeks to relocate houseboats; to where? — Only God knows.

This policy aims at wiping out houseboats in the name of conservation of Dal. At a time when big businesses around the world have been shattered, this policy requires houseboat owners to make massive investments or risk losing their registration.

The haphazard manner in which the policy has been rolled out without logical consideration of rehabilitation and preservation, makes the agenda clear: to take advantage of the helplessness of the houseboat community and snatch their livelihoods by relocating their boats away from the Dal.

The houseboat community has always cooperated in the conservation of Dal. It being their source of livelihood, they will willingly make the necessary amendments to their boats. However, the way in which the policy has been framed, its timing and its aim to separate the two is regrettable.

Are only houseboats and Dal dwellers polluting the Dal?

On many occasions I have seen people tossing wrappers and plastic bottles into the lake and going about their lives as if the responsibility to conserve Dal lies solely with the Dal dwellers. But when it comes to taking aesthetic pictures with Dal and Shikaras in the background, the passion with which people do it is hypocritically unparalleled.

The time is not far away when there will be no houseboats lining the waters of Dal and no aesthetic backgrounds. I know many people who are considering selling their boats. It is too painful to see this community losing their boats — for a houseboat owner his boat is his right arm.

Houseboats creak when you walk in them, reminding you to be gentle. They smell of timbre and walnut, Lotus and Lilies, Kehwa and Kashmir. As houseboats fade into the background, abandoned, forlorn and forgotten, I may never wake up to find that gentle clatter of knives and forks against china and might never hear my mother speak in broken English — searching desperately for English counterparts of Kashmiri words.

Views expressed in the article are the author's own and do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of Kashmir Observer. The article was originally published on September 21, 2020 and is being reproduced in the wake of various fire incidents at houseboats in the past week and over the last few years, as well as in the context of the dwindling number of houseboats in Kashmir



THE FUNNY PART IS THERE IS NO POLICY WHICH COMPENSATES HOUSEBOAT OWNERS WHEN THEIR BOATS ARE REDUCED TO ASHES or when a houseboat submerges requiring investment in crores (the prices of timbre have skyrocketed). What is even worse is the fact that there's no way of insuring houseboats

or "Memsahab, would you like to see some jewellery?" would say the Shikarawalas.

Tourists wearing Pherrans would pose for the photographer, excited to take in as much Kashmir as they could. That's how my mornings used to be — a showcase of foreign languages and Kashmir's hospitality.

Evenings were filled with chats in languages I couldn't comprehend. An occasional laughter would burst out from dining rooms. Houseboats used to be like that — lively wooden things reverberating with light, laughter and conversations with a cuppa kehwa to sip.

I haven't had any of that for a year now.

The last time there were any tourists was in July, last year. Since then, houseboats are lying vacant. While much of business is turning around now, however, small houseboats and the people associated with them haven't seen any change. The people associated with houseboats have been watching their boats turn into poor irrelevant things.

As a kid, I would play with children from different places — Mumbai, Pune, Australia, Kerala, and Korea to name a few. We would sneak into a houseboat (we have three boats at my home) and play hide and seek; hiding under anything — dining table, beds, chairs and couches.

I never felt any different from them and they showered me with lots of love. They looked at me in awe, surprised, at my fair complexion, long nose and certainly my red cheeks. At times, I along with Dadu, would go to Gulmarg with them or to the Mughal Gardens.

stances in which a houseboat caught fire charring its wooden dexterity, walnut wood furniture, expensive carpets and wood carving. The losses are massive.

The funny part is there is no policy which compensates houseboat owners when their boats are reduced to ashes or when a houseboat submerges requiring investment in crores (the prices of timbre have skyrocketed). What is even worse is the fact that there's no way of insuring houseboats.

Houseboat owners have never been offered any worthy economic stimulus whenever situation turned bad in Kashmir and the administration promotes, "Kashmir's potential for tourism" with houseboats and shikaras printed on banners.

Sometimes due to lack of resources an owner sells his boat and prefers another venture. This is the reason why the number of houseboats in Srinagar's water bodies has gone down from 1500 to a mere 900, as recently reported by The Tribune.

Houseboats are Kashmir's and Kashmiris' heritage and have been an important part of Kashmir's tourism industry. Houseboats are an inseparable part of Kashmir's identity and culture. There was a time when Britishers would come to stay in houseboats because of the luxurious experience that they offer.

Houseboats in the past have attracted film stars and many high-profile guests. International celebrities like the Beatles lead guitarist George Harrison too have stayed in houseboats but unfortunately no step has been taken by subsequent administrations to promote and pre-



