



# MERC Times

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# SILK FACTORY REVIATALIZED

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## Kashmir gets its first national Aainball player, coach

**Syed Batool Andrabi**

**A**leem Andrabi, a young man from Pulwama District of South Kashmir, has made history by becoming the region's first aainball player and coach.

Aainball is a sport that combines elements of basketball and volleyball and is gaining popularity in India and other parts of the world as well.

Aleem's journey began when he discovered aainball while residing in Delhi. Inspired by the sport's unique blend of athleticism and strategy, Aleem started playing and practicing every day, determined to master the game.

After years of hard work and dedication, Aleem became one of the top aainball players in India, earning the title of "Best Player" in several national tournaments.

He also became a certified aainball coach, sharing his knowledge and expertise with others and helping to promote the sport in Kashmir.

Aleem travelled to several places, including South Africa, to instruct the game and represent India at the international level.

"I am thrilled to be able to bring aainball to my hometown of Kashmir," said Aleem. "The sport has the potential to inspire young people and provide new opportunities for sports enthusiasts in the region," he added.

Aleem's efforts have not gone unnoticed,



with many people in Kashmir and beyond praising him for his dedication and success in promoting aainball. Local sports authorities have also recognized Aleem's achievements and are supporting him in his efforts to establish aainball as a popular sport in Kashmir.

"Aleem's success is a testament to the power of hard work and dedication," said

a spokesperson for the Kashmir Sports Authority. "We are proud to have him as a role model for young people in the region and look forward to seeing aainball thrive under his leadership," he added.

Overall, Aleem's journey from aspiring player to successful coach and promoter of aainball is an inspiration to sports enthusiasts and young people everywhere.

His dedication to the sport and to his hometown of Kashmir is a shining example of how passion and hard work can lead to success and positive change in one's community.

"Aleem's achievement is remarkable and has put Kashmir on the map for aainball. His success will inspire many young people in the region to take up the sport and follow in his footsteps," said Kamran Showket, a local sports enthusiast.

"Aleem is a true pioneer for aainball. He has brought the sport to our attention and is helping to establish it as a popular activity in our region. We are proud of his accomplishments and grateful for his dedication to the sport," said Muzamil Ahmad, an Aainball player.

"Aleem is a source of pride for all of us in Kashmir. His success in aainball is a great achievement and a shining example of what we can achieve with hard work and dedication," said Syed Aasiya, Aleem's sister.

## Man who has committed his life to preservation, promotion of Kashmiri literature



**Faizan Qureshi**

**A**bdul Gani Baig Athar was born in a humble family in the village of Regipora in Kupwara district. His unwavering determination has propelled him to remarkable heights, establishing him as a revered literary figure with an extraordinary contribution to literature.

For decades, Athar Baig has dedicated himself to the preservation of the endangered Kashmiri language and its vibrant culture and heritage. In 1977, he co-founded the Cultural Trust Kupwara, an organization comprised of passionate individuals devoted to this cause.

Reflecting on his journey, Athar Baig proudly proclaims, "I owe my accomplishments to Cultural Trust Kupwara, of which I am honored to be a founding member."

In recognition of his literary work, Abdul Gani Baig Athar was bestowed with the prestigious Indian Sahitya Akademi Award in 2004 for his book, "Lukh karenn wapas." He has also written almost 300 short stories, numerous thought-provoking dramas, and insightful columns that paint a vivid picture of society. His dramas have been broadcasted on Radio Kashmir and various other platforms, captivating

audiences far and wide.

The profound impact of Baig's contributions has not gone unnoticed, as he has received accolades and appreciation from various quarters. Alongside the 'Indian Sahitya Akademi Award', he has been honored with the 'Best Actor Award' from the 'Cultural Academy' and the esteemed 'Kudoos of Kupwara' from the Education Department.

Additionally, his remarkable talent as a teacher and writer has garnered him the 'Best Resources Person' and 'Best Drama Writer' awards from esteemed governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Till date, Abdul Gani Baig has authored and published 21 books, each revered and cherished by individuals from diverse backgrounds. These literary works stand as a testament to his profound impact on the literary landscape. His inspiring journey is a testament to the power of dedication, determination, and a relentless pursuit of one's passion. His unwavering commitment to the preservation of Kashmiri language and culture has solidified his position as a champion, leaving an indelible mark on the literary world.



## KU's Kupwara Campus finally to start PG courses

Nuzhat Masooudi

Vice Chancellor of Kashmir University Dr. Nilofar Khan made visited the Kupwara campus of University of Kashmir and took announced that it will be made functional soon. The locals there have been complaining of non-functionality of the campus for years.

The Director of the campus, Professor Parvez Ahmad is upbeat and positive about starting it.

"We have started the admission process and despite a low turnout we have gone ahead with the admissions, with the hope that others will follow in due time," Professor Parvez said.

He said that the campus stumbled into quite a few roadblocks, beginning with the transfer of land, 2019 situation, and then subsequently the pandemic.

"The buildings at the campus were used as isolation centers, and needed quite a bit of restoration after they were handed back to



us," he added.

He said that the ball has been set into motion finally, and a total of 34 students have been enrolled for integrated courses in Physics and Energy Studies. "No other KU campus offers these courses and this campus, in that regard, will be a novel campus," he said.

Professor Parvaiz said that the contractual faculty for the two departments has been already hired and advertisements have been run for permanent recruitment as well.

"The campus will start PG courses in August this year and it is going to be one of the finest KU campuses. We have an academic block under construction and it is bigger than any block even the main KU campus has," he further added.

The locals said that the campus was sanctioned to give students from remote areas like Machil, Karnah, Keran, Lolab, Langate, and other such areas an opportunity to take up courses without having to travel to other parts of the valley or outside the valley.

The students have been left utterly disappointed with the slow pace of progress that this satellite campus of Kashmir University has been able to make in all these years, the locals said.

However, there is now hope that it will start and will pick up the pace soon.

## Unprecedented summer heatwave grips Kashmir valley



Ishfan Dar

In an extraordinary turn of events, the picturesque Kashmir valley finds itself grappling with an unprecedented summer heatwave, shattering temperature records and challenging the region's cool climate and scenic beauty.

The scorching heatwave has taken a toll on the daily lives of residents, leading to a lack of productivity and motivation. Many individuals, including students, are finding it difficult to concentrate on their work and studies amidst the extreme heat.

Faizan, a civil engineering student pursuing a bachelor's degree, expressed his concern over the challenging conditions during examinations, comparing the surroundings to an engulfing flame. He

further shared his fear of failing due to the debilitating laziness caused by the heat.

"It's very hard to concentrate during preparation and also in examination due to the extreme heat within the examination hall, making it feel as if the surroundings are engulfed in flames," Faizan said.

Businesses in the region have also suffered as customers avoid going outdoors to protect themselves from the intense heat.

The soaring temperatures have drained people's energy and enthusiasm, leaving them in a state of indolence and lethargy.

Ali Mohammad Bhat, who runs a hardware and sanitary showroom, lamented the significant decline in sales, attributing it to the sudden rise in temperature.

"Of course, there is a very slow rush in market due to this abrupt change in

temperature. Almost 40% of sales got affected by this hot temperature" Bhat said.

In an attempt to find relief from the sweltering summer, many young individuals, particularly boys, have resorted to seeking solace in various water bodies for swimming. Popular destinations like DARA, Shalimar, and Dale Lake have become a respite for these individuals, allowing them to cool down and spend their days in a more comfortable environment.

"When it goes out of control, we couldn't be able to bare the heat so we decided to go to DARA so that we could feel cool and simultaneously spend our day," said a 19-year-old boy who was participating in swimming.

The heatwave gripping the Kashmir valley is not an isolated incident but part of a larger global climate change issue. Like many regions across the world, Kashmir is also experiencing the adverse effects of increasing global temperatures, largely influenced by human-induced climate change. These rising temperatures contribute to the intensification of summer heatwaves and abnormal weather patterns.

