



# MERTimes

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MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE  
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR

## SEVs Future Tense

SEASONAL SCHOOL FOR THE CHILDREN OF  
UJJAR AND BAKARWAL AT MIMARG  
courtesy  
Chief Education Officer Katagakh



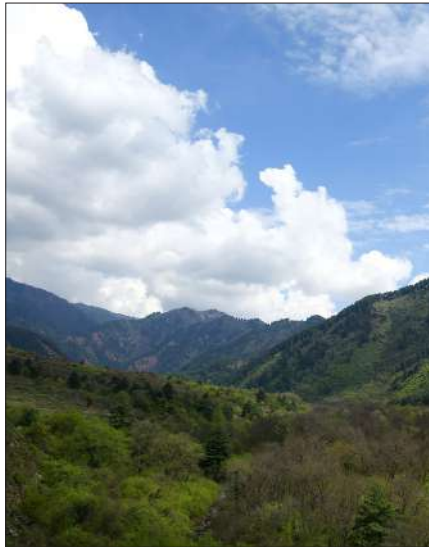
## G M Bhat's Wildlife Odyssey Unveils Kashmir's Hidden Treasures

**Mohsin Mushtaq**

In the heart of Kashmir's Dachigam Wildlife Sanctuary, Ghulam Muhammad Bhat, a 50-year-old wildlife enthusiast, embarks on a captivating journey armed with his camera and backpack. Hailing from Nishat, Srinagar, Bhat's connection with nature runs deep, having joined the Wildlife Department following in his father's footsteps, who served as a wildlife guard in the early 1990s.

Initially hesitant, Bhat gradually became proficient in understanding and protecting animals. Over the years, he not only embraced the role of a guardian but also documented the lives of these creatures, bringing their stories to the wider world. "It was the Hangul (Kashmiri Stag) that captured my heart," says Bhat, pointing towards the peaks where he has captured rare moments in nature. "Now, I can't imagine life without a glimpse of animals; nature is endearing, it captivates your heart the more you spend time with it," he remarks.

Dachigam National Park, where Bhat dedicates long hours during the day and frosty nights, unfolds a myriad of flora and fauna, captivating nature enthusiasts. Encompassing approximately 141 sq. km, the park is renowned for its population of Hangul Deer and other endangered animals. The rare sightings of these creatures can only be experienced within the park's boundaries. Over the last two decades, the Hangul population has gradually increased to 50% in Dachigam National Park, the home of the state animal Cervus Hanglu Hanglu.



A recent census conducted in April revealed a 10% increase in Hangul population, reaching 289 from 261 in 2021. Ghulam Muhammad Bhat and other dedicated officials play a pivotal role in ensuring the flourishing of these endangered animals. Despite the decline in deer populations in the 1990s due to insurgency, guardians like Bhat emerged to protect Hangul.

Unlike other guards solely focused on animal protection, Bhat took a distinctive approach, fostering a love for these species among people reluctant to visit core zones where animals roam freely. "The idea of

chronicling these species ignited in my mind in 2016," Bhat reminisces. "People can't venture into such places without proper training, which is why I took the initiative to bring the animal world to them within their four walls."

Bhat's wildlife portfolio showcases a diverse array of species, including the endangered Kashmiri Hangul, the enigmatic Black Bear, the elusive Leopard, the stately Himalayan Serow, the cunning Jackal, the vivid Red Fox, and even reptiles like the Levantine or Pit Viper.

Rashid Naqash, Regional Wildlife Warden Kashmir, applauds Bhat for his love towards nature and animals, stating, "This endeavor has encouraged people to appreciate animals in a world marked by man-animal conflicts." Bhat's significant presence on social media, with over 6000 followers on Facebook and more than 1000 on Instagram, amplifies his reach, fostering love and awareness for wildlife.

Despite his impressive achievements, Bhat remains modest, not seeking to monetize his account. "My goal is not to make a living off my wildlife photography. My only desire is for people to view images of these uncommon wildlife species," exemplifying his selfless commitment to raising awareness of the natural world's treasures.

As Bhat continues venturing into the wild with his camera, his chronicles captivate people with the rare sightings he encounters daily, fostering a sentiment that nature requires love and care to reciprocate affection, much like a mother loves her child.

