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## WAYIL BRIDGE EMERGES AS A VITAL LINK BETWEEN KASHMIR, LADAKH

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# PROGRESSING JAMMU & KASHMIR





# MISSION YOUTH: A boon for enhancing skills, promoting youth entrepreneurship

## Gets PM's award for Excellence in Public Administration

SRINAGAR: Mission Youth, a comprehensive youth development program, launched by Jammu and Kashmir government, has proved a boon in enhancing skills and entrepreneurship among the youth of the region.

The initiative has been successful in addressing the socio-economic issues faced by the youth of the UT by providing them a platform to optimally harness their skills in different potential entrepreneurial prospects, thereby contributing towards the growth and development of the region.

One of the primary objectives of Mission Youth was to address the issue of unemployment among youth which has been successful in creating employment opportunities by providing requisite training and support for entrepreneurship. Under the initiative, the government has established incubation centers and provided financial assistance to young entrepreneurs to start their own business ventures. This has not only created jobs but also boosted the economy of the region.

Muzafar Wani of Ramsoo, Ramban, always dreamt of owning a vehicle as he wanted to secure a respectable livelihood that could fulfill the needs of his family for a better tomorrow. Wani, who was working as a driver couldn't bear the expenses of his family including his two daughters with that meager salary.

"Sometimes I would not get work for many days. Many times I decided to stop my daughters from going to school. I always wanted to educate them but financial constraints always forced me to look another way," Wani said as he was revealing his struggle of 12 years while working for different vehicle owners on a daily basis.

Wani couldn't save enough money to purchase his own vehicle and the unfulfilled needs of the family had left him with a devastating feeling of frustration and depression. That is when the Mumkin scheme started by J&K Government through Mission Youth came to the rescue of Wani.

"In October last year, a friend of mine informed me about the 'Mumkin' livelihood scheme for unemployed youth and asked me to contact Mission Youth officials, Wani asserted. It was like a dream come true when I was informed about the benefits of the scheme," he said. An elated Wani said that he is satisfied being the happy owner of Tata Yodha and is earning enough to feed his family and educate his daughters.

In the present financial year, 4482 youth have been facilitated for self-employment under the scheme with the total financial support of 165 crores through the scheme banking partner and 16 crores as government contribution towards subsidy. Self-employment avenues



Mission Youth has succeeded in turning J-K youth into ambassadors of innovation, peace, and development through systematic interventions for youth engagement and outreach under six domains including livelihood generation, education/skill development, financial assistance, counseling/theory, sports, and recreation.

created under this scheme have instilled a sense of self-reliance and positivity among youth.

Similarly, the Tejaswani scheme is a specially tailored self-employment programme for the empowerment of young women of Jammu & Kashmir aimed to promote entrepreneurship among them.

This scheme helped them in attaining economic independence and improved their social status. All women entrepreneurs covered under the program have been given Entrepreneurship Development Program training through Jammu and Kashmir Entrepreneurship Development Institute (JKEDI), for attaining proper market skills and technical know-how for making their businesses viable.

Afshana of Ganderbal always dreamt of securing a respectable livelihood that could fulfill her personal and family's financial needs. She, before opting for Tejaswani, used to give home tuition to small children in her neighborhood. However, that was not sufficient to bear her personal expenses.

"Sometimes I would feel very distraught. I always wanted to serve my family and society but financial constraints always forced me to look another way," Afshana said as she was recalling her past.

Afshana established a poultry farm with the assistance provided under the Tejaswani scheme and now she is providing employment to five more fellow girls.

This financial year, assistance to more than 1588 women entrepreneurs has been provided under the scheme with a resultant employment generation of 3615. Total financial assistance to the tune of ₹ 102 crore has been sanctioned along with an amount of ₹ 12 crore as government contribution towards subsidy.

Likewise, Mission Youth started Youth Volunteer Program for youth engagement at the grassroots level and rolled out a special volunteer program in the name of YOUTH CLUBS. The initiative was approved by the Governing Body of Mission Youth, headed by the Lieutenant

Governor. The volunteer program was made fully operational on the eve of International Youth Day 2021 and 4500 youth clubs have been constituted under the program across the UT.

More than one lakh youth have been involved in volunteer activities through the program and got the opportunity to work through real challenges and make meaningful changes in society. Youth have been enabled to learn new social skills like collaboration and problem-solving that are vital to succeed in academics, the workplace, and their personal lives.

An amount of ₹ 7.25 crore has been provided as a grant in aid for specified activities of the youth clubs in the present financial year.

"We always felt alienated from the system but after joining the Youth Volunteer Program of Mission Youth, we are feeling part of policy making and governance," said Aqib from Pulwama.

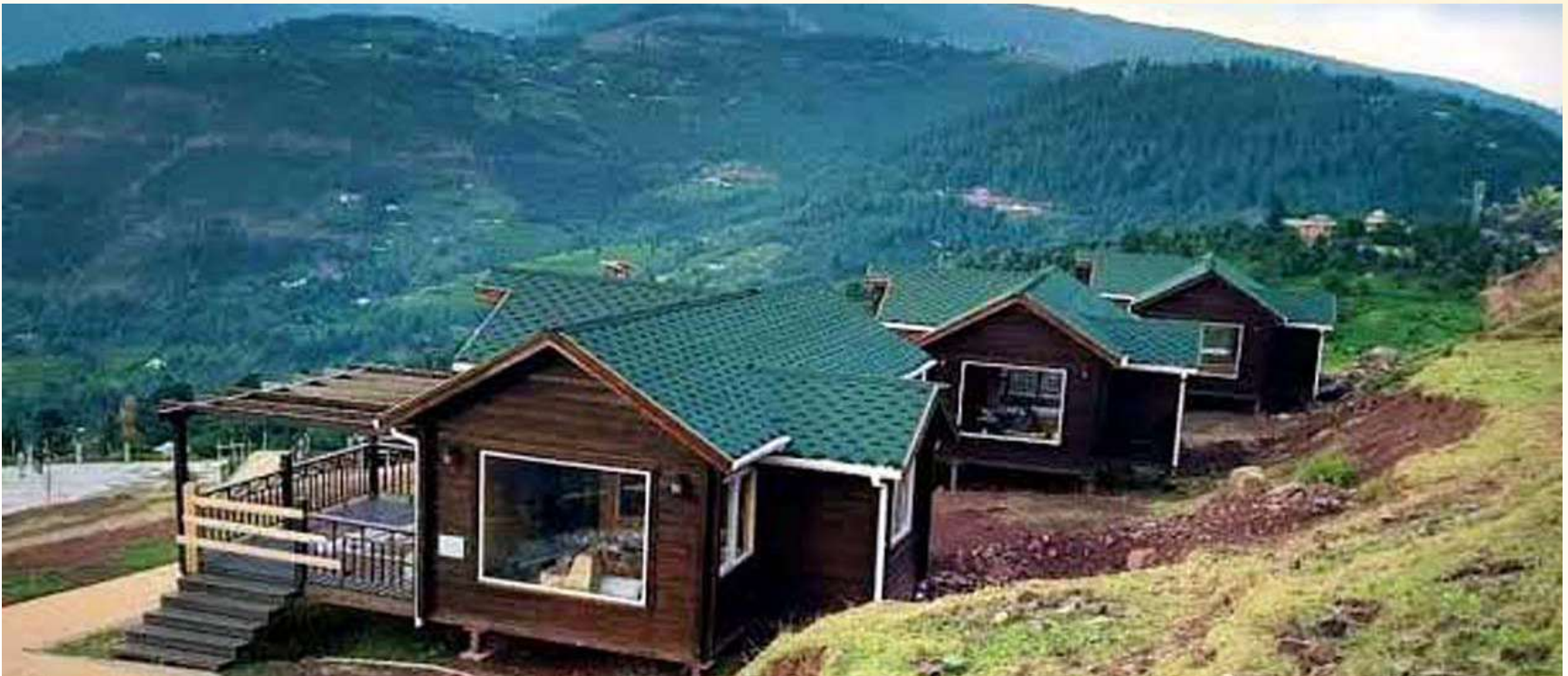
The youth volunteer members of Pulwama organized a month-long drug de-addiction campaign in every Panchayat of the district recently. "We will make Pulwama a drug-free district within the next few months," said an enthusiastic Youth volunteer.

Mission Youth has been a game changer for the youth of Jammu and Kashmir. The initiative has provided the youth with the necessary resources and support to enhance their skills and promote entrepreneurship, thereby contributing to the socio-economic development of the region. The success of Mission Youth serves as an inspiration for other states to implement similar initiatives for the development of their youth.

Mission Youth has succeeded in turning J-K youth into ambassadors of innovation, peace, and development through systematic interventions for youth engagement and outreach under six domains including livelihood generation, education/skill development, financial assistance, counseling/theory, sports, and recreation.

Remarkably, tremendous work performed by the Mission Youth during the past few years bore fruit when the Mission Youth was awarded Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration 2022, under the Innovation (State) category on 16th Civil Services Day this year.

# J&K Govt's homestay concept alluring huge tourist influx to rural tourist villages



SRINAGAR: Located 88 kilometers from Jammu in district Udhampur, 'Panchari' a snow-capped mountain surrounded by dense cedar forests, is all set to receive and captivate tourists this year with its natural magnificence and grandeur.

Many admirers of Panchari compare its scenic beauty and winter snowfall with globally acclaimed as the best destination 'Gulmarg'.

Panchari, a fascinating tourist destination abundantly blessed with natural scenic splendor and grandeur, started receiving a heavy tourist rush after being declared as the first Tourist Village with Homestay facilities by the J&K government under Tourist Village Development Programme (TVDP).

The construction of vintage huts and the creation of other requisite utilities in this picturesque spot has further added to its infrastructural edifice to accommodate the steeply rising tourist influx.

Notably, the government initiated the promotion of homestay tourism in the UT by launching Panchari as the first tourist village with homestay facilities under TVDP. The ambitious programme has the potential to mobilize the diverse geographical and socio-economic landscape of the entire Jammu and Kashmir region.

In January of this year, the Anderwali hamlet of Sangerwani village in South Kashmir's Pulwama district was festively adorned. A group of tourists from Pune City in Maharashtra chose this place for a pre-wedding shoot. Yogi, a professional event photographer from Pune, who was part of the group, said that he was astonished by the fascinating natural beauty of the place, stating that he had been there before with his family. He informed his friends, Rohit and Shilpa, about this beautiful place in Pulwama, and they decided to have their pre-wedding shoot there.

Anderwali Sangerwani has recently been designated as a tourist village by the government under the Tourist Village Development Programme to include picturesque places on the tourist map.

The ambitious programme, under the Mission Youth initiative, aims to develop 181 villages that possess distinct features such as scenic beauty, adventurous terrain, art and cultural significance, history, and archaeology. It is gaining tremendous momentum with a significant influx of tourists visiting these new destinations.

The main objectives of the programme are to develop new tourism destinations that integrate social, cultural, and spiritual characteristics with economic aspects, providing the necessary infrastructure for tourists within these selected villages.

The villages included in the programme were selected based on their potential for rural tourism in consultation with the Tourism Department and an expert committee of Mission Youth.

The Tourist Tribal Village Programme (TTVP), initiated by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, is proving to be a game changer for rural and tribal areas, offering economic and social benefits. The scheme promotes rural tourism and generates employment for local youth.