As the summer heatwave continues to hold its grip on the Kashmir valley, residents strive to adapt to the challenging circumstances. Authorities and individuals alike are urged to recognize the underlying causes of such extreme weather events and work towards sustainable solutions to mitigate the impacts of climate change.



## Exotic Alligator Gar fish in Dal Lake sends alarm bells ringing

**Numan Bhat**

During the continuing cleaning of Dal Lake, the Jammu and Kashmir Lake Conservation and Management Authority (LCMA) discovered a rare variety of fish for the first time. The fish, known as a "Alligator Gar," is native to North America and is distinguished by its crocodile-like head and razor-sharp teeth.

Scientists and government authorities are concerned about the discovery, which could represent a major danger to native fish species.

Masood Ahmad, an expert from the J&K LCMA's research and monitoring department, stated that they will undertake an analysis of the discovered fish with the assistance of the fisheries and SKUAST-K's fisheries department.

"We are going to seek assistance from the fisheries department and SKUAST-K to determine the effects of this type of fish on our existing fish species within Dal Lake," he said.

LCMA worker's discovered the uncommon fish on the conveyor during the normal de-weeding process in Dal Lake. "It was the first of its kind here," he added.

Videos of the uncommon fish discovered



during Dal Lake cleaning went viral on social media, where the fish was presented and exhibited. Many netizens were surprised, with many claiming that the fish type is an invasive species that threatens aquatic life.

Kashmir has several bodies of water, notably the Dal and Wular lakes, which cover around 50,000 hectares in Jammu and Kashmir.

Dal Lake, in particular, is home to 17 different fish species, on which 2,100 families rely for a living. Local fisherman, known as "mahigeers," have seen a major reduction in Dal fish yield in recent years.

Bashir Ahmad, a mahigeer (fisherman), emphasises the historical significance of fishing in Dal Lake as a significant source of revenue for the Kashmiri inhabitants who live along its banks.

However, their age-old way of life is now jeopardised due to a lack of fish in the lake. Rasool recalls catching 20 kilogramme of fish in a single day. However, during the last four years, his catch has shrunk to one or two kilogrammes only. "It appears that the local fish breed has disappeared," he added.

Dr. Farooz Ahmad Bhat, Dean of the Faculty of Fisheries at Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Science and Technology – Kashmir (SKUAST-K), stated that the fish seen in Dal Lake is an alligator gar fish, which has been spotted for the first time in Kashmir.

"This fish is not harmful, but we don't have any research on it because this is the first time it has been seen here in Dal Lake," Dr. Farooz said.

He also mentioned that grass carp fish were spotted in Dal Lake in 2016. "Later, our team discovered another in Manasbal Lake, but this alligator gar was heard for the first time in Kashmir," he said, adding, "We will investigate how and where it arrived in Kashmir, as well as how long it has been here."

According to Dr. Farooz, proper investigation will be conducted to discover how it got to Kashmir and whether it poses a threat to native fish kinds.

## PepsiCo signs MOUs with SKAUST, District Admin

**Gurez Valley's Potato Harvest** likely to flourish among new collaborations

**Mohsin Mushtaq**

Known as the "Potato Basket of Kashmir," the isolated Gurez valley in North Kashmir's Bandipora district, secluded from the rest of the world during the frosty winter months, yields over 1700 quintals of fresh potatoes annually.

This remarkable output has captured the attention of PepsiCo India, which recently signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with SKAUST and District administration to acquire the valley's inaugural crop.

PepsiCo India has initiated research trials in search of the finest potato varieties that suit the production of high-quality potato chips within the valley. This endeavour has sparked excitement and optimism among the locals, such as Ashiq Hussain Lone, an immigrant now residing in Pazzalpora Bandipora, who eagerly prepares to return to his birthplace in Gurez Valley.

Expressing his anticipation, Ashiq Hussain exclaims, "Finally, we have an irresist-

ible reason to return to our rustic wooden huts—a longing that has persisted for far too long."

Laden with nostalgia, packs his backpack and boards a sumo vehicle destined for Gurez Valley.

As the dawn breaks over the "Habba Khatoon Peak," Muhammad Rafiq Samoon tends to his potato farm, preparing to sow this year's crop.

"This year's production surpasses the previous years," Muhammad Rafiq exclaims, while his hands dig in a temporary canal to bring water to his farm in Dawar, Gurez.

After receiving recognition as the "Best Offbeat Tourist Destination" last year, Gurez's Intermountain plateaus enticed the international market with its abundant harvest of potatoes, perfectly complementing the valley's chilly climate and nutrient-rich soil, resulting in delectable and crispy feasts.

Bilal Ahmad, the Head of Mountain Agriculture Research and Extension Station and KVK-Gurez SKUAST-Kashmir,

affirms, "In collaboration with scientists from Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir (SKUAST-K), we are currently conducting research trials at the research station of the university's Mountain Agriculture and Extension Research Station (MARES) located in Izmar, Gurez."

"We are thrilled to embark on these research trials in Gurez Valley, celebrated for its rich heritage of potato cultivation," said Dr Santosh Tiwari, Associate Director (Agro R&D) at PepsiCo India Ltd., in an interview to a local daily.

"Our objective is to identify potato varieties that are best suited for producing high-quality potato chips, thereby creating a sustainable market for the farmers and boosting the valley's economic prospects," he emphasized.

The valley of Habba Khatoon's love now basks in tranquility following the Ceasefire Pact of 2021, a testament to the commitment of both armies to bring peace and harmony to the inhabitants living alongside the Line of Control (LoC).



# Old Srinagar Silk Factory gets new life



The World Bank funding has brought a wind of change to our beloved Silk Factory. We are now equipped with the tools to preserve our traditions and embrace innovation. It's a new chapter for us, and we are excited to showcase the beauty of Kashmiri silk to the world

**Uzma Shabnam**

**D**In the heart of the city, along the picturesque banks of the Jhelum River, the Rajbagh Silk Factory stands as a symbol of Kashmir's rich silk weaving tradition. This iconic 85-year-old government-run establishment has embarked on a remarkable journey of revival, embracing new technology to breathe new life into the age-old craft.

Supported by the World Bank, the factory underwent a transformative phase in August 2021 with the introduction of new machines and sophisticated looms. This modernization effort aims to strike a balance between preserving tradition and embracing innovation, revitalizing the silk industry in Srinagar.

"The use of modern technology has significantly increased production efficiency without compromising the quality of our craft. It has empowered our artisans and given a new life to the silk industry," said Maqsood Ahmed, the senior supervisor at the factory.

The journey of silk weavers in Srinagar has not been without challenges. However, their dedication to preserve the heritage of silk weaving remains unwavering.

Emphasising the importance of adapting to changing times, a skilled weaver Abdul Qayoom said, "We must

preserve our heritage and adapt to the changing times. Our silk carries stories, traditions, and dreams woven into every strand."

The intricate process of silk weaving unfolds within the walls of the factory. Nimble-fingered artisans meticulously work on handlooms, skillfully maneuvering delicate threads to create mesmerizing patterns and designs. This craftsmanship reflects the rich cultural heritage of Kashmir, where silk weaving is more than just a craft—it is an expression of identity and tradition.

The vibrancy of the silk threads tells a tale of innovation and heritage. Carefully selected for their quality, the threads showcase a kaleidoscope of hues, representing infinite possibilities and the artistic brilliance that emerges from the hands of the artisans.

Sabir Ali, an employee at the factory operating the newly introduced machines, expresses his excitement about the World Bank funding, saying, "The World Bank funding has brought a wind of change to our beloved Silk Factory. We are now equipped with the tools to preserve our traditions and embrace innovation. It's a new chapter for us, and we are excited to showcase the beauty of Kashmiri silk to the world."