## Non-functional bus stops create traffic chaos in Srinagar

**Mehroob Mushtaq**

The absence of functional bus stops in Srinagar leads to chaotic traffic mess that disrupts the city's daily activities. Buses pick and drop off passengers in a very chaotic manner leading to immense traffic jam.

Commuters and residents have been raising their concerns about the growing traffic mess caused mostly by non functional bus stops. Buses stop in middle of the road, obstructing the flow of other vehicles, this not only leads to delays but also poses significant safety risks for both pedestrians and drivers.

"Getting stuck in traffic has become a routine. Buses just stop wherever they feel like stopping, and it's a mess for everyone in Srinagar," Mohammad Iqbal a local resident

The problem is particularly seen in areas like Lal Chowk, MA Road which is City's Central Hub. The narrow roads become even more congested as buses halt abruptly, causing a traffic mess.

Rukhsana, a student who travels daily to

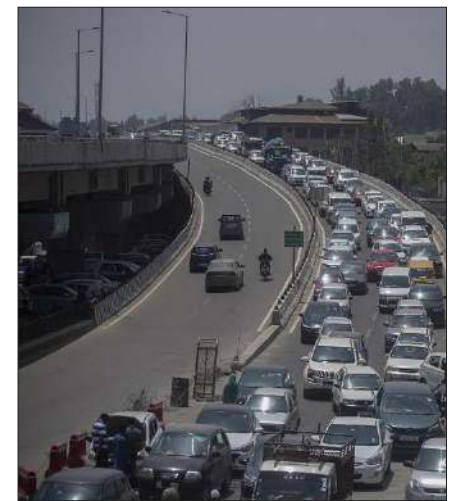
the college, says, "It's not just about being late to class, it's about the constant stress of the traffic. Buses just stop where they see lot of passengers waiting. We need a solution for everyone's sake."

The consequences of this traffic are sometimes beyond inconvenience. Our business suffers as deliveries get delayed, and we as residents want these bus stops to be functional so that busses will stop at a particular time at the respective stops. It will help traffic to be normal as well. Ali Mohammad, Shop owner Dalgate.

"The traffic mess is driving customers away. We need a solution that helps us and the city," he added.

"We understand that there has been lack of consistent functional bus stops in Srinagar. And tackling that situation, we have developed new structured bus stops recently to enhance the overall transportation experience for the citizens of Srinagar," said Wajahat Durrani, a transport official.

Our aim is to create safe, convenient, and accessible bus stops that prioritise the comfort and convenience of all commuters.



We will work closely with relevant authorities and stakeholders to bring about this positive change and ensure a well-defined culture of functional bus stops in Srinagar, he added.



# Kashmiri Scientist Breaks New Ground in Thermoelectric Technology

Syed Batool Andrabi

In a significant breakthrough, a young Kashmiri scientist, Abid Ahmad, has successfully tackled the limitations of existing thermoelectric materials and devices, aligning with the worldwide shift towards sustainable energy solutions.

Ahmad, presently a researcher at the Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen, China, led a research team that delved into solid-state thermoelectric power generators. These generators have the potential to revolutionize energy conversion by directly transforming temperature differentials into electrical energy.

The research focuses on addressing the drawbacks of current thermoelectric materials, with Ahmad highlighting the entropy effect as a central strategy to enhance the thermoelectric performance of Ag-doped BiSbTe<sub>2</sub>Se, a room-temperature Bi<sub>2</sub>Te<sub>3</sub>-based material.

Ahmad, originally from Sopore, completed his Masters in Physics from the University of Kashmir and pursued further studies, including an M Phil in Material



Science from Aligarh Muslim University and a PhD in Material Science and Engineering from Tsinghua University in Beijing, China. Currently, he is conducting post-doctoral research at Sustech University in Shenzhen, China.

The groundbreaking research explores the atomic structure of BiSbTe<sub>2</sub>Se through high-resolution TEM imaging, revealing that Selenium (Se) occupancy in the central layer significantly enhances the material's overall stability. This discovery provides valuable insights for improving the material's behavior and properties.

Ahmad expressed the significance of their findings, stating, "Our research represents a significant milestone in the advancement of thermoelectric technology. By leveraging

the entropy effect and gaining insights into the atomic structure of BiSbTe<sub>2</sub>Se, we have unlocked a material with extraordinary thermoelectric properties. This paves the way for further advancements in energy conversion and offers a promising solution for sustainable energy generation."

