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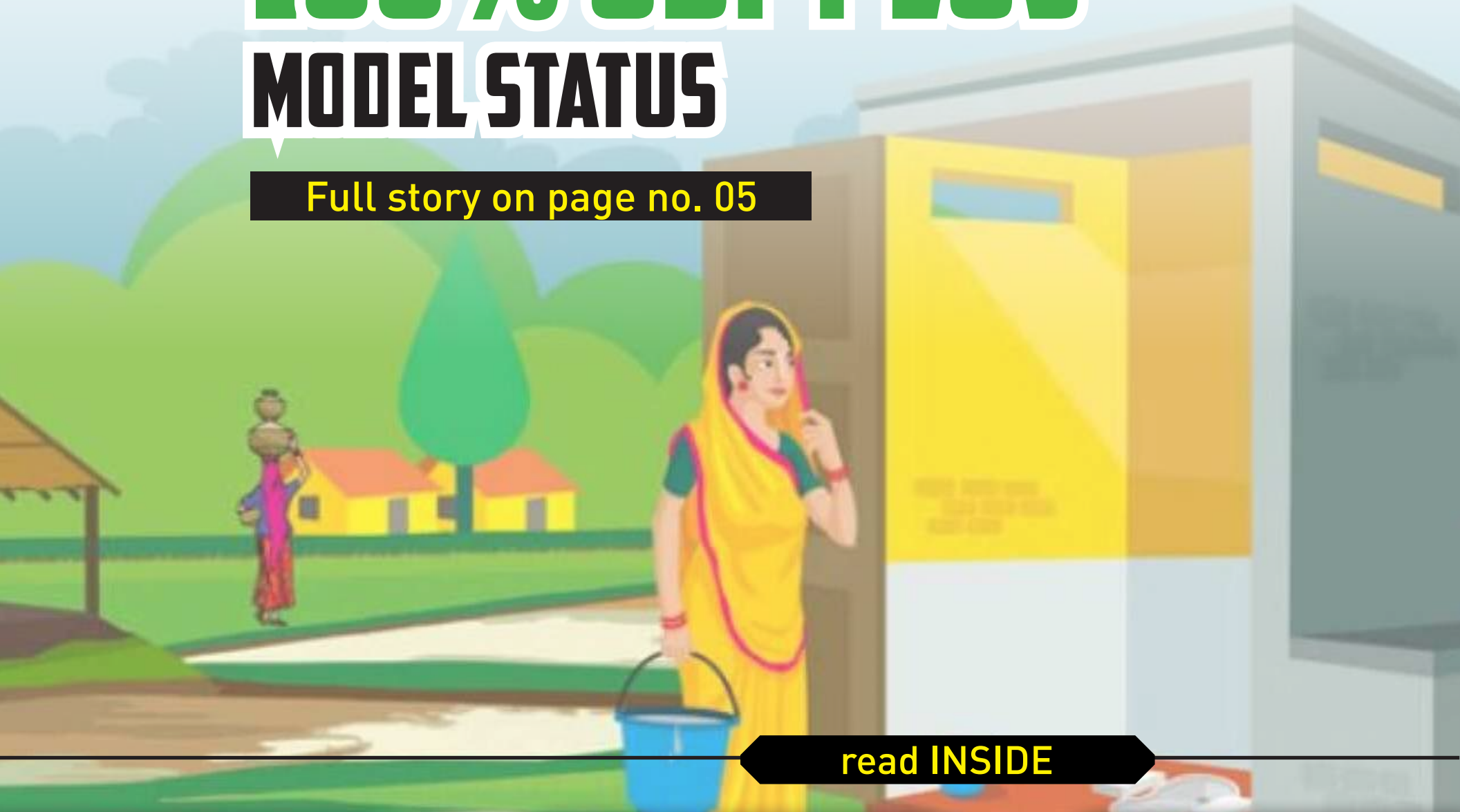
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## JAMMU & KASHMIR ACHIEVES 100% ODF PLUS MODEL STATUS

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## More than 5.50 lakh patients avail treatment at a cost of nearly Rs 1,225 Crores since the launch of AB-PMJAY SEHAT in December 2020

SRINAGAR: The AB-PMJAY SEHAT scheme in Jammu and Kashmir has proven to be a tremendous benefit to the public. Since its launch in December 2020, over 5.50 lakh patients have received treatment, amounting to nearly Rs. 1,225 Crores in healthcare expenses covered.

This initiative, under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana SEHAT (AB PM-JAY SEHAT) scheme, aims to provide Universal Health Coverage to all the residents of Jammu and Kashmir. Launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India on December 26, 2020, it offers an annual health cover of Rs. 5 lakhs per family for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization across both public and private empanelled hospitals in India.

Remarkably, Jammu and Kashmir is the only state or UT in India to implement such a comprehensive scheme, ensuring healthcare access for all residents, regardless of their socio-economic status. The UT boasts a total of 235 empanelled hospitals, both public and private, under the scheme. Additionally, national portability enables beneficiaries to receive treatment at nearly 28,000 empanelled hospitals across the country.

The Government of Jammu and Kashmir has diligently followed the guidelines of the National Health Authority (NHA), Government of India, for the scheme's implementation. This includes using the Model Tender Document issued by NHA for a transparent selection of insurance companies and adopting Health Benefits Packages (2.2 version) for implementation. The IT solutions developed by the National Health Authority are integral to the scheme's operation.

Since the launch of the AB PM-JAY SEHAT scheme, the Government of J&K has paid Rs. 982.59 Crores in premiums to insurance companies. In return, insurance companies have

disbursed a total of Rs. 1,226.68 Crores in claims to empanelled hospitals (Rs. 638.81 Crores to public hospitals and Rs. 587.87 Crores to private hospitals) for the treatment of beneficiaries. A total of around 5.50 lakh patients have availed treatment for various conditions under the scheme which, inter-alia, include 20,940 Cancer patients (amounting to Rs. 171.01 Crores), 19,177 patients with Cardiac ailments (amounting to Rs. 160.87 Crores) and 9,710 patients suffering from Chronic Kidney Diseases (amounting to Rs. 90.57 Crores). In the absence of such a scheme, most of the patients suffering from these life-consuming and Life-Threatening diseases could not have afforded such treatments which required prolonged medical management.

The scheme's insurance model shifts the risk to insurance companies, as evidenced by them paying nearly Rs. 244 Crores beyond the premiums to the empanelled public and private hospitals. This model has not only strengthened the healthcare system within the UT but has also significantly reduced out-of-pocket expenses, preventing catastrophic payments and poverty for families in need of hospitalization. It has also positively impacted the health-seeking behavior and satisfaction of beneficiaries, creating employment opportunities in both government and private hospitals.

For enhanced patient satisfaction, a feedback system using QR codes and a 104 Call Centre has been implemented. Impressively, nearly 99% of patients providing feedback have rated their treatment experience as Excellent or Good.

However, it's worth noting that there have been attempts to discredit the scheme through misinformation. Such allegations are intended to disrupt the services and shall be dealt with strictly.



# Jammu and Kashmir tops the country in e-Governance Service Delivery



JAMMU: Jammu and Kashmir has achieved a significant milestone and remarkable feat in e-governance by providing over 1028 services in online mode for citizens, institutions, and business establishments. In the National e-services Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) report released by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), the Government of India today, the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir secured the topmost position with an impressive 1028 e-services, surpassing Madhya Pradesh with 1010 e-services and Kerala with 911 e-services.

This landmark achievement firmly places Jammu and Kashmir at the forefront of states and UTs in the provisioning of e-services.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, while commending the efforts of all Departments, said that it is an achievement in tune with the commitment and resolve of the J&K administration to provide ease, convenience and accessibility of services to the common man ushering in a new era of digital governance.

This remarkable achievement is reshaping the social landscape, enhancing citizen satisfaction levels, ensuring transparency and accountability and empowering the aspirational and talented youth of the region.

“Driven by a ‘citizens-first’ approach and a steadfast commitment to empowering the public, this digital transformation represents a significant stride towards a governance system that is transparent, accountable, and highly efficient,” he said.

Under the Digital J & K programme launched in mission mode last year, the number of online services has increased exponentially from 35 services in 2019 to 1028 services as on date. The remarkable digital journey of J&K and the resultant transformation from a laggard status in e-governance to a leading position in such a short span of time is unprecedented.

This has brought about a paradigm shift resulting in increased transparency, accountability and efficiency at all levels. There has been a palpable reduction in corruption and an increase in citizen satisfaction which is being regularly monitored through a citizen feedback mechanism. Over 61 lakh messages have been sent to the

citizens for the feedback assessment with an 86% approval rating. Similarly, 73 services have been integrated with Digilocker.

The seriousness of the Government’s resolve can be gauged from the fact that the Public Services Guarantee Act (PSGA), 2011 has been amended to bring online services under its ambit. Around 300 services have been brought under the auto-escalation mechanism to ensure time-bound delivery of services and penalties for delays in service delivery.

Chief Secretary, Dr Arun Kumar Mehta, while congratulating all the Departments for achieving this feat, said that it is a result of commitment to transparent and corruption-free Governance. Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed an exceptional increase in the volume and uptake of e-services which has transformed the government-citizen interface as never before.

“It is the adoption of a robust model of e-Governance and citizen-centric approach by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir which has resulted in an exponential rise in the number of online services and availability of services 24\*7\*365,” he said.

Integration with systems like Digilocker, Aadhaar, and e-payment/SMS Gateways has further enhanced the ease of living and convenience of citizens obviating the need to visit government offices. He also thanked the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) for their unwavering support in this remarkable journey where our online services grew manifold.

Union Secretary, DARPG, V Srinivas, congratulated the UT government for this incredible feat. He stated that the NeSDA framework, developed by DARPG has played a pivotal role in catalyzing the improvement in the uptake, volume, and quality of e-services.

This achievement stands as a testament to the UT Government’s resolve and DARPG’s unwavering commitment to revolutionizing governance through technology. Through the NeSDA framework, DARPG has set a benchmark for states and UTs across the nation. He assured of all support to the UT Administration in its digital journey.

# J&K offers one of the lowest tariff rates to its consumers

**Smart meters known for accurate energy measurement, department demonstrated, proves at public places, consumer premises**



SRINAGAR: In response to a news item published in the local daily of Jammu and Kashmir on 12th September, the J&K Power Development department states that the news report is factually incorrect and the department was not consulted before publication of this news item.

According to the communique of JKPDD, the Hydro Power projects of Jammu and Kashmir have been developed in both State and Central sectors and the UT-owned plants contribute to 18 % of the total energy requirement. It adds that the allocations from Central Generating Stations (CGS) contribute to the majority (70%) of the power supply and the remaining (12 %) is sourced from the Power exchange/private sector.

The communique further reads that power generation from the UT-owned power plants, a major part of J&K's own electricity generation is produced from the Baglihar Hydro Electric Project (BHEP), which generates approximately 900 megawatts (MW) of power and the other locally owned power generation plants like Upper Sindh, Lower Jhelum, Chenani etc, collectively generate around 200-250 MW only. It adds that the total power generation of approximately culminates to 1100-1140 MWs through UT's own generating stations, which however, dips to around 200 MWs in winters due to low water discharge in rivers when the peak demand rises to more than 3000 MWs. The communique further reads that the remaining requirement of the power during winters is met through the Central Generating Stations (CGS) located both within and outside the J&K's boundary.

The PDD further states that out of the total installed capacity of 1140 MW in the UT sector, the major share of around 1030 MW (88% of total

capacity) is utilised in J&K, while the remaining 150 MW is sold outside the J&K to honour the agreements executed between J&K and other entities in the year 2009.

The communique adds that during the last four-year period, J&K has not added any PPA for selling power outside J&K i.e. same quantum has been maintained as per the previous PPAs. It also reads that new PPAs have been signed for procuring power to the tune of 2845 MW for J&K, from different powerhouses (hydro and solar) being developed by CPSUs/JV of J&K & NHPC at a nominal price, in the year 2023, thereby doubling the PPAs capacity/availability of power to J&K in the coming years.

In terms of tariff charges, Jammu and Kashmir offers one of the lowest tariff rates to its consumers in various categories, underscoring its commitment to providing affordable electricity to its residents, it adds.

The communique also reads that it is the wrong notion that consumers are getting inflated bills after the installation of smart meters, rather smart meters are known for accurate energy measurement which has been demonstrated and proved by the department at several public places and consumer premises.

In addition, smart meters also provide consumers with access to real-time data on their energy usage (daily, monthly, and hourly), insights into their average daily consumption, comprehensive billing information, applied tariff rates, and other relevant information – all aimed at empowering consumers to make informed decisions about their energy consumption, the communique reads.





# JAMMU & KASHMIR ACHIEVES 100% ODF PLUS MODEL STATUS

- Declares all 6650 Villages as ODF Plus Model under Swachh Bharat Mission–Grameen
- Over 17.4 lakh household toilets, 5 lakh soak pits; 1.8 lakh compost pits, 6509 waste Segregation sheds & 5523 community Sanitary Complexes constructed across UT



New Delhi: In yet another remarkable accomplishment, achieved during the ongoing 'Swachhata Hi Seva' Campaign, the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir has declared all its 6650 villages across 285 blocks in 20 Districts as ODF Plus Model.

The achievement of the ODF Plus Model for all villages in the UT is a significant milestone as it goes beyond constructing and use of toilets towards cleanliness by managing Grey water and Solid Waste in each village. For a village to achieve the status of the ODF Plus Model, it is required to pass through three stages of ODF Plus namely Aspiring, Rising and Model. When a village achieves a condition where it is visually clean with minimal litter and stagnant water, apart from solid and liquid waste management (SLWM) and adequate cleanliness awareness generation activities, it is declared as an ODF plus Model.

In its attempt to make all villages ODF Plus Model, comprehensive plans were made, bringing all the stakeholders on board before execution. The Village Sanitation Saturation Plans (VSSP) for each

village were made to ensure it has assets available for SLWM. Based on the plans, considerable SLWM infrastructure has been created under SBMG and MGNREGA. For Grey water management i.e., water generated from the kitchen, bathing etc. soak pits, magic and leach pits have been developed at household and community level. 4,83,404 individual soak pits and 24,088 community soak pits have been constructed in J&K. Wherever kitchen gardens are available people have been motivated to dispose grey water through the kitchen gardens. For Biodegradable waste management individual and community compost pits have been constructed. 1,77,442 individual compost pits and 12621 community compost pits have been constructed either by the government or by people themselves in their households under MGNREGA.

More and more of these assets are being constructed thereby making people accept and adopt self-disposal of their organic waste, whether solid or liquid. People are being encouraged to segregate dry and wet waste and process wet waste in compost pits. 6509 waste collection and segregation sheds have



been constructed for the proper disposal of waste. 5523 number of Community Sanitary Complexes and 17,46,619 Individual Household toilets have also been constructed in J&K since it embarked on the journey of ODF and ODF plus.

GOBARdhan which is Galvanising Organic Bio Agro Resources is a waste-to-wealth initiative where animal dung and kitchen waste is used to generate biogas/bio slurry. While two such projects are already functional in J&K, 18 more projects are in the final stages of completion. Door-to-door collection of waste has been initiated in all the panchayats. Through the involvement of locals, youth clubs, NGOs, and expert agencies, waste is being collected from households to be taken to segregation sheds where waste is segregated into various categories such as paper, wood, plastic etc. for its disposal. Some of these segregations shed are semi-mechanized with bailers, shredders etc. User charges are being collected from households, and commercial and institutional establishments, both government and private. A financial model has been put in place for all the districts based on their waste collection agency, to ensure the sustainability of the waste collection mechanism and also generate revenue for panchayats out of the waste disposal, thereby converting this waste to wealth.

To cater to plastic waste in villages, Plastic Waste Management Units (PWMU) are being established in each block, which are at different stages of completion. The plastic in these centres would be cleaned, shredded, bailed etc. for its final disposal. The complete life cycle of the waste is properly managed.

For declaring a village as ODF Plus besides the uploading of ground reporting with clear visuals, videos of Gram Sabhas being conducted and declaring their villages as ODF Plus are all required to be uploaded on the portal, thereby making the entire process very transparent and public. The work done on the ground was captured and updated on the IMIS portal of SBM- G by the Blocks and Districts which facilitated in declaration J&K ODF Plus Model which is a remarkable accomplishment.

To enhance the Capacity Building of officers, village-level workers, and elected representatives about Swachhata, Capacity Building programs across 285 blocks in 20 districts have been conducted at the panchayat level in which the entire Rural Development Department team and swachhagrahis have been trained to further train the people professionally for sustaining the goals of the mission.

Trainers have been trained to dispense information and provide orientations at the panchayat level. SBM(G) is not just a scheme for asset creation but is a behavioural change program which each household of the UT has to embrace for its success.

The focus of the departments on IEC through paintings, banners, awareness programs, plog runs, nukkadnataks is immense. Innovative ideas such as SwachhataKarwan, Swachhata Karwaan 2.0, Swachhata Internship, Swachh Yodha Pratiyogita, Swachhaton, Swachhata Bulletin and Swachhata Quiz have been launched to nudge behavioural change through cleanliness. The role of PRIs is pivotal in motivating people to understand the importance of Swachhata and help in making everyday activities such as Door to Door collection of waste a success. Some elected representatives have done exceptional work in their respective panchayats for which they have received awards and appreciation at the UT and national level. Today every village of J&K so conspicuously carries messages of Swachhata on every public and private building.

Throughout Phase II of the Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen campaign, J&K has carried out many innovative campaigns and initiatives such as “Pink Toilets” to



improve school attendance, Zero Landfill Shri Amarnath Ji Yatras, Give Polythene Get Gold campaign, pink societies to promote holistic development, Sarpanch Samvads, Swachhata internship, Swachhata quiz and Swachh Yodha Pratiyogita.

In another remarkable move to combat the sanitation challenges in rural areas of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the Directorate of Rural Sanitation, J&K announced the nomination of the country's highest gallantry awardee, the Param Var Chakra recipient Captain Bana Singh, a dedicated and decorated former soldier, as the ambassador for the “War Against Waste” initiative in Jammu & Kashmir.

As part of another new initiative aligning with the ongoing Swachhata Hi Seva campaign, the Directorate of Rural Sanitation in Jammu and Kashmir has introduced the ‘Swachhata Bulletin’. Its primary objective is to monitor and share daily updates on Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) activities conducted by districts under SHS 2023. It would create a platform wherein additional community members would come forward and add to the cause of Swachh and Swasth Bharat. The bulletin can be used to collect feedback from stakeholders, aiding in program evaluation and improvement.

Through consistent efforts, and support of the people and elected representatives the department has achieved the status of the ODF Plus Model. However, the biggest challenge shall be in sustaining the efforts that have been put in to ensure that J&K becomes the cleanest UT in the country.

Sustainability begins with a robust infrastructure. To ensure the sustainability of the ODF Plus model status of J&K in rural areas, the Department of Rural Development has to ensure consistent building and maintenance of sanitation facilities, including toilets and waste management systems across districts, blocks and panchayats, paid usage of this massive infrastructure through its every citizen, to ensure accountability and responsibility and regular efforts towards behaviour change so that filth and unhygienic behaviour becomes unacceptable to everyone and Swachhata becomes a mass movement in a real sense. For this, engaging the communities, socio-cultural groups, PRIs, and more particularly close to 90000 women SHGs of J&K is pivotal.

Moreover, leveraging technology and innovation can significantly enhance sustainability. The use of smart sanitation solutions, remote monitoring, and data analytics can help in efficient resource allocation and timely maintenance.

Sustainability in ODF Plus is not a one-time achievement but a continuous journey. It requires a multi-dimensional approach encompassing infrastructure development, behavioural change, community engagement, financial sustainability, technology integration, and more. By embracing these principles, J&K can not only sustain its ODF Plus Model status but also maintain it for generations to come, ensuring a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable future.



# ‘Rs 5000 Cr earmarked for upgrading infrastructure, setting up Public Libraries in Gram Panchayats’

SRINAGAR: The Government of India has earmarked a whopping Rs 5000 crores for the year 2023-24 for upgrading infrastructure in Public Libraries and extending Library facilities to the Gram Panchayat level across the country.

This was announced by Prof Ajay Pratap Singh, Director General, National Library of India (NLI) and Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) in his opening remarks at the two-day meeting of J&K UT-Level Library Advisory-cum-Purchase Committee (UTLLACPC) which began at SPS Library Complex here on Sunday.

Prof Singh said it is for the first time, that such a huge amount has been earmarked, in one go, by the Government of India for upgrading library infrastructure in the States & UTs. He said the extension of library facilities and taking the library movement to the grassroots level is aimed at facilitating improved access for children and adolescents in rural and semi-urban areas to the latest books and e-connecting them to the vast learning resources available through the National Digital Library of India (NDLI).

