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## Young female graduate starts online fashion hub



**Sayima Ahmad**

A young graduate, Snober from Central Kashmir's Ganderbal district has started her own clothing and fashion start-up to sell the designer clothing items online.

Snober has been a hard worker from her school days only when she would teach computer at a private institute in hometown. "I still remember how difficult it was to manage studies during my 11th and 12th classes in conjunction with teaching computer at an institute in Ganderbal," she said.

Before establishing this online start-up, JK Fashion Hub, she has worked with number of management companies throughout her college. The experience from the previous jobs has made way for her to establish this start up. "My first-hand experience with a management job was through a company called Royal Kashmir, which in my opinion is one of the finest Kashmiri companies in the field. I worked with them for two years. For sometime I also worked with Radio Kashmir as well."

They have a small team of ten friends' who work on designing and stitching of clothing to make a fine piece of art. "The nature of our business is home based – we pick a design, customize it to our liking and then all of our members share the work load," she tells us. "Our squad strength at present is 10, all of them, my friends. Orders are distributed equally among all the members. We stitch them as per agreed designs and then the boys in our team deliver them to various location," Snober said.

Additionally, the team is looking beyond the business angle by organizing events in different parts of Central Kashmir especially Srinagar and Ganderbal but they eye on reaching to whole Kashmir for a talent hunt.

"We have also started a youth based organization called 'Cash Event.' This is talent discovery group with fifteen active members currently. With their help we organize events that help youngsters to showcase their talent and skill."

Cash Event has about 80 budding artists, young and creative teenagers who make and showcase their art to inspire more young artists to collaborate.

## Season's first snowfall revives hope of tourist season

**Ifra Hassan**

Kashmir Valley received season's first snowfall bringing a sigh of relief for the locals especially the ones associated with tourism season. The MeT department had predicted moderate to heavy snowfall in higher reaches while light snow and rain in the plains in upcoming week.

With the season's first snowfall, Gulmarg, Pahalgam along with Pir Ki Gali and Pir Panjal range received the snow. However, Srinagar-Leh road and Mughal road were closed for vehicular traffic. For past two years, the tourism industry in Kashmir has witnessed the lowest footfall of tourists which has drastically plummeted the economy of this industry. This recent snowfall has however rejuvenated the hope of receiving tourists among locals.

"We have been suffering from

more than a year now and we have no other business except this. I have been a tourist guide from my childhood. I have not seen this industry suffering as it is now", said Abdul Rahim Ganie. "I hope this will be a good winter for tourism in Kashmir. We hope tourists would come here", he added.

With the first snowfall, some tourist have already reached Gulmarg where skiing is a major attraction of season. A tourist from Uttrakhand namely Dananjay Mundal, said, "I am visiting Kashmir for the first time after article 370 was abrogated. I feel happy and safe here. I request my friends and others who are planning to come, to visit Kashmir."

Local tourist guides and hoteliers have appealed government to put some efforts in helping the revival of this industry by starting the initiatives like the winter festival which can beckon more outsiders to visit the Valley.





# Charcoal-making picks up in Kashmir

Asif Amin

With the usual arrangements which includes the stocking up of essential items is done just ahead of winter, the making of charcoal is picking up pace across Kashmir region, where people mostly rely on Kangris (firepot) to keep themselves warm in winter.

The locals in a southern district, Anantnag say that, this is one of the arrangements done before the approach of cold conditions. Even with the availability of latest heating methods, traditional methods are still popular with the locals due to the frequent electricity outages.

The winter in Kashmir is harshest from December 21 to January 31, a period of

locally known as “Chillai Kalan”, during which temperatures fall drastically, often below freezing point.

“From the very young age, I have been making charcoal with the onset of winter. It helps us get through the winter”, said Mubeena, a housewife. She added that during winters there are frequent electricity outages and that ‘Kangris’ come in handy during the period.