The utilization of high-performance thermoelectric materials like BiSbTe<sub>2</sub>Se holds the potential to contribute to more efficient energy conversion, enabling the harnessing of low-temperature waste heat, an underexplored resource.

The research findings, published in Energy and Environmental Science, a prestigious journal of the Royal Society of Chemistry, underline the significance of the work within the scientific community. Ahmad believes the research has not only showcased their team's exceptional work but also highlights the potential of groundbreaking discoveries emerging from diverse backgrounds and regions.

This groundbreaking research not only showcases the exceptional work conducted by Ahmad and his team but also highlights the potential of groundbreaking discoveries emerging from diverse backgrounds and regions.

# Arin Nallah: Symphony of Serenity in Kashmir's Bandipora District

Aakash Gulzar

Nestled within the breathtaking Bandipora district of Kashmir, Arin Nallah, a sparkling freshwater stream, weaves a tale of serenity and natural wonder. This pristine waterway traces its origins to the formidable Harmokh Mountain glacier, winding its way through the heart of the valley and nourishing the local communities along its course.

Arin Nallah's journey is a sight to behold as it meanders gracefully, passing through charming villages such as Khudara, Sirandar, Chonti Mulla, Sumblar, Arin, Kunan, and Gamroo, before finally merging with the expansive waters of Wular Lake.

The gentle murmur of its crystal-clear waters resonates like music in the ears of those fortunate enough to visit, creating an atmosphere of unparalleled tranquility.

Local residents hold Arin Nallah close to their hearts, and their connection to this stream is deeply ingrained. One villager, Farooq Ahmad from Khudara, remarks, "Arin Nallah is not just a stream for us; it's a lifeline—a source of portable drinking water. Our daily lives, our agriculture, revolve around the blessings this stream brings. Its presence is a source of solace and sustenance."

Arin Nallah's significance extends beyond its role as a lifeline for the communities it touches. It has garnered attention from fishing enthusiasts and environmentalists for being a sanctuary for exotic trout species, including Rainbow Trout, Silver Trout, and Gray Trout. Muhammad Amin, an avid angler from Sirandar, expresses his admiration, "The allure of Arin Nallah is its incredible diversity of fish. You can spend hours here, casting your line into its pristine waters, hoping for a trophy trout. It's a haven for anglers," he said.

What sets Arin Nallah apart is its rich history of conservation. The stream was declared a protected zone under the Fisheries Protection Act. The area up to Pahchan Bridge is safeguarded to preserve the unique aquatic ecosystem and protect the natural beauty that envelops it. This has not only ensured the survival of trout species but also maintained the pristine environment for generations to come.

In the words of Sanaullah, a local environmentalist from Gamroo, "Arin Nallah's preservation is a testament to the delicate balance between nature and humanity. It's a shining example of how we can coexist harmoniously with our environment. Our duty is to protect and cherish this jewel of nature."

"Arin Nallah is more than just a

stream; it is a sanctuary for wildlife, a source of livelihood for communities, and a valuable source of income as it brings people from the city to our area. It helps us make money. People come from far away to enjoy its beauty, and while they're here, they also visit my small shop. The stream is like a friend to us, helping us succeed together," said a local shopkeeper of Sirandar.

In the midst of our fast-paced world, Arin Nallah stands as a timeless testament to the profound connection between nature and humanity. This pristine stream, with its clear waters and vibrant aquatic life, not only sustains the local communities but also beckons visitors from afar to its serene embrace. As we savor the tranquility it offers, it is a reminder that such natural wonders are fragile and deserving of our care and protection. Arin Nallah is a treasure that we must cherish, not just for today, but for the generations to come. It is a place where the whispers of nature's wisdom and the echoes of local communities harmoniously coexist, a living testament to the delicate dance between man and the environment. In the heart of Kashmir's Bandipora district, Arin Nallah remains a pristine stream of tranquility, a symbol of the enduring beauty that nature offers to those who appreciate and safeguard it.

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## Bandipora's Organic Spring Onions Spice Up Wazwan

Sajid Raina

**K**ashmiri cuisine is celebrated for its intricate flavours, relying on indigenous ingredients and time-honoured culinary techniques.