He said the Union Ministry of Finance has already sought proposals from all the States and Union Territories under the scheme as the funding for upgrading infrastructure in Public Libraries and providing Library facilities at the Gram Panchayat level would be available on a “First-Come-First-Serve” basis. “A communication in this regard has been sent by the Department of Expenditure, Union Ministry of Finance to the Chief Secretaries of all the States & UTs in May 2023,” he said.

Enumerating the broader contours of the scheme, Prof Singh said that funding under the scheme would be available to the states and UTs for the construction of new library buildings; renovation of existing libraries; purchase of library furniture; purchase of IT equipment including computers, printers, networking etc and purchase of books. He said financial assistance under the scheme would be limited to one Library in each Municipal Ward and one Library in each Gram Panchayat.

Prof Singh said J&K’s Libraries Department should also explore the possibility of establishing decent reading spaces, in convergence with related departments, at the Public Parks, Gardens, along Jhelum River bank and around Dal Lake for tourists and morning walkers.

Earlier, welcoming the participants at the meeting, the Director, Libraries & Research, Mr Mohammad Rafi gave an overview of the initiatives taken by the Department to upgrade the infrastructure in Public Libraries and provide best possible facilities to the library users. He said the huge increase in footfall in the Public Libraries has put immense pressure on library resources and there is a pressing need for upgrading the infrastructure, especially the library furniture.

The Director Libraries sought the intervention of Director General RRRLF to facilitate early release of funds under National Mission on Libraries (NML) from

RRRLF for construction of buildings for Gani Memorial UT Central Library at Rajouri Kadal Srinagar and District Library Samba. He also pressed for release of RRRLF financial assistance under Matching Grant Scheme for upgrading furniture in Public Libraries.

UT-Level Library Advisory-cum-Purchase Committee discussed and approved various proposals put forth by the Director, Libraries and Research for upgradation and expansion of Public Library facilities in J&K. These include, Digitization of Libraries; establishment of theme-based Libraries-cum-Reading Centres at tourist resorts, setting up of dedicated Reading Areas for travellers at Srinagar & Jammu Airports, collaboration with School Education Department to organize free coaching of students for various competitive exams, organizing Book Fair at Srinagar and Jammu in collaboration with National Book Trust (NBT), setting up of “Book Village” at Aragam in District Bandipora as a joint initiative of the Department of Libraries & Research; District Administration Bandipora and Pune-based NGO “Sarhad”, setting up of Public Library-cum-Reading Room at Gandtal, Harwan under Aspirational Blocks Development Program (ABDP) in convergence with the Department of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, extension of Internet facility to the Public Libraries at Tehsil & Block levels, weeding out of obsolete books & reference material for Competitive Examinations, write off the damaged/lost books, conservation of books & manuscripts, procurement of e-Books and making available more Online Services to the Library Users.

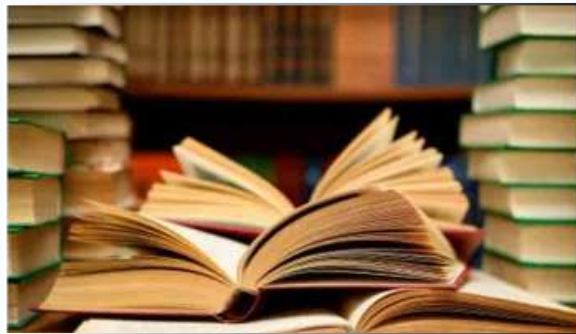
UTLLACPC approved the list of books under various categories to be purchased by the Department of Libraries & Research for its Libraries during the year 2023-24.

The meeting was informed that J&K has the distinction of having the oldest libraries in the country including SRS Library Jammu established in 1879 and SPS Library Srinagar established in 1898.

UTLLACPC members who attended the 4th meeting of the forum included Dr Arif, Dy Director, J&K Board of School Education; Mr Saleem Pandit, Journalist; Mr Satish Vimal, expert Hindi language; Mr Liaqat Jafri, expert Urdu language; Mr Ghulam Nabi Haleem, expert Kashmiri Language; Ms Surinder Neer, expert Punjabi Language; Prof Parvez Majeed, Media Studies and Mr Kulbushan Malhotra.

Besides UTLLACPC members, the meeting was attended by the Deputy Director of Libraries Jammu/Kashmir; Assistant Director, of Libraries & Research Kashmir; Chief Librarians of Oriental Research Library Srinagar & SPS Library Srinagar and other officials.

Pertinently, the 16-member J&K UT-Level Library Advisory-cum-Purchase Committee (UTLLACPC) was constituted by the J&K Government in February 2021 to recommend measures for the development of the library services and upgradation of library facilities in the UT. The Committee also makes the selection of books to be purchased by the Libraries Department for its libraries.



# Govt embarks on ambitious outreach programme to connect with masses

SRINAGAR: With a view to reaching out to the masses, Government has rolled out a unique and ambitious outreach programme of fortnight celebrations for the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) from August 01.

Under the programme, lasting for two weeks, officers and officials of different ranks from the UT as well as district administrations are visiting various Gram Panchayats to inspect the JJM works and interact with the local communities to make them familiar and get feedback about the implementation of this ambitious Mission.

During the launch of the campaign, Chief Secretary, Dr. Arun Kumar Mehta urged upon the Deputy Commissioners to ensure maximum participation of local communities in the programme and convert it into a water festival across the UT.

Principal Secretary, Jal Shakti Department, Shaleen Kabra, while speaking about the campaign, advised the visiting officers to check the pace and quality of work undertaken. He stressed the need for achieving 100% testing of water sources and schemes during the fortnight-long campaign.

Mission Director, Jal Shakti, Dr. G N Itoo highlighted the need for special focus on capacity building and involvement of local communities so that after completion of schemes they can take over and run the schemes successfully. He said with today's 446 programs more than 1000 programs have so far been organized across UT as a part of the campaign. He appreciated all Deputy Commissioners for their active support in the campaign.

During this campaign, is on inspection of works being executed under JJM by the visiting officers, reporting of 100% FHTC villages as Har Ghar Jal Villages, certification of Har Ghar Jal reported villages through special Gram Sabhas, installation of signages on all Water supply schemes, identification of 'JJM Nodal Person' from each village, making field testing kit available in each village, debates, painting Competitions, Rallies, Street Plays and other activities.

A District level Pani Samiti Convention (concluding function at district level) on 14th August is also proposed under the outreach programme.

## J&K govt simplifies 'transfer of vehicle ownership' through e-Sign

SRINAGAR: The Transport Department of J&K, in its drive to increase ease of doing business with the Government and eliminate opportunities for corrupt behaviour, launched a new online module for the Transfer of Vehicle ownership in Jammu and Kashmir.

The new module would enable both the buyer and the seller to have the option of electronically signing the legal documents, required for the application process through their AADHAR registered mobile number. This has not only made the process of making the transfer of ownership application much easier but also obviated the requirement for the buyer and seller to visit the Motor Vehicle Department's offices in person to get their identities verified as the same is being accomplished through the AADHAR enabled e-Signing process.



Earlier, the buyer and seller of a vehicle had to download application forms, fill them manually on the portal, upload them back and submit the physical copies to the Transport Department's Offices too. But now after the introduction of this ambitious initiative, Form 29 and Form 30 shall be auto-generated by fetching relevant information from VAHAN and AADHAR databases.

Earlier, the buyer and seller had to upload some extra documents such as the sale deed,

address proof and others. But now, there will be no such requirement, if the buyer and seller opt for the e-Sign method of application.

Also, processing of such applications used to take weeks or even months, but now with the use of the e-Sign method the same would take hours if not minutes, because all the relevant data will be fetched through VAHAN and AADHAR databases, obviating the need for another verification by Motor Vehicle Department Officials.



# Crewel embroidery entrepreneur from Kupwara ‘Razia Sultane’ establishes successful venture

‘Karkhandar’ scheme beneficiary trains 200 girls; earns Rs 60k to Rs 70k per month



KUPWARA: Razia Sultan, a young crewel embroidery entrepreneur from Trehgam Kupwara never pinned her hopes on Government jobs; instead she took her interest in handicraft activities and scripted her own success story by dint of her hard work and passion.

Today, she has established a successful Crewel Embroidery and chain stitch unit at Trehgam Kupwara where she is generating livelihood for herself and other women working in her unit and simultaneously imparting training to other girls of the area.

“In 2012 my father passed away and there was no one to support my family financially. It was in 2013, when the Handicrafts Department, Kupwara established a Crewel Elementary Training Centre at my native village Trehgam and I along with other village girls got registered for the Crewel training Course against a monthly stipend of Rupees 500/= per month,” said Razia Sultan, daughter of Mohammad Sultan Sheikh.

“The initial training course had a duration of one year and because of good response from the trainees, the batch was put to the advanced training for two more years in Advanced Training Course in Crewel craft against a monthly stipend of Rs 700/= Per month to each trainee,” Razia added.

The love for the craft was the passion of the girl, she never thought to leave it halfway, Razia Sultan got engaged as a Crafts-Instructor at a Crewel center at the age of 19 years against a monthly salary of Rs.2000. Salary of Rs.2000 in 2017 meant a lot for her and her family and her joy was doubled as she was engaged as a Craft Instructor, the profession she loved most.

In the meantime, Razia Sultan was honored with a State Level Award by the Handicrafts department

in Crewel Craft in 2018, which fueled her passion for crewel embroidery.

This award completely changed her life. She took up crewel embroidery as her full-time profession.

During the same time, the Government of J&K UT announced the ‘Karkhandar’ scheme wherein the meritorious Pass-outs are given advanced training regarding the design and marketing, and the Karkhana of Razia Sultan was covered under the said scheme for a period of six months thus enabling Razia Sultan to carry forward her dream business in the Handicrafts sector viz a viz handholding of the trainees of the Karkhana to strive for their success as well.

Razia Sultan has been getting all logistic support from the Government through the Handicrafts Department Kupwara, taking the benefit of the Karkhandar scheme she made 285-meter crewel cloth and produced 236 Crewel Embroidered cushion covers. She said that during the last 5 months, she got revenue of Rs 160,000 for her Crewel work. Simultaneously Razia Sultan is now training other girls in her crewel embroidery and Chain Stitch unit at Trehgam where she has trained more than 200 girls so far besides she has established her successful Entrepreneurial venture and is earning around Rs. 60000 to Rs 70000 per month.

Razia Sultan believes that every woman should become financially Independent which will make them more self-reliant and improve their self-esteem and boost their confidence.

She suggests that women/girls should come forward and start their ventures to generate employment and earn profit simultaneously and become job providers, not job seekers.

# Srinagar ranks first across India in implementation of JJM among Har Ghar Jal Certified Districts

SRINAGAR: In one more major recognition, the Srinagar District has been Ranked as the top performing District under Jal Jeevan Survekshan(JJS-2023) among 114 Har Ghar Jal Certified Villages across the Country in the implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission(JJM) during October 01, 2022 to June 30, 2023.

The Srinagar District has attained the top rank in the implementation of JJM by obtaining the highest score of 83.0 under the set parameters and indicators of JJS-2023.

The activities during this period for achieving the top rank were conducted under the overall supervision of the Deputy Commissioner Srinagar, Mohammad Aijaz Asad(Chairman JJM Board Srinagar) including completing water Quality testing of all the sources of different villages of Srinagar for Physical and bacteriological and Chemical Parameters which plays a crucial role in ensuring the provision of clean and safe drinking water to rural households.

The mission emphasizes regular and comprehensive testing of water sources such as borewells, handpumps, springs, and surface water bodies to assess their suitability for human consumption the sources of all the villages have been tested successfully and meet the specific quality standards set by regulatory authorities.

Similarly, 5 Women in each village of Srinagar have been trained using FTK's for conducting Water Quality tests. The purpose is to empower women with the tools and knowledge to perform basic water quality tests in their communities. By providing women with FTK's and appropriate training they can actively participate in monitoring the quality of Water sources.

In addition, Water Quality Testing for Chemical and Bacteriological Parameters of each School and Anganwadi Centre of all Villages of Srinagar has been conducted successfully with the aim of ensuring that drinking water provided to children in these institutions meets the required quality standards and is safe for consumption as Children are more vulnerable to water-borne diseases due to their developing immune systems and potential exposure to contaminated water sources.

Likewise, Water Quality testing of at least 3 Households from each village of Srinagar for Chemical and Bacteriological Parameters has been performed.

While Geo-Tagging of the PWS/Assets of all the Villages of Srinagar has been completed within a stipulated time frame.

In addition, 100 % FHTC( Functional Household Tap Water Connection ) Coverage along with Har Ghar Jal Certification of each Village. Under FHTC every rural household of Srinagar has been provided with a reliable and sustainable water supply, thereby improving the overall quality of life and promoting better health and hygienic practices within the



Community.

Construction of New Water Supply Scheme Poshpathri and Retrofitting Scheme of Upper Pora Balhama, Augmentation/Improvement/Retrofitting of Pipelines at Balhama A&B.

Similarly, 2 Skilled persons have been identified for various villages for the operation and Maintenance of the Water Supply Scheme.

Under JJM awareness programmes /Cultural programmes were also conducted on the directions of the Deputy Commissioner in different villages of Srinagar to raise public awareness about Water Conservation, Water Management, and the importance of Clean Drinking water. These programmes were designed to educate and engage communities in understanding the significance of water resources, promoting water-saving practices, and ensuring sustainable use of water for various purposes.

Pani Samitis were also formed in different Panchayat Halkas of Srinagar wherein local communities were part of decision-making processes related to Water Supply Schemes thereby ensuring community ownership and promoting sustainability of water sources and Infrastructure in Srinagar District.

Worth to mention that, Jal Jeevan Survekshsan (JJS 2022) is an evaluation methodology introduced by MoJS, GoI on October 02, 2022, to assess the Districts/ States on the basis of performance in the implementation of JJM and rank them accordingly at the national level on a monthly basis.

Under this competition, District Srinagar has done some remarkable work in Har Ghar Jal Certification, Water Quality Testing through labs & FTKs, Training of women for the use of FTKs, Skill training for O&M Staff, etc.

Speaking about the achievement, Deputy Commissioner Srinagar, Mohammad Aijaz Asad has said that this is a pride moment for Srinagar District which has been achieved through the collective efforts of the Team.

The DC has also congratulated the team of JJM and urged them to work with added zeal and dedication to maintain top rank in JJS.



# FROM **TURMOIL** TO **TRIUMPH**: Kupwara's spectacular journey to becoming a sports hub



**KUPWARA:** In a remarkable testament to resilience and positive transformation, the picturesque town of Kupwara in Jammu and Kashmir has undergone a striking metamorphosis, evolving from a former terror hotspot to a vibrant sports hub.

This inspiring change was evident in the enthusiastic gathering of thousands who had gathered to watch a recent cricket match held at the iconic Karihama ground. The winds of change are sweeping through the region, and the collective embrace of this shift toward progress is heartening.

To mark the 77th Independence Day, J&K Sports Council had organized the final match of the Ramhal Cricket League at Karihama Sports Stadium in district Kupwara. The match became a prominent attraction of the day and was attended by Secretary Sports Council, Nuzhat Gul; DC Kupwara, Ayushi Sudan; SSP Kupwara, Yougal Manhas, besides, people in crowds witnessed the cricket match.

The match was organized under the banner of Azadi Ka Khel Utsav, Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyan, and My Youth My Pride. It was played between Friends XI Lolab and Sultan Warriors Baramulla. Sultan Warriors Baramulla won the toss, elected to bat, and managed to score 138 runs. The target turned out to be meagre in front of Friends XI, and they won the title easily.

Secretary Sports Council, Nuzhat Gul, emphasized that the cricket match is a part of the sports revolution taking place in J&K UT. She highlighted that sports events are being organized all over J&K, engaging a large number of youth. The Karihama Stadium witnessed a historic cricket match, providing a positive step for engaging the youth of Kupwara district in sports activities, aiming to keep them away from social evils like drug menace.

Responding to public demand, Secretary Nuzhat Gul assured the people of improving facilities in the Karihama stadium and committed to the construction and upgradation of sports infrastructure across the Kupwara

district.

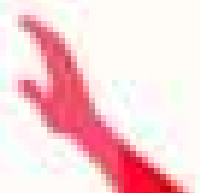
DC Kupwara, Ayushi Sudan, congratulated both cricket teams for their athletic skills, particularly the winning team for their victory. She mentioned the recent inauguration of the Sports Complex at Handwara by the Hon'ble Lt. Governor to boost sports activities in the district. She also shared plans for developing playgrounds under MGNREGA in each block of the district, emphasizing the commitment of the J&K Government and District Administration Kupwara to provide a better platform for sports enthusiasts.

The revitalization of Kupwara as a sports hub is a testament to the indomitable spirit of its people, who have chosen to shape their own destiny despite challenges. The transition from violence to vibrancy is a result of collective efforts, forward-looking policies, and unwavering determination.

The rise of Kupwara as a sports hub has been a gradual yet purposeful journey. Local authorities, community leaders, and residents have joined hands to channel their energies into constructive endeavors, and sports have emerged as a unifying force. The Karihama cricket match, with its electrifying atmosphere and a sea of enthusiastic spectators, reflects the growing sense of unity and hope that has taken root in the region.

The significance of this transformation extends beyond the realm of sports. It is a testament to the indomitable spirit of the people of Kupwara, who have chosen to shape their own destiny despite the challenges they have faced. The transition from violence to vibrancy is a result of collective efforts, forward-looking policies, and the unwavering determination of both the local populace and government.

As Kupwara paves the way for a brighter future, it serves as an inspiration not only to its residents but to the world at large—a reminder that even in the face of adversity, the human spirit has the capacity to triumph and soar to new heights.







## SEHAT-PMJAY: Transforming the health sector in Jammu and Kashmir over the last 4 years

Over the past four years, Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has witnessed a massive transformation in its health sector through the implementation of the SEHAT-PMJAY (Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana - SEHAT) scheme. This landmark initiative, launched by the government, has revolutionized healthcare accessibility and affordability for all residents in the region. By providing free and universal health insurance coverage, the scheme has brought a wave of positive change and hope for millions of beneficiaries.

**Universal Health Insurance Scheme**  
J&K has proudly become the first state in India to introduce a Universal Health Insurance Scheme. This ambitious scheme ensures that all residents of the state have access to quality healthcare, irrespective of their economic background or social status. The provision of free health insurance coverage to every individual in J&K has been a game-changer, eliminating financial barriers that previously hindered healthcare access for many.

**Upto Rs 5 Lakh Health Cover Per Family**

One of the key highlights of SEHAT-PMJAY is the provision of up to Rs 5 lakh health coverage per family. This significant amount ensures that families can avail of medical treatment without worrying about the burden of exorbitant healthcare expenses. The financial security provided by the scheme has empowered families to seek timely medical attention, contributing to better health outcomes and improved quality of life.

**Impressive Enrollment and Coverage**

The success of SEHAT-PMJAY is evident in the staggering number

of beneficiaries registered under the scheme. With 82.22 lakh beneficiaries already enrolled, the initiative has reached far and wide, covering a substantial portion of the state's population. Notably, all families registered under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) have also been included in the ambit of AB PMJAY-SEHAT, further enhancing the reach of this comprehensive healthcare program.

**Issuance of Golden Cards**

82 lakh individuals have been issued Golden Cards under SEHAT-PMJAY, symbolizing their entitlement to medical treatment under the scheme. These cards serve as a gateway to quality healthcare services at empanelled hospitals, granting beneficiaries the dignity and care they deserve in times of medical need.

**Growing Network of Empanelled Hospitals**

To ensure seamless healthcare services, 229 hospitals have been empanelled under the PM-JAY network. This extensive network of hospitals caters to a diverse range of medical needs, making healthcare more accessible and convenient for beneficiaries across the state.

The SEHAT-PMJAY initiative has indeed been a beacon of hope and transformation in the health sector of Jammu and Kashmir. By providing free and universal health insurance coverage, extending PMJAY to additional families, and establishing a robust network of empanelled hospitals, the scheme has brought about a positive change in the lives of millions of people. As the state continues to witness progress in its healthcare accessibility and outcomes, SEHAT-PMJAY stands as a testament to the power of inclusive and comprehensive healthcare policies.



# Strengthening grassroots democracy: Empowering PRI institutions in last four years



**I**n the past four years, significant strides have been made in strengthening grassroots democracy through the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India. Transparent and fair elections were conducted in 2019-20, resulting in the election of about 33,000 representatives across all tiers of PRIs in 20 districts, covering 4291 panchayats.

To bolster the infrastructure of PRIs, 20 District Development Council (DDC) and 48 Block Development Council (BDC) office buildings are under construction, aiming to provide better facilities and support for local governance.