For young individuals interested in establishing ventures in the tourism and hospitality service sector, financial assistance of up to Rs 10 lakh is available including Rs 8.50 lakh from a banking partner. Mission Youth J&K provides a special upfront incentive (subsidy) of Rs 1.5 lakh or 15% of the project cost (whichever is minimum), along with a special subsidy of Rs 3.5 lakh towards loan repayment.

Similarly, for the development of homestays under the programme, financial assistance of up to Rs 1 lakh is provided including 0.85 lakh from a banking partner. Mission Youth also offers a special upfront incentive of 0.15 lakh or 15% of the project cost (whichever is minimum), 25% of the project cost as an upfront subsidy for women applicants, and a special subsidy of 0.35 lakh towards loan repayment.

Furthermore, the beneficiary must be unemployed and registered with the concerned District Employment and Counselling Centre. This initiative aims to promote homestays across the UT, strengthen the rural economy, encourage youth entrepreneurship, and provide employment opportunities for women in the tourism sector.

The initiative also recognizes the potential of J&K for film shootings and aims to promote filming in the region by offering financial aid to villages for their sustainable development. Despite having significant tourism potential, we are still unable to garner requisite attention due to infrastructural bottlenecks. Destinations that lag behind in the sphere of tourism infrastructure can overcome the downsides by introducing homestays as a means of accommodation facilities for the tourists which do not require heavy investment.

# Kupwara district becomes milk surplus, produces 15.39 crore liters of milk a year

- 267 dairy units, milk ATM established

KUPWARA: With the substantial increase in cattle population and employing modern interventions, the milk production in Kupwara district has reached an all-time high of 1539,50,000 liters per year generating an income of Rs 537 crores annually from milk alone making the district Kupwara milk Surplus, besides playing a crucial role in the growth of rural agri-economy.

Milk productivity in the Financial year 2021-22 in the Kupwara district was 1323, 20,000 liters which reached 1539,50,000 liters during the financial year 2022-23.

The total tagged cattle population of the Kupwara district is 1.58 lakh, while the number of poultry birds has touched 5.06 lakh with a total egg production of 1.45 crore per year.

Dairy farming is a major source of livelihood for many families in the Kupwara district and this sector is constantly growing with a focus on increasing milk production and improving the quality of milk, besides upgrading milk collection, processing, and marketing infrastructure with the intervention of centrally sponsored schemes.

The dairy sector in the Kupwara district is holding immense potential for the economy and provides employment opportunities, besides contributing to the local population's well-being.

With the increased demand for dairy products and interventions of the government, significant growth is being recorded in this sector.

The use of artificial insemination (AI) in the dairy sector has been proven to be a highly effective tool to increase animal productivity. By using AI, dairy farmers are benefitting from the efficient use of high-quality bulls.

Dr. Mohammad Ashraf, Chief Animal Husbandry Officer (CAHO) Kupwara said that during 2022-23, 34731 artificial insemination procedures were done in the district while in 2021-22, 33866, AI procedures were done.

IDDS (Integrated Dairy Development Scheme) is a major scheme that not only focuses on providing financial assistance but also supports the dairy producer by providing milking machines, and bulk milk cooling units at 50% subsidy as well as other benefits. The scheme also provides Paneer Making Machine, Khoya Making Machine, Dahi Making Machine, Cream Separator Machine, Ice Cream Making Machine, Butter, and Ghee Making Machine, Milk Van, Milk ATMs, and DG Set, to aspiring entrepreneurs who trying to create their start-ups in the dairy sector.

During the financial year 2022-23, under IDDS a total of 463 cases were sponsored in the Kupwara district and 267 dairy units were established, thus providing employment avenues to around 500 unemployed persons. Established units are 3 times more than in the previous financial year.



Two Softy Making machines were established in Handwara by two unemployed youths. Moreover, two milk vans were availed by beneficiaries to supply the milk to far-off places of the district and the first of its kind a Milk ATM was established in Tangdar Karnah which is dispensing quality milk.

With the help of IDDS poor and marginal farmers of rural societies of the district, especially the women members of Bungus Valley FPO Hurdoona have benefitted.

Oagbal, Potushai, Rajwar, Karnah, and Khumryal have been declared as milk villages by the Animal husbandry department Kupwara.

A project under IPDP (Integrated Poultry Development Program) is being implemented in the district for the socio-economic upliftment of poor households. More than 100 rural farmers and youth benefited in the district. 3 new poultry farms were established and 22 already existing poultry farms were augmented with poultry equipment and automation.

In the Kupwara district 98% of cattle have been vaccinated against FMD/LSD and 75% of the eligible female calves of 4-8 months of age have been vaccinated for Brucellosis during the financial year 2022-23.

Deputy Commissioner Kupwara, Dr. Doifode Sagar Dattatray has urged the educated youth of the district to come forward and take benefits from different CSS schemes and turn to Dairy and Poultry farming which have developed as important sources of livelihood and employment generation for rural areas of Kupwara district.

The efforts of the district administration headed by Deputy Commissioner Kupwara for the successful implementation of centrally sponsored schemes in the district for employment generation are being lauded by the public.

# 98.10 pc families covered under PMJAY-SEHAT Scheme in J&K

SRINAGAR: Ambitious 'ABPMJAY-SEHAT' has proved a savior for an ailing 65-year-old 'Anchal Das' of ward number 7, Kathua, when he got hassle-free treatment in a most convenient way he would have never even dreamt of.

All his life, Das toiled hard to feed his family of 7 but things turned haywire when doctors advised him

first time in his whole life and was completely appreciative of the government for this great help.

Finally, after eight long years of hurt and waiting, Dar got his knee replaced in a private hospital under the ABPMJAY-SEHAT scheme which was no less than some miracle for him.

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, in his commitment to developing India as a healthy nation, launched this ambitious Ayushman Bharat PMJAY scheme on 26th December 2020.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the scheme was implemented through insurance mode with private Bajaj Allianz GIC as the implementing agency. This is for the first time that a public-funded Health Insurance Scheme meant for the entire population is being implemented in the UT.

The scheme primarily focuses on financial protection from catastrophic health expenditures, which is the pillar of Universal Health Coverage. It is delivered through both public and private healthcare providers for secondary and tertiary care health services. It provides a cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year. All Medical and surgical conditions are included with minimal exclusions. It covers both Pre and Post hospitalization expenses and all pre-existing conditions are covered from day one.

This cashless treatment facility being provided by the central government under the ABPMJAY-SEHAT scheme after the abrogation of Article 370 for poor and needy families has substantially reduced their out-of-pocket expenditure as well as financial bankruptcy due to severe and prolonged illness, and expensive treatment.

With substantial health insurance coverage to the populace of the Union Territory, J&K has bagged the best performing Union Territory category for enrolment under Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY).

Under this scheme, more than 81.22 lakh persons (78.74%) have been registered to make them eligible for free and quality treatment in empanelled hospitals in the country.

Nearly, 81.20 lakh persons have been issued golden cards. State Health Agency has also launched a citizen-friendly facility for citizens to avail of golden cards. The citizens can visit the website [setu.pmjay.gov.in](http://setu.pmjay.gov.in) and register themselves and their families with details of ration cards issued by the Food and Supply Department and download their golden cards.

Earlier, SHA rolled out an ambitious door-to-door exercise to achieve 100 percent saturation under the Ayushman Bharat PMJAY SEHAT scheme.

AB-PMJAY SEHAT scheme has been like a ray of hope for poor families who couldn't afford health treatment at premier medical institutes of the country.



Ureter (PCNL) surgery. His world fell apart. Saving is a luxury for him due to a meager monthly income of Rs 8,000, Das could save just a few hundred bucks a month.

Das was virtually broken on the mere thought of managing Rs 58,000 for his surgery and subsequent treatment. But despair turned into hope with ABPMJAY-SEHAT coming as a savior.

"The health scheme came as a life booster when I was treated in a hospital for free and with great care," says Das while expressing his deep gratitude to the J&K administration for this historic initiative.

For someone whose only means to earn a living is toiling hard in the fields of Kashmir, even a small injury would mean empty bellies back home.

Similarly, Abdul Razzaq Dar had five family members solely dependent on him for all their needs. For the last eight years, he had been going through a tough time in performing his daily work due to his knee pain.

With a meager annual income of Rs 50,000, Dar could have hardly thought of proper treatment and his condition was deteriorating with each passing day.

And this was the time when the "Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana SEHAT" scheme came as a blessing for distressed Dar. Dar availed the benefit of a government scheme for the

# WAYIL BRIDGE EMERGES AS A VITAL LINK BETWEEN KASHMIR, LADAKH

**Symbolizes a brighter future of seamless travel, economic growth, and prosperity**



**GANDERBAL:** The first semi-arch ‘Wayil Truss Bridge’ on the Srinagar-Leh National Highway in the Ganderbal district of central Kashmir has emerged as a vital link between Kashmir and Ladakh which has significantly helped the J&K administration in easing the journey on the highway.

The people have expressed high appreciation to the UT government and all other stakeholders for establishing this unique engineering marvel in the region.

According to bridge experts and engineers at World Bank-funded Technical Assistance and Quality Audit Control (TAQAC), the construction of this prestigious bridge was sanctioned under the World Bank-funded Jhelum and Tawi Flood Recovery Project (JTFRP) with a cost of Rs 23.79 crore.

Assistant Executive Engineer JTFRP, Showkat Ali Shah, who was instrumental in conceptualizing the bridge, said that it was heartwarming to see the project proving to be a boon

for the people who are reaping the benefits. Recollecting his ideation days on the project, Shah said that he along with TAQAC technical staff went to several places across the country to understand several other technical nuances of this kind of project. He said that the project has undergone three-tier quality checks including environmental, civil, and mechanical which make it a safe project.

“This is a very strategic road. People in this area have been facing a lot of issues due to the lack of a vital link. This bridge will be instrumental in giving a big fillip to the development profile of Kashmir,” Shah maintained.

“This bridge (Wayil) spans over 110 meters and weighs over 700 metric tons of mild steel for the superstructure,” he said, adding that “before this, all attempts to construct the bridge at the spot on the same foundation pattern were left halfway.”



The construction of the bridge was a long pending demand of the locals as well as the travelers as it is the only main link connecting Srinagar with Leh.

“This was our long pending demand from last many years. The pending works of the bridge used to create a lot of traffic chaos in this part. Not only the locals were suffering, but the pilgrims, yatris, and tourists visiting various areas here have to bear the brunt,” said, Mushtaq Ahmad, a local from Wayil, Ganderbal.

“We are highly thankful to the dedicated engineers and officials of JTFRP who have been part of this project. This has brought a new lease of life for a population of around 4 lakh. This marks the beginning of new dawn in Kashmir with development on top priority of the government,” he added.

Local stakeholders have also lauded the government saying that the construction of permanent bridges over nallah Sindh at Wayil would now ease the traffic snarls due to which the commuters, travelers, and pilgrims were facing inconvenience.

After the Wayil bridge in central Kashmir’s Ganderbal district was thrown open for traffic, it has brought much relief to the motorists and commuters. The enhanced connectivity brought about by the Wayil Bridge will undoubtedly boost tourism and pilgrimage activities in the area besides bolstering the local economy.

Lieutenant Governor, Manoj Sinha, has expressed satisfaction with the successful completion of the project and the positive impact it will have on the lives of the people. “The Wayil Bridge is not just a structure of steel and concrete, but a symbol of connectivity, progress and convenience. It will pave the way for enhanced trade, tourism, and overall socio-economic development in the region,” Sinha said.