Among these ingredients, spring onions, known as "Praan" in the local language, stand out, lending their unique flavour to a multitude of Kashmiri dishes, from soups and stews to curries and kebabs.

The use of spring onions in Kashmiri cuisine has deep historical roots, closely intertwined with the region's agricultural heritage. With its fertile soil and favourable climate, Kashmir has long been an agricultural hub. For generations, local farmers have cultivated spring onions, incorporating them into their traditional recipes.

However, it was during the 14th century that spring onions truly gained prominence in Kashmiri cuisine, thanks to the Mughal Emperor Akbar's fondness for Kashmiri food. His court's opulent feasts featured a diverse array of dishes, many of which prominently featured spring onions.

Over time, spring onions became an indispensable component of Kashmiri cuisine, particularly in the elaborate "wazwan" feasts, a cornerstone of the region's culinary culture, often served at weddings and special occasions. No wazwan feast is deemed complete without the addition of spring onions, which impart a refreshing, aromatic note to the rich and



spicy dishes that define the feast.

The Buthoo village earned renown for producing a prized ingredient of Kashmiri cuisine: organic spring onions. This unassuming vegetable, cherished for its delicate flavor and crisp texture, plays a pivotal role in enriching the famous Kashmiri wazwan, a multi-course traditional feast that holds a central place in the region's culinary legacy.

The organic spring onions cultivated in Bandipora are esteemed for their distinctive flavor and aroma, a result of the area's unique soil and climate conditions. Typically harvested in late spring when they are at their most tender and flavorful, these onions undergo meticulous cleaning

and packaging for sale, finding their way to the bustling markets of Srinagar.

Farmers in Buthoo village practice pesticide-free and sustainable spring onion cultivation, yielding an annual production of 1500 quintals, the highest in Jammu and Kashmir.

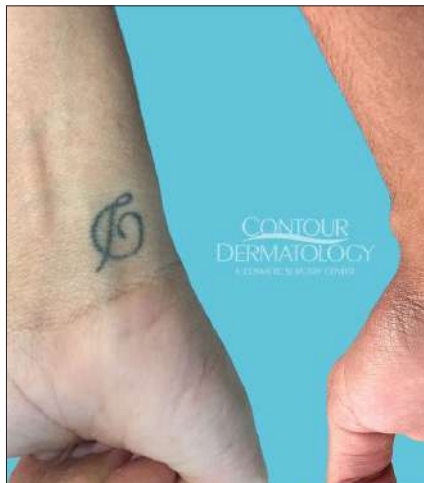
Mohammad Shafi Reshi, a farmer who annually sells five to ten quintals of spring onions, said that their pivotal role in Kashmiri cuisine, especially in the Wazwan feast. "It fills me with pride to know that our hard work contributes to preserving our cultural heritage and promoting our local cuisine," he said.

For these farmers, cultivating organic spring onions is more than a livelihood; it is a means of preserving their traditional way of life and honouring their forebears. They take immense pride in growing these onions organically, viewing it as a passion and a heritage they've inherited.

Abdul Gani Reshi, another farmer, said that cultivating spring onions is not just a means of making a living but a way of honouring their ancestors and preserving their legacy. "We take great pride in farming these onions organically and maintaining their quality and taste," he added.

Shahid Reshi, a young farmer, highlights the importance of sustainable farming practices. By cultivating spring onions organically, they ensure not only the health and safety of their customers but also the preservation of the environment for future generations.

## Removing Tattoos, Restoring Faith



Iqra Qayoom

**I**n the heart of Karanagar, Basit Bashir, a chiropractor, and hijama specialist at Valley Care Centre, is on a mission that goes beyond conventional healthcare. At his clinic surrounded by the scenic landscapes

of the valley, Bashir has been offering a unique service – free tattoo removal for religious reasons.

Driven by a deep sense of duty to help individuals align their bodies with their faith, Bashir's approach emphasizes spiritual well-being alongside physical health. In just four months, his compassionate initiative has resulted in over five thousand tattoos being removed, turning Valley Care Centre into a symbol of unity within the community.

The decision to provide free tattoo removals came to Bashir during a hijama session when he noticed the Kalima on a patient's arm. Concerned about potential conflicts, he asked the patient, who revealed, "I want to remove it, but I can't afford it. The removal costs more than getting it done in the first place."