Making charcoal involves burning of fallen leaves and twigs of trees accumulated mostly by women. The charcoal is known as ‘Czinne’ locally. The process involves charring of the collected material by a thick stick and water to douse off the flames, till the charcoal is made. The charcoal is then loaded in big bags mostly for personal consumption and at times to

be sold in urban pockets in the valley. The charcoal making process picks up during the months of October and November in rural areas.

During the winter season in Kashmir, frequent power cuts render the heating appliances useless and people only have “Kangri” to keep themselves warm. Kangri is ignited by adding charcoal which then gives the warmth for hours.

Ghulam Rasool, a labourer from the Aishmuqam area of the district said, “We make large quantities of charcoal and sell it in the market to make some money”, adding that in the winter season work opportunities are scarce due to the cold, so we make some money by selling the charcoal. “We sometimes go from house to house to sell it,” he said.

# Kangri: Important ‘asset’ in winters



Mubashir Bashir

As the winter is approaching, the Kangri sales in the valley have seen a spike. Six inches wide and encased in a wicker-frame, with two arms erected to handle the bowl supported on the back with strong wicker sticks, Kangri is a quite essential Kashmiri thing for winter.

Kangri making needs skill, labour and craftsmanship. Twigs are collected from deciduous shrubs, scraped and peeled and go through a process of soaking, drying

and dyeing and are finally woven around the bowl shaped earthenware.

The Kangri can cost anywhere from 50 to 3500 per piece depending upon the intricacy of the design and the work.

Besides being used for heating purposes, Kangri has become a popular handicraft as well. Kangri has deep roots in Kashmiri culture and its folklore. Just as a person is first greeted with a glass of water and sweets in other states, a Kashmiri host will greet you with the warmth of a Kangri. In the valley no celebration is complete without the gift of Kangri. Be it a marriage,

or the beginning of any ceremony, the warm heart of Kashmir, the Kangri is there to spread its warmth.

Besides the advantages, reports show that prolonged use of Kangri may result to Cancer, a heat-induced carcinoma, which is found in the abdomen and inner thighs.

With the increasing winter cold, modern heating equipment’s sales soar in markets and have

started replacing the traditional Kangri. The production of Kangris has declined over the years due to increase in availability of alternate heating equipments.





## Common cold, fever cases surging with onset of winter

**A**s the boon chilling winter is approaching in Kashmir amid the ongoing global pandemic, with that the people of Kashmir are witnessing a surge in cold cough and fever. Tanveer Ahmad covered this Vox-pop to know what people think about it.

### Aaqib Naseem:

People must maintain social distance and continue to follow the SOP's. Even though health officials are working on their toes to stop the spread of covid-19. So it is our primary responsibility to stick on the basics protocol to save ourselves and our beloved families.

### Asif Amin:

I think it's going to be a tough winter because of the pandemic. I worry about the students in coaching institutions that are often overcrowded, thus their can be more risk of transmission of the virus. They need to be extra cautious.

### Muzamil Ahmad Dar:

Corona virus has confined us to our homes, life in winters will be no different from the prevailing norms. The harsh conditions of winter will further force people to stay indoors. In a way it will help to maintain physical distancing.

### Yasir Ahmad:

People of Kashmir have taken this pandemic very lightly. In the beginning, people were very cautious and followed all SOP's. But now, coronavirus sounds like a joke to people. Winter has almost come, people should take all the necessary precautions as possible as there is an ever looming threat of a second wave.

### Sehr ul Nisa:

People with respiratory ailments may find it difficult during the winter. We need to take care of our elderly and take all precautions.

### Sabreena Mir:

As the first chills of winter arrive, it's highly possible that people can face influenza, cold cough and fever which are common symptoms of COVID 19. So we need to be more cautious.



## Police organizes sports festival in Bandipora



### Sheikh Sehar

**M**any sports lovers took part in a month-long sports festival organized by Jammu and Kashmir police in north Kashmir's Bandipora district.

A police official said a month-long event received an overwhelming response from participating youth and locals. He added the festival begun in October and concluded in the first week of November, "The festival was held across four sporting categories: cricket, football, Kabaddi, and sprinting," he said.