“We have done our best to put everything in the best possible way technically. This bridge has become an

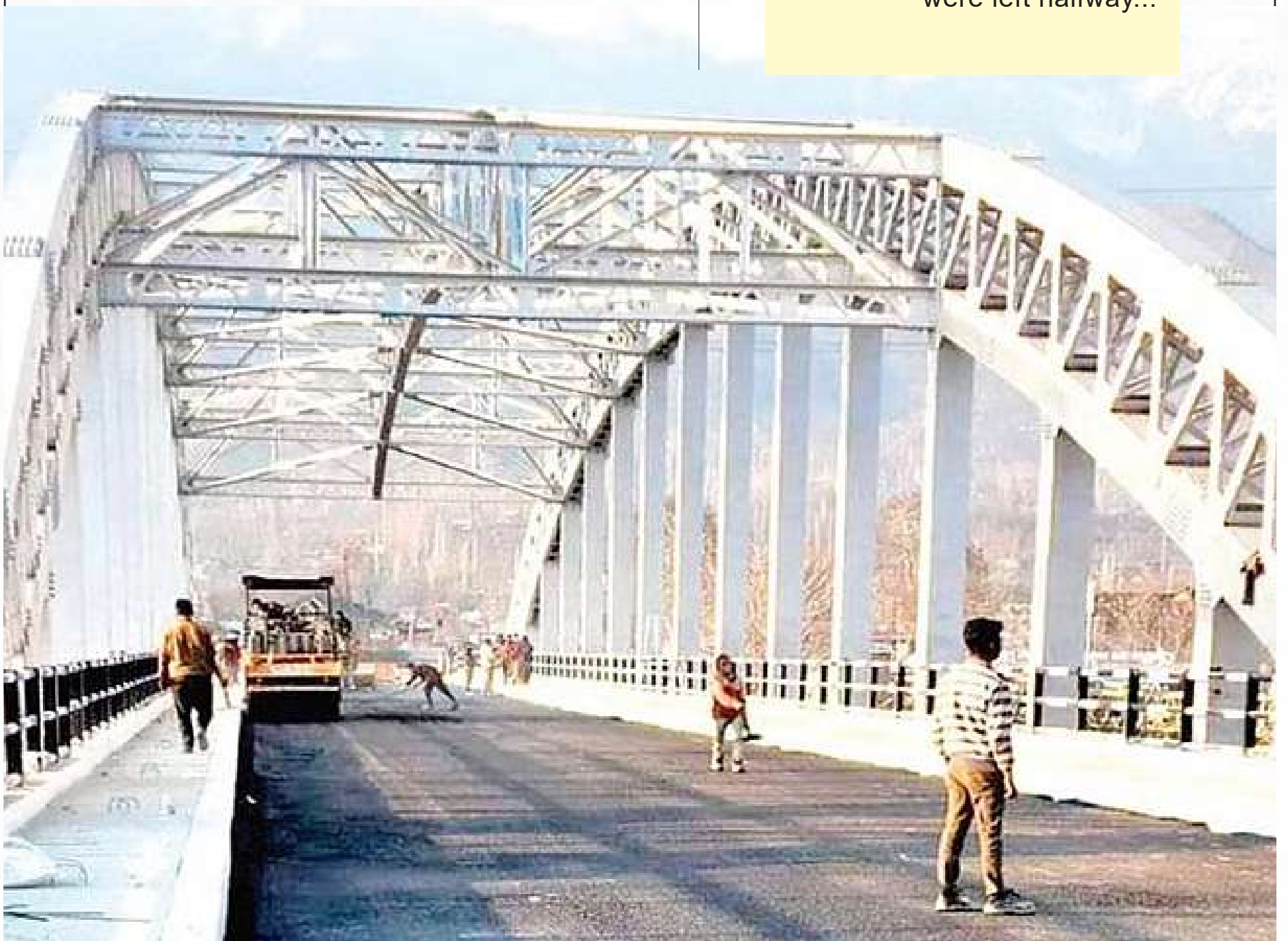
engineering marvel so far. We are hoping this brings much relief to the people and the commuters,” bridge engineer (TAQAC), Abid Braroo, informed.

The Wayil Bridge has been constructed using a unique combination of truss and arch bridge elements and girders, is poised to alleviate the longstanding challenges faced by commuters in the area. It replaces the old single-lane bridge, which often led to traffic congestion and delays. With its enhanced capacity and improved infrastructure, the bridge has become a crucial link for the people of Ganderbal, facilitating smoother travel and reducing travel time significantly.

Pertinently, the Wayil Bridge stands as a testament to the government’s commitment to improving infrastructure and connectivity in the region. As its importance reverberates through the hearts of the people of Ganderbal and beyond, it symbolizes a brighter future of seamless travel, economic growth, and prosperity. With the Wayil Bridge spanning the gushing waters of Sindh nallah, the gateway to progress and development has been flung wide open, inviting new opportunities and forging stronger bonds between communities.



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## J&K secures top rank in Food Safety Index for consecutive 3rd year

SRINAGAR: In a significant achievement, Jammu and Kashmir has maintained its first rank in the UT category in Food Safety Index 2022-23.

The Department of Food and Drugs Administration, J&K received the award third time in a row for 2021, 2022, and 2023.

The index is released annually by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to measure the performance of states and UTs on various parameters of food safety.

The award was received by Food Safety Commissioner Shakeel-ul-Rehman from Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, in the presence of Dr. Bharati Pravin Pawar and Professor Satya Pal Singh Baghel, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Chairman FSSAI, Rajesh Bhushan and CEO FSSAI, G. Kamala Vardhana Rao.

Jammu and Kashmir also won first prize for having the maximum number of Eat Right Mela districts in the country. These districts have implemented various initiatives of FSSAI to promote healthy and safe food habits among consumers. This reflects the commitment and dedication of the UT administration and the public toward ensuring food safety and hygiene in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Food Safety Index is a dynamic quantitative and qualitative benchmarking model that provides an objective framework for evaluating food safety across all States/UTs. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) began the State Food Safety Index evaluation process for 2022-2023 by undertaking correspondence with



Food Safety Commissioners of all UTs/States to furnish the data for statistical evaluation.

The critical indicator on the basis of which evaluation is done included Human Resources, Compliance Levels, Food Testing Infrastructure and Surveillance, Training, and Capacity Building besides Consumer Empowerment.

The award has been conferred for exemplary performance in the implementation of the FSS Act, 2006 as well as Eat Right initiatives in the financial year 2022-23, under which the department has conducted 29342 inspections, tested 11848 legal samples, filed 1606 prosecutions, imposed a penalty of Rs. 14805850/-, compounded 774 cases with a fine of Rs. 1104300/-, and conducting 11380 tests, 155 trainings, 414 awareness programmes through Mobile Food Testing Vans.

J&K has also got special recognition in implementing Eat Right initiatives including 162 License/Registration melas, 43 FoSTaC training programmes, 588 certifications under Hygiene Rating of Hotels, Restaurants,

Dhabas, Meat Shops, and Sweets Shops, 50 Certifications under Eat Right Campuses, 07 Certifications under Eat Right Places of Worship, 15 Certifications under Eat Right School and lifting of 16998 Kg of Used Cooking Oil from the Food Markets for its diversion for biodiesel manufacturing.

Commissioner FDA, J&K, has attributed the award to selfless and committed efforts put in by the functionaries of the department who are empowered to perform statutory duties under the FSS Act, 2006 Rules and Regulations made there under, in the UT. He has acknowledged the overwhelming support provided by the Government of UT of J&K and FSSAI in terms of capacity building by providing sufficient financial assistance to the department for supporting the cause to ensure food safety and healthy food practices.

He enjoined upon the stakeholders including Food Business Operators, consumers, civil society, and aligned departments to join hands toward achieving the objective of a healthy nation.

# Horticulture Deptt Kashmir, SKUAST-K leaving no stone unturned to contain Apple leaf blotch miner

- All types of measures being taken to curb the infestation; no shortage of pesticides required for the management of pest
- Orchardists have been requested not to panic & follow the ad hoc advisory framed by SKUAST-K



SRINAGAR: With the diversification of crops as well as the climate-driven changes in pest dynamics, some areas of Kashmir valley especially the districts of south Kashmir, have witnessed the emergence of a new insect pest namely Apple Leaf Blotch Miner.

The pest was reported during the year 2021 from Zainapora and other adjoining areas of district Shopian and can be identified by circular necrotic blotches on apple leaf-like Alternaria Leaf spots. During high pest incidence, the leaf shows multi spots, especially in heavily infested pockets, and trees show a burnt appearance from a distance.

The surveys conducted by SKUAST-K and the Department of Horticulture revealed that the pest infestation is prevalent in the orchards of some villages of district Shopian, Kulgam, Anantnag, and Pulwama. The economic threshold level of blotch leaf miners is 0.5 to 1 blotch/leaf. Dispersal of blotch leafminer to new areas takes place through infested fruits, Bud/graft wood, and plant material.

In order to ensure the containment of any further resurgence and to reduce the intensity of the pest, Financial Commissioner/ Additional Chief Secretary, Atal Dulloo has already instructed SKUAST-K and the Department of Horticulture, Kashmir for working out the strategy of its management to delineate the areas into various infestation zones, such as red, yellow and green depending upon the severity of the infestation, so that the pest can be efficiently managed.

Following the instructions, the Department of Horticulture, Kashmir, and SKUAST-K proactively initiated a programme and strategy for damage assessment and management of the pest. The strategy involves not only the identification of pest hot spots but also its possible spread channels, its containment and eradication measures, and to the prevention of an imminent outbreak.

In this respect, all the viable means and methods both physical and IT-enabled will be put in place. SKUAST-K has already developed Google form for receiving responses from various stakeholders, particularly orchardists regarding the presence and

severity of the pest. So far 10,764 responses were received through the Google form.

The Department of Horticulture and SKUAST-K are pre-emptively following the situation and are leaving no stone unturned to eradicate the pest. The teams of officers from the Department of Horticulture, Kashmir, and SKUAST-K scientists are regularly visiting the infested areas.

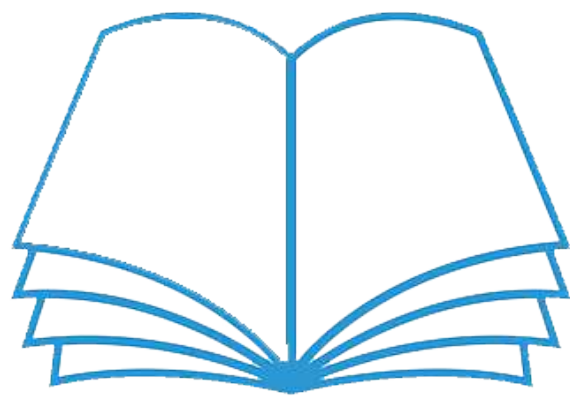
This time also teams of experts are in the orchards of district Kulgam, Shopian, and Budgam to provide on-the-spot advisory and awareness regarding the management of the pest to the orchardists. One of the teams visiting District Shopian and Kulgam is being led by Joint Director Horticulture, Kashmir Zahoor Ahmad Bhat.

All types of measures are being taken to curb the infestation. There is no shortage of pesticides that are required for the management of pests as confirmed by the Director of Agriculture, Kashmir Controller Pesticides. The Department of Horticulture, Kashmir, SKUAST-K, and Director Agriculture, Controller Pesticides are working in cohesion and coordination to control the pest.