Motivated by a desire to break down financial barriers, Bashir took matters into his own hands, purchasing a tattoo removing machine. This move marked a turning point, transforming his clinic into a haven where the convergence of

healthcare and religious convictions became accessible to all.

Bashir's dedication to his mission brings him immense peace. "Doing these free tattoo removals adds a deeper meaning to my work as a healer," he shares. The stories within Valley Care Centre reflect a diverse tapestry of personal journeys, from young individuals seeking redemption to older community members finding solace in aligning their bodies with their faith.

Coming from the tranquil town of Chatterhama, Basit Bashir's story is a testament to the power of compassion, bridging the gap between faith and the ink on one's skin. His clinic stands as a living example of how understanding and empathy can bring about transformative change in the lives of thousands, fostering a sense of community and support within the serene valley. Bashir notes, "Since day 1, I've been overwhelmed by the positive response; people are genuinely happy with the initiative, and it fuels my commitment to making a meaningful difference."



# Kashmir's Seasonal Education Volunteers Face Hardships, Uncertain Future

Sajid Raina

**P**arwaiz Ahmad, a 32-year-old seasonal teacher in the high hills of North Kashmir's Bandipora district nestled high in the Himalayas, 55 km north of the capital Srinagar, frequently finds himself pondering his future. His current role, a temporary teaching position provided by the government of Kashmir to educate the children of nomadic Gujjar and Bakarwal communities, will come to an end in six months. This leaves him contemplating what lies ahead.

Contemplating a famous English proverb, "less is more," he strives to bring daily happiness to his students at these Seasonal Centers, where he imparts education to migratory and nomadic children for a maximum of six months each year.

Regardless of the weather—be it rain, snow, or sunshine—Ahmad who has been running the seasonal school for the last three years sets out from home at 7:00 in the morning, as he is keenly aware of the group of children from the Gujjar and Bakarwal nomadic communities eagerly awaiting him, just a four-kilometre journey on foot away.

As per the official data from the J&K education department, more than 33,000 children hailing from nomadic communities enrol in these schools. Annually, approximately 1,500 teachers, serving as seasonal educators, are appointed for six months duration to provide instruction to these students.

In 2003, the Jammu and Kashmir government, in collaboration with the central government, instituted seasonal educational centres tailored to the needs of children belonging to the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. These centres are equipped with tented facilities, educational materials, and volunteers like Ahmad.

During the summer months, these nomadic groups, constituting 12.1 percent of the union territory's overall population, migrate to highland pastures with their families, accompanied by their sheep and goats. Their dwellings consist of tents and kothas (single mud huts), providing shelter, while they return to their permanent homes when winter sets in.

Mohammad Mustafa (57), a nomad from Rajouri district, cherishes the impact of mobile schools, saying, "These schools have become the foundation for our children's education." His nine year old daughter, Aisha, a 9th standard student adds, "I love learning in the school; the teachers are from our own community."

Abdul Gani, a 75-year-old nomad from the same district, said that the pivotal role these schools have played in educating our children, who have now become, if I dare say so, the first generation of



learners in our community. "However," he adds, "these schools continue to face challenges related to infrastructure and other essential facilities."

Vikas Khan, now 29 years old and a former student of a seasonal school who currently serves as a government employee in the J&K education department in central Kashmir's Budgam district, acknowledges the transformative impact of these schools. He states, "These schools have transformed the lives of many, including myself. Out of our batch, five of us have become government employees." Reflecting on his school days, he notes, "While our school lacked sufficient facilities back then, in this modern era, it's crucial to equip these schools with modern technology to enhance the learning experience for students."

"Initially, it was only for a four-month period, and the salary was 4,000 rupees. Then, in 2020, thanks to the Central Government's intervention, the salary was increased to 10,000 rupees, and the duration extended to six months," added Ahmad.

Ahmad said that the six-month unemployment gap takes a toll on us, causing mental pressure. "Some of us resort to manual labour, while others work in the homes of the children we've taught. This gap disrupts the teacher-student relationship and impacts our dignity," he added.

"My passion for teaching drives me to venture into high altitudes to educate these students. My family constantly worries because there's a real risk of encountering wild animals as I traverse uninhabited and dense forests," said 27-year-old teacher Yakoob Khan from north Kashmir's Kupwara district.