The games were played at Chittnar ground, SK sports stadium Bandipora and another adjacent playgrounds of the district.

Advisor RR Bhatnagar, who was accompanied by DGP Dilbagh Singh and other senior officials of police and civil administration, inaugurated the festival. "The main aim of the festival was to bring the youth to the mainstream as it plays a key role to prevent them from drug addiction and other social evils. We organized the event to engage the youth and inculcate a spirit of fair play in them," DGP said on the occasion.

The participants said such events allow them to showcase their talents, "We are grateful that Jammu and Kashmir Police organized this event in our district. It encouraged us as it was the best platform to showcase our talent," said a local youth Shabeer Ahmad.

In cricket, the final was played between BCC Bandipora and DPL. BCC Bandipora emerged as winners after defeating DPL by two wickets.

The winning team was awarded a cash prize of twenty thousand and the runners-up were awarded a cash prize of ten thousand.

In the football category, Sumbal FC defeated Bandipora FC in the finals.

In the sprinting category, first prize of ten thousand was awarded to Gulbadan Hikmatyar of Lar, Ganderbal, while second prize was awarded to Umar Farooq Bhat son of Farooq Ahmad Bhat of Hazratbal, Srinagar.

Meanwhile, the locals hoped police should hold such events regularly so that they can showcase their talent and learn a spirit of true sportsmanship.

## Kashmir University organizes week-long Mental Awareness program



**Tamana Aarizoo**

Department of Student Welfare (DSW), University of Kashmir organized a week long mental health awareness program starting from November 2. The program was conducted in association with various colleges across Kashmir Valley which include districts Baramulla, Ganderbal, Pulwama, Anantnag, Kulgam and Srinagar till 9th November 2020.

The event stressed on the mental well-being of newer generation along with issues, challenges and healing methodologies were discussed. Some of the key issues included, alarming rise in suicide cases, rampant use of drugs and misuse of medications.

Vice Chancellor of University, Prof Talat Ahmad was the chief guest on the occasion while Registrar Dr. Nisar Ahmad Mir was the guest of honour.

Dr. Abdul Majid, HOD Department of Psychiatry SKIMS Medical College was the featured subject matter expert who shared well researched data and information about the significance of emotional wellness and approaches to conquer anxiety and depression.

Dr. Nisar Ahmad Mir stressed on the need for mental wellness which he said people mostly take for granted. “Shocking mental health in Kashmir is two fold more in comparison with rest of the country. Existential crises

in itself is exceptionally depressing. A large portion of the students of universities and colleges right now in Kashmir are facing stress which is related to conflict,” he said.

Vice-Chancellor discussed the various studies and series of reports which he pointed out about

Kashmir presenting very grim and disturbing figures related to mental health especially women folk. He featured a survey which asserts Kashmir as the ‘saddest spot on earth’.

The program outlined some of the studies which have shown the significant mental issues looming large in Kashmiri society. For instance, a sample of about 1.8 million adults showed 45% of population having alarming mental distress.

Dr. Abdul Majid shared his personal insight of troubled childhood and inspired students to defeat obstacles of life boldly and urged them to help others who are in distress. He said that pandemic has exacerbated this issue.

Dr Majid pointed out that lack of empathy had caused the mental health problems to increase manifold. “I am pleased and salute Kashmiris who have come across the trauma of years long conflict and are still enduring it with bravery,” Majid said.

Additionally, the program has encouraged young people to come together, create awareness about mental issues and work collectively for the relative cause.