This is not the first time that the Orchardists of the valley are confronting the infestation. Some decades back scab had also attained an alarming situation, but through cooperation and coordination of all the stakeholders viz, the Department of Horticulture, Kashmir, SKUAST-K, and the orchardists, we were able to manage the situation.

This pest will also be brought under control through the integrated and cooperative approach. The results of management strategies are encouraging, as the infestation of Leaf Blotch Miner in the ACDH, Zainapora Shopian has been brought down from 90% during the year 2021 to 10% during the current year.

The orchardists are requested not to panic and to follow the ad hoc advisory framed by SKUAST-K and also published by the Department of Horticulture, Kashmir in letter and spirit. By adopting a cooperative, integrated, and sustained approach we will be able to eradicate the pest.



# **JKPI Publications**

# China's mediation between Saudi and Iran reflect its growing role in the Middle East



ULVEE MUNEEER

### Introduction

China's growing role in the Middle East has become increasingly prominent in recent years. As the world's second-largest economy and global power, China has been actively pursuing its economic, political, and strategic interests in the region. This shift in focus can be attributed to China's quest for energy resources, its desire to expand its influence globally, and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to enhance connectivity and trade routes between China and the rest of the world. One of the primary motivations for China's involvement in the Middle East is its need for energy resources to sustain its rapid economic growth. The region is rich in oil and natural gas reserves, making it a vital source of energy for China. To secure these resources, China has been engaged in various energy-related projects, including investments in oil fields, pipelines, and refineries. For instance, China has deepened its energy ties with countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates, among others.

Furthermore, China's economic interests extend beyond energy. It has become a significant trading partner for many Middle Eastern countries. Chinese companies have invested heavily in sectors like infrastructure, telecommunications, construction, and manufacturing. The BRI, a massive infrastructure and development project spanning multiple continents, has further cemented China's economic presence in the region. The BRI includes projects such as ports, railways, highways, and industrial zones, aimed at enhancing regional connectivity and facilitating trade between China and the Middle East.

#### The scope of China's engagement in Middle East

China's engagement in the Middle East is not limited to economic aspects. It has also been actively involved in regional diplomacy

and security matters. China has played a role in mediating conflicts and fostering dialogue among regional actors. For instance, it has been involved in diplomatic efforts to resolve the Syrian civil war and has supported the Iran nuclear deal. China's engagement in these issues helps safeguard its interests and enhance its reputation as a responsible global player. Moreover, China's involvement in the Middle East is also driven by strategic considerations. The region lies at the crossroads of several important geopolitical routes and is of immense geostrategic significance. By cultivating relationships with Middle Eastern countries, China aims to expand its influence and shape regional dynamics to its advantage. It seeks to ensure stability in the region to protect its economic investments and maintain access to vital sea routes such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez Canal. Moreover, China's growing role in the Middle East has not been without challenges. The region is highly complex and fraught with historical, cultural, and religious sensitivities. China has had to navigate carefully to avoid getting embroiled in the region's various conflicts and controversies. Its relationships with certain countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, have posed diplomatic dilemmas due to their rivalry and competing interests. Additionally, China's treatment of its Muslim minority population, particularly the Uighurs in Xinjiang, has raised concerns among some Middle Eastern countries, which have large Muslim populations.

#### Mediation in Middle East

China's recent entry into Middle East mediation emerged during the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia, a long-standing headache for Chinese leaders. Traditionally, this role was occupied by the United States. However, China recognized the opportunity to demonstrate its rising diplomatic influence and showcase an alternative narrative of global power dynamics. By appearing to facilitate negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, China asserts itself as a powerful rising diplomatic presence, contributing to the perception of a shrinking US global influence.

#### Background of Iran and Saudi Arabia Relations

The strained relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia dates back several decades and is rooted in a complex mix of religious, geopolitical, and sectarian factors. However, the events of 2016, specifically the seizure of Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran, exacerbated tensions between the two countries and led to a

significant deterioration in their bilateral ties.

In January 2016, Saudi Arabia executed Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent Shiite cleric and vocal critic of the Saudi government. The execution sparked outrage among Shiite communities in Iran and other parts of the Muslim world. In response, Iranian protestors stormed the Saudi embassy in Tehran and the consulate in Mashhad, leading to the severing of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The incident not only strained bilateral ties but also exacerbated the existing sectarian tensions between the predominantly Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shiite-majority Iran. The two countries have long been engaged in a regional power struggle and have supported opposing sides in various conflicts across the Middle East, such as in Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. The sectarian divide between Sunni and Shiite Islam further complicates their relationship, as both countries often perceive themselves as protectors of their respective sects.

Since 2021, there have been attempts to mend the break in relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Several factors have contributed to this shift. Firstly, there has been a change in leadership in both countries. Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who has been more assertive in his foreign policy approach, has shown a willingness to engage with Iran. Similarly, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, who took office in August 2021, has signaled a desire to improve ties with neighboring countries, including Saudi Arabia. Secondly, regional dynamics have evolved, prompting a reassessment of priorities. Both countries have realized the need for stability in the region, especially in the face of shared challenges such as the rise of non-state actors like ISIS and the ongoing conflicts in Yemen and Syria. Furthermore, the United States' changing stance on Iran, with the Biden administration expressing interest in rejoining the Iran nuclear deal, has created an incentive for regional rivals to explore diplomatic solutions.

Despite the initial positive steps, significant obstacles remain on the path to normalization. Deep-rooted mistrust, differences in ideology and regional ambitions, as well as competing interests, continue to hamper progress. Proxy conflicts in Yemen, where Iran supports the Houthi rebels, and in Syria, where Saudi Arabia supports rebel groups, present ongoing challenges. Additionally, the issue of sectarianism remains a divisive factor. The regional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia has often exacerbated sectarian tensions, leading to violence and instability in countries with mixed Sunni-Shiite populations.

### **China's Diplomatic Triumph: The Iranian-Saudi Agreement**

China's mediation efforts in the Middle East not only contribute to regional stability but also enhance its global prestige. By positioning itself as a powerful diplomatic player, China sends a subtle message that while the United States remains the preponderant military power in the region, China is rapidly rising as a diplomatic force. This narrative bolsters the perception of Chinese power and influence worldwide and adds to the evolving narrative of a diminishing US global presence.

In February 2023, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi visited China and met with President Xi Jinping. During the visit, Iran found Saudi Arabia's proposal for a resumption of ties acceptable. In exchange, Iran demanded that Saudi Arabia cease funding Iran International, a Persian-language news channel critical of the Islamic Republic, withdraw completely from Yemen, and recognize the Ansarallah (Houthi) movement as a legitimate authority in the country. Tehran also urged Saudi Arabia to halt its support for Iranian opposition groups and ease pressure on its Shiite minority. These demands reflect the complex dynamics and longstanding grievances between the two countries. After years of patient efforts, China's passive diplomatic approach finally bore fruit with a historic announcement on March 10, 2023, in Beijing. By successfully brokering a deal to restore relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, China has signaled its intention to play a larger role in the Middle East and potentially challenge US dominance in the oil-rich region. The agreement reached in Beijing marked a breakthrough after seven years of severed diplomatic ties

and tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Under the deal, both countries agreed to reopen their embassies and exchange ambassadors, resume direct flights, and restart security and trade agreements. China, emphasizing its non-selfish interests in the region, hailed this outcome as a major achievement resulting from concerted efforts by all three nations. This success represents a major triumph for Chinese diplomacy and underscores its growing role in shaping regional dynamics.

### **Economic and Political Ties**

China has strategically cultivated strong economic and political ties with both Riyadh and Tehran in recent years. Saudi Arabia stands as China's largest oil supplier, with bilateral trade amounting to \$87 billion in 2021. Similarly, China plays a significant role in Iran's foreign trade, accounting for as much as 30% of its total trade volume, valued at over \$16 billion in the same year. Concomitantly President Xi Jinping sees Iran as a strategically important nation that shares China's critical views of the West and possesses abundant natural resources, a battle-hardened military, and a rich civilization. With over 40 percent of its crude oil imports coming from the region, Beijing is keen on ensuring stability in the Gulf. Furthermore, the region serves as a vital component of China's Belt and Road Initiative, offering trade routes and acting as a significant market for Chinese consumer goods and technology.

By facilitating the Saudi-Iran peace deal, Beijing not only solidifies its economic interests but also signals its willingness to engage politically in a region crucial for China's energy imports.

China's involvement in the Middle East is no longer confined to trade and investment. Beijing's mediation success demonstrates a shift towards actively engaging in the region's complex conflicts. In addition to economic ties, China's growing influence in the Middle East stems from its multilateral approach and reluctance to criticize human rights records in the region. By positioning itself as a partner that shuns Western ideals and US interests, China has capitalized on events that have diminished Washington's standing in the Middle East, such as the 2003 Iraq invasion and the great war on Terror. By emphasizing multilateralism, refraining from criticism of human rights records, and capitalizing on events that have diminished US influence, China is gradually reshaping the Middle East's geopolitical landscape. As China's involvement deepens, its growing appeal as a partner and its alternative narrative challenge the traditional dominance of Western powers in the region.

### **Conclusion**

China's Global Security Initiative, introduced by President Xi Jinping, aims to provide Chinese solutions and wisdom to global security challenges. It champions commitments in various areas, including the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, adherence to the UN Charter, rejection of the Cold War mentality, peaceful resolution of disputes, and maintenance of security in traditional and non-traditional domains. The initiative emphasizes the rejection of unilateralism, double standards, and the use of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction.

The Global Security Initiative carries implications for US-China relations, as it appears to delegitimize security cooperation with the United States. China's emphasis on non-interference in internal affairs and respect for different development paths challenges the US approach of promoting liberal ideals and intervening in global security issues. By offering an alternative narrative and proposing Chinese solutions to security challenges, China aims to reshape the international order and reduce American influence. Beijing's economic partnerships, diplomatic maneuvers, and willingness to avoid criticizing human rights abuses have positioned China as an attractive partner for nations in the Middle East. As China's influence grows, the battle of narratives for the future of the international order intensifies, and the region becomes a crucial arena for reshaping global power dynamics.

# The importance of World Environment Day and its relevance in Kashmir



**PARVAIZ YOUSUF**

**W**orld Environment Day isn't just another day on the calendar; it's a call for everyone to work together and do something to protect our planet. Every year on June 5, this important event shows us how important it is to protect and preserve our environment. Among the many environmental problems around the world, the region of Kashmir stands out as an important focus for World Environment Day.

As a result of its unique ecosystem and natural resources, Kashmir is an important place in the fight to protect the environment. And World Environment Day can be a key part of solving the environmental issues that currently plague the region.

## Understanding World Environment Day and its Significance

The United Nations General Assembly started World Environment Day in 1972. Its goal is to raise environmental awareness around the world and encourage people to do good things for the environment. This day is a chance for governments, groups, and individuals to come together and talk about how to protect the environment and build a better world.

Each year, there is a particular theme for World Environment Day, and the theme for World Environment Day 2023 is the campaign #BeatPlasticPollution, 'Ecosystem Restoration'. We know that plastic pollution can harm our ecosystems and environment, as its wrath can be seen everywhere. The Kashmir valley is no exception to this. We know how plastic enters our lives and domains in all possible ways. So, there is a strong need to implement the theme of this world environment day into our lives.

It's frightening to consider the size of the environmental problems our planet faces today. World Environment Day is a good time to remember that everyone can do something to protect the environment. By getting people all over the world involved, this day acts as a catalyst for change, encouraging communities to adopt sustainable practices and build a sense of responsibility toward the natural world.