In 2021, a Seasonal Education Volunteer teacher, Khurshid Ahmed Dar, hailing from Central Kashmir's Budgam district, fell victim to a bear attack while

returning home after his duty.

"I've been serving as an education volunteer since 2016, initially for just four months with a monthly wage of 4000 rupees, funded by various zones. However, in 2021, the duration extended to six months, with a monthly wage of 10000 rupees, albeit provided at the end of the period. After these six months, many of us are compelled to take up odd jobs, including working in the homes of our former students, blurring the teacher-student boundary and affecting our dignity. This six-month unemployment disrupts our lives and causes mental distress," said Tanveer Ahmad Khatana, a 28-year-old seasonal teacher from Central Kashmir's Ganderbal district.

He said that the Samagra Shiksha Department in Kashmir now oversees our work. "We believe that salary should be paid monthly to ease our financial burdens. Proper lighting, mid-day meals (MDM), a government initiative to provide a healthy meal at noontime for students in government schools and first aid facilities should be available when we move to the hills with nomadic tribes. Extending our seasonal period to 12 months and placing us in local schools could enhance student-teacher coordination and expose us to diverse teaching methods," he added.

"Our appointments last for just six months, leaving us jobless thereafter. Some of us resort to labour-intensive tasks, while our connection with the students diminishes over this period. Occasionally, we find ourselves working in the homes of our own students, taking up roles like carpentry, grass-cutting, and construction. This scenario blurs the line between teacher and student, leading to an unfortunate loss of dignity," Uzair Ahmad Khata (26), another teacher said.

Aamir Khan, a seventh-grade student, expressed, "Mathematics is my favourite subject, and I aspire to become a businessman in the future. These schools have been instrumental in broadening our knowledge. They provide us with hope for the future, especially considering our past challenges, where continuous relocations hindered our access to education."

Saleem Khan, aged 19, is another student who discovers a glimmer of hope through seasonal school education. Previously, in the lush pastures, they were constrained to follow the same shepherding traditions that their ancestors upheld for generations.

"I have enrolled in this school with the aspiration of gaining admission to a reputable college and pursuing a career in engineering," Khan expressed. He added, "We don't consider these schools lacking in facilities because in the past, we didn't have access to such opportunities. Having these facilities now means a lot to us."



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## Irtiza Firdous Is Redefining Kashmir's Canvas

Uzma Shabnam

Irtiza Firdous, 19 is a young and passionate painting artist from Madinah Colony, MallaBagh. Her creative ability knows no boundaries, telling a story of passion, determination, and an unwavering dedication to her craft. Embracing education and artistic endeavors in harmony, Irtiza, a graduate of R.P. School and Crescent Public School, currently treads the path of knowledge pursuing a B.A. Honors at Government College for Women, M.A. Road, Srinagar.

Irtiza's artistic journey began when she was young and had a passion for painting and drawing. She continued to pursue her artistic goals until she took a break to prepare for her board examinations in the tenth grade. "Pressure and anxiety enveloped me," she recollected. Seeking solace, she reached for the brushes lying nearby, painting away her worries. "It became my refuge," she expressed, a turning point that reignited her artistic fervor, a passion she vowed never to forsake.

Initially embracing painting, her artistic work expanded to include calligraphy, venturing into landscapes, abstract art, and multilingual calligraphic expressions in English, Urdu, and Arabic. Encouragement from friends boosted her confidence, culminating in the genesis of an online presence in 2018. Under the username '@theartgallery,' Irtiza anonymously showcased



and sold her customized creations, from paintings to crafted delights like personalized greeting cards and bookmarks.

A firm believer in intrinsic inspiration, she firmly asserted, "Art comes from within, needing no external influencers." However, her unwavering support system remains rooted in her family, particularly her mother, whose encouragement bolsters her artistic endeavors amid the challenge of balancing her studies and her burgeoning business.

While admirers showered her with affection, accolades from fine arts professors held special significance, validating her artistic journey. Committed to nurturing Kashmir's young talent, she aspires to champion emerging artists, envisioning a platform for recognition and collaboration.

Amidst aspirations, she acknowledged an area for growth: time management. Admitting occasional delays in fulfilling orders, she sought improvement to alleviate stress and ensure timely deliveries.

For Irtiza, '@theartgallery' embodies more than a commerce concept; it's a springboard for Kashmiri artists. Her workshops aim to empower budding talents, fostering connections and nurturing creative growth within Kashmir's art community.