As we venture deeper into the factory,



the symphony of machinery harmonizes with the legacy of craftsmanship. Ghulam Mohiuddin, an expert weaver, tenderly tends to the machine that has been his companion for decades. With retirement on the horizon, he leaves behind a legacy of dedication and artistry. "The craft of silk weaving requires our total attention and is more than just a job. The opportunity to support this enduring heritage has been an honor," Mohiuddin reflected.

Amidst the rhythmic hum of machinery, diligent workers ensure the quality of the delicate silk threads. Every aspect, from strength to color consistency, undergoes rigorous inspection to maintain the factory's reputation for exceptional craftsmanship.

Maqsood Ahmed, a living testament to his four decades of dedicated service, stands amidst the bustling looms. Reflecting on his experiences, he emphasizes the dedication required to master the art of silk weaving. "I have worked here for 40 years and have witnessed the evolution of the factory. It takes a lot of dedication to learn the technique of silk weaving; it is not an easy craft," says Ahmed. His expertise and priceless experience have played a significant role in shaping the history of silk weaving in Srinagar.

The Rajbagh Silk Factory's transformative journey exemplifies the delicate dance between tradition and innovation. Through the infusion of modern technology, the factory preserves its cultural heritage while embracing the opportunities of the modern age. The revival of this ancient craft not only sustains the legacy of silk weaving but also creates economic growth for the artisans and the region as a whole.

As the hum of looms continues, the Rajbagh Silk Factory remains a beacon of hope for artisans, weavers, and the wider community. It stands as a testament to the beauty and value of preserving traditions while embracing the potential of the future.

**The use of modern technology has significantly increased production efficiency without compromising the quality of our craft.** It has empowered our artisans and given a new life to the silk industry



## Trans-Woman from Kashmir blazing new path to pursue dreams



Mehroob Mushtaq

**S**hoab Khan has become the first transgender woman in Kashmir to make her mark in the corporate world, defying societal norms and breaking barriers. Her journey from flight attendant to corporate professional is not only reshaping perceptions but also inspiring the LGBTQ+ community to pursue their dreams.

Born and raised in Kashmir, Shoab Khan overcame immense challenges and adversity throughout her life. Recounting her childhood, she revealed that it was a period of hardship, validation, and the freedom to express herself authentically.

School became a place of fear, where bullying and humiliation were constant companions. Reflecting on her early years, Khan expressed a longing to relive her childhood, free from discrimination and able to enjoy the same experiences as her peers.

“My childhood is not something I like to remember. I lacked love, validation, and many other things that a child deserves. I faced constant fear and humiliation, which made me afraid of going to school and being bullied by seniors,” she said.

When asked about the most influential and supportive person in her life, Khan turned to her unwavering faith. Emphasising her deep connection with a higher power, she found comfort and strength in her relationship with God. While acknowledging that there were moments of loneliness and a lack of support from those closest to her, Khan also emphasised the importance of self-motivation and the power of believing in oneself.



My connection with **Allah** has positively influenced my life. While there may have been well-wishers along the way, **I have often felt alone and lacked proper support from my own people**

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“My connection with Allah has positively influenced my life. While there may have been well-wishers along the way, I have often felt alone and lacked proper support from my own people,” said Khan.

The decision to transition was a pivotal moment for Khan, and she embarked on this journey when she gained financial independence and the ability to make her own choices.

Overcoming the fear of potential discard by her family, she realised that living authentically was essential for

her well-being. Khan had spent much of her life pretending to conform to societal norms, but with newfound clarity and determination, she chose to live for herself.

The journey was not without its challenges, but Khan learned valuable lessons along the way. She discovered that true happiness came from accepting oneself and living without regret.

Challenging the stereotypical beliefs that limit the potential of transgender individuals, Khan advocated for a society that embraces diversity and provides equal opportunities for everyone.

She stressed the need to focus on the upbringing of children, urging parents and teachers to bring up tendency without discrimination and to reject societal expectations based on gender.

“Stereotypical thinking regarding transgender people is prevalent in society. Some believe they are meant for entertainment, sexual exploitation, or limited to professions like matchmaking or dancing at weddings. It is essential to acknowledge that every individual, regardless of gender identity, has basic human rights, including the right to education, safety, and dignity,” she said.

With her courageous pursuit of a career in the corporate sector, Khan has shattered stereotypes and ignited a positive change in society. Her achievement has had a significant impact on the community, inspiring others to embrace their true identities and pursue their dreams.

“My message to the younger generation, especially those going through similar experiences, is to never lose hope. You will face mental trauma and instability, but stay focused on your dreams. Whether you aspire to be a singer, doctor, scientist, or astronaut, pursue your passions without holding back,” Khan said.

“Accept yourself, express your true self, and let those who support you join you on your journey. Don’t lose hope as long as you are content with yourself and the Creator is pleased with your actions,” she further added.

Shoab Khan’s journey serves as a beacon of hope for individuals who face societal prejudices and discrimination. Her story reminds us of the importance of acceptance, self-belief, and the power to overcome adversity.

As we attempt for a more inclusive society, Khan’s call to action resonates strongly, urging us to focus on acceptance within families, sensitise ourselves about gender discrimination, and encourage young generations to fearlessly pursue their dreams.

Shoab Khan’s groundbreaking achievement not only transforms her own life but also inspires a movement towards a more accepting and unbiased world.

## Nomads in J&K face acute shortage of healthcare facilities

Sajid Raina

“I lost one of my sons last year in these forests during delivery. My family believes that childbirth will happen naturally as it usually does for most pregnant nomadic women, but things are not the same. That day, we couldn’t reach the hospital on time,” said Aisha (23), a young nomadic woman who experienced the tragic loss of her son last year while her family was in the Uri forests with their livestock.

“Every year, we move towards these green pastures and spend around five months in Chaknallah of Gurez, in the Bandipora district. During this seasonal migration, our pregnant women and expectant mothers suffer the most due to the lack of proper healthcare, resulting in iron deficiency and other diseases among them,” said Khatija (56), a grandmother of four children.

Thousands of nomadic families from different parts of the valley began their seasonal migration in May towards the green pastures of Kashmir valley from Pir Panjal Range of Jammu region. Although the government claims to provide mobile healthcare centers to these nomadic people during their seasonal migration, the ground reality tells a different story.

Ghulam Khan (56) from Reasi district, Jammu, shared his story, stating that the journey is never easy for them. “Every year, we prepare ourselves for various challenges, but our pregnant women suffer the most during this five-month seasonal migration.”

“The government’s mobile healthcare centers to nomadic people in green pastures are nowhere to be seen on the ground. We have to travel 30 km to reach doctors, who often refuse to see our pregnant women, saying that we are enrolled in Jammu or in nearby centers,” expressed Ali Cheche, a member of the nomadic community from Reasi.

“We don’t seek concrete houses for our children; instead, we demand basic healthcare facilities, which are the right of every citizen in our country. Unfortunately, we have been deprived of that for years,” said Shahnaza, while traveling to the Shopian forests with her family and livestock.

“Our elders used to rely on traditional practices, where they would collect certain leaves, boil them in water, and drink the concoction to alleviate headaches and other ailments. However, things have changed now, and nobody relies on those traditional practices anymore,” explained Ulfat (27), a young woman from the community.

She further shared that even for the slightest toothache, they have to travel approximately 30 km on foot from the green pastures to reach the nearest hospital.

“We are content with our way of life, as it is unlikely to change. However, we appeal to the government to provide us with basic healthcare facilities during this seasonal migration,” emphasized Shahnaza.



The government’s mobile healthcare centers to nomadic people in green pastures are nowhere to be seen on the ground. We have to travel 30 km to reach doctors, who often refuse to see our pregnant women, saying that we are enrolled in Jammu or in nearby centers

Shaziya Khan, another young woman added, “While the government claims to be improving sanitation in rural areas and providing gas cylinders and other facilities, we have yet to see any assistance reaching the nomadic people. Several schemes have been initiated by the central government, but we have been deprived of their benefits every time.”