Recognizing the importance of capacity-building, a massive exercise was undertaken, equating to over 6 lakhs mandays, to empower all PRIs. Around 6,000 Elected Representatives were also sent on exposure visits to other states and prestigious institutes to gain insights into effective governance practices. Furthermore, a plan to send 10,000 more representatives on such visits is underway for the current year.

Empowering PRIs at the local level, the power to grant building permissions in certain areas has been delegated to the panchayats. Additionally, all Panchayats have been e-enabled, streamlining communication and administrative processes.

Recognizing the dedication of elected representatives, monthly honorariums are being provided to representatives from all three tiers of Panchayati Raj, ensuring financial stability and incentivizing their commitment to public service.

Addressing security concerns, an ex-gratia compensation of Rs. 251 is provided to the next of kin of elected representatives in the event of loss of life due to militancy-related incidents, safeguarding their families and encouraging their participation.

To facilitate effective planning and

implementation, Panchayat Prabhari Officers have been nominated for all 4291 Panchayats, enhancing coordination and support at the grassroots level.

Promoting excellence, 23 Panchayats were awarded at the UT level for their exemplary work, fostering healthy competition and inspiring further progress.

Infrastructure development continues, with more than 2,500 Panchayats having Panchayat Ghar, and a plan to construct 500 more during the current year, providing essential community spaces for local governance and activities.

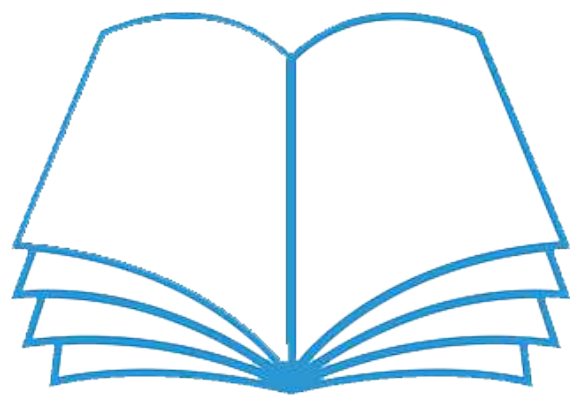
Recognizing the significance of renewable energy, 1131 Gram Panchayats are being solarized, ensuring uninterrupted power supply and internet connectivity, thereby facilitating communication and development.

In line with capacity-building efforts, 1889 Posts of Panchayat Accounts Assistants were created and filled up through the Jammu and Kashmir Services Selection Board (JKSSB), enhancing financial management and accountability.

Acknowledging the efforts of PRIs, 22 Panchayats received national-level awards since 2018, with an additional 3 Panchayats being recognized this year, highlighting their contributions to the nation.

The successful implementation of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act in 2018 was a crucial step towards decentralization and financial empowerment of PRI institutions across all tiers, fostering local governance and development.

In conclusion, the last four years have witnessed remarkable progress in strengthening grassroots democracy through PRIs. The efforts towards transparency, capacity-building, infrastructure development, and recognition have empowered these institutions to play a pivotal role in local governance, paving the way for inclusive and sustainable development across the nation.



# **JKPI Publications**



# Investigating the vital link between Clean Energy and Maternal Health

How Sustainable Solutions Transform the Well-being of Mothers and Communities.



**NEHA AGGARWAL**

The relationship between clean energy and maternal health is a subject of increasing importance as countries around the world are seeking to transition from fossil fuels towards more sustainable sources of energy. This relationship between clean energy and maternal health has been continuously ignored. From solar, wind, and hydropower to geothermal, clean energy technologies offer a range of benefits that extend beyond environmental sustainability, including improved public health, enhanced energy security, and economic growth. Access to clean energy is critical for improving maternal health outcomes in developing countries where women often rely on traditional sources of energy such as wood, charcoal, and kerosene for cooking, heating and lighting. It has been found that regions with high levels of maternal and newborn mortality have the highest overlap with regions lacking modern energy sources.

Through an in-depth exploration of case studies and a foundation in scientific research, this article highlights that clean energy initiatives not only champion environmental sustainability but also significantly bolster maternal health outcomes.

## **Traditional sources of energy and Maternal Health**

The traditional sources of energy emit hazardous emissions that not only damage the earth's atmosphere but also deteriorate the health condition of individuals. Women are the worst to suffer from the reliance on fossil fuels for cooking. According to the UN Women's 2014 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, women take on the majority of care work and cooking in the households exposing them to harmful smoke emitted from biomass-burning cookstoves. Indoor smoke can be 100 times higher than the acceptable level of fine particulate matter (PM 2.5), as per WHO. Inhaling these toxic fumes kills more people than malaria, and

women are disproportionately affected. Exposure to smoke and other pollutants during pregnancy and the postpartum period can increase the risk of maternal and newborn mortality, as well as complications such as low birth weight, preterm delivery, and stillbirths. Each year, more than 300,000 women worldwide die from pregnancy-related and childbirth-related issues, and more than 1 million newborns die in the first month of life. WHO data reveals that soot inhalation accounts for 45% of pneumonia mortality in children under the age of five, and women exposed to high levels of indoor smoke have a twofold increased risk of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease compared to women who use cleaner fuels and technology.

Women's health is adversely affected by long-term household use of non-clean energy sources such as firewood, coal, and cow dung. Households in developing countries (regions) such as Southeast Asia, South Africa, the Sahara, and China have used unclean energy for a long time, which has caused more obvious harm to women's health. It has been found that a third of people on the planet (2.6 billion) lack access to clean fuels.

## **Benefits of Clean Energy Sources**

Cleaner household energy eliminates harmful emissions such as CO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>2</sub>, PM (Particulate Matters), etc., and optimizes indoor air quality. It reduces the likelihood of women being diagnosed with respiratory diseases. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency, access to clean energy can reduce the burden of indoor air pollution by up to 90%, reducing the risk of respiratory diseases such as pneumonia. A study conducted in India found that the use of clean cookstoves was associated with a 37% reduction in the risk of stillbirth and a 21% reduction in the risk of low birth weight. Similarly, a study conducted in Nepal found that the use of biogas stoves was associated with a 42% reduction in the risk of stillbirth and a 22% reduction in the risk of low birth weight. A study in China found that clean energy consumption increased from 2000 to 2014 while maternal mortality rates decreased, indicating a strong negative correlation between cleaner household energy and maternal mortality.

It has been found that the mortality rate is high in regions that lack modern energy resources, access to solar and wind energy that can provide electricity can be a powerful solution. When health facilities will have sufficient and reliable power, women will be able to safely give birth. Also, with cleaner energy sources, clinics would

be able to preserve lifesaving vaccines for newborns and children. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the critical link between clean energy and maternal health, with several examples of how clean energy sources have improved maternal health outcomes in different countries. In India and Nepal, traditional cookstoves that burn solid fuels like wood, charcoal, and animal dung are commonly used for cooking. In recent years, the introduction of improved cookstoves that use clean-burning fuels like liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) in India has resulted in improved maternal health outcomes, with reduced rates of preterm birth and low birth weight. Nepal has installed biogas systems that convert animal waste into clean-burning fuel has reduced exposure to harmful pollutants, resulting in a decrease in maternal mortality rate.

In sub-Saharan Africa, where access to electricity and healthcare services is limited in many rural areas, solar-powered health clinics have emerged as a solution. By providing clean energy to power medical equipment and lighting, as well as improving access to maternal healthcare services, solar-powered clinics have contributed to reduced maternal and infant mortality rates and improved health outcomes for mothers and babies. Similarly, access to clean drinking water is a major challenge in many areas of Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas. The installation of wind-powered water pumps has improved access to clean water, reducing the incidence of waterborne diseases that can impact maternal and child health.

### Challenges in implementing Clean Energy Solutions

It is crystal clear that clean energy is critical in achieving sustainable development. However, implementing clean energy solutions is a daunting task, fraught with challenges. One of the biggest challenges in implementing clean energy solutions is the high installation costs. The initial cost of installing clean energy solutions is financially difficult for governments of low-income countries to manage. Another challenge is the lack of infrastructure and technical capacity to support the deployment of clean energy technologies. In many areas, there may be insufficient access to the necessary resources, such as trained personnel, equipment, and financing, to implement clean energy solutions effectively. This limits the ability of communities and governments to adopt and benefit from these technologies.

Furthermore, the policy and regulatory framework can present significant challenges to the implementation of clean

energy solutions. In some cases, policies may be outdated or insufficient to support the deployment of clean energy technologies. Additionally, there may be a lack of coordination and collaboration between different levels of government, which can lead to conflicting regulations and a fragmented approach to clean energy implementation. Finally, there may be social and cultural barriers to the adoption of clean energy solutions. For example, in some communities, traditional practices and beliefs may limit the adoption of new technologies, particularly if they are perceived as unfamiliar or disruptive.

### Way forward

Despite these challenges, there are several opportunities to overcome these barriers and promote the adoption of clean energy solutions. The need is to invest in research and development to drive down the costs of clean energy technologies, build technical capacity and infrastructure to support clean energy deployment and create policies and regulations that support the adoption of clean energy at all levels of government. Moreover, there is a need for greater public awareness and education to promote the benefits of clean energy and dispel myths and misconceptions about these technologies. This can help to build a more supportive environment for the adoption of clean energy solutions and foster greater collaboration between different stakeholders.

Since the cooking technologies that use cleaner fuels are expensive, subsidies must be poured in from development organizations. UN Women's World Survey also highlights the need to invest in efficient solid-fuel stoves or cooking technologies that use cleaner fuels, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, and to involve women in stove design, testing and social marketing. Thus, implementing clean energy solutions is a complex and challenging task that requires a multi-faceted approach. However, with the right policies, investments, and social support, it is possible to overcome these barriers and realize the full potential of clean energy technologies for a sustainable future.

The relationship between clean energy and maternal health is an essential yet often overlooked aspect of sustainable development. To achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, it is imperative that we invest in clean energy solutions and acknowledge the multifaceted benefits of such initiatives for maternal health and overall societal well-being. By doing so, we can pave the way for a healthier, more sustainable, and equitable future for all.



**It has been found that the mortality rate is high in regions that lack modern energy resources, access to solar and wind energy that can provide electricity can be a powerful solution. When health facilities will have sufficient and reliable power, women will be able to safely give birth. Also, with cleaner energy sources, clinics would be able to preserve lifesaving vaccines for newborns and children.**





# Kashmir's native fish species in serious decline



## PARVAIZ YOUSUF

**K**ashmir has beautiful aquatic ecosystems, which used to be a safe haven for many local fish species. These fish species are now facing a serious threat of decline. This scary situation is the result of a lot of different things working together, like bad policies, pollution, the spread of exotic species, and uncontrolled mining in rivers.

Kashmir's main attraction has always been its large and beautiful bodies of water, like the famous Dal Lake or the flowing Jhelum River. Yet, beneath the calm surface of these waters is a disturbing fact: the sharp fall of native fish species that used to live in harmony and do well in these water bodies. In this article, we will discuss why the endemic species of Kashmir Valley are facing a threat and what can be done!

### **A Threatened Heritage of Indigenous Fish Species in Kashmir**

The situation has reached a critical point, and local fish species are now classified as "endangered and threatened." This classification is a sad reminder of how long-term carelessness has hurt their attempts to protect the environment. The native *Schizothorax* species (Kashir gaad), *Bortia birdi* (Rami gurun), *Carassius carassius* (Gang-e-gaad), and other species are having a hard time adapting to the changing environment, which is very different from the invasive species like the common carp (*Punjab gaad*). These native fish are used to living in cold, clean water, but now they face a dangerous problem: the rapid spread of eutrophication (algal blooms), which is a bad side effect of increasing water pollution.

The native species have not adapted well to aquaculture practices in this region. It is hard to protect local species when environmental stressors keep coming at them all the time. These important aquatic species are in a dangerous situation because it is hard to find a

balance between keeping the ecological balance and meeting the needs of modern development. As the thin thread that links these fish to the complex web of aquatic life in Kashmir weakens, the urgent call for coordinated action to change this trend becomes louder. The only way to save these native fish and give them their due place in Kashmir's rich aquatic history is for conservation efforts and sustainable practices to work together.

### **Research and Policy Gaps**

A big reason why the environment is getting worse is that there isn't enough study or regulation to protect native species. A lot of research is yet to be done in this field to understand the fish species and their interaction better. While exotic species make good use of available resources, their native counterparts suffer in the shadows, their importance hidden. This makes it hard to understand their different needs and weaknesses. There is a lack of advanced technology and study, which leaves native fish species in a very dangerous situation.

This lack of care is clear from the fact that there is very little accurate information about the fish that live in Kashmir's bodies. The lack of information makes protection efforts much less effective, which makes the current situation even worse. The government's role in bringing in non-native species, like the common carp, has made things even more complicated. It pushes out the native fish species and throws off the delicate ecological balance.

### **The Threat of Invasive Species and Pollution**

Invasive species, which are a worldwide problem, have taken root in the waterways of Kashmir, making it harder for local fish to survive. Notably, bringing in the carnivorous brown trout, which is not native to the area, has made conflicts between the native herbivorous species worse. This conflict is made worse by rising temperatures, which force native fish to move to higher levels in search of food. This increases competition and makes them more vulnerable.

The situation is getting worse, and water pollution is making it even worse. When herbicides, pesticides, and fertilisers are used without limits, they get into the water and cause a bad thing called "eutrophication." Such a change is very bad for the *Schizothorax* species, which has evolved to live in clean water. They are now



struggling to survive in these changed circumstances, which will only speed up their decline. Tragically, cutting down trees makes the problem worse because eroded soil gets into the water and destroys important places for native fish to breed.

Kashmir's aquatic environment is in danger, and everyone needs to work together to fix the problem. We need a solid approach that includes strict control and management of invasive species, careful reduction of pollution through careful farming practices, and consistent reforestation efforts to protect aquatic habitats.

### **Unregulated Mining is a Growing Concern**

In addition to all the other problems, there is a big threat from the unchecked rise of riverbed mining, which hurts Kashmir's rivers. Heavy equipment that is hard to control, like JCBs and cranes, destroys the homes of many fish species. But it's not just the fish that suffer; the effects ripple through the whole web of life, putting crops at risk and bringing up the scary possibility of flash floods.

The uncontrolled and unchecked nature of this mining activity raises concerns not only for the native and exotic fish species but also for the farming problems that were already there. It makes the threat of devastating flash floods even more real. Even though the National Green Tribunal has stepped in and rules have been made, the sad fact is that they aren't being enforced well enough, which lets the mining keep going. So, the biological balance of the area is getting worse and worse, which is a cycle of imbalance that, if not fixed quickly, threatens to change Kashmir's aquatic history for good. To restore the sanctity of Kashmir's water bodies, there needs to be a firm resolve to follow the rules that are already in place. These rules must be put in place through monitoring systems and to get everyone involved to work together.

### **Urgent Interventions are Needed**

The seriousness of the situation calls for quick and coordinated action. Governments, environmentalists, and local groups must work together to come up with comprehensive plans. These plans will help in restoring and protecting native fish species. Indigenous breeds such as Schizothorax and Bortia birdi should be studied in depth with the help of modern technology to learn about their specific needs and weaknesses.

To stop alien species from being a problem, it is important

to set up strict rules. It is important to carefully introduce and handle exotic species, such as carp, as well as keep a close eye on them. This will help us to reduce any negative effects they might have. At the same time, aggressive steps must be taken to reduce pollution, such as limiting the use of herbicides, pesticides, and fertilisers. This will help restore an environment in which local fish can thrive.

When it comes to riverbed mining, regulatory bodies should put an emphasis on safe methods that cause the least amount of harm to the environment. With methods for using local labour and strict enforcement of rules that limit the use of heavy machines, habitats and spawning sites can be kept in good shape for a long time.

The fish that live in Kashmir are more than just fish. They are a sign of a fragile culture that is tied to the way people make a living there. The sharp drop shows how closely human health and the health of the world are linked. If nothing is done, it could hurt Kashmir's business and ecosystem. It is important to stop being lazy and take a thorough approach to conservation, one that ensures the return of Kashmir's native fish species and secures their place in the region's history for future generations. This is the time to work together to bring life back to Kashmir's waterbodies, which hold the key to natural and cultural growth in Kashmir.

### **Conclusion**

Kashmir's native fish species are in trouble, and this is a wake-up call that goes beyond protection and ecology. It shows how much people don't care about nature's fragile balance and how bad things can get when people don't stop doing bad things. As the fight to save native fish goes on, it becomes clear that this isn't just a fight to save fish; it's a fight to save an ecosystem, a history, and the jobs of people who rely on it.

The decline of native fish species is a clear warning that when the environment gets worse, not only does it hurt aquatic life, but it also hurts the people whose lives depend on these water bodies. If nothing is done, the effects will be far-reaching and affect everything from Kashmir's business to the stability of its environment. It's time to stop being lazy and start taking a strong approach to protection. This will help make sure that Kashmir's native fish continue to grow and thrive for generations to come.





# Rising cloudburst events in the Himalayas: Causes and consequences



KAINAT AZIZ

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the frequency of reported occurrences of atmospheric phenomena known as “cloudburst” events. While in the past many politicians have made the public aware of cloud bursts via the lens of a “foreign conspiracy,” the scientific explanation for the phenomenon has remained largely unknown to the general public. The majority of the cloudburst events are linked to unforeseen intense precipitation. The topography of the Himalayas, characterized by its steep and unstable slopes, provides an ideal setting for the occurrence of cloudburst events, which can result in the rapid onset of flash floods or landslides. However, it is still difficult to foresee the exact location, amplitude, and severity of such catastrophic events.

## Characteristics of cloudburst events

A cloudburst refers to a significant volume of precipitation occurring within a brief timeframe, often accompanied by the occurrence of hail and thunder. Indian metrological department

also defines cloudburst as a meteorological event characterized by unanticipated precipitation surpassing 100mm/h within a geographic area spanning approximately 20-30 Km<sup>2</sup>. This meteorological phenomenon possesses the potential to induce flood-like conditions. One such major consequence of cloudbursts in the form of floods was witnessed in J&K in 2014. Research scholars have proposed that the convergence of low-level westward moving monsoonal systems and eastward moving mid-tropospheric westerly troughs was a significant factor contributing to the occurrence of the devastating flood of 2014.

## Factors contributing to cloudbursts

Over the past few years, there has been an increased occurrence of lethal convergence between moist warm monsoon winds and cool dry western winds, commonly referred to as western disturbance. This convergence has resulted in the formation of a low-pressure system over J&K. Also, due to the phenomenon of climate change, rising temperatures have led to a notable increase in oceanic warming. Consequently, this warming trend has facilitated the transportation of moisture-laden air towards the Himalayan region. These warm winds vertically uplift saturated clouds which are unable to precipitate due to these upward vertical motions of an exceptionally warm air current. Raindrops, in contrast to descending, are transported in an upward direction by the prevailing air current. New droplets are created while preexisting raindrops undergo growth. Once a certain threshold is reached, the raindrops attain a mass that exceeds the cloud’s capacity to retain them, resulting in their rapid descent in unison. The vertical motion of clouds supplies the necessary energy for the occurrence of a cloudburst. Typically, this phenomenon occurs at elevations ranging from 1,000 to 2,500 meters above sea level.

## Frequency and impact of cloudbursts in Jammu and Kashmir





The most well-known cloud burst incident occurred on July 8 2022, just upstream from Amarnath Shrine, during the height of the pilgrimage season. Because of this, a large amount of rubble and rocks rushed downstream, sweeping away three lungars and 40 camps which were established up within and along the drainage channel. 17 pilgrims were killed in the incident, injuring 60 pilgrims while 30 were reported missing. However, this devastation could be blamed more on human actions as authorities despite being acquainted with the fact that the area is prone to natural disasters, permitted the establishment of camps along the water course.

Based on a report compiled by the State Disaster Management Authority, it has been observed that a significant number of flash floods and cloudbursts have occurred in Jammu and Kashmir since 2010, leading to a loss of human lives amounting to approximately 300 individuals. In the year 2022, a significant number of fatalities, amounting to nearly 40 individuals, were recorded as a result of cloud bursts in the region of Jammu and Kashmir. Additionally, numerous individuals sustained injuries during these incidents. The majority of the cloudburst incidents have been reported in pre-monsoon months unlike the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand where such incidents occur from the month of September-October.

The cloud burst disaster has had a devastating effect on public and private infrastructures and properties across the entire territory of both UTs (J&K and Ladakh), including interior roadways, highways, tunnels, bridges, water and power supply lines, farmland, crops, and orchards. The quantity and severity of cloud burst disasters are rising, yet the systems in place to track them and lessen their impact are woefully insufficient. Most often, uncontrolled construction and encroachment on drainage systems are to blame for the devastation. The number of deaths in Amarnath is evidence of official indifference. In many instances, the government tends to attribute climate change as the primary cause of various issues, thereby implying a sense of incapacity. While this assertion cannot be disregarded, it is important to acknowledge that there exists significant potential for proactive measures in the areas of cloud burst monitoring, forecasting, and management. Regrettably, these aspects are currently absent from the government's disaster management strategies and initiatives.