# Budgam village facing frequent power cuts

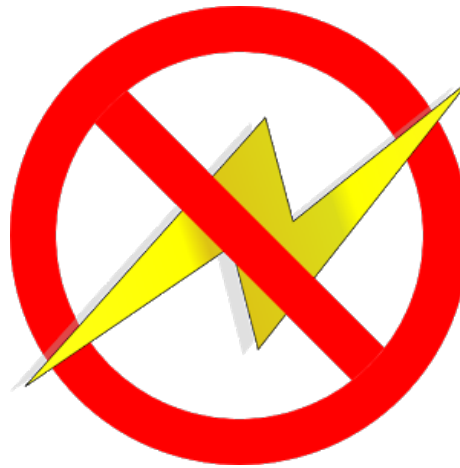
Imran Bashir

The residents of Khag village in central Kashmir's Budgam district are facing prolonged power cuts due to which they have to spend maximum hours in darkness in the ongoing winter.

The residents said the power scenario has worsened as the Power Development Department is resorting to unscheduled and frequent power cuts, "We face a shortage of electricity all year long. But in winter, prolonged and unscheduled power cuts make our life tough", said Zulfiqar Ali, a local resident.

Echoing him, Khursheed Ahmad, another local resident, told MERC Times that the condition of

electricity in their area had gone from bad to worse with the onset of winter. "We



already had limited electricity supply, but with the start of winter, the electricity is nowhere to be seen. Even when it is available, the voltage is very low." Ahmad added.

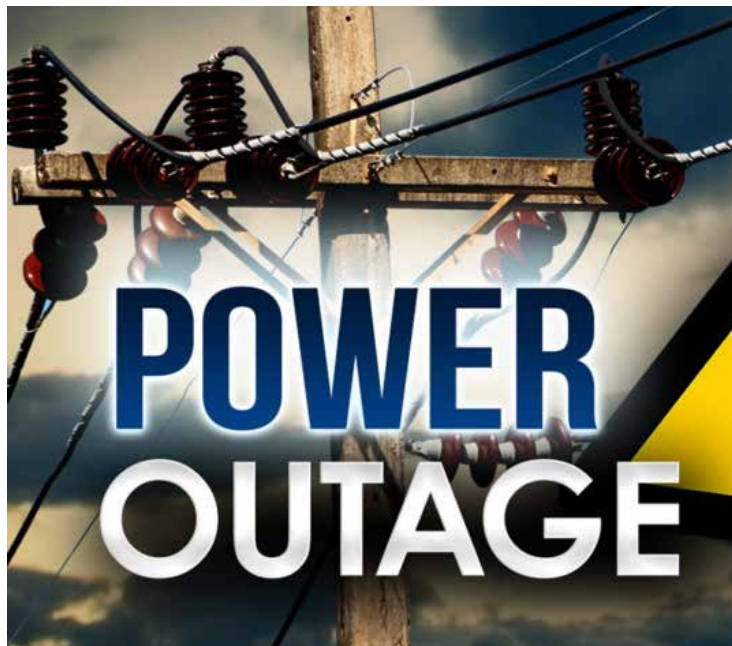
Several students who spoke to MERC

Times lamented at the unavailability of electricity, saying that

it had impacted their studies. Further they said, "We and our fellow students appear in 10th and 12th class board exams and some other students are preparing for recruitment exams. Lack of electricity is adversely affecting our preparation."

The power crisis in Kashmir has become a natural phenomena owing to the fact that the power department has failed to enhance its transmission capacities to meet the demand for electricity in boon chilling winter months when the temperature falls below zero. The extreme weather conditions and continuous electricity outage makes winter harder and difficult for Kashmiris

The authorities however could not be reached for comments despite repeated attempts.



## Frequent electricity outage making winter unbearable

Shahana Arshad

With the onset of winter in Kashmir, electricity outages has become a norm in most parts of the valley as Power Development Department has resorted to unscheduled power cuts, making life harder for the residents.

Ali Mohammad, 72, a resident of Budgam, said that being a patient of orthopaedics, he fears winters as joint pain gets worse, "I fear winter more than death, as the joint pain gets worse in cold weather and the electricity shortage adds to the misery," he said.

The worst sufferers are students as the frequent outages affect their studies, "With no electricity at home, I have to study under candlelight most of the times," a student said, adding that frequent outages often force to hit streets across valley.