“Every year, the situation worsens for us in terms of climate change, human-animal conflicts, and natural disasters. We all share responsibility, and the authorities should address these issues and protect our natural resources, as we are entirely dependent on these green pastures,” concluded Mohd Lateef (79), an elderly member of the community

“Being pregnant during the seasonal migration is incredibly challenging. We lack access to proper prenatal care, and it puts both the mother and the unborn child at risk. The government needs to prioritize our healthcare needs,” urged Farida, a pregnant nomadic woman

“The lack of healthcare facilities during our seasonal migration is not just a matter of inconvenience; it’s a matter of life and death. We need immediate attention and support from the authorities,” emphasized Abdul, a concerned father-to-be.

“Our nomadic lifestyle shouldn’t be a barrier to receiving healthcare. We deserve equal access to medical services, regardless of our transient way of life,” stated Rukhsana, a nomadic community advocate.

“It’s disheartening to see our pregnant women suffering and struggling with health issues while we are constantly on the move. We need sustainable solutions that cater to our unique circumstances,” stressed Yusuf, a member of the nomadic community.

“The government should invest in mobile healthcare units that can reach us during our seasonal migrations. This will alleviate the burden on pregnant women and provide the necessary medical support,” suggested Rahim, a community elder.

“Pregnant nomadic women face unique challenges due to the transient nature of their lifestyle. It is crucial to address their healthcare needs during their seasonal migration. Providing mobile healthcare units equipped with skilled medical professionals, distributing essential medicines, raising awareness, and collaborating with community leaders are essential steps to improve the situation. By implementing these measures, we can bridge the healthcare gap and ensure the well-being of pregnant nomadic women and their unborn children,” said, Dr Suriya, a senior gynecologist who often doing casual checkups to these nomadic women at Bandipora

Meanwhile, an official acknowledged that the pressing concerns raised regarding the healthcare challenges faced by pregnant nomadic women during their seasonal migration.

He said that the well-being of all citizens, regardless of their lifestyle or location, is of paramount importance to us.

“We are committed to addressing these issues and working towards providing improved healthcare services to pregnant nomadic women. We will collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including community leaders and medical professionals, to develop effective strategies and implement sustainable solutions. Our aim is to ensure that every pregnant woman in the nomadic community receives the necessary medical care and support they deserve,” he said.



# Kashmiri cyclist holds two world records

Ada Jaan

Adil Teli, a Kashmiri cyclist is a resident of Narbal in Baramulla district. Adil has achieved a remarkable feat of holding two Guinness World Records. In a span of just eight days he pedalled a staggering distance of 3,600 kilometers earning a place in the Guinness Book of World Records for the fastest Kashmir to Kanyakumari journey on bicycle.

He cycled from Leh to Manali in a record time. He peddled the high altitude and arduous path from Leh to Manali – a distance of 470 km – in 29:18:21 hours, thus breaking the earlier record set in 2020 by Bharat Panu who finished the track in 35 hours, 32 minutes, and 22 seconds on October 11, 2020.

Adil, who started his cycle journey from City Center, GhantaGhar, LalChowk from 7:30 am on March 22 after being flagged off by the Divisional Commissioner Kashmir completed the distance in eight days, 1 hour and 39 minutes by reaching the destination on March 30 at 7:30 am.

Speaking about his remarkable record, the



young cyclist said that it was not an easy task and involved a lot of training besides several health issues also make it a difficult task.

“On March 22, I started my journey of dreams with the active support of divisional administration. That day it was raining all day from Srinagar up to Punjab that made my

journey very difficult,” Adil said.

He faced several health issues during the entire journey but his determination made it easier for him. “I faced several issues during this travel. After the 7th day of my journey, my body started to show signs of weakness. My knees started to swell with extreme pain making it difficult to pedal but I only kept the goal of beating the record in my mind,” he added.

He also gets felicitated by the Director Tourism Kashmir, Fazlul Haseeb for his achievement.

Adil also represents Jammu and Kashmir in senior national championship for last five years.

After the record Adil qualified for UCI Gran Fondo World Championship scheduled to be held at Glasgow Scotland in August later this year.

“The hard work, dedication, and perseverance have paid off, and now I have a chance to compete against the best of the best. This championship will be a defining moment in my career and will be remembered for years to come. Ready to give it all. Kashmir, will make you proud again. InshaAllah,” said Adil.

# Kashmir’s Great Lakes

JOURNEY THROUGH THE HEART OF BEAUTY

Aakash Gulzar

My cousin and I set out on an amazing journey through the captivating scenery of the Kashmir Great Lakes Trek last year.

This well-known Himalayan alpine trail guaranteed us a week of extraordinary beauty, difficult terrain, and priceless memories.

As we set out on our trek from Sonamarg, we were filled with excitement and anticipation as we prepared to enter the enchanted world of alpine lakes, mighty peaks, and lush meadows.

Our journey started in Sonamarg, where we eagerly embarked on the trail that would take us to the base camp at Table Top or ‘Shaukdari. The trek took about 6-7 hours, but the stunning scenery and the company of the welcoming Gujjar-Bakarwal community made the journey enjoyable. Table Top was the ideal place to relax and prepare for the days ahead because plenty of firewood was available and it was warm and inviting.

We first encountered the magnificent twin lakes of Vishansar and Kishansar on the second day of our trek. With the prospect of seeing the lakes’ glistening azure waters serving as our motivation, we set out on a long and arduous journey through the difficult terrain. While traversing the challenging

Nichnai Pass, we were astounded by the breathtaking panoramic views and even managed to get mobile network reception a rare window into the outside world in the middle of the wilderness.

Every new day brought us new natural wonders as we continued our expedition. Alpine lakes, majestic mountain peaks, sweeping meadows, and ice-cold glaciers played a symphony for us. We were in awe of the landscape’s incredible diversity as we took pictures and made memories that we will always cherish. Our resiliency and tenacity were required by the difficult terrain, but the rewards were incredible.

After a little more hiking, we came across Satsar Lake, a collection of seven interconnected lakes that resembled a secret paradise. We were awestruck by the variety of colors and landscapes each lake offered, each of which had its distinct personality. It appeared as though nature had sprinkled its magic across these alluring waters.

We couldn’t help but think back on the profound effect this trip had on our lives as we got closer to the end of the trek. Our physical stamina had been put to the test, our sense of adventure had been sparked, and we had gained a profound respect for the beauty of our planet thanks to the Kashmir Great Lakes Trek. Every difficult step taught us more about our inner strength and the joy of

creating lifelong memories with loved ones.

We traveled to the twin lakes of Gangabal and Nundkol, which served as the expedition’s capstone. These lakes emanated tranquility that touched our souls because they were surrounded by majestic mountains. We simply sat by their shores for hours, transfixed by their incredible beauty.

We had the opportunity to completely immerse ourselves in the beauty of nature during the trek through the Kashmir Great Lakes. Every step was accompanied by the sweet scent of wildflowers, the soft rustling of the breeze through the meadows, and the whisper of distant waterfalls. We found comfort and a strong connection to nature in the majesty of high peaks and the serenity of clear lakes.

We were pleasantly surprised by the extraordinary adventure of our trek through the Kashmir Great Lakes. This journey captured nature’s grandeur, from the charming base camp at Table Top to the breathtaking twin lakes and the ever-changing landscapes. We carried the beauty, tenacity, and tranquility of the Kashmir Valley with us as we made our way back home with a buoyant spirit. We will always be reminded of the transformative power of exploration and the enduring allure of the great outdoors by the memories we made and the lessons we learned.

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# MERC Times

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MEDIA EDUCATION RESEARCH CENTRE  
UNIVERSITY OF KASHMIR

## SANG TARAASH

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## Gujjar womens' embroidered skullcaps lose out to modern fashion



**Rayees Ramzan**

**W**ith grassy meadows encircled by tall trees as far as the eyes can see, Namblan in the Pulwama district of Jammu & Kashmir is a picture perfect village.