### **Proactive measures and disaster management**

The escalation of climate change's repercussions is becoming more pronounced, necessitating proactive measures to mitigate its intensifying impact. Policymakers, as well as humanitarian and development organizations, have to effectively address, proactively prevent, and mitigate the potentially catastrophic consequences of climate change in a timely manner, in order to avert irreparable damage. First and foremost, it is imperative to identify specific locations where flash floods resulting from cloud bursts have the potential to cause catastrophic events. Consequently, it is crucial to map and closely monitor human settlements situated in close proximity to these vulnerable areas in order to mitigate the associated risks.

The implementation of mitigation measures, such as relocating residents from low-lying areas to higher ground, elevating infrastructure, homes, and businesses above floodplains, and relocating them far from rivers and streams can reduce the lethal losses by cloud burst events. Better management of watersheds is required to prevent landslides, flash floods, mudflows, and cave-ins on hilly terrain. Extensive deliberation and proactive measures are necessary to address the feasibility of establishing Doppler Radars capable of forecasting cloud bursts with a lead time of several hours. The utilization of such predictions can prove highly advantageous in terms of preserving human lives, provided that comprehensive disaster management strategies are established with clearly delineated responsibilities assigned to specific roles. Regrettably, there has been minimal advancement in the establishment of radar systems at designated susceptible sites, particularly in a limited number of locations where our available resources permit initial implementation. That's a big fat failure on the part of the present Union and related state administrations. The issue necessitates immediate attention.

The quantity and severity of cloud burst disasters are rising, yet the systems in place to track them and lessen their impact are woefully insufficient. Most often, uncontrolled construction and encroachment on drainage systems are to blame for the devastation. The number of deaths in Amarnath is evidence of official indifference. In many instances, the government tends to attribute climate change as the primary cause of various issues, thereby implying a sense of incapacity.





# Kashmir's Changing River Beds and the Looming Threat of Floods



**SEMRAN PARVAIZ**

The world grapples with the recurring menace of floods, and the Kashmir Valley is no stranger to this peril. In a recent episode, relentless downpours rekindled the haunting recollections of the catastrophic deluge that engulfed the region in 2014. Regrettably, despite nearly a decade having elapsed since that calamity, it is disheartening to observe that the lessons from that ordeal remain largely unheeded by both the authorities and the populace. While floods are an inevitable facet of the natural order, the recurrent disasters in Jammu and Kashmir are predominantly the result of heedless human activities that disrupt the fragile equilibrium of nature.

Human actions wield profound repercussions, as we've disrupted nature's delicate balance through the indiscriminate exploitation of its resources. Our wanton interference has taken its toll on vital ecosystems, including forests, mountains, glaciers, and water bodies, unleashing unintended consequences. Now, nature is retaliating with a vengeance, meting out floods as a direct consequence of our actions.

Within the idyllic confines of the Kashmir Valley, the spectre of flooding looms ominously over all its districts, with multifarious causal factors at play. Even a mere three days of rainfall can spell impending disaster for thousands of homes. In this piece, we delve into the intricate intricacies of Kashmir's vulnerability to flooding, with a particular emphasis on the pivotal role played by shifting riverbeds in this complex narrative.

## **Flood-Prone Kashmir**

The geographical location of Kashmir valley, located in the middle of mountains, makes it particularly vulnerable to floods. Throughout history, the region has been affected by recurrent flood disasters, with records dating back to as early as 1903. From 1929 to the catastrophic events of 2014, the flood cycle has persisted as an undeniable reality, influenced by both natural forces and human activities.

The presence of surrounding mountains creates a natural funnel that channels heavy rainfall and snowmelt waters towards the valley, increasing the risk of flooding. Additionally, the Himalayas are known for their rapidly changing weather patterns, which can lead to sudden and intense downpours, increasing the flood threat.

While natural factors play a significant role, human actions have also contributed to the severity of the floods. Over the years, extensive deforestation, mining, and urbanization have altered the landscape, affecting the region's hydrological balance. The loss of vegetation reduces the soil's ability to absorb excess water, leading to faster runoff and increased flood risk.

Furthermore, the expansion of buildings and infrastructure projects without proper consideration for floodplain areas such as river beds has restricted natural drainage channels. As a result, floodwaters have fewer outlets to flow out, causing water levels to rise rapidly during heavy rains.

## **Human-Induced Disasters and The 2014 Calamity**

In the face of floods, we must confront the undeniable truth that

human actions play a significant role in increasing these disasters. Our relentless exploitation of natural resources, such as forests, mountains, glaciers, and water bodies, has had dire consequences. Nature, in its response, is merely reciprocating the harm we have out to it.

The devastating floods of 2014 were a clear reminder of our vulnerability to nature's anger. Heavy rainfall unleashed massive water flow from higher mountains, leading to the overflowing of critical basins, including Jhelum, Chenab, and Tawi. The aftermath was nothing short of catastrophic, with widespread destruction of property and the irreplaceable loss of countless lives. Despite nine years having passed since that tragic event, the recent rains have reignited fears of a similar calamity happening once again.

Having said that floods happen often in Kashmir valley because it is surrounded by big mountains. But people have made a big difference in how bad and how often these events happen. The rapid cutting down of once-lush forests has upset the delicate balance of nature, making it harder for the land to soak up extra water. So, when it rains hard in the area, the water rushes without control, flooding towns and causing a lot of damage.

Climate change is causing glaciers to melt, which makes it more likely that floods will happen in the area. As glaciers melt quickly, they leave behind glacial lakes that can burst and cause huge floods downstream. Jammu and Kashmir has more than 100 glacial lakes spread across many mountain areas. The possibility of such tragedies needs our immediate attention.

Also, people have moved into natural drainage pathways and marshes, which has made them smaller. Construction is being done in and around lakes. Concrete has taken the place of these once-important floodwater storage areas, reducing their ability to soak up extra water. Floods are more likely to happen, and when they do, they can cause a lot of damage.

After the rains of 2014, there were claims of complete plans for dealing with floods. But work has been slow, and many of the plans have not yet come to fruition. Flood predictions and early warning systems are still very important because they can help save lives by allowing evacuations and rescue measures to be taken on time.

## **The possible reasons for floods**

Kashmir's vulnerability to floods is not the result of a singular cause but rather a complex interplay of factors that demand a comprehensive understanding. Here, we delve into the multifaceted reasons contributing to the imminent flood threat in Kashmir.

## **The problems with Jhelum**

Over the past few decades, the Jhelum River, vital for irrigation in Kashmir, has faced a significant challenge: extensive siltation. Another problem is the construction of houses on river banks. The Jhelum River bank is covered almost everywhere with the residential areas, which affects the natural structure of the river. It's like floods don't come to houses, but houses go to floods rather. Lack of proper prevention measures has made it less able to hold water, which makes it more likely to flood. Encroachments and fast urbanisation have made things worse because they have made the river and its floodplains less able to handle heavy rain. So, when it rains hard, the river has a hard time holding all the extra water. This can cause floods that can cause a lot of damage to the towns and villages along its banks. To protect the area from the looming danger of flooding, steps must be taken right away to recover the river's flow and keep people from building on its natural floodplains. We can only hope to lessen the risks of floods in the beautiful valley of Kashmir if we take steps like these.

## **Degradation of wetlands**

Kashmir is known for its beautiful wetlands all over the world. The environmentally important wetlands in the Jhelum floodplains,



which were once important floodwater storage areas, have been hurt by urbanisation and pollution. These important marshes, which were once nature's sponges, have been slowly replaced by concrete structures, which has made them less able to soak up floods. Because of this, the area is now more likely to be damaged by floods.

The loss of marshes caused by urbanisation and expansion has upset the natural balance and flow of water in the area. By holding and slowly releasing extra water during heavy rain, these marshes were very important in reducing the damage from floods. But because they are falling apart, there are fewer places for water to gather. This means that the area is quickly and completely flooded.

The effects of this damage were clear during the recent floods in Kashmir when the lack of natural sponges made the damage from the floods worse. By keeping these natural pools in good shape, we can make the area more resistant to flooding and protect people from the harmful forces of nature. Also, the Jhelum floodplains need careful planning for how land is used and steps to stop further development if they are to have a better and more stable future.

### **Incomplete Flood Management Efforts**

Even though the deadly floods of 2014 made it clear that complete flood management was needed right away, progress in this area has been slow and insufficient. Initiatives to increase the Jhelum River's carrying capacity through cleaning and repair have run into problems because they don't have enough money or space.

The size of the problem has been huge. Not only did they have to deal with the river's carrying capacity, but they also had to deal with other things that make floods more likely, like encroachments of river banks and wetlands. Important flood control measures haven't been put into place because there aren't enough resources and buildings.

With the recent rains, the effects of this slow progress have become clear, and people are once again worried about the threat of flooding. To protect towns from future disasters, the government must put flood control at the top of its list of priorities and put money into it. To make the area more resistant to floods, it is important to give it enough resources and make sure it has the tools it needs. We can only reduce the risks that floods bring and protect the health of the people who live in the area if we are vigilant and work hard.

### **The Glacial Threat**

Having said that climate change is causing glaciers to melt quickly, which is a big worry for the area. As glaciers melt, they leave behind glacial lakes in different mountain areas. These lakes can cause flash floods in the valleys below. Because of how vulnerable towns are to floods caused by glacial lake outbursts, they need to be constantly monitored and prepared. Every other day we hear the news of a mountainous area being struck with cloud bursts in Kashmir which causes flash floods.

Studies show that climate change is making many of the mountains in Jammu and Kashmir melt quickly. This is what makes glacier lakes, which have a lot of water in them. So, if the natural walls that hold these lakes back break, the water can rush out all at once, causing terrible flash floods downstream.

Thus, it is important to keep an eye on ice lakes on a daily basis. Monitoring helps find possible dangers early, so officials can take steps to stop disasters before they happen. Floods caused by glacial lake outbursts can be less dangerous if people take preventative steps, like building the right infrastructure to strengthen glacial lake walls.

Due to the growing number of extreme weather events and the ongoing changes in the climate of the area, it is important to invest in studies and resources to learn more about how glaciers move and how they might affect communities further downstream. Floods caused by glacial lake outbursts are very dangerous and can cause a lot of damage. The only way to keep people safe and healthy in the area is to stay aware and take

action.

### **What Can Be Done**

Even though it may be hard to stop natural disasters from happening altogether, there are things we can do to lessen their effects and save lives. One of the most important steps is to put money into tools that can predict floods and tell people about them early.

Flood forecasting methods use information from many different sources, such as weather forecasts, river levels, and patterns of rainfall, to predict when floods might happen. These systems can give important information ahead of time, so officials can tell people in the affected areas in a timely manner. Early reports can greatly reduce the chances of deaths and damage to property by giving people time to move to better places.

Another important part of getting ready for floods is to strengthen the banks along rivers and other bodies of water. When there is a flood, embankments protect against rising water levels. Making sure they are strong and have good structure can help stop them from breaking and reduce the number of floods in vulnerable places. Also, all the illegal encroachments must be removed from the river banks all over the Kashmir valley.

It is very important to give local groups the tools and training they need to help save lives during floods. Local people are often the first ones to help in an emergency, so giving them the skills and tools they need can make a big difference in the aid efforts. People who know how to use boats and other safety tools can help rescue and evacuation efforts go more smoothly, especially in places where emergency services might be hard to reach during floods.

In addition to these steps, flood hazard zonation mapping is a key way to find places that are at high risk of flooding and are sensitive to it. By knowing which areas are most likely to flood, officials can decide where to put their resources and how to help lessen the damage.

The deployment of flood alarm systems in susceptible areas offers a significant boost to preparedness. These systems leverage sensors and real-time data to detect escalating water levels, triggering timely alarms that serve as a vital warning for both residents and authorities alike. Such rapid alerts empower communities to spring into immediate action, ensuring swift and effective response to flood situations, thereby minimizing their impact.

### **Conclusion**

Floods remain an ever-present threat in Kashmir, necessitating an immediate and collective effort. To break free from the cycle of recurrent disasters, we must conscientiously acknowledge the consequences of our actions and prioritize ecological solutions. One crucial step involves the restoration of wetland areas, which serve as natural bulwarks against storms, facilitating enhanced absorption of excess water.

In our endeavor to mitigate flood risks, it is imperative to undertake the dredging and rehabilitation of the Jhelum River, increasing its capacity to contain surging waters. Concurrently, the rejuvenation of riverbanks and the removal of all unauthorized encroachments become pivotal measures essential for the safety and well-being of the populace.

Furthermore, preparedness is of paramount importance. The establishment of advanced flood prediction systems and early warning mechanisms empowers communities to receive timely alerts, enabling them to take requisite actions or, if necessary, evacuate promptly. Through a collaborative effort and a commitment to respecting the delicate equilibrium of nature, we can safeguard Kashmir from the devastating floods that have inflicted profound suffering in the past.

The moment has arrived for decisive action. By fortifying our communities, we can fortify them against the ravages unleashed by tempestuous storms, ushering in a future of greater resilience and protection.



# Community-Based Rehabilitation: Rethinking rehabilitation for trafficked individuals



**NEHA AGGARWAL**

***Human rights are not a privilege conferred by government. They are every human being's entitlement by virtue of his humanity. —Mother Teresa***

**H**uman beings are the most intriguing creations among other species. To be a human implies belief in the dignity and moral worth of all other beings. As humans, one is entitled to be treated with a fair degree of equality and justice without being subjected to discrimination. However, when a human being is deprived of natural rights and liberties, it goes against the principles of natural justice. Human trafficking is one such grave violation of fundamental rights. Trade of humans or flesh trade is an abrasive act of taking away all the basic rights one is born and entitled to. In fact, it is the negation of the essence of being.

This negation of basic civil liberties is not something new. Human trafficking is basically a form of contemporary slavery that can be defined as the act of removing, transferring or transporting an individual from one place to another by means of force, fraud, coercion, deception, abduction or payment for the purpose of exploitation. It may be for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation, forced labour, forced marriage, domestic servitude, debt bondage, organ removal or begging. The people get trapped due to factors like drug use, poverty, history of sexual abuse, marginalized communities, women immigrants, LGBTQ individuals, domestic violence and sexual assault victims. ILO Global Estimates of Forced Labor shows that there are approximately 3.3 million sex-trafficked persons in the world, nearly all of them women. According to the Global Slavery Index 2018, there are around 7 million victims of modern slavery in India.

At the heart of this article lies the central theme of Community-Based Rehabilitation for survivors of human trafficking. However, before delving into this transformative concept, it is imperative to illuminate the grim realities faced by these victims and examine the inadequacies within our current policy framework. Human trafficking inflicts profound physical, psychological, and emotional scars on its victims, tearing apart the very fabric of their lives. These survivors often find themselves ensnared in a complex web of trauma, isolation, and distrust. Moreover, existing policies, while making strides in addressing the issue, often fall short of providing comprehensive support and long-term solutions. Recognizing these pressing issues is the first step towards comprehending the dire need for innovative, community-driven approaches to rehabilitation. In this exploration, we shall shed light on both the devastating consequences and the promising avenues of hope that Community-Based Rehabilitation offers to those who have endured the darkest of ordeals.

## **Devastating consequences**

It is beyond any doubt that most survivors of human trafficking have mental illness. Human trafficking and mental illness seem inevitably linked. The research aimed at examining the link between sex trafficking and mental illness finds that 78% of survivors experience clinical anxiety (range 48–98%); 52% depression (range 3–100%) and 37% posttraumatic stress disorder. The majority of survivors thus have depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder or a more severe diagnosis: Disorders of Extreme Stress. In addition to these diagnoses, many victims of human trafficking also have secondary psychological issues such as alcohol and drug abuse plus concurrent medical illnesses. There are other mental health sequelae too such as poor sleep, insomnia, nightmares, feelings such as of hopelessness, fear and distrust, being trapped, shame, humiliation, a sense of continuous stress, anger, and irritability. Apart from mental illness, rehabilitated survivors of sex trafficking are often stigmatized. Stigma is an amalgamation of various interrelated elements like labelling, stereotyping, separation, loss of status and discrimination. In some communities, the survivors of sex trafficking are seen as tainted and thus unable to marry. Survivors of sex trafficking are also prone to become victims of violence, and more likely to become involved in criminality.

There are physical consequences associated with mental illness in survivors of trafficking. In the majority of cases, the skin and hair show evidence of cigarette burns attempts at self-harm, rashes, evidence of intravenous drug use, vitamin deficiency, bruising from physical abuse and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis or lice. The teeth show poor overall dental hygiene; methamphetamine and bulimia scar teeth too. In the case of sex trafficking, survivors often suffer from Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), cervical dysplasia, non-menstrual vaginal bleeding, vaginal pain, dysuria, dyspareunia, traumatic scarring and ovulatory failure.

Recognizing these devastating consequences and the urgency of combating this grave violation of human rights, the Indian government has put in place various policies, initiatives and schemes. While these policies represent significant steps forward, it is essential to examine their effectiveness, implementation, challenges, and gaps that persist within the existing framework.

## **Current policy landscape**

Holistic rehabilitation and societal reintegration remain a dream in the prevailing policy landscape. Rehabilitating trafficked women and children in institutional care is included under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956 (ITPA) and IPC Section 370 as a response to victim assistance systems. When rescued, victims of trafficking are either sent home or placed in institutionalized care settings, such as shelter homes, especially if they are victims of sex trafficking. It is lamentable that the present approach to the rehabilitation of trafficked individuals follows a linear procedure, which is then followed by institutional care and family reunion. For a variety of reasons, long-term institutionalization is unproductive. It has a negative impact on survivors' mental health and increases their risk of becoming victims again.

When it comes to the rehabilitation of women and children, childcare facilities under the Ujjawala plan and the Swadhar Greh shelter houses fall short. They don't have the adequate funds or expertise to take care of the victims' basic requirements, and they don't contribute much to help the survivors integrate into the community or with their families. In-house therapists lack the training necessary to assist survivors, a majority of whom





struggle with dysthymia. Also, no job-oriented vocational training is provided in shelter homes. Thus, it is clear that aftercare or reintegration services in communities are not prioritized by the system.

The draft of the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Care and Rehabilitation) Bill 2021 Bill, which is being touted as one of the most comprehensive documents on the prevention of trafficking has also some issues. Firstly, the definition of rehabilitation is open to interpretation. It defines rehabilitation to include all processes of restoring the physical, psychological, and social well-being of a victim and includes protection, access to education, skill development, healthcare, psychological and physiological support, medical services, economic

empowerment, legal aid and assistance, and safe and secure accommodation. Despite the fact that the Bill claims that these services would be provided under rehabilitation, a careful examination of the definition leads one to suspect that the provision of such services would largely be limited to institutional-based protection and rehabilitation homes, which can make survivors vulnerable to discrimination. The Bill does not address skill-development training, support services, or mental healthcare for survivors. Second, there is uncertainty because the word “reintegration” is not defined. The fact that law enforcement officials do not hold social welfare organizations accountable for monitoring and assisting with the reintegration of survivors demonstrates neglect on their part.

It is clear that the current legal framework and institutionalization fails to ensure that the survivors once released from institutional shelters are equipped to battle the stigma and shame associated with being trafficked and, thus be able to reintegrate into society. Establishing a framework for community-based rehabilitation is a solution to persistent problems. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act and the Juvenile Justice Act both detail non-institutional treatment based on the Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) method in India. A similar approach is required for survivors of human trafficking.

### Community-based-Rehabilitation

Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) was initially launched by WHO following the Declaration of Alma-Ata as a strategy to increase access to rehabilitation services at the community level for people with disabilities, but it has evolved into a much broader and multisectoral approach to community-based inclusive development. CBR can be understood as a system consisting of three pillars:

1. The first pillar represents the members of local communities with an understanding of the issue and have positive attitudes towards the survivors.
2. The second pillar represents a selected group of local volunteers and others who have specific knowledge and skills in CBR and also have positive attitudes.
3. The third pillar represents individuals and organizations outside the local community who have knowledge and skills in CBR, resources for CBR, along positive attitudes.

As per the 2019 study on community-based rehabilitation interventions run by NGOs across 10 states, it is cost-efficient, effective, and decentralized and hence it is more impactful. It aids

in the psychological recovery of survivors from depression, anxiety, and PTSD much more effectively than counselling services in shelter homes. It uses a grassroots approach to guide development priorities. It promotes inclusion of all people, particularly those of survivors, in local decision-making, governance and resource allocation. CBR aims to achieve rehabilitation, equalization of opportunities and social inclusion through the combined efforts of various stakeholders.