## The need to protect and preserve Kashmir's Environmental Heritage

Kashmir Valley is ecologically diverse and rich in different kinds of habitats. This is why there is a strong need to observe World Environment Day on a large scale. Different kinds of habitats make it quite relevant to observe the world environment as this helps raise a good awareness among local masses.

## World Environment Day for National Parks and Sanctuaries in Kashmir

Kashmir's national parks and sanctuaries are important ecological treasures that add to the region's environmental diversity and give many plant and animal species a place to live. These protected areas are very important for keeping ecosystems in balance and keeping biodiversity safe.

Many plants and animals find refuge in national parks like Dachigam National Park, Kazinag National Park, and Overa-Aru Wildlife Sanctuary. Several endangered species, such as the Kashmir



stag (Hangul), snow leopard, black bear, and Himalayan brown bear, need these protected areas to survive. By keeping these habitats in good shape, national parks and sanctuaries make sure that these species will continue to live and keep the ecological balance of the area.

Kashmir's national parks and sanctuaries have a lot of different plant species and a lot of different animal species. This makes them hotspots for biological diversity. Forests, alpine meadows, and wetlands in these areas are home to a wide range of plants, including rare and endemic species. By taking care of these ecosystems, national parks and sanctuaries help save genetic resources, make the environment more resilient, and keep the unique plant diversity of the area.

Apart from that, Kashmir's national parks and wildlife sanctuaries bring in tourists, researchers, and nature lovers from all over the world. Ecotourism in these areas not only brings money into the local economy but also helps people understand how important it is to protect the environment. Visitors learn more about the ecological importance of these protected areas through guided tours, educational programmes, and interpretation centers. This builds a sense of responsibility and encourages sustainable practices.

## World Environment Day for Wetlands in Kashmir

Kashmir is lucky to have a lot of wetlands, like Dal Lake, Wular Lake, Pampore Wetlands, and Hokersar Wetland, which are very important ecologically and do a lot for the environment. This is why the significance of specific days, such as World Environment Day, raises considerably.

Wetlands in Kashmir are important homes for a wide range of plants and animals. There are many different kinds of aquatic plants in these ecosystems, like lotus, water lilies, and reeds, which give many bird species places to nest and food. These wetlands are also where birds like the Mallard, Northern Shovelers, Pheasant-tailed jacana, and common teal breed. These birds travel long distances to Kashmir to spend the winter. The fact that these wetlands are there helps these migratory birds stay alive and adds to the overall diversity of the area.

Moreover, the wetlands act as natural filters by catching sediments, nutrients, and pollutants, which clean the water. They are an important part of the hydrological cycle because they soak up extra water when it rains hard and slowly let it out when it's dry. This keeps floods and droughts from happening as often. Wetlands also replenish groundwater, keep water tables stable, and help keep the water balance of the region as a whole.

Similarly, a lot of carbon is stored in the wetlands and peatlands of Kashmir. Carbon-rich ecosystems like these act as carbon sinks, taking in carbon dioxide from the air and slowing climate change. Wetlands also give off methane, which is a powerful greenhouse gas, but they also help change it into less harmful forms.

## World Environment Day for Plains in Kashmir

Remember, we should never ignore the ecological importance of plains in Kashmir either anytime. This is because, with their rich soils and wide range of plants, Kashmir's plains are very

important to the environment and provide both economic and environmental benefits to the people.

For instance, Kashmir's fertile plains are good for farming, which helps the local economy and makes sure there is enough food for all. Thus, local people need to grow crops like rice, apples, saffron, and different kinds of vegetables in order to make a living for themselves. Moreover, rich alluvial soils and a mild climate make the plains of Kashmir a great place to grow crops of different kinds. With this, the plains of Kashmir become very productive and help ensure food security in the Kashmir valley.

In addition, the Kashmiri plains feature a diverse ecosystem because of their combination of farms, orchards, and marshy areas. Keep in mind that many bird species, including sparrows, hoopoes, and mynas, frequent agricultural areas near human settlements because this is where they can find the insects and grains they eat. Likewise, the valley is home to a wide variety of small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.

In addition, the plains of Kashmir play a crucial role in the process of groundwater recharge. Keep in mind that the soils are porous, and there is much vegetation, allowing precipitation to seep into subsurface aquifers. In addition, agriculture relies on this groundwater, as does the domestic water supply and the maintenance of Kashmir Valley's delicate ecological balance.

### **Beating Plastic Pollution in Kashmir**

As people all over the world come together to celebrate World Environment Day 2023 with the theme "Beat Plastic Pollution," Kashmir must join the efforts. Through innovative projects and strong actions, the Valley is already taking big steps to stop plastic pollution and setting a strong example for the rest of the world to follow.

For instance, in an impressive show of creativity and community involvement, a town-Hiller, Shahabad, in South Kashmir's Anantnag, started a new program that got rid of all the plastic in their area. By coming up with an interesting idea that gives residents gold in exchange for their plastic trash, this town has not only stopped plastic waste from polluting the environment, but it has also started a huge change in the way people think. Their strong desire for a cleaner, greener future fits well with the World Environment Day theme, especially since they are actively working to stop plastic pollution around the world.

Knowing how important it is to stop plastic pollution, the government of Jammu and Kashmir has taken strong steps to ban single-use plastic throughout the Kashmir valley. By doing this, they put themselves at the front of the fight against plastic waste and made sure that their efforts fit with the theme for World Environment Day in 2023.

Even though there has been improvement, there are still problems with making sure the ban on single-use plastics is fully enforced. It is very important for the government to work with local officials and the community to make sure that the rules are followed. By tackling these problems head-on, Kashmir can be a leader in the fight against plastic waste, making a big difference on the world stage and giving life to the theme of World Environment Day 2023.

By choosing the theme for World Environment Day 2023, Kashmir shows that it is committed and determined to stop plastic waste. The creative community projects and strict government actions are an example to the rest of the world and help build a sense of unity and drive in the fight against plastic pollution.

## **Linking World Environment Day and Kashmir**

### **Promoting green initiatives**

World Environment Day can motivate people in Kashmir to start and support green projects. From recycling and waste management programmes to promoting renewable energy

sources, these projects can help the region grow sustainably while protecting its unique natural heritage. Also, these projects could create jobs and help the local economy. We can join hands voluntarily with several non-governmental organizations working at the ground level. At the same time, every single village and town in Kashmir must implement the theme of World Environment Day 2023 in our lives.

### **Raising more awareness**

The people of Kashmir would benefit greatly from learning about the importance of environmental protection on World Environment Day. More and more people should know about the theme of this World Environment Day and its significance. The day can be a strong opportunity to educate and involve the local populace and encourage them to take care of the environment through various educational programmes, workshops, and awareness campaigns.

### **Trying to mitigate the impacts of climate change**

Higher temperatures, altered rain, and snow patterns, and higher glacier melting are just a few of the ways in which climate change threatens the Kashmir region. The regular rains in the entire Kashmir valley are having a major impact on the apple sector; thus, this is clearly a possible problem. Discussing these issues and calling for action on climate change can take place on World Environment Day. The event can assist in cutting greenhouse gas emissions and help in Kashmir's environmental recovery by raising awareness of the effects of climate change and encouraging the adoption of sustainable practices.

### **Encouraging sustainable tourism**

Kashmir is a popular place to visit, and people from all over the world come to see it. But the large number of tourists can put a lot of stress on the fragile ecosystems in the area. On World Environment Day, everyone can work together to promote sustainable tourism practices that will keep Kashmir's beauty for future generations and help the local economy at the same time.

### **Empowering local stakeholders**

Local people in Kashmir have an important part to play in keeping their environment safe. World Environment Day can help local groups, government agencies, and community members work together to give them the knowledge and tools they need to protect the environment in a good way. When local communities are involved, conservation efforts are more likely to be successful and fit the needs and challenges of the area.

### **Conclusion**

World Environment Day offers people a chance to advocate for environmental preservation and sustainable development. This annual event is particularly significant for Kashmir because of the region's diversified ecology and great environmental issues. We should not only focus on beating plastic pollution but take into consideration climate change, water pollution, and air pollution as well. The opportunity to mobilize resources and people to protect Kashmir's environment on World Environment Day is exceptional. It offers the area the ability to discuss and provide support for implementing effective solutions to environmental problems like deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution, and the effects of climate change. World Environment Day can encourage collaboration among individuals, groups, organizations, and governmental agencies to address these issues and advance sustainable development. Kashmir has a chance to create a better and more sustainable future if it takes advantage of this opportunity. It is our responsibility to ensure that everyone lives in a way that helps the environment, for businesses to use eco-friendly methods, and for lawmakers to make strict rules to protect nature. Everyone can take responsibility for taking care of the environment and making sure it stays healthy. Let's all join hands together on this day to make sure Kashmir and the rest of the world take steps toward a future that is friendlier to nature and sustainable for the long term.



# G20 tourism working group meeting in Srinagar: Benefits and Opportunities



**NEHA AGGARWAL**

**A**s India acquired the presidency of G20, an intergovernmental forum that accounts for 80% of gross world product (GWP), 75% of international trade, 2/3 of the global population, and 60% of the world's land area, the cities are bustling with vehement fervor and spruced up to showcase the 'spirited India' at the global stage. India's prestigious presidency of G20 as an opportunity was showcased by the manifestation of its rich geographic and socio-cultural diversity and heritage. Other than Jammu and Kashmir, India had organized similar events in states such as Gujarat and West Bengal earlier this year.

Srinagar, the capital city hosted the Third G20 Tourism Working Group Meeting from 22nd May to 24th May 2023 at the Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre (SKICC). The city streets were packed with a teeming entourage of 60 foreign delegates from 27 nations. The event and the location also hold importance by virtue of it being one of the largest international events hosted in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) since the repeal of Article 370 in August 2019, which put an end to the area's semi-autonomous status.

Despite some diplomatic hiccups, the event had an overwhelming presence of delegates and officials from G20 member nations including, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France,

Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, the UK, the US, and the European Union. This is the only working group meeting to have taken place in Srinagar as part of the G20 effort, and it has received an overwhelming response from all member countries, invited countries, and international organizations, with the highest participation recorded compared to the first two Tourism Working Group Meetings in Rann of Kutch and Siliguri.

The three-day event kicked off with a rejuvenating session of yoga against the backdrop of the Zabarwan mountain range followed by a visit to the 17th-century structure emblematic of Mughal architecture, the Nishat Garden, and subsequently to the Royal Spring Golf Course on the banks of the Dal Lake. Providing a fillip to the tourism potential in India and exploring tourism as an avenue of inter-personal exchange among G20 nations, the event focused on five key priority areas namely, Green Tourism, Digitalization, Skills, MSMEs, and Destination Management. However, in Kashmir, the G20 focused on three major areas; boost to the tourism industry, film tourism, and, investment and trade opportunities.

## **Boost to tourism industry**

Tourism is the key sector of Jammu and Kashmir's economy and accounts for 6.98 percent of the state's GDP. According to the Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Department, the region witnessed an upward surge both in domestic and international tourist arrivals in recent years. Jammu & Kashmir recorded 1.88 crore tourist arrivals up to December 2022, the highest in the past 75 years. Although the majority of them were Vaishno Devi-bound pilgrims yet generating optimism and safety is a big achievement for the government of India. The officials claim that the Valley got nearly 26 lakh tourists. The tourism industry generates around Rs. 8,000 crores annually,



contributing to nearly 7% of the state's GDP. The industry provides employment to around 70,000 people directly and indirectly. This includes hotel staff, tour operators, taxi drivers, and souvenir vendors. The massive numbers validate the fact that there is a huge potential for the sector to boost the local economy and provide employment opportunities.