And in the pleasant weather it's no wonder 65-year-old Zulaikha sits on the grass in front of her kotah (mud and wood house) in the afternoon hours, busy in stitching a skullcap.

For it's not every day that she gets an order for a skullcap – that too from a man who lives nearly 150 km from her village.

Though Zulaikha does not earn as much as she used to, she is happy for any orders to stitch skullcaps. It is work that gives her hope the tradition of making skullcaps will continue for a while.

**Gujjar women's skullcap – a cultural and religious identity**

The major ethnic communities living in Jammu and Kashmir all have their own distinct attire from Kashmiris to Gujjars, Bakerwal, Pahari and Dogras.

Women from the Gujjar and Bakerwal communities, which form the third largest ethnic group in the region, stand out. They wear traditional caps that are totally different from ordinary skullcaps.

Stitched from a piece of cloth, the cap – locally known as topi – is then embroidered with colourful threads, similar to the one Zulaikha was embellishing with simple designs.

“Whether it's young girls below 10 or older

There was a time when women in every household were busy making these skullcaps,” she said, even as her fingers deftly embroidered the cap

The young girls are of the view that society will discriminate against them on the basis of wearing old-fashioned skullcaps

women above 80, women have been wearing topi as a representation of our tradition and culture. It covers our hair too, which is also important in our religion,” said Zulaikha, who is a Muslim.

About three decades ago making skullcaps, mostly for the women of affluent families, was common among the Gujjars. But times are changing.

**Changing trends, disappearing tradition**

Zulaikha, who has been making these skullcaps since she was 18, has observed their

traditions and traditional attire disappearing, especially in the last decade.

“There was a time when women in every household were busy making these skullcaps,” she said, even as her fingers deftly embroidered the cap. “The tradition is now vanishing slowly.”

**She attributed the change to global fashion trends that are attracting younger people.**

True to her words, many young girls from her village did not have their hair covered by a topi, yet were reluctant to say why.

They are impressed by the contemporary fashion, according to Shazia Choudhary, a national television anchor who continues to wear the topi even while on TV.

“The young girls are of the view that society will discriminate against them on the basis of wearing old-fashioned skullcaps,” she said.

**Diminishing income**

The change in fashion is affecting the household incomes of women of Nimblan.

“I wish I could earn the same amount of money making these skullcaps that I earned in my twenties,” said Zulaikha with a sigh.

Her neighbours Suraiya and Saleema, who have been making skullcaps for decades, agreed.

Earlier the women were constantly making these skullcaps so that there was an abundant stock and a buyer could pick the colours of her choice. Now that the orders are so few and far between, the women make caps only after they get an order. So they make caps of fabric and colours as specified by their customers.

A decade ago, a Gujjar woman could earn Rs 5,000 to 7,000 per month – which was quite sufficient for the community in these villages. But now they earn a maximum of Rs 3,000, which is not often.

**Towards keeping the tradition alive**

The Gujjar women who continue to make the skullcaps said that the women of their community must wear the caps again to continue the tradition.

The women suggested that the administration should conduct cultural programmes – both locally and across the country – so that people would appreciate their rich tradition.

“Though the government authorities and NGOs claim that they're making efforts to save traditional culture, nothing has been done for our community,” Showkat Ahmad, a Gujjar social activist, said.

Danish Ali Tedwa, president of Gujjar and Bakerwal Youth Welfare, Pulwama, said that the community as well as the administration should work to revive the traditional topi.

“Government must organise cultural programmes so that the younger generation develops an interest towards our traditional attire,” said Tedwa.

Perhaps fashion designers could make it an accessory in haute couture to revive the traditional women's skullcaps of the Gujjars and Bakerwals.



# Kashmir University celebrates World Yoga Day

Mehroob Mushtaq

International Yoga Day was observed on Wednesday with a huge participation of students and authorities from the main campuses of the University of Kashmir.

The event was organized by the Department of Student Welfare in collaboration with the Department of Physical Education and Sports Sciences. It aimed to promote the physical and mental well-being of the university community through the practice of yoga.

The day began with an early morning yoga session in which participants gathered on the university's lush green lawns. Renowned yoga instructors from Srinagar were present to guide the participants through various yoga asanas and breathing exercises.

The participants were of all ages from young students to senior faculty members. The event served as a great opportunity for everyone to come together and experience the benefits of yoga which is known for its ability to improve physical fitness reduce stress and enhance mental clarity.

After the yoga session there were informative sessions conducted by experts



highlighting the significance of yoga and its various forms. The participants were educated about the importance of regular yoga practice and were given tips on how to incorporate yoga into their daily lives.

Speaking on the occasion the Vice-Chancellor (Prof. Nilofer Khan) of the university expressed her gratitude to all the participants and organizers for making the event a grand success. She emphasised the theme of this year's International Day of

Yoga, which focuses on the idea of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'. She said that the youth of J&K have a wonderful ability to raise public awareness about the value of Yoga and stressed that the University will provide full assistance in this endeavour.

Dr Nisar A Mir, Registrar of KU, chaired over the International Day of Yoga celebrations and encouraged students to continue practising Yoga with the same zeal and gain its numerous advantages, particularly Yoga Asanas that lead to inner serenity, power, and self-discovery. He thanked DPES and NSS for hosting the IDY every year at the University.

Yoga instructors including Danishta Mushtaq from Physical Education College, Ganderbal, and Zahoor ul Haq, Lecturer DPES, imparted training to young students on key aspects of Yoga.

Mirza Irshad Hussain Baig, Section Officer, DPES (Director of Physical Education and Sports ) and Riyaz Ahmad from NSS, coordinated the event under the supervision of Coordinator DPES/NSS, Mussavir Ahmad.

## Erratic climatic is adversely impacting crops in Kashmir

Yasmeena Rasheed

Manzoor Ahmad 52 year old has a little hope of growing any crop this year due to erratic climate which stucks Kashmir all seasons. Flooded in 2014 has already wreaked havoc upon the agriculture production. He was expecting for better harvest this year but climate change is projecting a shadow over his crops.

Jammu Kashmir Union Territory saw a major drop in the number of snow spells this winter with the valley experts terming it as a weathervane of coming prolonged warmer months.

Mohammad Yousuf Dar's apple crops deteriorated last year due to unseasonal and massive snowfall in the last week of October across valley.

"Farmers across South Kashmir were in despair as heavy snow buried apple trees in thousands of acres of orchards. With

fruits strewn on the ground, trees could not be seen as they scuttled by the weight of apple," says Mohammad Yousuf dar.

In 2019, Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change reported that "Land degradation is a driver of climate change through emissions of Green House Gases (GHG's) and reduced rates of carbon intake."

Farooq Ahmad, a saffron grower said that, "The production of saffron has declined now due to the unusual weather pattern. Every year there are more loses than gains. The unpredictable weather events have severely impacted the production of traditional variety of all crops in the valley".

By 2041, the world will witness the average temperature improving by 1.5 degree Celsius, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has said in its bleak forecast in its report Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis.

## J&K battling extreme weather shifts

Sajidah Masalli

In a significant development, the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory experienced a significant rise in temperature during the summer and a sharp drop during the winter, marking the hottest day and coldest night within the same year. This extreme weather pattern has raised concerns among experts who view it as a clear indicator of prolonged warmer months to come. Notably, the previous winter saw a less number of snow spells, further reinforcing the predictions of valley experts.

The region's climate has undergone drastic changes, with spring starting earlier in the calendar year than before, following an extended period of time. Faizan Arif, an independent weather forecaster, emphasizes the gravity of the situation, stating, "Climate change is a real killer. Its impacts, though often invisible, claim thousands of lives every year, directly or indirectly. The rising temperatures have disrupted our atmospheric conditions, enabling it to hold

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MERC TIMES



## Urbanization threatens livelihood of rag pickers as construction boom hits cities

Ishfan Dar

At a scrapyards site in Raj Bagh, Srinagar, Mohammad Shabbir, 27, gives livelihood to around 15-20 people working for him as rag pickers.