The rehabilitation process is an amalgamation of psychiatric treatment, economic empowerment, and the restoration of the victim’s civic identity. This results in the survivor’s effective assimilation into society. When a survivor is returned to his country of origin, the process of reintegration takes place while he rebuilds his life in the nation, community, and family. However, the process of integrating victims of trafficking and reorganizing ties within a community in their country of origin involves four distinct stages, and it goes beyond just returning them to their home country.

1. Physical- Resettlement of the victims in a territorial space within the country
2. Socio-economic- Establishment of a decent standard of living similar to the existing population of the country
3. Socio-political- Ensure maximum participation of the survivors in the democratic process at the local and national level
4. Cultural- Adaptation of the survivor within the population to ensure inclusion in society (Dr Chandrani Dasgupta, 2015)

CBR is used by NGOs all over the world, but none of the State rehabilitation policies have it as a concept, making it difficult for survivors to assert their rights. The challenges to implementing CBR programs range from inadequate allocation of funds, and human resources to dissemination of information about CBR services. The success of any program heavily depends on the availability of resources. CBR programs have not been very successful in developing supportive socio-cultural environments for survivors of human trafficking, or in mobilizing community resources due to limited resources for welfare and development in general. There is a lack of an adequate number of personnel who understand and know how to deal with rehabilitation and community behaviour. Apart from these, there are attitudinal challenges. Most donors for rehabilitation prefer a charitable approach. Donors are thrilled with pictures and numbers of persons who have received rehabilitation services. However, it is not easy to evaluate a CBR project since CBR involves a change in the community’s behaviour, motivation, knowledge and skills. This change, which is critical for CBR, is difficult to see or evaluate.

### Recommendations

The need is to improve the quality of human resources in CBR by providing training in community development as well as in rehabilitation methods and skills. Since CBR implementation needs financial support, a change in the attitude of donors is a must. There should be regular communication between the donors and the implementers about CBR concepts and strategies, to convince the donors that CBR is a development program and not a charity effort.

There is also an urgency for the TIP Bill to ensure that the survivors’ right to rehabilitation is fulfilled by defining ‘reintegration’ and bringing the scope of victim-centric services within its ambit. Holistic rehabilitation includes the fulfilment of basic needs, survivor-friendly support, financial inclusion, the right to access identity documents, social security and much more. Community gatekeeping mechanisms must be established to prevent intergenerational trafficking. The principle of participation, the principle of appropriateness, the principle of necessity, and the principle of suitability need to be adopted while designing policies. In addition to this, the government should address the existing trust deficit between victims and policymakers. In short, the need of the hour is a shift from a provider role to a participatory role as well as from survivor-informed to survivor-led to tackle this crisis of humanity.



# The shadow epidemic: Escalating crisis of drug addiction in Jammu & Kashmir



**ZAHOOR AHMAD DAR**

## Introduction

**D**rug addiction is a widespread problem affecting millions of people today, and it poses a serious threat to the well-being of societies and countries. In India, for instance, the amount of illegal drugs confiscated by authorities has dramatically increased over the years. In 2017, they seized 2146 kilograms of these substances, but by 2021, the figure had skyrocketed to 7282 kilograms. This represents a staggering 239.32% increase in just five years.

The use of injectable narcotics, particularly heroin, has been on the rise as well. This overall trend indicates that the problem of drug addiction in India is steadily growing. According to data from the Narcotics Control Bureau, approximately 10 crore (100 million) people in India are currently addicted to various narcotics substances.

When we examine the prevalence of drug addiction on a regional or state-specific level, we discover that certain states like Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Sikkim, and Chhattisgarh have notably higher rates of cannabis consumption. This information comes from a national survey. In fact, the survey indicates that over 30 million

individuals in the country use cannabis products, and 2.5 million of them have developed a dependence on cannabis. Additionally, the report reveals that 2.06% of the population uses opioids, with 1.7% of children and adolescents and 0.58% of adults being inhalant users.

Turning our attention to Jammu & Kashmir, the situation regarding drug addiction is quite bleak, especially in the valley. The region has faced ongoing political turmoil since independence, along with issues like unemployment, trauma, stress, and the challenges of modern life, which have contributed to making the valley a hotspot for drug addiction. Among the youth in Kashmir, drug addiction has reached alarming levels.

### Epidemic of Drug Addiction

Recent data released by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for the year 2022 reveals alarming statistics regarding substance abuse in Jammu and Kashmir. In the region, 1.08 lakh men and 36,000 women were identified as cannabis users. Moreover, the report highlights that a staggering 5.34 lakh men and 8,000 women were reported to have consumed opioids, while 1.6 lakh men and 8,000 women were found to be abusing sedatives. Additionally, 1.27 lakh men and 7,000 women were ensnared by the devastating grip of inhalants. These figures paint a troubling picture of the substance abuse epidemic in the UT.

The February 2019 report by the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre (NDDTC) at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences revealed a staggering statistic: approximately 600,000 individuals in Jammu and Kashmir were grappling with substance abuse, representing nearly 5% of the total population. Within this concerning context, the report also underscored the gravity of the situation by indicating that 4.91% of the population was actively using opioids, with 0.62% of the population exhibiting a significant dependency on these



substances. This data underscores the profound impact of drug addiction on the region.

270 young individuals, aged 16 to 30, interviewed across different districts of Kashmir revealed that the primary factors driving drug addiction among this demographic were the persistent conflict and high unemployment rates. Moreover, a consistent pattern emerged from several studies, indicating that a staggering 80% of drug addicts develop their addiction before reaching the age of 30.

In a study led by Bhat et al., an even more alarming revelation came to light: over 90% of those surveyed were unaware of the drug de-addiction process, and only a mere 8% had knowledge of the existence of a drug de-addiction center in Srinagar, Kashmir. These findings underscore the urgent need for awareness and intervention in addressing the pressing issue of drug addiction among Kashmir's youth.

In one of their enlightening studies, Dr. Maqgoob and Dutta uncovered a distressing reality: the Kashmir Valley is grappling with a staggering 2.11 lakh drug addicts. These individuals are ensnared by a variety of substances, including cannabis, brown sugar, heroin, SP tablets, Anxit, Alprax, as well as inhalants such as Fevicol, SR solution, thinner, shoe polish, paint varnish, and other similar substances.

A separate study conducted in 1993 shed further light on this issue, revealing that the majority of drug addicts were male, with cannabis emerging as the predominant substance of addiction. Equally significant is a study by Mushtaq et al., which emphasized that approximately 90% of drug abusers are poly-substance users, meaning they concurrently consume two or more drugs. For instance, an individual may simultaneously use cannabis, alcohol, heroin, or other drugs. This study also unveiled that the age of initiation into drug use typically falls within the range of 11 to 20 years old, underscoring the need for early intervention and preventive measures.

The surge in youth drug addiction cases has been intricately linked, either directly or indirectly, to the prolonged turmoil experienced in the region. Kashmir has weathered two decades of upheaval, resulting in an escalation of psychiatric disorders. This turbulent environment has given rise to a spectrum of mental health issues, including depression, OCD, PTSD, and drug addiction.

According to a comprehensive 2015 survey conducted by Medecins Sans Frontières, an alarming 1.8 million adults in Kashmir—equivalent to 45% of the adult population—have reported experiencing symptoms of mental distress. This distress manifested as 41% displaying indications of probable depression, 26% likely grappling with anxiety, and 19% possibly suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. However, while political turmoil plays a significant role in this epidemic, it's not the sole contributor. Unemployment and relationship problems further compound the issue.

Peer pressure emerges as yet another substantial factor driving drug addiction, with a staggering 78% of drug addicts confessing that they turned to drugs

due to this external influence. Moreover, the onset of the pandemic seems to have exacerbated the problem, as enforcement efforts waned while drug trafficking persisted, even amid lockdowns and restrictions.

A striking illustration of this worsening crisis is evident in the patient-intake records at the Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (IMHANS) in Srinagar, a prominent rehabilitation facility. In 2016, the facility reported 489 drug abusers seeking help, a number that ballooned exponentially to 7,420 in 2019. However, due to the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, the figures dropped to 3,536, highlighting the multifaceted nature of this complex issue.

As the Kashmir Valley grapples with a growing drug addiction crisis, the J&K Police have taken proactive steps to address this pressing issue. They have initiated comprehensive awareness programs across three key districts: Srinagar, Baramulla, and Anantnag. These efforts have resulted in the establishment of the Drug Deaddiction Center at the Police Control Room in Srinagar.

The Drug Addiction and Rehabilitation Center in Srinagar has diligently tracked and treated patients over the years, reporting a total of 15,294 cases seen in the outpatient department from February 2008 to December 2016, all diagnosed according to ICD 10 standards. This extensive caseload encompassed individuals with various substance abuse issues, including 472 alcohol abusers, 1,359 opioid abusers, 7,860 cannabis abusers, 352 cocaine users, 1,080 benzodiazepines users, 460 volatile substance abusers, and 3,741 polydrug abusers.

To further combat this crisis, the police have initiated "Mission Wapsi," a vital program designed to steer the youth away from the clutches of drug addiction. These collective efforts represent a significant step toward addressing and mitigating the growing challenge of substance abuse in the region.

The most expansive district de-addiction center in the Kashmir Valley is situated at SMHS Hospital Srinagar, which witnessed a notable surge in outpatient department (OPD) visits, soaring by 75% to reach 41,110 in March 2023. This remarkable statistic translates to a new patient arriving at the OPD approximately every 12 minutes.

The findings of the 2022-23 survey, conducted collaboratively by the Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Kashmir (IMHANS-K), and the Jammu and Kashmir government, provide valuable insights into the demographic composition of drug users in the region. Surprisingly, the data reveals that 25% of these users are unemployed, with only 8% classified as illiterate. This diverse group comprises 15% graduates, 14% with intermediate education, and 33% holding matric qualifications, offering a nuanced understanding of the educational backgrounds of those affected by drug addiction.

In 2019, authorities seized 392 kg of Charas in Jammu and Kashmir. However, by 2022, this figure had surged to a substantial 497 kg. Heroin seizures followed a similar upward trajectory, escalating from 103 kg in



2019 to a concerning 240 kg in 2022. Additionally, approximately 51 kg of ganja was confiscated in 2019. Notably, an alarming three out of every four drug users in Kashmir have turned to heroin.

In response to this escalating crisis, law enforcement agencies, such as the police, registered 1,850 First Information Reports (FIRs) and made 2,756 arrests in 2022, marking a significant 60% increase from 2019.

The ImHance-K surveys conducted for the year 2022-23 offer a comprehensive view of substance abuse in the Valley, with 2.87% of the population grappling with this issue, and a significant 2.23% facing opioid dependence. The survey further underscores the pervasive nature of dependence on psychoactive substances, affecting 67,468 individuals across ten districts of Kashmir. Disturbingly, more than 90% of these users are young, averaging around 28 years of age. Within this overall prevalence, 52,404 individuals, or 77.67%, are dependent on heroin, signifying its status as the most commonly abused drug. Notably, heroin carries a high cost, with the average monthly expenditure for a user amounting to Rs 88,183, compounding the multifaceted challenges posed by drug addiction in the region.

### **Challenges and Recommendations in Addressing the Drug Addiction Epidemic in Kashmir Valley**

The drug addiction crisis in the Kashmir Valley presents a host of formidable challenges that necessitate concerted efforts from the public, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Among these challenges, the illegal trafficking and sale of drugs loom large as a significant problem. The accessibility and perpetual availability of opioids cultivated in Kashmir contribute to an elevated consumption rate, driven by high demand.

To effectively combat this crisis, several key recommendations and strategies must be considered:

1. **Expanded Rehabilitation Facilities:** The pressing need for more drug rehabilitation centers cannot be overstated. These centers play a crucial role in aiding victims on their path to recovery.
2. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** A critical challenge lies in the lack of awareness surrounding drug addiction, detoxification, and rehabilitation processes. Mass mobilization efforts aimed at educating the public, especially the younger generation, are imperative.
3. **Enhanced Coordination:** To facilitate information sharing, improved coordination mechanisms among law enforcement agencies, civil society activists, and the general public are essential.
4. **Disrupting the Drug Supply Chain:** Targeting the drug supply chain is paramount. Law enforcement agencies should prioritize dismantling these networks to curb the distribution of drugs.
5. **Decriminalization and Rehabilitation:** To

better assist victims, there is a need to decriminalize addiction and provide opportunities for rehabilitation, ensuring that they receive the support they need to recover.

6. **Government Action:** Government agencies must take proactive measures, including more arrests targeting drug networks and thorough investigations into any involvement of government officials.

7. **Strengthening Addiction Treatment Facilities:** The Addiction Treatment Facilities (ATF) established in various districts within the valley must be enhanced and expedited to provide comprehensive treatment.

8. **Multifaceted Education:** Educational institutions, NGOs, religious leaders, and organizations should actively engage in educating the public, particularly parents and caregivers. Seminars, symposiums, academic workshops, counseling sessions, and street plays should be regularly organized to disseminate crucial information to the target audience.

9. **Restoring Public Trust:** Reinvigorating public trust in the efforts to combat drug addiction is imperative. This requires transparency and effective communication to garner support from the community.

Addressing the drug addiction epidemic in the Kashmir Valley demands a collaborative, multifaceted approach, and the implementation of these recommendations can significantly contribute to mitigating the crisis and offering support to those affected.

### **Conclusion**

Drug addiction represents a formidable and multifaceted challenge, stemming from a complex interplay of factors such as political unrest, unemployment, stress, societal pressures, and peer influence. It is widely acknowledged that the health of a society is deeply compromised when it neglects its collective duty to foster a positive environment for its individuals.

Hence, it is incumbent upon all stakeholders, from government authorities to the broader public, to unite and confront this scourge that is corroding the very foundations of our moral and societal fabric. The collective effort of state administration, public support, and active engagement by civil society can serve as a potent antidote to this menacing issue.

As a society, we bear a profound responsibility to recognize that those battling drug addiction often grapple with feelings of isolation and alienation. Providing them with unwavering social and moral support not only aids their recovery but also empowers them to conquer this formidable challenge. By fostering empathy, understanding, and unity, we can strive for a society where the bonds of compassion and assistance are stronger than the grip of addiction.



# Why India's Historic Moon Landing on the South Pole Is So Important



**PARVAIZ YOUSUF**

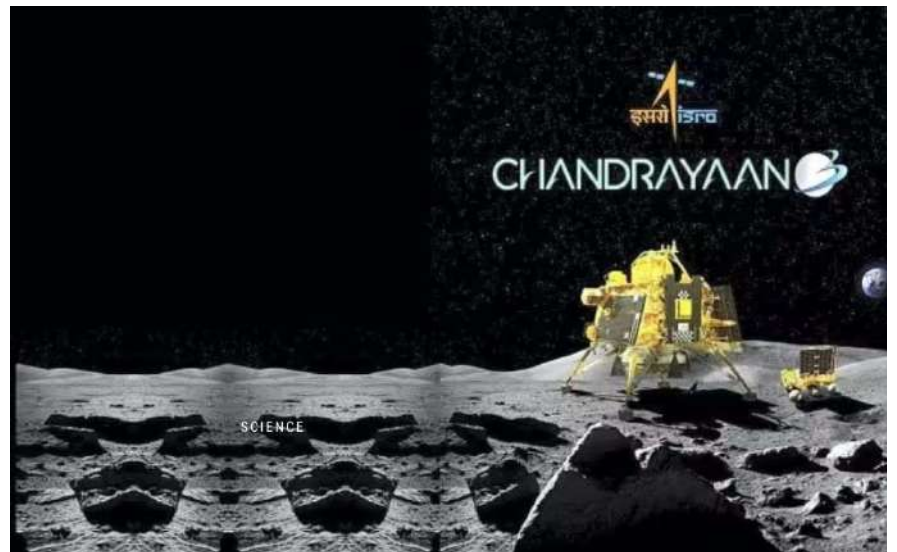
**O**n August 23, 2023, India did something that had never been done before: it successfully landed its Chandrayaan-3 lander near the mysterious south pole of the moon. This event sent shockwaves through the entire world. India's name will be written in golden letters to join as one of the first explorers in space. India is at the forefront of lunar research when it comes to the moon's south pole, which had never been explored before.

This important moment in history has meaning beyond national borders and shows what space travel is all about. India's historic landing shows us science keeps getting better and better, which helps us learn more about the universe and our place in it. As India's Chandrayaan-3 begins its journey through space, it not only explores the moon's surface but also empowers the spirit of exploration that brings people from all countries and cultures together. Let's know more in detail about India's past space exploration adventures.

## **Previous Achievements of ISRO**

With the help of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the Chandrayaan programme has become India's way to get to the front of space research. India's space journey has been written with a story of three missions as of now, each of which was a big step forward in space travel. Chandrayaan-1, a momentous event that happened in October 2008, was the start of this story about the space. As India's first trip to the moon, the mission was a big step forward that made waves not just in India but around the world. By bringing an orbiter and an impactor, Chandrayaan-1 showed how well India could use space technology for scientific research. This was a big step forward in the history of space research.

Building on this progress, Chandrayaan-2 was sent into space in 2019, bringing with it the possibility of new developments. It was a trio of an orbiter, a lander, and a robot, and it showed how India's ambitions are growing. Even though the lander's trip ended in an unexpected problem, the orbiter kept sending back important information and solidifying India's place in lunar space. This, in turn, set the stage for the bold Chandrayaan-3 mission, which is set to leave its own mark on history. With Chandrayaan-2 and Chandrayaan-1 laying the groundwork, Chandrayaan-3's historic mission is a sign of India's determination to figure out the mysteries of space. It shows that the outer space is no longer out of reach.



## **Chandrayaan-3 Follows On**

India launched Chandrayaan-3 on July 14, 2023. This was a big project that would cement India's name in the history of space travel. Chandrayaan-3 was the result of years of study, new ideas, and working together. Its goal was to find out what was going on at the south pole of the moon, pushing the limits of technology and science.

Chandrayaan-3 took its first step towards the unknown parts of the moon when it took off from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. On the impressive GSLV Mk III, also called LVM3 M4, the spaceship set off on a path that would take it to the surface of the moon. This project was important not only because it took a lot of technical skill to launch and guide the spacecraft but also because it had very important scientific goals.

The main science goal of Chandrayaan-3 was to map the location and amount of water on the moon. This was a hugely important task. Water on the Moon is not only interesting to scientists, but it could also be useful for future trips to the moon. The fact that there is water on the moon could change the way we explore it. It could give humans the food and water they need and even be used to make rocket fuel. So, this journey laid the groundwork for people to stay on other planets for a long time.

Chandrayaan-3 was different from its predecessor, Chandrayaan-2, in that it didn't have a satellite. Chandrayaan-2 had an orbiter, a lander, and a rover. This strategic choice made the project easier to manage and more focused, so resources could be put towards the specific goals of this task. The probe from Chandrayaan-2, which showed how advanced India's technology was, was a key part of Chandrayaan-3.

When Chandrayaan-3's mission came to an end, it was a moment of amazing success. Chandrayaan-3 landed on the moon's surface at 18:05 IST (6:05 PM) on August 23, 2023. This was India's second safe landing on the moon. This big step went beyond national pride and showed that everyone wants to learn and find new things.

## **Is Global Interest in Space Increasing?**

The renewed interest in space exploration around the world is clear as day. A story that used to be about giants fighting for control of the universe has changed into a complex web of cooperation that includes a wide range of countries and



businesses. This change shows how much people want to leave Earth and go into the unknown space.

With more than 60 countries sending out satellites to look at Earth, the boundaries of exploration have grown beyond our world. This constant change has made it possible to explore the moon as well. The moon, which used to be a distant mystery, is now at the centre of this space exploration, calling out to people to learn more about its secrets. This call, combined with the attraction of the moon's unexplored regions, pushes countries to improve their technical skills. It also sparks the ideas of young people and creates an era of international cooperation that has never been seen before. The background of strong rivals has changed into a landscape of shared goals, where countries contribute their resources, knowledge, and goals. They do so to work together on projects that used to only exist in dreams.

### **Why Countries like India want to Explore the Moon**

The first and foremost thing why countries want to go to the moon is for its resources. The moon may someday be a place where humans live. Similarly, the minerals present on the moon are very rare and costly. They can make any country rich and powerful, so every country wants to go there and get a hold of these resources. Moreover, the moon's charm is not related to science only, but it's deeply embedded into human culture. The moon's appearance in the night sky makes people feel amazed. When we realise that our inventions—spacecraft made by humans—can travel over its rough terrain, we feel a sense of accomplishment and wonder that we can't explain. This shared interest has been a key factor in making space travel and increasing the interest of people around the world. It has also shown how natural it is for humans to want to explore beyond the limits of Earth.