In the canvas of Irtiza Firdous' life, strokes of passion, dedication, and vision blend harmoniously, painting a portrait of an artist poised to not only leave an indelible mark but also weave an intricate web of creativity connecting Kashmir's artistic talents to a global stage.

## Dr. Rukhsar Saeed Clinches Second Runner-Up Title in MasterChef India Season 8

Yasmeena Rasheed

Dr. Rukhsar Saeed, a Kashmiri food technologist, has secured the second runner-up position in the latest season of MasterChef India.

Rukhsar became the first contestant from Kashmir to participate in India's biggest food reality show. The grand finale of the show was telecasted on Friday, in which Mohammad Ashiq of Mangalore was declared the winner of MasterChef India Season 8. Dr. Rukhsar was declared the second runner-up of the show. She has won Rs 5 lakh for securing the second position in the show.

The recently concluded season saw Dr. Rukhsar not only securing a coveted spot among the final 12 contestants but also receiving good remarks from the judges for taking Kashmiri cuisines to such a big platform. Out of 12 passionate chefs, only 4 reached the finale—Nambie Marak, Mohammed

Aashiq, Dr. Rukhsar Sayeed, and Suraj Thapa.

In a gruelling audition process held in June, she navigated through a series of challenges and tests, showcasing her exceptional skills and unwavering determination.

Dr. Rukhsar, a native of Pampore, who has already stated that she is on a mission to introduce the world to the unique and delectable flavors of Kashmiri cuisine, said she learned the recipe of this 'lost Kashmiri dish' from her mother, who, in turn, had inherited it from her mother (Rukhsar's grandmother).

In her final culinary creation of the season, Rukhsar curated a harmonious Brotherhood Platter, featuring a delightful fusion of flavors from both Muslim and Kashmiri Pandit traditions. The exquisite dish showcased a medley of Wazwan delicacies, including Rogan Josh, Dum Aloo, and Bata Haakh, symbolizing the rich culinary tapestry that unites diverse communities.





## Transforming Bones into Masterpieces



Zarka Shabir

In the heart of Gulab Bagh, Srinagar, Kashmir, Aziz-ur-Rehman, a 22-year-old multidisciplinary artist, has emerged as a trailblazer in the realm of bone carving. Breaking barriers as the

first person in Kashmir to delve into this unique art form, Aziz is garnering attention for his breathtaking creations.

Currently pursuing a B.A. at the Faculty of Fisheries, Kashmir SKUAST, Aziz stumbled upon bone carving after finding inspiration in the Netflix series

“Vikings.” What began as a casual interest transformed into a passion as he discovered the artistry hidden within discarded bones.

A resident of GulabBagh, Aziz meticulously collects bones from fields and butcher shops, later sanitizing and boiling them to create a canvas for his art. Utilizing machines and an array of tools, he crafts exquisite bone ornaments, including necklaces, earrings, home décor items like bone knives, frames, brush holders, pen holders, and jewelry stands.

Aziz’s dedication extends to using halal bones, sourced from sheep, goats, and buffaloes. Fascinated by social media, he shares his unique creations that have captivated not only the online community but also his own family members.

Aziz-ur-Rehman’s bone carving prowess transcends artistic boundaries, proving that beauty can indeed emerge from the unlikeliest of places. His story stands as a testament to the transformative power of passion and innovation in the realm of traditional artistry.

## Kashmir’s Edible Wild Greens Are Fading From Urban Kitchens

Nuzhat Masooudi

Kashmir, with its diverse topography, has been a home to a variety of wild edible flora that are not only tasty but also healthy. Traditionally, these wild greens and vegetables were an essential part of the Kashmiri diet, passed down from one generation to another. However, with the changing times, these once-vital components of Kashmiri cuisine are fading away from urban kitchens, though they still flourish in rural areas and old bazaars.

**Handh (Dandelion):** Handh, known as Dandelion, is a classic spring foraging plant in the Himalayan range. It is rich in iron and is considered a medicinal aid with several health benefits. The flowers, roots, and leaves of Dandelion are all edible. It is an important part of Himalayan cuisine and is dried in the summer months for use during winter.