Mohammad Shabbir came in Kashmir as a rag picker with his uncle when he was 13 years old in the year 2009. Today Shabbir owns his own garbage site working as a dealer.

"If one exhibits unwavering honesty and exerts diligent effort, the possibilities of achievement become boundless." Said Shabbir. He further said, "This particular occupation was not a deliberate choice on my part; rather, it was the prevailing circumstances and environment that guided me towards embracing this job."

In Kashmir, collecting garbage or solid waste materials is a lifeline for rag pickers coming from different parts of the country. Rag pickers, often hailing from marginalized communities and facing socio-economic hardships, exhibit remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in their pursuit of sustenance.

Shabbir, working as a dealer for over a decade, giving livelihood to other rag pickers. Today, the city's relentless drive towards urban development has now posed a significant threat to his way of life. As construction projects continue to



reshape the city, the demand for land and infrastructure has intensified, leading to the displacement of many like Shabbir.

"In the coming months, I will quit this job. I will go to my village and start my own small business—a general store or become a car driver," said Shabbir.

But the rapid pace of urbanization and construction in Raj Bagh area due to the introduction of tuition centres, hotels for tourism purpose have left rag pickers like Shabbir and others in a state of uncertainty, as their decade-long work hangs in the balance. The construction of buildings, sprawling malls, and the transformation of once-familiar landscapes have instilled fear in these individuals, compelling them to contemplate a shift in their livelihoods.

"I have been duly notified by the landowner to vacate the premises as they

intend to construct a building for rental purposes". Said Shabbir

As cities continue to expand and urban development remains a priority, it is essential for policymakers and urban planners to consider the implications on these marginalized communities. Strategies must be implemented to ensure their livelihoods are protected and viable alternatives are provided to mitigate the adverse effects of urbanization.

In the face of these challenges, rag pickers like Shabbir and others alike find themselves at a crossroads, forced to make

difficult decisions about their future. The construction boom may symbolize progress for some, but for the rag pickers who have toiled for years, it signifies a threat to their way of life. The ultimate question that remains is whether society can find a balance between urbanization and the preservation of livelihoods, ensuring that no one is left behind in the process.

**I have been duly notified by the landowner to vacate the premises as they intend to construct a building for rental purposes**

## Young Kupwara poet writes about drug addiction, suicidal trends

Faizan Qureshi

In a remarkable literary effort, 24-year-old Qurat Ul Ain from Vodhpura Shahbaz New Colony in Kupwara has published two poetry books addressing the critical issues of drug addiction and the alarming rise in suicidal tendencies among the youth in the region.

Qurat, a dedicated writer with a master's degree in Economics from the University of Kashmir, spoke with the reporter about her books, published by Robin Barren publication. Through her evocative verses, she draws attention to the pervasive drug addiction crisis gripping the valley, where an increasing number of young people find their lives consumed by drugs, leaving behind devastation and shattered dreams.



**Qurat's poetry aims to evoke a sense of collective responsibility and emphasize the value of human life. Her profound works serve as a powerful call to action, urging individuals to reflect on and combat these troubling trends.**

Her second book, titled "Suicide," bravely tackles the distressing surge in self-harm incidents in the region.

Qurat sheds light on the complex factors and underlying concerns that contribute to these tragic occurrences. Disturbed by the rising number of suicides for various reasons, she hopes to raise awareness and prompt society to address this critical issue.

Qurat's poetry aims to evoke a sense of collective responsibility and emphasize the value of human life. Her profound works serve as a powerful call to action, urging individuals to reflect on and combat these troubling trends.

Her poetic voice serves as a beacon of hope, inspiring others to confront these pressing challenges head-on and work collectively towards a brighter future for the region's young generation.



# Kashmiri craft persons are keeping ‘Sang Taraashi’ tradition alive

Numan Bhat

The art of stone carving has a long-standing tradition in the beautiful valley of Kashmir in India. For centuries Kashmiri stone carvers known as Sang Taraash have been creating intricate designs on various types of stones showcasing their exceptional craftsmanship and artistic skills.

The origins of stone carving in Kashmir can be traced back to the 9th century when it flourished under the reign of the Hindu king Lalitaditya Muktapida. The art form reached its pinnacle during the ruling period of the Mughals in the 15th and 16th centuries. The Mughal rulers had a great admiration for the intricate stone carvings and introduced new techniques and designs which further enriched the art form.

The Sang Taraash work involves using various types of stones like marble sandstone and limestone which are abundantly available in the region. These stones are meticulously handcrafted into exquisite artwork employing techniques like relief carving undercutting and engraving. The carvings often depict floral patterns intricate latticework calligraphic inscriptions and scenes from nature.

One of the most iconic examples of Sang Taraash art is found in the architectural marvels of the Mughals particularly in the Mughal gardens of Kashmir. The intricate stone carvings can be seen in the walls ceilings arches pillars and domes of these magnificent structures. The delicate lattice patterns create a mesmerizing play of light and shadow adding to the ethereal beauty of the gardens.

The Sang Taraash work goes beyond architectural ornamentation. It extends to the creation of various decorative and utility items like vases bowls plates tabletops and jewelry boxes. These pieces often feature intricate motifs and patterns showcasing the mastery of the stone carvers in creating detailed and delicate designs on hard surfaces.

These stone carvers are called Sang Taraash in Kashmiri, and they are a dying breed.

Stone carving has been an important part of life in Kashmir, whether it is the veneering technique used in building Kashmiri homes, the curbstones used in pathways or the use of stones in gardens, fountains or other such special structures.

“The young generation will not work with stones any longer; it is a job that requires patience and diligence,”

Bashir Ahmed Mir said. “Young people are running short on both these days.” He apprenticed with a stone carving for four years before venturing out on his own.



“Allah rest his soul, my father brought me here.” Fathers used to make men out of their sons back then. Now I see cellphones, motorcycles, and boys. No men.” He added.

Carving tools for the craft include mallet, chisel and a metal straight edge (for making flat surfaces). The chisels are of various types depending upon their use. They all need to be sharp, though. In Sempora, different types of stones are carved: ‘Kene Kaen’, veneering stones, are produced in bulk. These are used in veneers and plinths. ‘Braande Kaen’, or curbstones, are also produced in large numbers. ‘Kaanas’, a specially designed stone that is used in fountains and other special structures, and millstones are also made on order.

The Sang Taraash art form has faced several challenges over the years. Political unrest economic difficulties and changing tastes have led to a decline in the demand for stone-carved products. However efforts are being made to revive and promote the art form by organizations and individuals passionate about preserving Kashmir’s cultural heritage.

Today Sang Taraash work is not just limited to Kashmir but has gained recognition and popularity worldwide. The exquisite stone carvings are admired by art connoisseurs and collectors alike. They serve as a reminder of the rich cultural legacy of Kashmir and the extraordinary skill of its stone carvers.

Mohammad Ramzan, a 45-year old stone carver from Zewan, has been giving shapes to rocks since he was a kid. “My father was also a Sang



Sang Taraash work goes beyond architectural ornamentation. It extends to the creation of various decorative and utility items like vases bowls plates tabletops and jewelry boxes

Taraash. I used to go with him to his workshop, and with his mallet & chisel, I would bang at stones. I love this work.” Mohammad said.

Working with Kanaas. The work is tough and requires sturdiness and power, as well as a sharp eye and patience.

The Sang Taraash Association, a union of sorts of the stone carvers has been demanding a dispensary to be set up near the workshop. The work is dangerous and injuries, though not common, are possible.

The government seems least interested. Although the sales are going down, stone still is a very important part of our lives, and the Sang Taraash is the master of the stone.