But the moon's appeal isn't limited to people who just want to think about it. It is a symbol of an international stage where countries work together in harmonious cooperation. The lunar theatre becomes a place where countries with different strategic ties can work together peacefully. This crossing of national borders for mutual gain and sharing of knowledge makes the moon more than just a celestial body; it makes it a symbol of working together on a global scale.

These collaborative motives are interesting because they go beyond the celestial world and bring their benefits back to Earth. They connect people, building friendship networks that feed the ground for creativity. So, the moon, which is an astronomical object, changes into an iconic body that helps not only science but also the ties that make us all human.

### **Moon Missions from Other Countries**

As India successfully sets up a base on the moon's south pole, it is important to put this historic achievement into the bigger picture of lunar research. The progress made by India's Chandrayaan-3 fits smoothly into a larger story that includes a number of lunar operations. These include South Korea's Pathfinder Lunar Orbiter, NASA's CAPSTONE spaceship, and China's famous Chang'e missions. Together, they show how everyone wants to figure out the mysteries of the moon's surface.

India's achievement is important, but it fits in well with the efforts of other countries around the world. Together

with these efforts, India's steps add a lot to what we know about the moon and show how much we all want to figure out how complicated our neighbour (moon) in the sky is. As India's story of exploring the moon unfolds, it fits in beautifully with these scientific goals. It gives people a deeper and more complex understanding of the moon.

### **Why is the Moon's South Pole so Important?**

The careful choice to study the southern pole of the moon is a sign of strategic foresight and shows how interesting it is from a scientific point of view. This area is a key part of NASA's Artemis programme and has become a top landing spot because of its potential to find the hidden treasure of water ice. This is an important asset that will take lunar research to a new level. Water ice on the moon is important in and of itself, but it also has a lot of other uses. For example, it could be used to feed humans and make fuel for interstellar travel.

Also, the lit peaks of the South Pole offer a unique place to grow energy that won't run out, making them a key part of long-term trips to the moon. This mutually beneficial relationship between the lunar landscape and human technology is a key part of creating long-term projects beyond our home planet. With India's successful landing on this very ground, we've taken a huge step forward in our understanding of the moon's resources and how it might be possible to live there.

### **What Lies Ahead**

India's success with Chandrayaan-3 isn't just the end of something; it's also a key step towards future goals. As scientists try to go deeper into space, India's Chandrayaan mission serves as a clear template for future endeavours. The moon's attraction goes beyond scientific curiosity. It may have a wide range of economic benefits, such as the birth of space technology companies and the increasing possibility of using lunar resources.

India's pioneering steps in this area aren't limited to its own borders; they send out a signal of hope for all people everywhere. India paves the way for mankind's future in the universe by working hard to push the limits of travel. Once thought of as a mystery body, the moon is now a real stepping body that invites us to shape our fate so that the universe becomes our shared domain.

### **Conclusion**

India's huge achievement of landing on the moon's south pole is a successful example of how human creativity, persistence, and teamwork can never be stopped. The huge success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission marks the beginning of a new era in India's history of space exploration. It will leave a bigger mark in space and add to the story of humanity's search for answers in the universe as a whole. This victory shows that people all over the world are working together to figure out the secrets of the universe. It has nothing to do with national pride.

This achievement shows a deep truth that everyone can relate to: our constant desire to understand the universe has no limits. When we look at the moon, it becomes a symbol of endless possibilities and a bright reminder of the mysteries we have yet to discover. This view of the sky shows the unity of mankind, which goes beyond geopolitical boundaries and stands as a symbol of how we all want to find truth and wisdom.



# Challenges and opportunities of smart meter installations in Kashmir



**HANEEN FARID**

In May this year, the Power Development Department (PDD) stated that 100% of smart meter coverage would be done across the Kashmir valley in the next two years. PDD Chief Engineer Javed Yousuf Dar claimed that conventional meters were inconvenient as they necessitated manual readings, suggesting that smart meters would eliminate the concern of involving significant manpower.

However, the rollout of these smart meters was met with widespread protests across the valley; the public expressed their disapproval towards the new system citing concerns over inflated bills and demanding a return of flat rates. Despite these demonstrations, the Kashmir Power Development Corporation (KPDCL) Ltd refused to halt the installation process and stated that there was no alternative to this.

Further, in June, it was announced that as per the new pre-paid system, consumers will have to recharge their smart meters with credit prior to using electricity. This is contrary to the earlier practice of paying tariffs at the end of the month. Following this, over 57,000 smart meter users were informed by KPDCL to switch their smart meters from a post-paid to a pre-paid mode in addition to clearing outstanding bills in order to continue receiving electricity.

## **Smart meters as energy conservation tools**

In spite of the outrage against this recent reform, nothing discounts the fact that smart meters have multiple benefits in terms of sustainable energy development; they reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve energy efficiency by making consumers aware of the extent of their energy usage. In doing so, they link two types of information- the amount of energy consumption as well as the elapsed period of consumption. Smart meters are also site-specific, enabling companies to charge different prices for electricity usage. So in essence, this feedback system acts as a motivator or a reminder to users, for judicious consumption.

At the same time, there are other tools that can promote energy conservation. These include awareness, relevant tax, pricing, subsidy policies, administrative policies, and efficient devices. However, such changes are not sufficient, by themselves, in ensuring an improvement in conservation- unless supplicated by behavioral shifts. As is apparent in the valley through hefty household bills, habits of judicious consumption are integral to inculcating in people, as I shall illustrate further.

## **Balancing energy conservation and public acceptance**

Smart meters involve a type of real-time dynamic pricing, whereby retail electricity prices are permitted to vary persistently as per supply and demand conditions. So, this real-time dynamic pricing, known as the Time of Day (TOD) tariff in J&K, has the potential to lead to rapid increases in price based on changes in market conditions. In certain cases, there may be a prior notice given whereby consumers would be informed that tariffs may increase during a particular period of time on a particular day as a result of high demand. In J&K, the price of electricity is cheaper during the day as this is sourced through solar power, whereas that in the evening is sourced through hydroelectric, thermal, and gas-fired power. This system has the capability of conserving money for consumers who are able to shift their electricity consumption to periods where demand and consequently, prices are low. So, consumers would have to put in efforts to ensure that their energy spending is during solar hours, or at least a majority of it.

However, the people who fail to respond adequately to these variations by shifting their energy consumption risk incurring exceedingly high electricity bills. An important consideration to bear in mind is that the winters in Kashmir, which are intrinsically harsh in nature, increase the demand for electricity in terms of heating appliances such as heaters and radiators. So, people tend to use heating appliances- and thereby electricity- much more when compared to other times of the year in order to stay warm. And, it is a reasonable argument to say that residents cannot limit the usage of heating appliances merely to solar hours due to the climatic conditions.

Moreover, while a resident who earns a sufficient income may be able to meet these financial requirements, there is a certain segment of the population that cannot afford to pay a hefty amount under any circumstance. Jammu & Kashmir Policy Institute spoke with Javed Yousuf Dar with regard to economic incentives available to the poor. Dar states that electricity rates in J&K are one of the cheapest in India. A similar claim was made by LG Manoj Sinha in early August this year. Additionally, Dar mentioned the below poverty line rates, which are Rs 1.25 for up to 30 units per month. However, the cost incurred by BPL households for electricity consumed beyond this prescribed limit would be charged at Rs 2 up to 200 units per month, which is the same as ordinary residents.

An important thought to bear in mind is that a sizable factory or a large office can foreplan to close operations early when electricity prices become high. Households, on the other hand, cannot do that. Suppose an individual uses an appliance and leaves it running prior to leaving their house; upon their arrival, they find that they consumed electricity during peak hours and there is no step they can take to undo this. The only means through which they can manage the electricity consumption would be to program their smart meters such that they shut down appliances when required.



### The challenge of gathering public willingness

Based on data from the 2009-10 Irish Commission for Energy Regulation Smart Metering Electricity Customer Behaviour Trials (involving 4232 to 3423 pre-trial and post-trial households and businesses) it was found that smart electricity systems might be irrelevant for most consumers. This is because the costs incurred towards the establishment and upkeep of these systems in conserving electricity may seem to be higher to consumers rather than not paying attention to their usage at all. In the case of Kashmir, this upkeep involves recharging credit on the smart meters as well as ensuring that energy usage is kept to a minimum ideally during non-peak hours.

Because smart meter installations rely heavily on the willingness of residents to pay and especially, on understanding the reasons that would bring about such willingness. Hence, the economic benefits of such installation need to be clear to the general public. This is challenging in the case of Kashmir as the public already has a perception that the smart meters produce exorbitant bills. But, a solution to this would be to raise awareness on how to ensure minimal spending along with information on peak hours during which consumers can reduce their consumption. PDD Chief Engineer Dar stated that KPDCL conducts awareness programmes routinely to educate people about smart meters and clear misconceptions, which is an apt step in the direction of gaining acceptance amongst the public.

At the same time, another reason for households' resistance to smart metering could be a bias toward the status quo. The status quo, here, refers to a preference for doing that which requires no effort, significantly contributing to its appeal. If such household inertia is strong, then even economic incentives to promote the adoption of energy conservation methods may prove to be insufficient. This is highly relevant to the valley since customers now have to recharge their credit every month and make extra efforts to consume less electricity than

earlier- or at least ensure that they consume less during peak hours. This state of discomfort has the potential to cause substantial resistance, even in the long run- unless the authorities introduce economic incentives or customers adapt to these new changes.

Not to mention that when resistance among people grew, the KPDCL snapped electricity in the regions of protest such as Habba Kadal. The authorities claimed that this was done to prevent any 'law and order issues'; this response, however, is ambiguous to the author since one can reasonably conclude that cutting the supply of electricity in areas enraged by electricity reforms only contributes to their existing resentment. This view is also echoed by residents who perceived this action as one of exerting pressure on them to accept the smart meters.

### Conclusion

Smart meters, in theory, are an excellent energy-conserving device and should, in principle, contribute to large-scale energy-saving in Jammu & Kashmir. But, there are certain valid concerns that accompany its installation and moreover, appropriateness in the valley at the moment. The introduction of smart metering was practically inevitable, as it was introduced by a government order and its roll-out was already slower than anticipated. However, the public's unfavorable perception of this new move shows resistance and disapproval.

For this reason, it seems like smart metering may be a move that is beneficial for the public- at least in the long run- but has not been communicated to them effectively. Presently, people are outraged at the high cost of bills that the smart meters produce, even if this is seemingly a result of their own usage. So in order for this program to be successful, people must be informed about the benefits of smart meters in comparison to conventional meters. And, consumption habits must be such that there is minimum electricity usage in households to ensure that the motive behind introducing smart meters is truly realized in Jammu & Kashmir.





# Healthcare disparities in Jammu and Kashmir: Challenges and systemic inefficiencies



SEMRAN PARVAIZ

Jammu and Kashmir's healthcare system has encountered significant challenges, particularly amidst the backdrop of political instability since the 1990s. Over time, while there has been an improvement, the rapid expansion of the private healthcare sector has raised concerns about its priorities. The pursuit of profit often appeared to overshadow the genuine concern for patient well-being within this sector. Regrettably, this trend fostered a disconcerting pattern in which doctors in private hospitals ordered unnecessary medical tests solely to reap substantial financial rewards and receive incentives from specific testing facilities.

Efforts to curb this unethical behavior have proven inadequate, resulting in significant hardship for economically disadvantaged patients. Rather than focusing on safeguarding public health, the system seems to disproportionately favor the interests of physicians engaged in private practice. Consequently, individuals with limited financial means are confronted with restricted access to high-quality healthcare services.

This disparity within the healthcare system has further exacerbated the issue of protracted waiting times in government hospitals. Those most in need of medical assistance find themselves enduring lengthy queues, sometimes spanning hours, to secure a consultation with a physician. These distressing experiences not only exacerbate their physical ailments but also underscore the systemic inefficiencies prevalent within government healthcare facilities. It is crucial to delve into the myriad shortcomings of the healthcare system in Jammu and Kashmir to comprehensively address these concerns.

## **Struggles in Government Hospitals: Prolonged**

### **Waiting Times**

One of the most pressing and consequential challenges faced by individuals seeking medical assistance in Kashmir is the arduous wait times experienced at government hospitals. This issue is deeply frustrating and carries significant implications, as patients often endure prolonged waits, spanning hours on end, just to secure an opportunity to consult with a physician. This exacerbating and time-intensive ordeal further compounds the difficulties faced by individuals who are already grappling with health concerns.

Those in need of medical attention are disheartened

and demotivated by the lack of expedient care and attention within government healthcare facilities. In critical medical situations, where each moment holds profound significance, the duration spent awaiting attention takes on heightened importance. Regrettably, the protracted nature of these extensive waiting periods often compels numerous patients to seek recourse at private hospitals, with the aspiration of accessing medical aid more promptly.

Nevertheless, opting for private healthcare alternatives introduces its own array of challenges, particularly for economically disadvantaged individuals whose financial resources are already severely constrained. A significant portion of the populace, particularly those hailing from low-income households, find themselves unable to afford the exorbitant costs associated with private medical care. Consequently, they find themselves constrained to endure the interminable queues at government hospitals, holding out hope for an eventual consultation with a medical professional.

The principal cause underpinning these extensive waiting times can be attributed to the shortage of both personnel and funding within government healthcare institutions. The dearth of medical practitioners and auxiliary staff, juxtaposed with the overwhelming number of individuals in need of care, has resulted in an untenable situation. The volume of patients seeking treatment consistently surpasses the hospitals' operational capacities, rendering the swift and effective treatment of individuals a formidable challenge.

The absence of tangible action on the part of the government to address this critical issue serves as a disheartening indicator of their apparent disregard for public welfare and priorities. Instead of implementing efficacious strategies to streamline patient flow and mitigate waiting times, the governing authorities appear to have neglected this crucial facet of healthcare management.

### **Doctors Prioritizing Private Practice**

Within Kashmir's healthcare landscape, concerns have arisen regarding the operational practices of doctors within government hospitals. Despite the substantial remuneration and accompanying benefits offered by the government, a significant number of these medical professionals opt to prioritize their private practices over their responsibilities within state-run medical institutions. This disconcerting trend not only raises ethical questions but also casts doubt upon the quality of care attainable within these hospitals.

The diversion of doctors' time and expertise toward private practices at the expense of their commitments within government hospitals inevitably erodes the caliber of care provided within the latter. The scarcity of medical personnel further exacerbates the challenges facing the healthcare system, leading to limited choices for individuals seeking medical attention. This situation engenders frustration and disillusionment among users of the



government healthcare system, prompting them to explore alternative options within the private sector.

The departure of doctors from government hospitals to engage in private practice creates a substantial void within the healthcare framework. Despite existing constraints on resources, the dearth of proficient medical professionals intensifies the struggle for government hospitals to accommodate the escalating demand for healthcare services. As a consequence, patients encounter extended wait times, diminished access to specialized treatments, and an overarching discontent with the overall healthcare experience.

The deficiency in doctors' dedication significantly erodes public confidence in government hospitals, which are ideally the primary destination for medical care. This erosion of trust erases the assurance of reliable and expeditious care delivery from the collective consciousness of patients, thereby amplifying their inclination towards private healthcare alternatives.

### **Shortage of Medical Staff in Government Hospitals**

The acute dearth of medical professionals within the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) government healthcare system constitutes a pressing issue that necessitates immediate attention and rectification. This shortage of doctors and allied healthcare workers exerts a profound impact on patient welfare, particularly in remote and challenging-to-access locales such as Kupwara, Karnah, and Machil.

The scarcity of medical personnel in these regions engenders an insufficiency of essential healthcare services for their inhabitants. Basic medical care becomes a considerable undertaking as patients are compelled to undertake extensive journeys to access even the most fundamental medical attention due to the scarcity of available medical professionals. This predicament exacts both a physical and financial toll on the residents of these remote areas, demanding strenuous efforts and incurring substantial expenses to procure medical care.

The deficiency of doctors and nurses concurrently imposes an immense burden upon the existing healthcare infrastructure. Hospitals and medical facilities, already grappling with overexertion and inadequate staffing, struggle to accommodate the escalating demand for medical services. Consequently, patients encounter prolonged waiting periods, diminished access to specialized care, and an erosion of the quality of services provided.

The repercussions of the inadequate medical workforce are particularly dire in emergency situations and other critical junctures. Residents of remote localities often find themselves subjected to protracted waits for the essential medical attention they require, a predicament that could potentially jeopardize their lives. The delay in receiving prompt medical care heightens the risk of deteriorating health conditions if immediate interventions are not administered.

The deficiency in healthcare provisions within these regions compels many individuals to seek medical assistance beyond the confines of J&K. The pronounced inclination toward private hospitals situated outside the region further exacerbates the financial burdens borne by these individuals, as private healthcare services often incur substantial costs.

Urgent and comprehensive measures are imperative

to rectify this pressing issue and bolster the availability of medical professionals within the J&K government healthcare system. Addressing this scarcity would not only enhance patient care but also alleviate the burden on existing healthcare facilities, ultimately fostering improved healthcare access and outcomes for all residents.

### **Government Response and Ayushman Bharat Scheme**

The governmental efforts aimed at rectifying the healthcare challenges within Jammu and Kashmir have fallen short of the necessary mark. Despite the implementation of the Ayushman Bharat program, its impact has proven insufficient in comprehensively addressing the array of pressing healthcare concerns. While the initiative has garnered some commendation, it has demonstrated limitations that hinder its efficacy, particularly concerning critical medical treatments like dialysis and chemotherapy. Regrettably, these limitations engender heightened financial burdens for individuals necessitating imperative medical interventions.

To genuinely empower disadvantaged segments of the population through the Ayushman Bharat program, a substantial overhaul is imperative. A constructive step would involve eliminating the constraints that curtail coverage for vital treatments such as dialysis and chemotherapy. By effecting this change, the government can ensure that those who are most in need of medical assistance receive comprehensive support and comprehensive coverage from the program.

The expeditious reassessment of the Ayushman Bharat plan is of paramount importance to enhance its accessibility and utility for all patients, with a particular focus on those grappling with life-threatening illnesses. Prioritizing the health and well-being of citizens and enacting the necessary reforms within the healthcare framework will facilitate the resolution of existing challenges, thereby rendering the healthcare system in Jammu and Kashmir more efficient, empathetic, and efficacious.

### **Reforming the Healthcare System**

In Jammu and Kashmir, the absence of substantial private engagement within the healthcare sector has led to a disproportionate reliance on government-operated hospitals. While this scenario can prove advantageous in certain regions, it also ushers in a host of challenges in other localities. A prime illustration of this dichotomy lies in Ladakh, where the scarcity of private healthcare options compels residents to turn to government health centers, benefitting from the dedication and compassion of medical professionals who diligently cater to their patients' needs.

Conversely, in locales where private healthcare alternatives are limited, the burden on government hospitals becomes formidable. Already grappling with resource and staffing deficiencies, these facilities grapple with an escalating influx of patients. Individuals are left with no recourse but to flock to these already overwhelmed government hospitals, resulting in protracted waiting periods and compromised quality of care.

The dearth of private sector involvement in healthcare further exacerbates the challenge of accessing specialized treatments and cutting-edge medical technologies that are often available through private establishments. Consequently, residents of such areas find themselves compelled to undertake long journeys or even leave the



state to secure the requisite medical attention.

Resolving this situation necessitates a balanced approach that embraces both government and private sector participation in the healthcare domain. By fostering a collaborative ecosystem, individuals across diverse localities can avail themselves of comprehensive healthcare services, with government institutions shouldering the responsibility alongside private counterparts. This approach not only alleviates the strain on government hospitals but also ensures equitable access to specialized care and innovative medical advancements, thereby enhancing the overall healthcare landscape in the region.

### **Reforming the Healthcare System**

Revamping the operational framework of hospitals in Kashmir necessitates a comprehensive and expeditious strategic overhaul. Urgent action is imperative on the part of the government to address the prevalent vacancies within medical personnel across government hospitals and health centers throughout Jammu and Kashmir. Swift rectification of this staffing deficit will alleviate the burden on the existing medical workforce, culminating in enhanced patient care and reduced wait times.

Moreover, a paramount priority lies in augmenting infrastructure and ensuring the integration of contemporary medical equipment within all government healthcare facilities. The provisioning of state-of-the-art medical tools is pivotal, as it not only elevates the quality of healthcare delivery but also fosters public confidence in the government-operated healthcare sector.

To further enhance the healthcare landscape, proactive engagement with the business sector is pivotal. Encouraging private sector participation imparts a competitive edge to the healthcare industry, allowing private entities to leverage their expertise, knowledge, and resources in support of the government's initiatives. This collaborative approach not only alleviates the strain on government hospitals but also extends healthcare accessibility to individuals residing in remote and rural areas.