**Nunnar (Purslane):** Purslane, known as Nunnar in Kashmiri, is abundant and has thick, succulent leaves. It has a culinary history in Kashmir and is considered a treatment for various health issues. Purslane is rich in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, minerals, and has antimutagenic properties. The entire plant is almost edible, with a slightly tangy and



sour taste.

**Aobigh (Curly Dock or Yellow Dock):** Curly Dock, known as Aobigh in Kashmiri, is an early spring wild vegetable that grows easily in kitchen gardens and backyards. It is cooked green by frying in oil and adding basic spices. It is rich in Vitamin C but should be eaten in moderation due to its high oxalic acid content.

**Sochal (Ground Ivy):** Sochal, also known as Ground Ivy, belongs to the mint family. It cannot be eaten raw and is typically cooked

by adding garlic and deep frying. It has a strong flavor and is considered helpful for digestive issues.

Despite their historical significance and nutritional value, these wild greens are now rarely cooked in Kashmiri kitchens. The advancement of road infrastructure, keeping the Jammu-Srinagar highway open almost throughout the year, has contributed to the diminishing importance of these traditional ingredients for the new generation.

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# MERC's Experiential Learning Journey: Unveiling the Tapestry of Ganderbal District

Ilhak Tantray

The Media Education Research Centre (MERC) orchestrated a captivating field trip for its senior batch on December 8th, transforming a routine excursion into an experiential venture into the terrains of Ganderbal District. Students embraced the opportunity with anticipation, eager to extract valuable insights aligned with the contours of media research, a prominent subject at MERC.

The day unfolded as a blend of meticulously curated activities, fostering practical applications in the realm of media research. Ganderbal, with its mosaic of communities, provided a fertile ground for exploration. Immersed in the collection of cultures, students engaged with various facets of the district, making the most of this enriching experience.

Mohsin Mushtaq, a student, expressed his reflections, stating, "It was an immensely fulfilling day filled with a variety of experiences. We delved into the diverse cultures that thrive in Ganderbal." The heart of the activity lay in students interacting with residents from different communities, unveiling unique perspectives on a world that, for some, seemed both distant and advanced.

Rayees Ramzan, another student, conveyed



his delight, saying, "Interacting with people of different communities, understanding their thoughts on the outer world – it was a new experience for me. I'm happy to be here." Venturing into the hills of TsuntWali War, students found themselves immersed in a thrill of exploration, with each household becoming a narrative, unfolding stories of people, societies, languages, and opinions.

The department's innovative approach to integrating real-world experiences into

academic pursuits was met with enthusiasm. Reflecting on the success of the day, a student suggested, "The department should continue organizing these field trips regularly. It goes beyond conventional classroom learning, offering students a deeper understanding of people and societies."

The allure of such opportunities was evident, especially for students who eagerly seized the chance to engage with the world beyond textbooks.

## A Maestro in the Timeless Art of Kangri Making



Fawad Showkat

In the enchanting town of Charar-i-Sharief in Budgam district, Ali Mohammad Dar, a 64-year-old artisan, stands as a custodian of a tradition that has warmed the hearts and

homes of Kashmiris for generations. Devoting 50 years of his life to perfecting the craft of Kangri making, Dar creates a diverse range of 12 distinct types of these traditional firepots, celebrated by locals for providing warmth during harsh winters.

Dar, recently recognized for his exceptional

skills, received a 50,000 rupees award for crafting a unique and stylish Kangri that captured attention. Another creation earned him an additional 30,000 rupees, a testament to his unparalleled craftsmanship. Reflecting on the changing dynamics of his craft, Dar acknowledged the challenges posed by modern heating equipment and alternative clothing. Despite these hurdles, Dar and approximately 100 other artisans in the region continue to weave Kangris with passion and dedication.

Crafting one Kangri a day, these artisans produce award-winning pieces that take up to four days to complete. Dar emphasized the importance of government support, particularly in marketing, to revive and sustain this traditional craft. He highlighted the pricing range of Kangris, starting from 300 rupees for the most affordable to 13,000 rupees for the award-winning masterpiece.

In Dar's vision, governmental backing in marketing could secure the future of Kangri craftsmanship for generations to come. As these handcrafted firepots blend tradition with artistic innovation, Ali Mohammad Dar stands as a beacon of resilience, determined to keep the flame of Kangri making alive in the hearts and homes of Kashmir.

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