However, the Power Development Department maintained

that a huge gap between supply and demand forces them to go for extra power cuts. "in addition, people use more load in winters than their agreements which forces the authorities to snap the supply to ensure no damage is caused to the infrastructure. Also, a lot of electricity is lost in transmission and distribution. T&D losses in Kashmir

valley are one of the highest in India," officials said.

According to the state economic survey report of 2015, electricity generated by the power projects is meagre and the free power or the amount of electricity that centre grants to Kashmir as royalty also accounts for very little.

The power Development Department (PDD) bears the brunt whenever there is heavy snowfall, in fact hide and seek of electricity increases every year and people suffer badly due to frequent power cuts.



## Man-animal conflict on rise, experts warn

Musaib Ismail

In the recent past, wild animals, particularly black bear and leopards have been making frequent intrusions into residential areas of Srinagar causing many injuries and fatalities.

Locals from Theed, Harwan say that there have been numerous incidents of Man-animal conflict where people have endured severe injuries and even lost lives.

“There have been countless incidents of black bear assaults in our area which have caused many deaths and loss of cattle. Some people who were attacked lost their vision while others were left physically impaired”, said Mohammed Salaam, a farmer said. “In October, an elderly woman was mauled to death by a black bear when she was working in the kitchen garden of her home”, he added.

The woman was rushed to SKIMS by the locals where doctors declared her dead on arrival. “We rushed the lady to SKIMS Soura in critical condition but

doctors declared her dead on arrival,” said Ghulam Mohammad Bhat who was accompanying the slain lady to hospital.

After a couple of days of this incident, another bear attack was reported from Dara which is another village on the outskirts of Srinagar city and just 5 kilometres from Theed.

Showkat Ahmad, 19, was attacked by a black bear when he was returning home. People from the vicinity came to his rescue but his limbs were damaged and he was subsequently hospitalized.

Experts cite the destruction the habitat of these wild animals as a reason for increasing man-animal confrontation.

Abdul Rahman Ganai, a senior officer in Forest Department said, “Human population is increasing at a rapid pace while the forest cover is decreasing. Infringement on their habitat has led to increase in the attacks by wild animals.”

However there have been incidents in which people have killed the wild animals at various places across Kashmir but experts denounce the brutality.

“Killing a wild animal is not the ultimate solution. About 80% animal attacks involve bears. Their assaults are primarily motivated by their need to protect themselves.” Ganai added.

There have been countless incidents of black bear assaults in our area which have caused many deaths and loss of cattle. Some people who were attacked lost their vision while others were left physically impaired





“People who want to steer clear of the traditional picnic spots in the Srinagar but want to stay close to city, Astanmarg should be on top of their list

## Astanmarg: Place of solace and tranquility

**Aadil Farooq**

Located in the Zabarwan range, Astanmag offers a stunning panoramic view of the city has emerged as a popular destination among city residents Astanmarg is just 20 kilometres or half an hour away from the heart of city, Lal Chowk. The spot furnishes a grand view of Dal Lake, Dargah, Hari Parbat fort and the old city.

Locals escape the busy city life to have a solace Astanmarg after driving past the Harwan garden.

“I along with my friends usually visit this breath-taking place to take a break from our hectic schedule.” said Faizan Bashir, an MBA student from

Ishber area.

People say that they love to have some leisure time in Astanmarg because of its calm environment.

A local resident Mir Adnan said, “Camping at this location is always enjoyable and impressive, this year we made couple of trips to Astanmarg because of lockdown.” The trees and big giant rocks suffuse the spot and add an extra point in the adventure,” Adnan adds.

In 2013, the Department of Tourism introduced paragliding from Astanmarg which truly spiked the number of adventure sport enthusiasts visiting the spot. Faqeer Gujri, another low key camping site is adjacent to the place.

“People who want to steer clear of the traditional picnic spots in the Srinagar but want to stay close to city, Astanmarg should be on top of their list”, said Ayaan Hassan, a local from Shalimar. “The place saw a lot of rush during the lockdown.”