By virtue of the G20 meeting held in Srinagar, the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir got an opportunity to exhibit its market prospects, eco-tourism ventures, and cultural assets to the leading global nations. A record number of tourists are expected to visit Kashmir this year also. The event, which took place from May 22-24 on the banks of the famous Dal Lake in Srinagar is expected to have a positive impact on the tourism industry and the trade sectors of the region. The event holds importance in light of the devastating Covid-19 pandemic that brought the lives, society, and economy of Jammu and Kashmir and its people to a halt. The meeting is projected to generate work possibilities for people in the handicraft and tourist industries, delivering a much-needed boost to the local labor market and assisting in the reduction of poverty in the region. There is a need for building new infrastructural amenities such as hotels, restaurants, and transit facilities, to allow local businesses to benefit from the development of these services.

### Boost to film tourism

Kashmir has always attracted the attention of filmmakers since the days of late Raj Kapoor's movie *Barsaat* was shot in Kashmir in 1949. After that 1960s and 1970s saw several Bollywood films on the screen including the famous movies '*Kashmir Ki Kali* (1964), '*Jab Jab Phool Khile*' (1965), and '*Bobby*' (1973), among many others. The movie and their songs remained favorites for generations to come. Kashmir offers the perfect location for movie makers which were earlier shot in Europe due to security reasons back in the valley. Kashmir as a film destination was beneficial for two major reasons. One it saved huge financial resources for the producers and second it was within the contiguity.

In the recent past many movies have been shot in Kashmir including the popular ones such as *Jab Tak Hain Jaan* of Superstar Shah Rukh Khan or *Haider* for that matter. However, Kashmir's image for film tourism was never displayed due to volatile security reasons. Now the contours have changed. On the eve of the G20 summit, a large event was staged to emphasize film tourism, which the UT administration has been heavily pushing in recent years. The purpose of the film tourism event was to present visiting delegates' film shoot offers, with a focus on single-window clearance and other services for international crews. On the fringes of the conference, the draught for a national strategy on film tourism was also revealed. The benefit from the interest shown by Multinationals in Investing in J&K was also an outcome of the G20 in Kashmir.

## I

### Investment and trade opportunities

Many corporate executives, expatriates, businesspeople, and diplomats from Middle Eastern nations have visited Jammu and Kashmir in recent months to explore investment prospects in the UT. Multinationals' enthusiasm for investing in J&K is likely what pushed India to decide to hold the G20 meeting in the UT this year. Finally, the G20 summit is a high-profile event that draws media attention from across the world, enabling the host country to highlight both its symbolic significance as well as present its narrative to the world community.



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### Geostrategic importance

The G20 continues to play an important role in defining and enhancing global governance and architecture on all key international economic challenges. The premise underpinning New Delhi's decision to revoke Article 370 in 2019, meetings such as G20 in Kashmir confers a degree of approval for India's actions from the world's major economies. India aims to use the G20 meeting to unveil the tourism potential of Kashmir however, it is also projecting before the world that there is peace and tranquility in Kashmir. New Delhi is trying to showcase Kashmir as an attractive place for trade and investments, in part to achieve its economic development promises in the region. The meeting was intended to demonstrate that there is a growing perception within the world community that India has integrated Kashmir for the development and prosperity of the region, not for any other malafide reason. This high-level summit is also an affirmation to both domestic as well as international travelers about the safety aspect. What is also an important takeaway from this mega event is that even three members of organizations of Islamic States attended the meeting, a manifestation of India's deep engagement with different stakeholders.

### Conclusion

The G20 tourism meeting was quintessentially important for India both for symbolic reasons as well as to demonstrate India's stature at the global level where it is exercising pragmatic diplomacy and influencing multilateral institutions. Essentially focusing on tourism, the meeting also outlined how Kashmir can be represented through this international forum. Apart from tourism, G20 also deliberated on film tourism and emphasized on trade and investment. Albeit all this, it is important to underline the fact that India organized this event in the heart of Kashmir sending the message that it exercises strategic autonomy when it is about dealing with sensitive regions such as Kashmir.

# J&K has compelling reasons for earthquake-resilient construction



**ADEELA HAMEED**

The Turkey-Syria earthquakes demonstrated the effectiveness of seismic protection technologies and engineering techniques that can be employed to manage the reaction of structures to earthquakes. The earthquakes put to the test advanced building technologies that can minimize damage and keep buildings functioning after a quake. Several hospitals built with one such technology – called a seismic isolation system – survived the earthquakes with almost no harm, according to local news reports, even while surrounding buildings sustained heavy damage.

Also, shortly after the Turkey-Syria earthquake, a video displaying Japanese methods of addressing such disasters began circulating on social media. It showed how engineers and architects in Japan developed different techniques to deal with earthquakes because their country is geographically vulnerable. The two primary techniques implemented were seismic isolation and base isolation. Seismic isolation is a technique of introducing a set of bearings and a sliding system under a building to reduce its response to the motion of the ground during a quake. The isolation of the base is a design strategy to avoid seismic shocks, which reduces the effects of earthquakes by separating the superstructural structure from the ground.

## **Vulnerability of Jammu and Kashmir to earthquakes**

As tectonics is actively shaping the geomorphology and climate of Jammu and Kashmir, the occurrence of earthquakes is likely unavoidable. Research and knowledge about the causes of earthquakes have informed us that it is important to put more emphasis on preparedness rather than prediction. Field evidence from various research has suggested an urgent need for comprehensive planning to educate, engage, and train residents as well as students about the science of earthquakes. Vulnerability to hazards is unavoidable unless and until a robust framework is planned for the Union Territory as a whole.

People of J&K tend to consider earthquake hazards of secondary importance as such, people were clueless and unprepared to cope with the 2005 earthquake that struck the northern parts of Kashmir valley. As expected, the response was haphazard and rehabilitation unplanned, without much consideration for sustainability. This led to an increase in vulnerability rather than reducing it. And with the recent one in 2023, a near-disaster 6.8 magnitude earthquake, the population was yet again unprepared to deal with it. Since then, a number of small-magnitude earthquakes have jolted the Union Territory, much to the concern of the residents. As frightening as it may seem, now is the time to think ahead and plan new structures keeping in mind the safety of all concerned.

## **Structural safety and earthquake-resilient designs**

The recent tremors have given flame to the long-forgotten concept of constructing disaster-resilient structures in Jammu and Kashmir.

Dr. Raj Suhail, a structural engineer, and researcher in the field of civil-structural engineering shared concerns about earthquake safety in Kashmir's residential and commercial spaces. "Jammu and Kashmir is placed on highly mobile tectonic plates, i.e. the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates, thus structural safety is always going to be a worry in our region. My research suggests that residential houses in Kashmir are relatively safe but are getting uneconomical and massive, mass-wise, day by day. Earthquake doesn't like mass. The more massive the structures, the more earthquake forces will it attract. So, new constructions might be at risk."

Dr. Suhail is an alumnus of NIT Srinagar with educational qualifications from multiple prestigious institutes, including the University of Surrey, UK (MS), Trinity College Dublin, and Queen's University Belfast, UK (Ph.D.). "The issue is not the two-story houses but the upcoming commercial buildings, all of which are tall and massive. It has come to my notice that some of them have even skipped the fundamental requirement of earthquake-resilient design – such as the provision of bracing and shear walls. If your building is more than four stories tall and there is no shear wall or bracing system, get a structural engineer, I mean a qualified structural engineer, not a self-proclaimed structural engineer, to inspect it, without delay."

## **Recommendations**

There is a need for a paradigm shift to address disaster management from a relief centric to a multidimensional, preparedness-oriented approach. As the probability of earthquake occurrences in Kashmir valley is very high, the authorities need to revise guidelines and strategies to include the prevention of colossal damage at the onset of disaster (mitigation) rather than over-emphasizing rehabilitation of the affected after it strikes.

- Safety audit of buildings, in terms of, resilience to the impending hazards and requirement of retrofitting of critical infrastructure.
- Strictly adhere to existing and state-of-the-art building codes and the constitution of teams for review and enforcement of these codes.
- Introduction of disaster management as a subject at school, college, and university levels, and conducting mass awareness programs at block, district, and state levels.
- Requirement of research about hazards to educate local people. This can be done by organizing workshops, and training sessions, introducing course modules, conducting international conferences, and public talks, together with spreading awareness about adopting an earthquake-resilient construction model.
- Alignment of the building codes in accordance with the provisions of the Disaster Management Act, Sendai Framework, and state plan.
- More geological and geotechnical investigations are to be carried out to document the active, near-source seismogenic structure which would help in formulating safer design decisions.
- Community contingency strategies are to be prepared by people themselves by identifying their vulnerabilities and preparing action plans to equip themselves for future

disasters. E.g. Caritas India initiated SHIRKAT, an Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction program with the support of the Catholic Social Service Society (CSSS) to reduce the risk of disaster and increase the community's capacity through engaging and training them on different aspects of the disaster. The last few years have enabled people to build robust community institutions in the form of Task Forces and SHGs and Farmers' Clubs. These institutions have been instrumental in mobilizing the marginalized populace with their knowledge and experience and gaining visibility locally.

Earthquakes are endemic to the valley, as has been researched and experienced time and again. Better preparedness for disasters can ensure our relative safety. An efficient disaster management and mitigation plan can be only developed through the participation of all stakeholders.

Although natural calamities cannot be prevented completely, proper strategies and mitigation measures would substantially decrease the level of hazard and damage. So, when disaster strikes, those who have emergency plans and practice them routinely will be in a better position to ride out the event and help their people.

#### Precautions to follow in the event of an earthquake

- Staying calm is the first step.
- Remember: Drop, Cover, and Hold On. When an earthquake starts, grab your emergency preparedness kit.
- Get down on the ground, preferably under a table or desk.
- Never stand under objects that can fall on top of you like a large bookcase.
- Keep clear of windows as glass may shatter from the shaking.
- If you are outside, move away from buildings that can collapse. Stay in an open area. Prefer the parts with no buildings, trees, or power lines.
- If you are at work, school, or any shopping area, don't take the elevator. Take the stairs.
- If you are home, don't go outside. Stay off the roads. If in bed, cover your head and neck with pillows.
- If you are driving, pull over to a large open area, not under trees or power lines. Set the parking brake. Stay in the vehicle.



People of J&K tend to consider earthquake hazards of secondary importance as such, people were clueless and unprepared to cope with the 2005 earthquake that struck the northern parts of Kashmir valley. As expected, the response was haphazard and rehabilitation unplanned, without much consideration for sustainability. This led to an increase in vulnerability rather than reducing it.



# Alligator gar in Dal Lake: A matter of grave concern for native aquatic species



As the alligator gar moves into Dal Lake, there is a real chance that the number of native fish will go down. This drop can have a negative effect on the lake's ecosystem since fish are a key part of keeping the lake in balance. They help move nutrients around, keep algae growth in check, and provide food for other organisms. If the number of fish in a lake goes down, it can mess up these important ecological processes and hurt the lake's health as a whole.



## SEMRAN PARVAIZ

Dal Lake, with its stunning natural beauty, has been drawing people to Kashmir Valley for decades. Other than attracting thousands of tourists worldwide, the lake is home to many species of birds, fish and amphibians. However, what has become the centre of attention this time in Dal Lake is the presence of alligator gar in Dal Lake. Researchers, scientists, and people living near the lake are very worried about this news because the introduction of this exotic species could upset the delicate balance of the lake's ecosystem and put the lives of native aquatic species at risk.