The stone carvers of Kashmir continue to showcase their craftsmanship and keep the legacy of Sangtaraash alive. Their dedication and skill contribute to the rich cultural heritage of the region and add a touch of elegance and charm to any space adorned with their beautiful stone carvings.



Contd. from P3

## Erratic climatic

“Climate change is making farming difficult for us. Our crops need set temperature, rainfall and snowfall but unfortunately in recent times with changing climate. The crops are suffering, untimely snowfall damaged our crops last year also which is devastating for a farmer who is dependent on crops only with no crop insurance we are at the mercy of Allah,” says Nasir Ahmad a local farmer

In 2016, the State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) stated that Kashmir has witnessed a rise in temperature of 1.45 degree Celsius over the last two decades. This rise in temperature is melting the glaciers of Kashmir which might lead to scarcity of water and decrease in temperature productivity in coming year. It also revealed that the quantity of snowfall has reduced even in forest areas of Fakeer Gujri, located in outskirts of Srinagar.

A research study conducted by Prof. Shakil Ahmad Romshoo, Vice Chancellor of IUST on “Implications of shrinking cryosphere changing climate change on the streamflows of Lidder catchment in the Upper Indus Basin” showed that due to rise in temperature, the glacier surface area in the basin is depleting at a rapid rate.

“The stream flows have the potential to adversely affect agriculture, energy production, tourism and even domestic water supplies,” explains Prof. Romshoo in this study.

Faizan Arif, an independent weather forecaster says that, “Climate change is a real killer. People may not be able to see it, but directly or indirectly it kills thousands of individuals every year. The temperature rise has disturbed the conditions in our atmosphere, and now, air can hold more moisture. IPCC in its

reports has continuously warned of the deadly consequences of climate change. The extreme events are going to increase, there is no doubt about it. Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh are no exception. In fact, the Himalayas are warming at a much more rapid pace than other parts. If we take things into account since 2014, hundreds of extreme events have happened. People may say that these extreme events used to happen in the past and there is nothing new in it. We saw the 2014 floods - one of the worst in Kashmir's history and also the costliest disaster in India. We saw a number of frequent, more than 30, cloudbursts in 2015. Six month long dry weather is 2016, with a few months recording zero rainfall. A number of times water level of Jhelum crossing the danger mark at Ram Munshi Bagh since 2014. Kishtwar cloudburst that happened last year in which 7 people lost their lives and 19 people are missing till date. 2018 November snowfall in which horticulture and agriculture sectors faced huge losses. 2019 November snowfall broke all-time records. 2021 October snowfall in south Kashmir parts. 2022 March for Srinagar and many other locations was the warmest since at least after 1892”

“These extreme events due to human-induced global warming are going to increase furthermore in Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, just like in every other part of the world. There is still some time left to bring down these temperatures. We have to cut our carbon dioxide emissions. The use of clean energy should be emphasized. Everything starts with a bit, a blizzard starts with a gentle snowflake, this will also start slowly and over the years, me, you, and everyone will succeed in bringing down the temperatures. The water level of Jhelum is hitting all-time lowest figures. And if we don't do anything about it, water scarcity may arise. Farmers will be hit most. People will be left without drinkable water. There are no second thoughts in it. The action needs to be

taken at the Global level, but it starts with every single individual” he added.

Another study conducted by Dr. Bilal Ahmad Bhat, an Associate Professor in faculty of Fisheries, SKAUST Kashmir named as “Local Perception of Climate Changes, COVID-19 and their Impact on Birds in Jammu and Kashmir” reported that the impact of climate change has been seen in many aspects, e.g. human health, ecosystem health, biodiversity, food production, economic growth, tourism and water resources. The study revealed that climate change is viewed as one of the global problems which affect directly or indirectly the structure of the environment. The world is more concerned about the fact that the changes taking place today have speeded up because of human activities worldwide.

“Streamflow response to shrinking glaciers under changing climate in Lidder valley Kashmir Himalayas” research conducted by Prof. Shakil Ahmad Romshoo explained that in Kashmir Himalayas, the indicators of global warming are clear and loud in terms of increase in temperature, enhanced receding of snow and glacier resources, decrease in snow precipitation and depleting snowfall.

Dr. Mohammad Muslim, Assistant Professor, Department of Environmental Sciences, University of Kashmir says “Two forces are responsible for the climatic change which includes natural and anthropogenic forces. Anthropogenic activities increases the Carbon level which ultimately leads to increase in Green House Gases (GHG's) causing climatic variability in the atmosphere. Moreover climate change is mainly drawn by regional variations”.

“We have to adhere mitigative and adaptative measures to balance the climatic change, which can have strong implications on people living in Himalayan regions with strong regional variability in the atmosphere” he added.

## J&K battling

more moisture. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports have consistently warned about the lethal consequences of climate change, and it is undeniable that extreme events will continue to escalate. Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh are no exceptions to this global phenomenon.”

Arif further warns that Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh will witness a further increase in extreme weather events due to human-induced global warming, just like every other part of the world. Urging immediate action, he emphasizes the need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and prioritize the use of clean energy sources.

Local farmers have also been grappling with the repercussions of climate change.

Nasir Ahmad, a farmer in region, laments, “Climate change is making farming increasingly challenging for us. Our crops rely on specific temperature, rainfall, and snowfall patterns, but with the changing climate, these conditions have become unpredictable. Last year, untimely snowfall devastated our crops, leaving us, as farmers, entirely dependent on our crops with no insurance. We are at the mercy of Allah.”

The adverse effects of climate change extend to traditional crops as well. Farooq Ahmad, a saffron grower, expresses his concern, saying, “The production of saffron has suffered due to the unusual weather patterns. Every year, losses outweigh gains. The unpredictable weather events have severely impacted the cultivation of traditional crops in the valley.”

Dr. Mohammad Muslim, Assistant Professor in the Department of

Environmental Sciences at the University of Kashmir, sheds light on the underlying causes of climate change, explaining, “Two forces are responsible for climatic changes: natural and anthropogenic forces. Anthropogenic activities, such as increasing carbon levels, result in higher concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHGs), leading to atmospheric climatic variability. Moreover, climate change is influenced by regional variations.”

Dr. Muslim stresses the urgent need for mitigative and adaptive measures to address the impact of climate change. He emphasizes that such measures are crucial, particularly for people residing in the Himalayan regions, where the atmospheric variability is particularly pronounced. By implementing strategies to balance and counteract climate change, the region can mitigate the potential consequences and safeguard the well-being of its inhabitants.



**International Day against Drug Abuse  
and Illicit Trafficking**

# Uniting against substance abuse

**Syed Batool Andrabi**

SP College launched a series of programs to mark the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, demonstrating its commitment to raising awareness and combating the grave issue. The event, held within and outside the campus, witnessed the active participation of 50 dedicated NSS volunteers.

Inaugurated by Dr Ghulam Jeelani Qureshi, Principal of SP College, alongside NSS Programme Officers Dr Nadia Shah and Dr Syed Rashid Maqsood, the event aimed to educate students and the wider community about the severe consequences of drug abuse.

As part of the initiative, NSS volunteers visited local schools, where they engaged with students through informative



lectures in classrooms and morning assemblies. The volunteers passionately emphasized the social and medical implications associated with substance abuse, encouraging students to make informed decisions and lead drug-free lives.

Interactive discussions formed a crucial component of the sessions, enabling students to actively participate in the fight against drug abuse. The volunteers sensitized them to the detrimental effects of drugs on personal well-being, relationships, and society as a whole.

Furthermore, the NSS volunteers organized various engaging activities, distributing informative pamphlets and brochures that highlighted the consequences of drug abuse and the support systems available for those in need. These efforts aimed to empower students and foster a sense of responsibility, equipping them to advocate for a drug-free society.

The NSS volunteers shed light on the urgency of combatting drug abuse and illicit trafficking, and the series of programs underscored the importance of collective action in building a healthier and safer society.