By cultivating private sector involvement, the integration of novel medical technologies and specialized treatments can be streamlined, rendering them more accessible to the general populace. The consequential amelioration in health and well-being is contingent upon ensuring that individuals have access to quality healthcare at an affordable cost.

Synthesizing these components results in the transformation of the healthcare system in Kashmir into a patient-centric and adaptable model. Timely implementation of these measures empowers government hospitals to furnish comprehensive medical services, with private sector collaboration addressing gaps in specialized treatments. This synergistic approach engenders a healthcare framework that is not only efficient and accessible but also attuned to the diverse needs of all citizens, irrespective of their geographic location or financial means. The government's steadfast commitment to enacting these reforms reflects its dedication to the health and safety of the populace of Jammu and Kashmir.

### **Conclusion**

The ineffectual healthcare management prevailing in



Kashmir has spawned a myriad of adverse consequences, disproportionately impacting economically disadvantaged patients. The pervasive issues of extended queues and a scarcity of medical practitioners in government hospitals have inflicted significant obstacles upon individuals seeking medical treatment. Furthermore, the absence of private sector engagement within the healthcare sphere has exacerbated the fragility of an already strained system.

The importance of accessible and affordable healthcare resonates universally, transcending financial disparities. A robust and equitable healthcare infrastructure is an essential facet of overall well-being, and its realization hinges upon concerted efforts from all stakeholders. It is imperative that a collaborative endeavor be undertaken to uplift the healthcare landscape.

Central to this endeavor is the premise that quality healthcare should be universally accessible, irrespective of financial standing. The government's role in fostering an environment conducive to the attainment of optimal health cannot be understated. It is only through the collective dedication and prioritization of systemic enhancements that substantial improvements can be effected.

A pivotal shift towards prioritizing the welfare of citizens is indispensable. Bolstering the healthcare system demands unwavering commitment and resolute action. By prioritizing proactive changes that revamp the current healthcare framework, the government lays the foundation for an efficient and compassionate system that caters to the diverse needs of the populace.

Ultimately, the well-being of individuals must stand as the paramount objective. It is through a collective resolve to implement necessary changes that the government can orchestrate the evolution of a healthcare system that is both effective and empathetic, ensuring that every citizen, irrespective of their financial circumstances, can access the medical care they require.



# Wasteland reclamation: A path to environmental and socioeconomic restoration



**ZAHOOR AHMAD DAR**

As the world's population continues to grow exponentially, so does the scale of associated negative by-products and externalities in the environment. Among the bunch of degenerative implications of overpopulation is the issue of rising wastelands. Wasteland is a land that is unfit for cultivation or is unproductive, unimproved, or barren. Natural processes like undulating uplands, snow-covered lands, coastal saline areas, and sandy areas along with anthropogenic activities such as deforestation, overgrazing, and unsustainable farming practices contribute to its formation that results in degraded, saline, or flooded lands.

According to Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), 33% of the world's land is moderately to severely degraded, posing environmental and socioeconomic challenges in the form of food insecurity and loss of biodiversity. At the country-wide level, wastelands occupy as far as 5,57,665.51 sq. Km as per the Wasteland Atlas, 2019, published by the Ministry of Rural Development. Wastelands can be classified into culturable wastelands and unculturable wastelands. The former signifies the

land which has potential for the development of vegetative cover but is lying unused owing to different constraints of varying degrees such as erosion, water logging, salinity, etc. On the other hand, the latter incorporates land that cannot be developed for vegetative cover, for instance, the barren rocky areas and snow-covered glacier areas.

However, amidst the whirlwind of mounting challenges, a beacon of hope shines through wasteland reclamation. Synonymously used with the term land rehabilitation or land reclamation, it aims to restore these desolate landscapes, revive biodiversity, improve the lives of affected communities, and enhance economic and ecological value. This multidisciplinary approach combines ecological restoration, sustainable agriculture, and community engagement to create a synergy that fosters long-term environmental and social benefits.

Of India's total population, 40% depend on wastelands for livelihood. This population is primarily rural, non/semi-literate, and from marginalized communities. In light of such huge dependence, the need for reclamation becomes even more urgent.

The article is an attempt to delineate the discursive contours around wastelands, the need and methods for recuperation of wastelands, and reclamation initiatives undertaken in Jammu and Kashmir.

## **The Importance of Wasteland Reclamation**

The expansion of agriculture, urbanization, mining, and industrial activities often leads to the degradation of vast areas, leaving behind barren lands stripped of their natural vegetation and productive capacity. Wasteland reclamation is of paramount importance because it:

1. Promotes Biodiversity: Reclaiming wastelands



allows for the restoration of diverse plant and animal species, creating habitats for wildlife and promoting ecological balance.

2. **Improves Soil Fertility and enlarges area under agriculture:** By introducing appropriate soil conservation techniques and organic matter, reclaimed lands can regain their fertility and support sustainable agricultural activities, thereby preventing further degradation. The reclamation process prioritizes soil health through erosion control, organic matter restoration, and natural soil-building techniques.

3. **Water Conservation:** By restoring degraded lands, natural sources of water are revitalized, promoting groundwater recharge and preventing soil erosion. These efforts lead to increased water retention, immensely benefitting the communities and ecosystem in the long run. With the wastelands reclamation, water quality improves thereby enhancing the availability of water.

4. **Mitigates Climate Change:** Reforestation efforts through wasteland reclamation can serve as carbon sinks, helping absorb atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> and mitigate the impacts of climate change.

5. **Supports Livelihoods:** Reclaimed wastelands can provide livelihood opportunities for local communities through sustainable agriculture, agroforestry, and ecotourism. Emphasizing agroforestry and eco-tourism ventures can generate income and employment. Livelihood opportunities are generated for local communities from planting and monitoring to ecotourism and sustainable resource management. These projects boost the local economy and alleviate poverty.

6. **Ensures Food Security:** Enlarged expanses of land under agriculture address the problem of food insecurity under which the world is currently reeling.

7. **Entry-level barrier to natural disasters:** Restoration of wastelands serves as the first window to tackle natural disasters such as floods and cyclones.

Having underscored the preeminent importance of wasteland conservation, we now move further to understand the presence of wastelands in the world and how it is affecting the global geography and masses. The reality is far more complex than it appears.

Notwithstanding the burgeoning rise of wastelands the world over owing to a multitude of factors, some case studies point towards optimistic results in the path of wasteland reclamation. China's Loess Plateau, once plagued by severe erosion and desertification has been transformed into a fecund, lush land due to the "Grain for Green" program. The Chinese government and local communities worked together to plant trees and grasses, ultimately reclaiming over 35 million hectares of degraded land. The program improved the ecological conditions of the region and provided farmers with additional income from fruit and timber production.

At the national level, the Government of India has taken note of the rising tide of wastelands and has undertaken concerted efforts in association with several non-governmental organizations and local communities to reclaim and restore these wastelands. The Indian government has gotten into full swing in light of the fact that India has 18% of the world's population, while it only has 2.4% of the land area. Therefore the per capita

land availability of India is one of the lowest in the world. To ensure food security, it is critical to increase the productivity of existing cultivated areas and bring more land under cultivation. Between 2008-09 and 2015-16, more than 14,000 square kilometers of wasteland in India were converted into productive use, predominantly dense brush, glacial areas, beaches, or marshland. By 2030, the government expects to cover 26 million hectares of wasteland and degraded land.

### **Government Initiatives and Programs**

India has implemented several programs to tackle wasteland reclamation, with a focus on ecological restoration, poverty alleviation, and sustainable rural development. One of the major initiatives is the "National Afforestation Programme" (NAP), launched in 2000, which aims to afforest and regenerate degraded forestlands, as well as other wastelands. Under the NAP, over 20 million hectares of land have been targeted for afforestation and regeneration.

### **Afforestation and Green Cover**

As per the State of Forest Report 2021, India's forest cover has increased by 3,976 square kilometers since the previous report in 2019, reaching a total of 24.56% of the country's geographical area. This increase in forest cover is a significant step towards wasteland reclamation and reflects the success of afforestation efforts across the nation.

#### **Soil Conservation and Watershed Management**

Wasteland reclamation also involves measures to prevent soil erosion and improve water management. The "Integrated Watershed Management Programme" (IWMP) is one such initiative that focuses on conserving soil and water resources in rain-fed areas. Since its inception in 2009, the IWMP has covered more than 7 million hectares, benefiting thousands of rural communities.

While India has made significant strides in wasteland reclamation, challenges persist. Rapid urbanization, industrialization, and increasing population pressures continue to pose threats to the environment. Sustainable land-use planning and community involvement are vital for the success of reclamation efforts.

### **The Case Study of Jammu & Kashmir**

Kashmir, known for its breathtaking landscapes and diverse ecosystems, has faced significant challenges in recent decades due to rapid urbanization, deforestation, and land degradation. Wasteland reclamation initiatives have become crucial to restore and conserve the region's natural resources and biodiversity. As of 2021, approximately 27% of the total geographical area in Kashmir is classified as wasteland. This subsequent section delves into the efforts and achievements of the wasteland reclamation projects in Kashmir, highlighting the facts, statistics, and their impact on the environment. The process of wasteland reclamation involves a combination of ecological, engineering, and social interventions.

**Reforestation and Afforestation:** One of the primary approaches to wasteland reclamation in Kashmir is reforestation and afforestation. These projects involve planting native tree species in degraded areas to restore ecological balance and combat climate change. Since 2010, over 10,000 hectares of wasteland in the region have been reforested, contributing significantly to the restoration



of wildlife habitats and the promotion of sustainable forestry practices.

**Watershed Management:** Kashmir's unique geography with its numerous rivers and streams makes it essential to prioritize watershed management in wasteland reclamation efforts. Implementation of techniques such as check dams, terracing, and contour bunding has helped control soil erosion and enhance water availability. As of 2021, over 150 watershed management projects have been implemented in the region.

**Rainwater Harvesting:** Collecting and storing rainwater can help replenish groundwater levels and improve overall water availability.

**Bio-remediation:** Using plants and microorganisms to remove pollutants from contaminated soil and water, aiding in the restoration of ecosystem health.

**Biodiversity Conservation:** Wasteland reclamation in Kashmir focuses not only on reestablishing flora but also on preserving the region's diverse wildlife. Conservation of endangered species like the Kashmir Stag (Hangul) and the Snow Leopard has been a significant objective of these initiatives. By reclaiming degraded habitats, these projects have seen an increase in the population of several endangered species over the years.

**Economic Impact:** Wasteland reclamation projects have had a positive economic impact on local communities. Through community involvement in afforestation and sustainable farming practices, job opportunities have been created, providing livelihoods for many households. Additionally, the restored forests and improved water resources have aided agricultural productivity, further contributing to the region's economic development.

### **Challenges and Future Prospects**

While wasteland reclamation offers numerous benefits, several challenges must be addressed for successful implementation. Some of the key challenges include:

1. **Financial Constraints:** Funding reclamation projects can be a significant obstacle, requiring government support and private investments.
2. **Community Participation:** Involving local communities in the reclamation process is vital for the long-term success and sustainability of the projects.
3. **Monitoring and Maintenance:** Regular monitoring

and maintenance of reclaimed lands are essential to ensure their continued productivity and ecological health.

Wasteland reclamation projects particularly in Kashmir face several challenges. Encroachments, illegal logging, and insufficient financial resources remain significant obstacles. To ensure the long-term success of these projects, it is crucial to strengthen enforcement against illegal activities and secure sustained funding from governmental and non-governmental sources.

### **Recommendations**

Advancements in technology and interdisciplinary collaborations in the future will play a crucial role in optimizing wasteland reclamation efforts. Furthermore, promoting sustainable practices, raising environmental consciousness, and implementing supportive policies will be essential in creating a thriving ecosystem for wasteland reclamation on a global scale. Active participation and involvement by the locals in conservation efforts can ensure success since their involvement may instill in them a sense of community ownership and responsibility towards their vicinity. It may also foster a sense of empowerment within them, build strong community ties and ensure project sustainability.

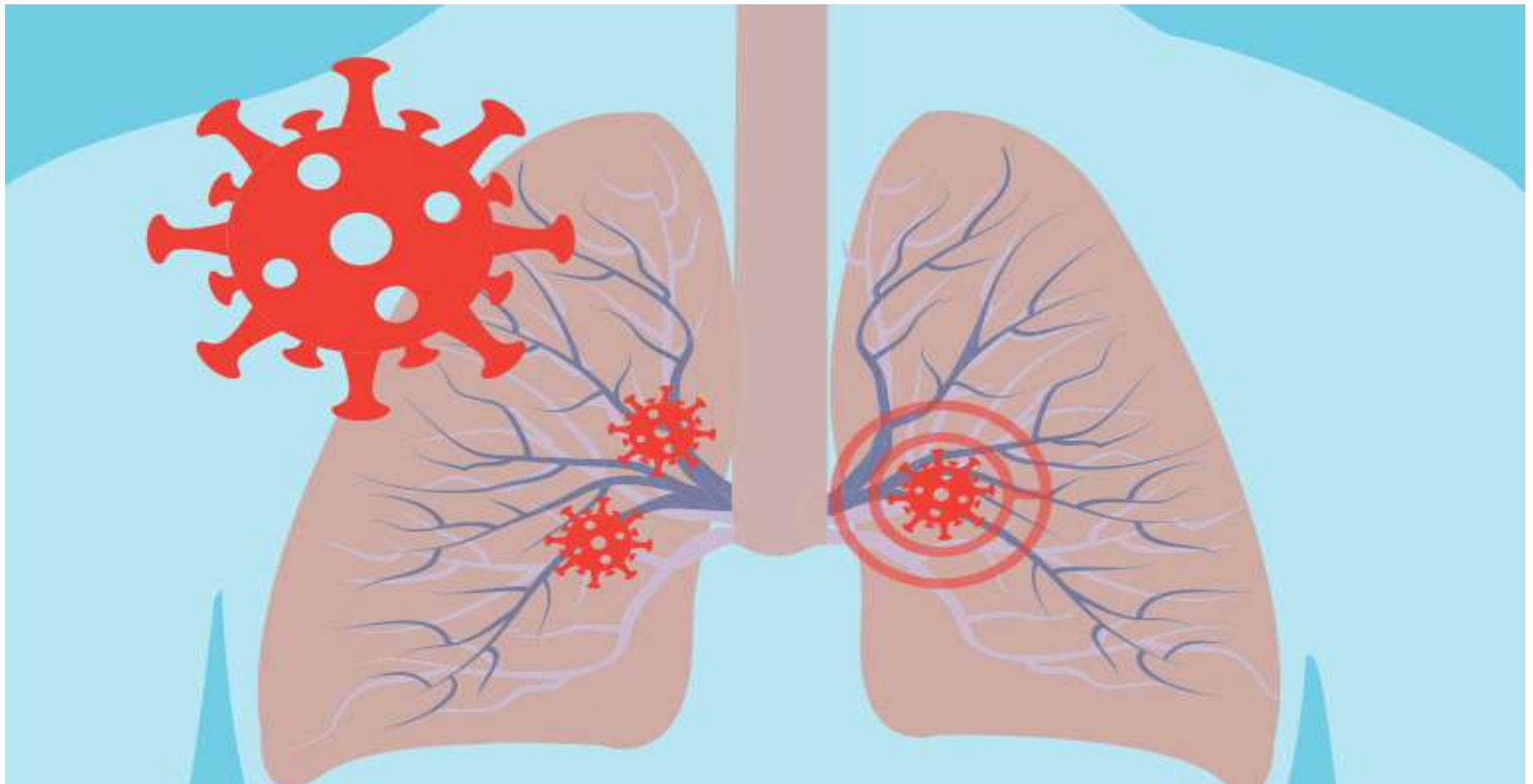
### **Conclusion**

The unprecedented mushrooming of wastelands is an acknowledged offshoot of unplanned development and urban sprawl. The clarion call for its subversion and the need to set reclamation activities into motion has been raised time and again. Through reforestation, watershed management, and biodiversity conservation, the stakeholders have not only revived the flora and fauna but also improved the livelihoods of local communities. Moving forward, continued commitment from various stakeholders and increased public awareness are essential to ensure the sustainability and success of these endeavors, preserving the natural heritage of Kashmir for generations to come. To overcome these challenges, it is essential for the government, civil society, and private sector to collaborate and invest in sustainable land management practices. Empowering local communities with knowledge and resources can foster a sense of ownership and ensure the success and continuity of wasteland reclamation projects.





# Respiratory viruses and health after COVID-19: Insights from a distinguished medical practitioner



**ADEELA HAMEED**

**F**or nearly two years the COVID pandemic disrupted life around the world. The WHO has confirmed that 117,332,262 cases of COVID-19 were reported globally. Around 2,605,356 deaths were reported as of March 11, 2021. Of all the cases worldwide, about 24.5% were present in the United States, followed by India at 9.6%, Brazil at 9.41%, and the Russian Federation at 3.7%.

Other infectious diseases had temporarily seemed withdrawn for that period. Now that we dismantled the measures to slow the spread of the coronavirus disease, the viral and bacterial nuisances, previously on hiatus, are returning — and misbehaving in unexpected ways.

Flu experts are worrying that when influenza viruses return in a serious way affecting the section of our population who haven't had a recent infection, the upcoming flu season would be really difficult.

The last two winters were amongst the mildest influenza seasons on record. However, flu has picked up pace in the last few months, not just in Kashmir but, all over the globe.

Adenovirus type 41, believed to cause moderately harmless bouts of gastrointestinal illness, might be setting off severe hepatitis in healthy young children.

Respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, normally causes disease in the winter, but it has been spreading like wildfire

among children in the summer now.

Monkeypox, mostly found in West and Central Africa, is causing an uncalled-for outbreak in many countries in Europe, North America, the Middle East, and Australia.

**These viruses are not different than before, but we are.**

**Because of COVID restrictions, we have a lot less recently acquired immunity.**

Some studies suggest that after a 1- or 2-year period in which flu transmission is low, there could be ample reduction in the number of people who have flu antibodies at levels high enough to be considered protective. Endemic diseases have a certain pattern of predictability, which in part is seasonal, but is also driven by the size of the immune or non-immune population.

An increase in vulnerable populations isn't the only way the COVID-19 pandemic might've affected patterns of disease transmission. And the disruption of normal patterns of infections might be more noticeable for diseases where children play an important role in dissemination.

Children are germ magnets and amplifiers. Their lives were greatly altered during the COVID pandemic. Most of them went months without attending daycare, or school in person. And many had less exposure to people outside their households. Even when they did meet others, those people may have been wearing masks.

A study that researched antibodies in the blood of young children showed the impact of what is called an infection honeymoon. This means that children have fewer antibodies to a set of common respiratory viruses in the second year of the pandemic because they were less exposed.

**The pandemic-induced disruption of normal mixing patterns has other outcomes.**

Adults, as well, haven't been producing the levels of



antibodies that would normally be acquired through their regular exposure to the virus, creating even larger groups of susceptible people. And as a consequence, babies delivered during the pandemic may have been born with few antibodies passed on by their mothers in the womb.

While all this could be unsettling over the next couple of years, things are bound to eventually dial down. Once people are infected, herd immunity gains a foothold and the virus goes away. The rules of infectious diseases haven't fundamentally changed.

In hospitals across the valley, physicians are adjusting protocols. These regulations had, for decades, showcased a predictable cycle of illnesses that would come and go when schools closed or the weather changed.

In this regard, JKPI held a conversation with a prominent physician, Dr. Abdul Hameed, who retired as Principal - Government Medical College, Baramulla. He has served for more than four decades in upholding and restoring healthcare facilities in GMC Srinagar and associated hospitals. Dr. Hameed has an MD in Anesthesia and Critical Care/Pain Medicine. He has been honored as one of the best medical practitioners and administrators during the pandemic.

**Q: Is COVID-19 still a highly transmissible respiratory illness or has it calmed down to act like the common flu?**

A: COVID has changed from pandemic to epidemic and is declared endemic now. This fifth-largest pandemic in medical history, which claimed approximately seven hundred thousand lives, has been a nightmare for the whole globe. But there is a marked and definite encouraging change in the frequency of cases and the severity of symptom complex which indicates the development of immunity in the community. Endemic nature means that herd immunity has come to safeguard but continuous vigil is needed to identify and manage possible complications.

**Q: How are respiratory virus behaving since the pandemic? Should there be a reason for alarm among the general Kashmiri population?**

A: Personally, I have noticed that the mode of infection and transmission of COVID is as per the general respiratory viral behavior. But evidence-based observations seem to indicate that the infection takes a longer time to settle, and the frequency of super-infections is higher which could be due essence here.