The alligator gar is native to the southern parts of North America. It is known for its large size, strong body, and unique snout that looks like an alligator's. How it got to the calm waters of Dal Lake is still a mystery. This makes people worry that non-native species could be brought there by humans. Its presence can reduce the number of native fish and change the food chain, which can have a negative effect on the lake's health and diversity as a whole.

Let's try to learn more about the fish first and then talk about why

the alligator gar's presence should be a matter of concern.

### Knowing Alligator Gar

The alligator gar (*Atractosteus spatula*) is a very interesting species of fish that is very important to aquatic ecosystems in North America. The alligator gar is known for its unique appearance. It has a long, thin body and a snout that looks like an alligator's, which is how it got its name. All of these physical characteristics help this species as a predator.

The alligator gar is a relatively large fish, as it can grow up to 10 feet. Its size makes it a dangerous predator in its natural environment, where it can dominate the ecosystem. It mostly uses its strong jaws, which have sharp teeth, to catch and eat a wide range of aquatic creatures.

The alligator gar eats whatever it can get its mouth on. Its diet includes small fish, reptiles, and even birds. Its eating habits contribute to its ecological importance as a top-level predator that keeps populations of prey in check and helps keep an aquatic ecosystem in balance.

But the alligator gar's ability to change and its tendency to be aggressive can be problematic when it is moved to an ecosystem such as Dal Lake, where it doesn't belong. Because it can live in many different kinds of environments, the alligator gar has been

seen as an invasive species in some places. When it is moved to a new area, it can lead to problems in the delicate balance of the ecosystem by eating native species and making it hard for other aquatic organisms to survive.

### **Alligator Gar Found in Dal Lake**

The recent news reports that alligator gar has been found in Dal Lake have shocked both scientists and people who live nearby. Dr Tariq Trambo, a well-known aquatic biologist, recently posted a series of photos that show this invasive species in the lake. These photos caught the attention of experts and sparked a lot of interest in the topic.

The discovery of alligator gar in Dal Lake is a big deal because it is probably the second time this species has ever been seen in the area. Concerns have been raised about the possible effects on the environment and the need to take action right away to lessen any bad effects.

Scientists think that people put alligator gar in Dal Lake. It is thought that aquarium owners or people who work in the aquarium business may have accidentally or on purpose put this exotic species in the lake. People can do this when they can't take care of the fish anymore or when the fish are too big for their aquariums, so they let them go into natural bodies of water.

No one knows what effect alligator gar will have on native species and the ecological balance of Dal Lake. But because they eat other fish, there are worries that they might compete with native fish for food and mess up the food chain. Researchers and environmental officials are now trying to figure out what might happen and come up with ways to protect the lake's biodiversity from any harm.

### **The Concern**

Having said that, the presence of alligator gar in Dal Lake has caused a lot of worry about the lake's ecosystem since bringing in a predator that isn't native to the area can have big effects. One of the biggest worries is that the food chain will be broken. The alligator gar is a powerful predator with a big appetite and good hunting skills. It can eat different kinds of fish.

As the alligator gar moves into Dal Lake, there is a real chance that the number of native fish will go down. This drop can have a negative effect on the lake's ecosystem since fish are a key part of keeping the lake in balance. They help move nutrients around, keep algae growth in check, and provide food for other organisms. If the number of fish in a lake goes down, it can mess up these important ecological processes and hurt the lake's health as a whole.

Also, the presence of alligator gar can have a direct effect on how local fishermen make a living. Many people who live around Dal Lake depend on fishing for food and money. Because alligator gar eats local fish, the number of fish in the area can go down, which can cause fishing communities to have trouble making money. This situation shows how important it is to act quickly to protect both the lake's ecosystem and the people whose lives depend on it.

The alligator gar may not only eat native fish, but it may also compete with them for food and a place to live. The delicate ecological balance of Dal Lake could be upset even more by this competition. Native species that have already adapted to the local conditions may be put under more stress, which could hurt their ability to reproduce and cause their numbers to drop.

### **A Threat to Native Species**

Dal Lake is also home to a wide range of native aquatic species. This beautiful body of water is home to many fish, amphibians, and invertebrates, each of which is important to the lake's delicate ecosystem. The alligator gar, on the other hand, has

become a threat to this natural balance.

The effects of this change are much bigger than just a drop in fish populations. The complex web of relationships between species that have grown up over time in Dal Lake depends on a delicate balance between them. Native fish are very important to the balance of prey populations. If their numbers go down because alligator gar eats them, this balance could be thrown off, which would have effects all through the ecosystem.

It is very important to protect Dal Lake's biodiversity, not only for its own sake but also for the health of the local ecosystem. The alligator gar population needs to be managed and controlled so that it doesn't hurt native species too much. Through careful monitoring, research, and the creation of conservation measures, it is possible to protect Dal Lake's delicate ecological balance and keep invasive species like the alligator gar from threatening its unique array of native aquatic species.

### **What Can Be Done?**

Scientists must acknowledge wholeheartedly that this is a real problem. A single-faceted approach won't do any good; rather, a multi-faceted approach is needed. In this section, some steps are outlined that can be taken to conserve Dal Lake and its biodiversity.

**Conduct scientific studies:** Since the species has been reported only the second time, researchers haven't seen so many alligator gars in Dal Lake. This is why no research has been conducted as of now. However, researchers must conduct scientific studies to confirm the total number of gars in dal lake. They must understand its biology, behavior as well as the impact on the local biodiversity. All these studies will form a base for future researchers and policymakers.

**Quick response:** It is very necessary to set up monitoring systems that can identify the existence of alligator gar in the lake as well as put in place procedures that allow for a prompt reaction. This might require conducting frequent surveys, establishing reporting channels, and working together with local people, scientists, and the appropriate authorities.

**Raise awareness:** It is necessary to educate local people, anglers, and tourists on the possible ecological effects of releasing non-native species into the lake. Education may also help prevent the release of non-native species. The necessity of protecting the natural biodiversity of Dal Lake and highlighting the problems connected with importing invasive species might be emphasised in public awareness campaigns in order to draw attention to these topics.

**Set up rules and regulations:** It is very necessary to enforce stringent rules on the importation, sale, and release of fish species that are not native to the area. This may be accomplished by cooperative efforts between departments of fisheries and the aquarium trade business, as well as environmental protection authorities, in order to guarantee appropriate behaviour.

**Set up conservation models:** It is possible to assist in strengthening the lake's ecology by putting habitat restoration initiatives into action. Some examples of such projects include replanting native flora and developing spawning sites for native fish species.

### **Conclusion**

The alligator gar is a major threat to the delicate ecological balance of Dal Lake. We need to act quickly to reduce the damage that could be done to native species and keep the lake's diversity. It is possible to solve this problem and ensure that Dal Lake's ecosystem will be around for a long time through scientific research, public education, and proactive conservation efforts. By taking care of this natural treasure, we not only protect the livelihoods of the people who live nearby, but we also help keep Kashmir's unique biodiversity thriving for future generations.

# How the air quality is affected and ways to improve it



**KAINAT AZIZ**

The magnificent valley of Kashmir is a popular tourist destination in India and is regarded as having a pure and pristine environment. Lamentably, this side of the story lives no more to be narrated with jocundity. Presently 12,541,302 individuals in Jammu and Kashmir are inhaling air that is harmful and does not comply with World Health Organization standards for clean air. Defying the national trend of shrinking sales of automobile companies all across the country, Jammu and Kashmir emerged one among 5 other states (Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim) with improved sales of automobiles from 4.43% to 8.84% in FY19.

As per the reports from the ARTO office in Srinagar, from 2014-15 to 2022 the number of commercial and private vehicles in Jammu and Kashmir has doubled, reaching 24 lakhs. These vehicles are responsible for emitting some major air pollutants into the air in Jammu and Kashmir which include PM2.5, PM10, CO, Ozone, and NO2. The updated guidelines state that annual average concentrations of PM2.5 should not exceed 5 µg/m<sup>3</sup>, while 24-hour average exposures should not exceed 15 µg/m<sup>3</sup> more than 3-4 days per year. Currently, the current concentration of PM2.5 in Srinagar is 23 (µg/m<sup>3</sup>), 0.92 times the recommended limit.

Particulate matter (PM) in the air is a complex combination of many different types of pollutants. It's a complicated aerosol that combines solids and liquids in the form of tiny droplets of liquid, dry solid fragments, and solid cores coated in liquid. For the purposes of regulating air quality, particles are characterized by their diameter. Particles with a diameter of 2.5 microns or less are considered fine particulate matter (PM2.5) while particles with a diameter of 10 microns are recognized as PM10.

PM2.5 and PM10, mostly caused by emissions from the burning of fossil fuels including gasoline, oil, diesel, and wood may be inhaled into the lungs and have negative effects on human health. While PM2.5 and PM10 are also inhalable, the deposition of these particles in the lung varies with particle size. Compared to PM10, which is more likely to settle on the bigger airways in the top lobes of the lungs, PM2.5 is more likely to enter the deeper lobes. Tissue damage and inflammation in the lungs may be caused by inhaled particles.

When fuels like coal, oil, gas, or diesel are burnt at high

temperatures, they release nitrogen oxide (NO<sub>2</sub>). Particle pollution and the chemical processes that produce ozone are both exacerbated by NO<sub>2</sub> and other nitrogen oxides in the outdoor air. It's one of the six most common air pollutants, and the national government has set guidelines to reduce its presence in the atmosphere. When fossil fuels like wood or natural gas are used in the home, nitrogen dioxide is also produced.

Air quality in Srinagar city has deteriorated mainly due to vehicular emission, road dust, and dust emitted from other developmental activities like construction and demolition of buildings, construction of flyovers, bridges, and repairing of roads. The higher levels of PM 10 and PM 2.5 are mainly due to the following reasons: i. Vehicular emission from traffic load – major concern. ii. Construction activities like flyovers, widening of roads, etc within the city, and the traffic diversions resulting in massive traffic jams due to construction of flyovers, etc. iii. The bad condition of roads and road dust. iv. Burning of biomass waste and municipal solid waste. v. Other activities i.e. D.G. sets, adulterated fuel, etc.

## Health consequences of air pollution

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and other lung disorders have been related to long-term exposure to these airborne respiratory irritants responsible for chronic inflammation of the lungs and making it hard to breathe. According to a study by Pati and Suliankatchi (2018), the prevalence of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) is rising fastest in J&K, with air pollution as a major cause of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, affecting about 4,750 out of every 100,000 persons in J&K.