## KU holds rally to raise awareness about risks of drug abuse

**Uzma Shabnam**

To commemorate the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, the University of Kashmir organized a rally in the main campus of the university. The rally's goal was to raise awareness about the risks of drug addiction. Many students, faculty members, and non-teaching staff members participated in the rally, which was titled "Unite Against Drugs," marching through the main campus while carrying placards and shouting slogans against drug abuse.

The Department of Student Welfare organized the "Unite Against Drugs" rally. The objective of the event was to alert students and faculty members about the detrimental effects of drug addiction. Abstaining from drugs was also stressed as valuable.

Dean of Students Welfare Prof. Aneesa Shafi, who flagged off the rally, stated in her introductory remarks that the diverse mix of participants in the program symbolizes the need for togetherness and joint effort to nip the evil of drug misuse in the bud. Referring to educational institutions' critical role, Prof. Aneesa reaffirmed the University's commitment to "creating a drug-free environment with the active participation of students in such awareness campaigns."

According to the official spokesperson of the university, Prof. Nilofer Khan, Vice Chancellor of KU, emphasized the critical role that academic institutions play in combating the "scourge" of drug abuse. She exhorted students to take the helm in drug de-addiction campaigns and to make a strong case to the general public for the necessity of taking action against drug abuse as a society. The "scourge"

of drug abuse must be addressed by academic institutions, according to Prof. Nilofer Khan "Students must lead drug de-addiction campaigns to send a message to society about the need for a collective effort to combat the menace of drug addiction."

Furthermore, it added that Dr. Nisar A. Mir, the Registrar of the University of Kashmir, praised the institution's proactive stance on addressing pressing social issues like drug abuse. Dr. Nisar said, "The University of Kashmir has been at the forefront of addressing pressing social issues like drug abuse by holding such mass awareness programs." He applauded the DSW for organizing the event and enlisting participation from students on campus.

Participants in the rally expressed their determination to combat drug addiction. "It's important for us to come together as a community to fight against drug abuse and create a safer environment for everyone," said a student, Basharat Khaki, during the rally.

Every year on June 26th, the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking is observed to increase public awareness of the problem of drug abuse and the illicit drug trade worldwide.

The "Unite Against Drugs" rally delivered several important messages, including the need to educate young people about the risks associated with drug addiction, the significance of seeking help for those who are struggling with addiction, and the necessity of a coordinated effort to combat drug abuse. Participants expressed their gratitude for the chance to come together and spread awareness about drug addiction, and the event was a success.





## Wayil bridge serves as important link between Kashmir and Ladakh

Nahida Mushtaq

The first semi-arch viaduct bridge at Kangan emerged as an important link between Kashmir and Ladakh, prompting efforts by the World Bank-funded Jhelum Tawi Flood Recovery Project (JTFRP) and the Government of Jammu and Kashmir. Appreciated.

According to the experts and engineers of the bridge, the World Bank-funded Technical Assistance and Quality Audit Control (TAQAC) bridge construction has received an amount of Rs 23.79 crore under the World Bank-funded JTFRP. Approval was granted. The construction of a major bridge over Nala Sindh in the Ganderbal district of central Kashmir is now becoming a major focus and is helping the administration to ease travel on the Srinagar-Leh highway.

Assistant Executive Engineer (AEA) JTFRP Shaukat Ali Shah played an important role in conceptualizing the bridge. He said that it was heartening to see that the project was finally completed and people were benefiting from it. Recalling his ideation days on the project, he said that he accompanied the TAQAC technical staff to several locations across the country to understand various other technical nuances of this type of project. He said that the project has undergone three levels of quality checks including environmental, civil and mechanical which made it a safe project.

He said that the span of this viaduct bridge is 110 meters and the weight of the superstructure is 700 metric tons of steel. Earlier, he said, all attempts to build a bridge on the same foundation pattern had failed.

The construction of the bridge was a long-standing demand of locals and commuters as it is the only major link connecting Srinagar with Leh.



Mushtaq Ahmed, a local of Vail Ganderbal, said, "This was our long-standing demand for the past many years." No one cared. The pending work under the bridge used to create a lot of traffic tension in this section. Not only the loss will have to be borne, but the pilgrims and tourists coming to different areas here will also have to bear the loss.

The World Bank provides financing and services to low- and middle-income countries to support development and transformation. Development projects are undertaken by borrowing countries following certain rules and procedures to ensure that the money reaches its intended target.

Local partners have also praised the government. He said that the construction of a permanent bridge over Nala Indus at Wail will reduce the traffic problems due to which passengers and tourists are facing difficulties.

Motorists and commuters have come to great relief after the Vayal Bridge in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district was opened for traffic.

Better connectivity to Wyalbridge will

undoubtedly boost tourism and pilgrimage activities in the area and further strengthen the local economy.

Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha has expressed his satisfaction over the successful completion of the project and the relief of the people. "Wail Bridge is not just a steel and concrete structure but a symbol of connectivity, development and convenience," he said. It will pave the way for trade, tourism, and overall socio-economic development in the region."

It is worth mentioning that Srinagar. In a major development for commuters travelling on the Leh Highway, the two-lane steel arch truss bridge at Vail in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district was inaugurated by Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha and opened for traffic. It was a momentous occasion after inaugurating the main Vail Bridge which spans the Indus Canal along the Srinagar-Leh Highway.

The two-lane bridge sanctioned under the Jammu Tawi Flood Reconstruction Project (JTFRP) for Rs 23.79 crore is a remarkable engineering feat in the valley.

Engineer TAQAC Abid Bararo said, "We have tried our best to present everything technically at its best. This bridge has become an engineering marvel so far. We hope this will bring a lot of relief to the people and the passengers."

The bridge is supported by a well-designed foundation with an arch-type steel girder spanning 110 m in length and a width of 10.50 m. The combined length of the approach roads leading to the bridge is 330 meters.

It should be noted that Vail Bridge is a proof of the government's determination to improve infrastructure and connectivity in the region. Its importance resonates in the hearts of the people of Ganderbal and beyond. It is a sign of a bright future of unhindered travel and economic growth and prosperity.

## Basit's journey to Mumbai Indians inspires youth in JK

Nuzhat Masoodi

Basit Bashir Lone, a 19-year-old net bowler from North Kashmir's Kupwara district, has made history by securing a place in the prestigious Mumbai Indians team of the Indian Premier League (IPL). His selection has not only made his family and community proud but has also raised hopes for the youth of Kashmir.

Born in a family of cricketers, Basit was inspired by his father Bashir Ahmad, uncle and siblings who used to play cricket at the district level. His interest in cricket was noticed by his father when he held a bat for the first time. Basit started playing cricket professionally at the age of 16 in 2017 and focused on bowling. With his hard work and dedication, he soon

became famous in his locality.

In 2018 Basit was selected for the Jammu Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) summer camps conducted by Indian fast bowler Irfan Pathan, who was the mentor-cum-coach of the Jammu Kashmir cricket team. He also played under sixteen tournaments at the national level, where his performance remained consistently good.

In the same year Basit was called for the Mumbai Cricket Association of BCCI special camp and played in the under-19 cricket tournaments. His journey continued and in 2021 he received a call for giving a trial for Punjab Kings.

"I couldn't believe it and before saying yes I called my coach and he said it is good news, you should go," Basit said.

Basit is a product of MRF pace academy and was a part of the Punjab Kings' net bowling contingent in the recently concluded IPL 2022. He has now signed with the Mumbai Indians IPL team as a net bowler.

Basit's success has inspired the youth of Kashmir and his selection has raised hopes for the state's talented youngsters. His story is proof that there is immense talent waiting to be discovered and honoured with the government's efforts. As Basit puts it, "Talent such as mine is everywhere in Kashmir, but we need to work hard and find them."

Basit, who was always fiercely determined and driven to succeed, while reflecting on his childhood said, "Children used to have toys like toy trains, toy cars, dolls and teddies but I only found bats and balls in my cupboard," he said.

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