**Q: Does COVID influence other respiratory or enteroviruses?**

A: The case count of Influe to the prolonged course of the viral syndrome. Kashmir is part of the globe and all medical rules that apply to people abroad hold the samenza and Respiratory syncytial viral illnesses were seen to be very low. It was attributed to Non Pharmacological Interventions like social distancing, masking, restrictions on travel, avoiding gatherings, teleconsultations, abstaining from socializing, etc. The season of peak activity of these viruses also showed a drift and cases occurred beyond expected time-lines. However, relaxation in NPIs marked

a resurgence. This was not seen in the cases of Rhinovirus and Respiratory enterovirus where the incidence as such was not altered much. It was also seen that the episodes of viral infections showed alterations in severity and duration which could be due to changes in immunological profiles during relative non-exposure during NPI implementation. All issues need further scientific clearance.

**Q: What, in your opinion and as per your clinical investigation, should people in Kashmir do to prevent infections?**

A: As I mentioned the medical rules are the same and need to be followed with commitment. Cleanliness and hygiene are important in communities and hospitals. Observing barrier nursing in health service centers is very important.

Common colds seem a bit virulent and tenacious now, however...

How and when they may revert to normal depends on modification in our own behavior during the pandemic and the interplay between SARS-CoV-2 and other viruses, known as viral interference. Humans have evolved alongside pathogens, and regular contacts usually allow our immune systems to upgrade the response without making us really sick.

The moment a population stops seeing a virus on this regular rhythm, that natural balance is disturbed. Those extraordinary measures we took to limit exposure to COVID-19, also limited the influence of other viruses. Hence, when we do get exposed to a virus again, and too much time has passed, we may not be able to protect ourselves significantly. This leads to out-of-season waves across the population and unexpectedly virulent infections for individuals. However, the coronavirus and other haywire viruses will, like other respiratory viruses, fall into a pattern of seasonal circulation once population immunity increases, thus decreasing the force of infection. All those shifts will be further affected by other environmental factors as climate change alters seasonal weather patterns.

However, maintaining a healthy environment is imperative at all costs. It is possible when all communities, both at national and international levels, strictly abide by the guidelines prescribed by authorities to combat the spread of viruses.

COVID-19 led to several advancements across many scientific fronts, including vaccine development.

Scientists are now proficient at rapidly developing vaccines. This is due to a more streamlined clinical testing strategy that does not trim down on safety analysis, and mRNA technology that permits rapid vaccine product development.

Surprisingly, COVID vaccine development took just 11 months. A major factor in this was the work previously done with mRNA vaccines. Researchers and developers are now in a much better position to develop vaccines more rapidly and respond to future epidemics and pandemics in a better way.

We can now easily categorize the world as pre- and post-COVID just like we did after the world wars. Such is the degree of shift witnessed by our planet during the pandemic.



# Bakarwal migration's impact on Dachigam National Park: Balancing tradition and conservation



## PARVAIZ YOUSUF

The Kashmir Himalayas harbor a distinctive and rich ecosystem teeming with diverse flora and fauna. Renowned for its national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and vibrant wildlife, the region, unfortunately, faces mounting anthropogenic pressure. A notable instance of this strain lies in the annual nomadic Bakarwal migration – a seasonal journey undertaken by the Bakarwal community, pastoral nomads who rely on livestock for their livelihood. This age-old migratory tradition has unfolded across centuries, leaving an indelible imprint on the ecological tapestry of the area.

Yet, the present era has brought to the fore a growing apprehension regarding the repercussions of this migration on the region's national parks. In this discourse, we aim to delve into the essence of this migration, unravel its intricacies, and subsequently shed light on its ramifications for the delicate balance of our national parks' ecosystems and the wildlife they harbor.

### **Understanding Bakarwal migration**

The Bakarwals, a pastoral community, inhabit the mountainous terrain of Jammu and Kashmir, orchestrating a fascinating annual migration. This tradition involves guiding their herds of sheep and goats from the lowlands of J&K to the elevated reaches of the Kashmir Himalayas as the summer ushers in. As the snow-capped Himalayan peaks yield to the warmth and the grasslands at lower elevations turn arid, these resourceful animals journey to higher ground in pursuit of nourishing forage.

Embedded within the cultural fabric, the Bakarwals' migratory path is steeped in history and familial legacy. Setting forth from the plains during the months of April or May, they embark on a traverse that concludes by late September or early October. Along this journey, they traverse through landscapes of breathtaking beauty, encompassing environmentally vital regions, including national parks and protected areas.

Of particular note is the significant intersection of their migratory route with Dachigam National Park (DNP), nestled in the Zabarwan Range of the Himalayas. Encompassing an expanse of approximately 141 square kilometers, this sanctuary boasts a rich tapestry of plant and animal life, further adorned by the presence of the critically endangered Kashmir Stag, or Hangul.

DNP's fortunate geographic placement aligns it with the Bakarwals' passage, yet this harmony is not without ecological consequences. The Bakarwals' livestock

graze upon the park's pastures, triggering a process of vegetation depletion. The repercussions are profound and far-reaching, initiating a cascade effect that reverberates throughout the park's intricate ecosystem.

### **Impact of grazing**

Regarding the Bakarwals' migration practices, a nuanced balance emerges between their livestock grazing and the preservation of the region's ecology. While these nomadic shepherds are permitted to graze their herds within the Kashmiri mountains, specific regulations, upheld by the law and the Jammu and Kashmir wildlife authorities, prohibit their entry into Dachigam National Park (DNP). The park, singular in its role as a bastion for the Hangul, or Kashmir Stag, embodies an indispensable haven for the feeding, breeding, and overall survival of this critically endangered species.

With a mere 250 Hanguls remaining in the wild, DNP's significance cannot be overstated, particularly in a landscape where other mountainous regions have undergone substantial disturbance, rendering their suitability for Hangul's existence increasingly precarious. The Bakarwals' livestock grazing, though rooted in tradition, exerts a considerable influence on the regional ecology. The continuous foraging of their flocks precipitates the depletion of vegetation, a phenomenon that resonates throughout the ecosystem's intricate food chain.

Anchoring this issue is the stark reality of thousands of sheep infiltrating DNP's core, effectively sweeping vast expanses of critical vegetation. This greenery is of pivotal import to Hangul and its progeny, which rely on a nutrient-rich diet, particularly during the demanding summer months. Altered vegetation dynamics consequently reverberate across the park's fauna, jeopardizing the sustenance of various wildlife species that rely on the now-depleted resources.

Compounding this ecological challenge is the substantial presence of livestock within DNP. This coexistence is markedly unharmonious for the Hangul, a timid and sensitive creature that instinctively shies away from disturbances, including human activity and the commotion associated with large herds of sheep, goats, humans, and dogs.

The Bakarwals' presence additionally ushers in direct interventions within the park's ecosystem. Their practice of felling small trees using tools like axes, often driven by the need for warmth and protection from predators, serves to disrupt the natural equilibrium of the area. Tragically, fires kindled for self-preservation occasionally spiral out of control, engendering widespread destruction.

The repercussions of Bakarwals' grazing extend beyond the immediate and are manifest in the form of soil erosion, a consequence of the persistent trampling by their livestock. This gradual soil degradation leads to its loosening, making it increasingly susceptible to being washed away during rainfall. The ensuing erosion profoundly impacts the



ecosystem's long-term vitality, compromising soil fertility and obstructing the growth of vital vegetation.

In essence, the intricate interplay between the Bakarwals' age-old practices and the delicate ecological balance of Dachigam National Park underscores the imperative for well-considered interventions and sustainable coexistence strategies.

### **Balancing Bakarwal migration and ecosystem conservation in national parks**

Recognizing the historical and integral role of Bakarwals in our society and their longstanding migratory tradition, it is imperative to address the impact of their seasonal movements on our national parks. A harmonious equilibrium must be achieved between the Bakarwals' way of life and the imperative of ecosystem conservation.

One viable approach involves the regulation of Bakarwal grazing within Dachigam National Park (DNP). Although the convenience of traversing the core of DNP aids their journey to northern Kashmir, stringent measures should prohibit their entry, while alternate routes circumvent the park. This aligns with the fundamental principle that no individual, including Bakarwals, should access the core of a National Park, save for scientific or research purposes. In this endeavor, the J&K wildlife department, along with organizations like the Wildlife Conservation Fund (WCF), has taken strides to curb Bakarwal entry using anti-grazing units at key transit points such as Bathen, Sangri, Zawoora, Astanpora, Brein, and Nishat. Although progress has been made, the scale of Bakarwals' movements necessitates a heightened and sustained effort to effectively safeguard the park from their intrusion.

Compounding the challenge is the diminishing expanse available for livestock grazing within the Kashmir Valley. To alleviate pressure on national parks, an innovative solution lies in the establishment of alternative grazing grounds outside these conservation areas. Collaboratively devised with the Bakarwals, these designated grazing zones would permit the continuation of their traditional practices while ensuring that the delicate regional ecology remains unharmed. This entails a significant responsibility on the part of the government to comprehensively address this issue, restrict Bakarwal access to core park areas, and ensure the availability of suitable alternative grazing areas.

A pivotal strategy revolves around educating and training the Bakarwals in sustainable grazing practices. This transformative approach would underscore the vital significance of preserving the ecological equilibrium of the region. Equipped with a profound understanding of the long-term consequences of unsustainable grazing, the Bakarwals can transition into guardians of the ecosystem, actively contributing to its preservation. Central to this education is the unequivocal prohibition of entering national parks, refraining from tree felling, and preventing uncontrolled fires. Regular interactions and guidance would cement the commitment of the Bakarwals to sustainable conservation practices, fortifying the delicate balance between tradition and environmental protection.

### **Recommendations**

Beyond the aforementioned measures, several additional recommendations can be put forth to effectively address the challenges posed by the annual Bakarwal migration to our national parks.

Firstly, fostering an open and constructive dialogue

between the Bakarwals and the pertinent authorities responsible for national park management emerges as a pivotal step. This dialogue must center on devising solutions that harmonize the Bakarwals' needs with the imperative of ecosystem preservation. By facilitating this discourse, the Bakarwals can be vested as active participants in the decision-making process, thus emerging as key stakeholders in the broader conservation efforts aimed at safeguarding the region's ecological balance.

A second vital recommendation involves the establishment of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework, developed collaboratively with the Bakarwals. This framework would holistically gauge the impact of Bakarwals' seasonal migration on various aspects such as vegetation, soil quality, and wildlife dynamics within the national parks. The insights derived from this system should play a pivotal role in informing and refining park management strategies, ensuring that the measures implemented are precisely tailored to address the specific challenges posed by Bakarwals' movements.

Furthermore, acknowledging the collateral issue of traffic disruption due to Bakarwal migration assumes significance. The ensuing traffic congestions significantly impede the daily activities of local residents. To alleviate this concern, the government should meticulously devise a time-bound schedule for Bakarwals and their livestock to access roads during their migration. By restricting their movements to nighttime, a prudent traffic management approach can be realized, minimizing interruptions and ensuring a smoother transition for both the Bakarwals and the local populace.

In summary, these recommended steps, encompassing the facilitation of dialogue, the establishment of a comprehensive monitoring system, and the implementation of a judicious traffic management plan, collectively offer a holistic strategy to effectively mitigate the multifaceted impact of Bakarwal seasonal migration on our cherished national parks. By combining these efforts, a harmonious coexistence between the Bakarwals and the ecological integrity of the parks can be realized.

### **Conclusion**

In summation, the Bakarwals play an integral role in the development and economy of Kashmir, sparing the need for substantial livestock imports. Their distinct identity is rooted in a centuries-old cultural practice of annual migrations through the Kashmir Himalayas. However, the coexistence of this tradition and the preservation of our national parks, housing crucial ecosystems, poses a complex challenge.

Achieving a delicate equilibrium is imperative; a balance between the Bakarwals' requirements and the integrity of the park's environment must be struck to mitigate their impact on these precious natural reserves. This necessitates a concerted effort encompassing measures like regulating Bakarwal presence and grazing within national parks, establishing alternative grazing zones, and fostering awareness about sustainable grazing practices.

By undertaking these proactive steps, the intrinsic harmony within our national parks can be preserved, safeguarding the rich tapestry of life they house. In this symbiotic approach, the continuation of Bakarwals' seasonal migration can coalesce with the imperative of ecological conservation, ensuring a sustainable future for both these unique shepherds and the natural wonders they traverse.



# Emerging multipolarity in Asia: Dynamics, challenges, and the rise of India as a superpower



ANAMITRA BANERJEE

## Introduction

Throughout the decades-long Cold War, the world split into two major blocs to maintain power dynamics. Subsequently, issues have emerged to influence international order with no monopolization by a superpower prevailing and the notion regarding stake for all nations outweighs the old international practices. Americans and the Chinese are competing to emerge as a hegemon, a tussle for power. This trend will remain along with other economic stakes from the EU, AU, Latin America, ASEAN, BRICS, and other regional groupings, altering the power equilibrium under various scenarios. Geopolitical trends and economies have shifted their approach from being highly centered around America.

## Body:

### Introductory Part

The ongoing Russo-Ukraine, successive coups in Africa, political instability in Latin America & Asia, and continuous provocations in the Taiwan Strait allegedly caused global financial upheavals that have lately rattled the world. A fourth version is currently set into motion, relying on historical assets while introducing novel emerging tech possibilities. By the second half of this century, Asia might account for fifty per cent of the world's GDP and sixty per cent of global consumption in a multipolar world.

### Descriptive Part:

With India, China, Japan, GCC, and ASEAN all playing important roles in crucial financial matters, Asia have continuously dominated the world in various sectors over the last decades. The IMF forecasts that this pattern will hold true since Asia will outperform the West in terms of revenue indicators. Multipolarity provides greater possibilities for nations to engage hence potential crises can also emerge given that every country's national interest becomes nuanced in the mechanism and hence accommodating them gets challenging. Given the rise in alliances and groupings, the multi-polar order would provide room for discrepancies, encouraging reorganization and increasing chaos. Regional conflicts may trigger a large-scale invasion to unfold. The security conundrum caused by the arms race will also lead to the destabilization of the multifaceted order. DPRK continues



to pursue its own arsenal which could create possible nuclear confrontation in the region. North Korean attempts may trigger ROK, Japan, China, and other nations to expedite their nuke procurements while altering their diplomatic strategies in light of an escalation in Asia.

The accelerated growth of India and China has boosted the desire for Asianisation by raising requirements for fossil fuels from West Asian nations, which have become the primary consumer base for oil supplies. A surge in energy prices supported the growth of investments, among the MENA countries, including the GCC members having earnings and revenue assets surpassing 1.7 trillion dollars. These nations have boosted their consumption of exports to industrializing Asia. In addition, they have boosted their commitment to promoting infrastructure in developing Asian economies.

While non-alignment created the circumstances for the formation of alliances like the BRICS, it also aroused the attention of hegemonic nations. Regional leaders, who have funds or a strategic edge, increased their presence in certain zones to alter the geopolitical landscape according to their desired ends. These counter-hegemons like the USA, Russia, China, France, UK typically intervened in areas with a stronger interest, such as Central Asia, the Middle East, or the Indo-Pacific for that matter.

While attempting to change the geopolitical trends of SE Asia and strengthen ties with Japan, South Korea, India, and other Asian collaborators, had to aid their strategic components in West Asia, demonstrating a solid footing and bolstering defense affiliation to their regular allies' while being proactively involved within the MENA's emergencies. So, what constitutes the main causes behind the Asian interests in addition to what are the larger consequences of the emerging Asian 'convergence' regarding the multilateral multipolar world?

Pan-Asian linkages are less robust: for instance, the ASEAN is more formalized than a single East & West Asian system. In fact, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership provide an additional systematic interaction, unlike any Asian alternative. The SCO has recognized India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan as suitable for affiliation, and represents the closet form of an Asian multipolar forum. If the SCO expands, Russia will remain the sole 'Eurasian'



participant, and all these ten nations will constitute over twenty per cent of global GDP with over forty per cent of the worldwide population, and more than twenty-five per cent of global hydrocarbon reserves.

To complicate issues further, the concept of Asian multipolarism is controversial; and represents a combination of varied nations, asymmetrical and disparate powers, with contentious legacies. Despite its prevalence, regional politics has created division across Asia which can be attributed to several sections: Asia-Pacific, South, West, and Central Asia. The first region, which includes East Asian nations, has complicated foundations from the Second World War division of supremacy and is likely to be segmented into a pair of vibrant sub-areas: SE Asia and NE Asia.

The regional structure of the MENA is similarly competitive but significantly more chaotic. Conflicts involving Arab governments, independent extremist entities, and Israel have served as an integral part of the area over the years, and decades-long wars have accomplished influence on both diplomatic and bilateral engagements within this geo-strategic region. In addition, protests, and coups have altered the internal structure of governments.

For a substantial portion of the 20th century, Asia became governed by power demands. Although attempts have been made by others, including ASEAN, to stay away from hegemonic forces, international partnerships continued to influence the very essence of regional power dynamics. In fact, an external superpower's involvement in Asia is most of the time dictated by a regional leader to bring about security and stability.

Asian countries are interested in becoming collaborators, and multiple opportunities are being developed to promote these factors, including the Japan-GCC Free Trade Agreement, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, the Indo-GCC Business Forum, the GCC-China Economic Forum, and the Kuala Lumpur-based GCC-ASEAN Economic Centre. These forums aid in ensuring the transparency and security of the flow of goods and services among Asian states, in addition to the advancement of new systems.

#### **Additional Information:**

##### **India's rise as a superpower in a Multipolar Asia:**

India's G20 leadership seeks a multipolar Asia, with integrated regional influence and shared governance status for all states. This strategy is premised on the notion that China's progress in Eurasia is disorienting the power dynamics and undermining India's strategic options. Although India has become more receptive to China's commitment to international frameworks, the Chinese geopolitical thirst for power additionally generated an imperative for prudence.

Three important aspects underpin India's plans for a multifaceted Asia. Firstly, Delhi seeks to improve the international system of governance by making it more egalitarian, diverse, and democratic. China has benefited both historically and structurally from its status as a long-standing member of the UN Security Council (UNSC). India's core strategic goal is always to achieve equal representation with the Chinese in diplomatic

bodies, particularly the UN Security Council. New Delhi's participation in the G4 with Japanese, Germans and Brazilian on the world stage, demonstrates a multipolar attitude.

Second, both small and big Asian states ought to have equal footing in regional decision-making. Indian endorsement of the ASEAN-centered system as well as its membership in RCEP underlines its desire for a collaborative strategy for economic integration. A multilateral Asia will boost the nation's maritime position within the Asia-Pacific. Chinese feels threatened by India's economic activity in the South China Sea, particularly its joint energy extraction alongside Vietnam. Additionally, recurrent Chinese vessel activities near Indian waters have alarmed Delhi. The construction of marine facilities throughout the Indian Ocean by the Chinese for its BRI projects (MSRI) has also aroused suspicions.

The third pillar of India's push for multipolarity is inclusivity, rather than exclusivity. Multipolarity allows space for an external power like the United States to contribute to the region's evolving security architecture. It also allows India to promote a regional paradigm of 'shared leadership' among the three major Asian powers: India, China, and Japan. From New Delhi's perspective, if the United States and Global South is excluded from Asia, Chinese President Xi Jinping's proposition of an 'Asia for Asians' will remain only a nomenclature, making Asia a China-dominated region.

A multifaceted agenda is intended to facilitate Indian interests in and out of organizations supported by Beijing and America despite observing any of those separate agendas. Several China-backed international institutions have been embraced by India. Primarily the AIIB's second-highest investor India has long viewed it as a regional Asian intergovernmental agency that will assist in the development of global and domestic systems. Entering the AIIB was perceived as an unparalleled move by India to play a larger role in multilateral organizational leadership. Alternatively, India has long been skeptical regarding the development of the BRI and has raised questions regarding its credibility as a connectivity program, stating such projects should be founded on 'universally accepted global standards, including 'good governance, rule of law, accessibility, and egalitarianism.' India sees the BRI's CPEC component as an extensive geopolitical impediment because it violates India's territorial integrity and statehood.

#### **Conclusion**

Asia was never a homogeneous region, and it does not endorse unilateralism. Despite many similarities, multipolar lies at the root of Asian civilization. Regarding cultures, customs, and practices, Asia remains eclectic. Asia has additionally experienced its fair share of supremacy and power struggles. Many of them persist to this day, along with fresh strife and divisions continuing to emerge. Nonetheless, Asia possesses an understanding of its rich legacy and combined past encounters. Using its Act East policy, Neighbourhood policy, and SAGAR project, India has embraced a multipolar Asia where Delhi plays an increasing part in international politics. A perfect realignment with Beijing would sustain and strengthen India's rise while not competing with China's rise.



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