The chest disease cases increase severely in winter in J&K due to the reason of colder air trapping more

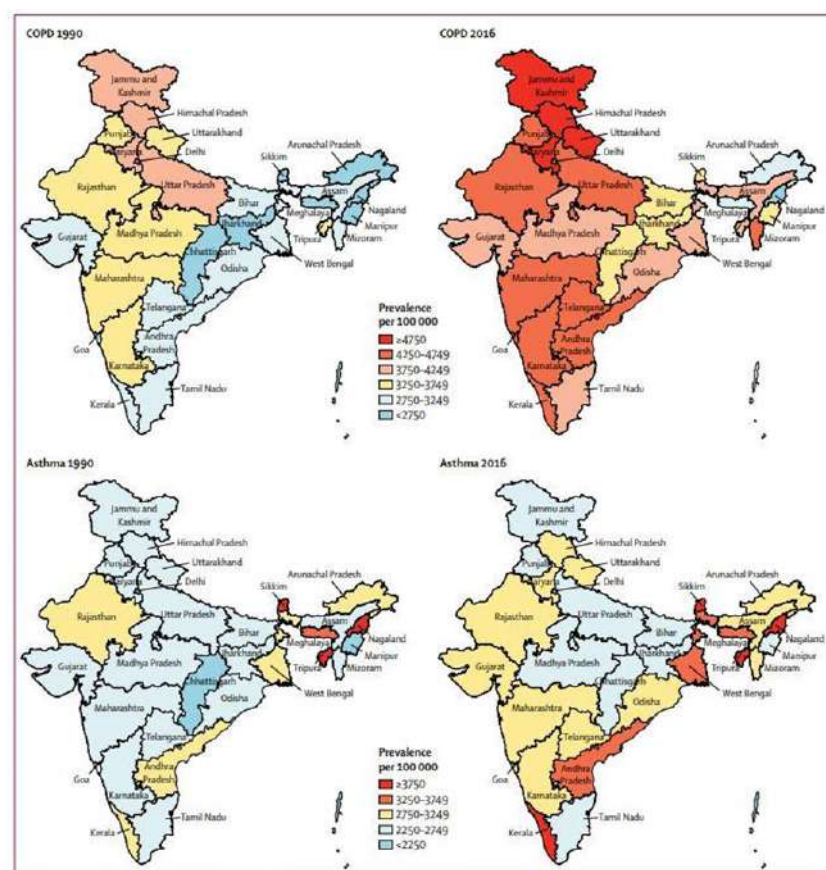


Figure 1: Crude prevalence of COPD and asthma in the states of India, 1990 and 2016  
COPD=chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

pollutants near the surface. As the general rule is that cooler air sinks and warmer air rises. Typically, cooler temperatures might be expected further up (how far up you are from the ground). Because of this, polluted air close to the earth's surface may be easily dispersed as it rises. Winter is when thermal inversions are most common. Because of the reduced strength of the sun at this time of year, the air close to the earth's surface may become cooler than the air above it, leading to the top layer of air acting as a 'lid' and trapping the colder, polluted air below it (Figure 2). In general, the health risks associated with breathing in polluted air during the winter are amplified by thermal inversions.

Another reason winter has higher pollution levels is because the air is less humid. Precipitation is less likely when the air is cold because the molecules in the air can't hold as much water as those in warm air. The rain washes away pollutants and prevents thermal inversions by mixing up the layers of air, so the lack of it is problematic. Air pollution is worse in the winter because of the decreased frequency of thunderstorms, which have the potential to break up ozone.

Moreover, according to a study from Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health the increased mortality risk from COVID-19 infection is attributable to the preexisting medical conditions that emerged from breathing the polluted air. More cases of the COVID-19 virus were found in areas with elevated concentrations of PM 2.5 and NO2 in a recent study by Pansini and Fornacca who analyzed the spatial characteristics of the infection in eight countries (Italy, Spain, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Iran, and China). Air quality index (AQI) was shown to be significantly correlated with the incidence of COVID-19 in Wuhan ( $p < 0.05$ ) and Xiao Gan ( $p < 0.01$ ) in China, according to a similar retrospective investigation by Li et al.

The authors found that PM 2.5 and NO2 were the most substantially connected with the occurrence of COVID-19 out of the four ambient air pollutants studied (PM 2.5, PM 10, NO2, and CO). Dutch researchers who pooled data from 355 different towns in the Netherlands found that PM2.5 was a very significant predictor of COVID-19 cases as well as hospital admissions. It also found that a 20% rise in pollution levels led to a nearly 100% increase in COVID-19 cases.

These studies from different corners of the world are significant enough to demonstrate how breathing poor air quality can make an individual easily fall prey to fatality rates from pulmonary viral outbreaks. Being part of the world's highest populated region where privileges of good healthcare facilities are not everybody's part and parcel of life, it becomes an obligation for every

citizen to play their part to serve mother nature in order to deter future pandemics. Only a healthy body is condonable to maladies.

**Figure 2:** Colder air close to the earth's surface traps pollutants causing health risks.

Ways to improve air quality

**Dealing With Traffic and Vehicle Emissions:** Reducing the numbers of automobile traffic and the use of cleaner vehicles is the best course of action for cutting down on emissions locally. Also, don't let your engine idle, and make sure it's properly tuned.

**Dealing With Industrial Emissions:** Regulation policies by environmental agencies are required to regulate industrial emissions.

**Eco-friendly transportation:** Cut down on your driving by opting for carpooling, public transit, cycling, or footing and all this could reduce air pollution.

**Renewable fuel and clean energy production:** Moving away from fossil fuels, and replacing them with alternative energies like solar, wind, and geothermal is the most basic solution for air pollution.

**Establishment of Policies and Clean Air Action Plans:** Local, national, and international environmental protection agencies need to work hand in hand to ensure the set air quality levels are met through an effective environmental action plan, strategies, and policies.

People in any nation tend to focus more on their rights than their responsibilities as citizens. Even our simple and moderate efforts may go a long way toward reducing the risks of air pollution-related chronic illnesses for ourselves and our communities. These are a few examples of crucial things you should do as a law-abiding citizen. Pollutants have the potential to negatively impact the health of everyone, even otherwise healthy individuals, although some people may be more susceptible than others. You can plan outdoor activities better based on the Air Quality Index (AQI) by downloading the app on your mobile phone. Do everything you can to limit your exposure to harmful levels of air pollution when you learn that the Air Quality Index (AQI) is high.

You must use an air purifier or fresh air machine at home or office indoors and close all the doors, windows, and ventilations when the outdoor Air Quality Index (AQI) is very high. Proper ventilation is highly recommended only when outdoor air quality is improving and moderate AQI range. Choose something that can't influence you quite as much. Include extra rest stops within your outdoor routine. Unless absolutely necessary, postpone plans until the morning or another day.

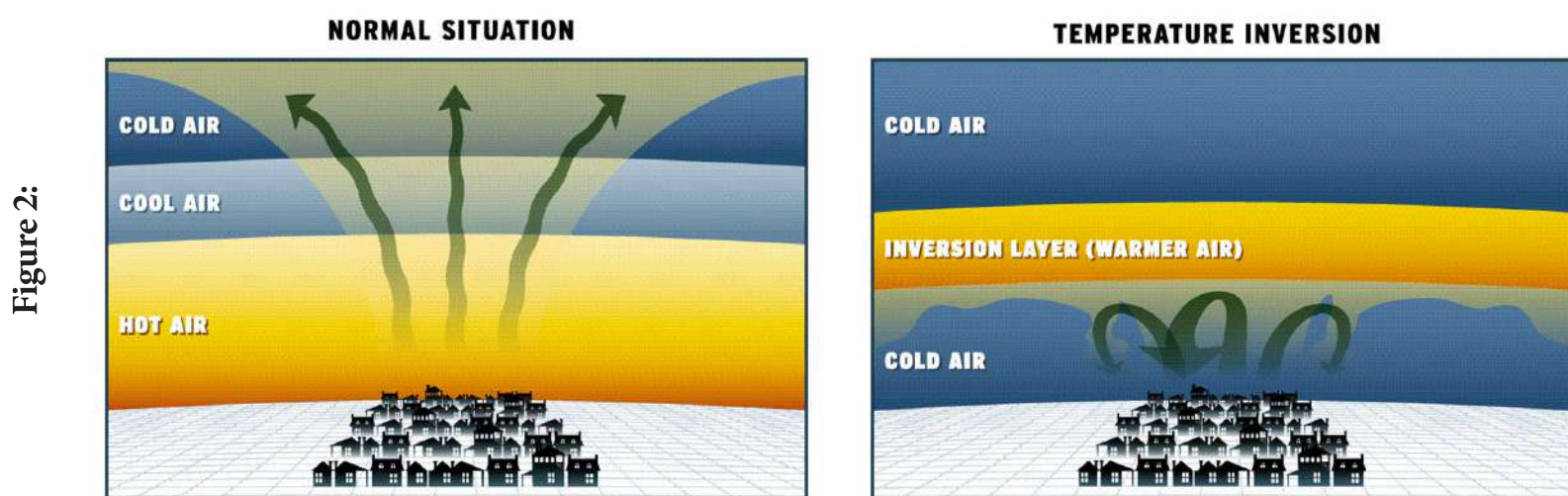


Figure 2:



# Art in Life Foundation hosts art workshop in Tral

Pulwama, June 23: Art in Life Foundation (ALIF), a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting art and creativity, successfully organized an art workshop titled 'Reimagining classrooms for the social and emotional well-being of children' in the picturesque village of Lorow Jagir Tral, Pulwama, south Kashmir.

The second art workshop of the session, held at Govt Middle School, Lorow Tral, aimed to promote empathy, emotional intelligence, and positive relationships among the children and offered them an engaging artistic experience, complete with free art supplies and refreshments.

With the guidance of an experienced art instructor, Nadeem Mushtaq, the students had the opportunity to explore various art forms and techniques, unleashing their creativity through hands-on activities.

Over seventy-five students enthusiastically participated in the workshop, making it a resounding success.

The Art in Life Foundation, which is a community development initiative of JK Policy Institute (JKPI), is committed to bringing art to the students' underserved communities as demonstrated by their decision to organize this workshop in the rural village of Lorow Jagir Tral. By bridging the gap and providing access to artistic opportunities, the foundation showcased the immense potential and talent within the village's young minds.

"We strongly believe in the power of art to transform lives and inspire positive change," said Akeel Rashid, the co-founder of the Art in Life Foundation. "This workshop aimed to empower children, ignite their creativity, and promote their emotional well-being. We are grateful to the staff of Govt Middle School, Lorow Tral, especially Headmaster Bashir Ahmad Wani and teacher Mir Masroor, for their warm reception and active participation."

"The art workshop exceeded our expectations in terms of participant engagement and enthusiasm. We were thrilled to witness the growth and progress of

each student artist as they explored different artistic techniques," said Akeel.

"Art in Life Foundation remains steadfast in its mission to promote the transformative power of art and plans to organize more workshops and initiatives in the future. By investing in the social and emotional well-being of children, the foundation aims to create a brighter, more inclusive future for communities throughout Pulwama and beyond," he said.

"Art workshops like these can have a significant positive impact on children's development, allowing them to express themselves creatively while also addressing their social and emotional needs," he added.

"It's commendable that the Art in Life Foundation took the initiative to organize this workshop in the rural village of Lorow Jagir Tral. Access to such opportunities in remote areas is crucial for providing holistic education and nurturing the talents and potential of children who may otherwise have limited exposure to artistic activities," said Bashir Ahmad Ahmad Wani, headmaster of Govt Middle School, Lorow Tral.

"Art in Life Foundation's commitment to providing these workshops free of charge has made art education accessible to students who may not have had the opportunity otherwise," he added.

Mir Masroor, one of the teachers at the school, said that he and his colleagues observed a remarkable improvement in their students' confidence, artistic skills, and overall engagement in the learning process. "The workshop not only allowed the students to develop their artistic abilities but also fostered a sense of self-expression and individuality," he said.

ALIF's free art workshop aims to provide a creative sanctuary for young students to explore their artistic potential. The organization believes that every child possesses an innate artistic spirit, and is thrilled to facilitate an environment where the children can tap into their creativity freely.



