

Jammu & Kashmir Update

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Saving the Hangul

Hangul, the state animal of Jammu and Kashmir, is the only survivor of the Red Deer group in the Indian subcontinent and, its population has been declining over the years due to habitat destruction, overgrazing by domestic livestock and poaching.

Alarmed by the fall in numbers of this rare red deer, known scientifically as *Cervus Elaphus Hanglu*, and locally known as "Hangul", the Government of Jammu and Kashmir is doing everything possible to save it from extinction.

Battling for its survival, the Hangul are now scattered within the Dachigam National Park, which is located under the Zabarwan mountain range on the outskirts of Srinagar.

The Dachigam National Park is the natural habitat of the Hangul, though in the summers, some of them cross the boundaries of the national park to graze in the higher mountain reaches.

The state government has prepared a plan for Hangul conservation with the help of the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India at a cost of Rs.220 million.

The five-year plan has been submitted to the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests for approval.

As part of the plan, the state government will buy field equipment, satellite images, GIS hardware and software. It would also build carnivore-proof enclosures, guard huts, watch towers and take steps to stop poachers.

Two conservation-breeding centres have also been established in the Kashmir Valley under a preservation programme.

The Hangul is a large deer. The male deer have impressive antlers, while the female Hangul does not have horns.

The colour of the Hangul's coat is a brownish red, which is why it is also called a Red Deer. However, this colour can vary with the season and the age of the Hangul.

In older Hangul, the coat is a dark brown. Hangul stags have long hair along the nape of their necks, while females do not.

The Hangul was once distributed widely in the mountains of Kashmir. There were 5,000 Hanguls at the beginning of the 20th century. Its population at the Dachigam National Park was pegged at 197 in 2004, 153 in 2006 and 127 in 2008.

According to a census conducted by the state wildlife department in 2009, the Hangul population was estimated to be between 201 and 234.



Cricket stadium in Srinagar being upgraded

The Jammu and Kashmir State Government has taken up an ambitious programme of building sports infrastructure and renovation of existing stadia in all the three regions of the State.

The Sher-i-Kashmir Cricket Stadium in Srinagar that is home to the Jammu and Kashmir cricket team is getting a facelift after twenty years and will be upgraded to international standard.

The state's former chief minister, Farooq Abdullah, who is currently the president of the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA) and a governing member of the Twenty20 Indian Premier League (IPL), has directed officials to complete the construction in time for the next IPL season so that matches can be organized in the Kashmir Valley.

Presently, the stadium's pavilions are being expanded, while dressing rooms for cricketers are under construction. Plans are also afoot to lay new grass across the ground.

"We are constructing the pavilion. Ninety percent of our work is almost complete. We have to construct four to five pavilions," said Ghulam Rasool, a site engineer with a construction firm.

The Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association is seeing the making of Srinagar as the hub of cricketing activity as a major goal.

In the past 20 years, the JKCA has hosted only a few first-class matches. Jammu, the winter capital, has been used for Jammu and Kashmir's home Ranji Trophy games.



The last one-day cricket match in Srinagar was played on September 9, 1986, where Australia beat India by three wickets.

Cricketers of the state are thrilled with the development and said they are looking forward to playing some Ranji games in Srinagar in the next season.

Cricket is an extremely popular sport among Kashmiris and recently, a T20 Jammu Kashmir Premier League was launched in the state. The Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA), the top governing body of the game in the state, organized the league.

Around 128 clubs from all across the state, including from far-flung areas of both Jammu and the Kashmir Valley took part in the event.

These developments are a part of a state government initiative to give a boost to sports and strengthen sports-related infrastructure. The state is keen to encourage players and wants to help them get greater exposure.

The renovation of the Sher-I-Kashmir cricket stadium in Srinagar is one among many other activities started by the state government that clearly indicates that normalcy is fast returning to Jammu and Kashmir.



Mongolia keen to tap potential of Leh Berry plant



A high level delegation from Mongolia led by the Governor of that country's Uvs Province, Tsaschikher Erdenesuren, was recently in Ladakh to explore opportunities for bilateral cooperation in various fields.

The delegation also took time off to visit the Defence Institute of High Altitude Research (DIHAR) in Leh.

Welcoming the Mongolian delegation the Director DIHAR, Dr. Shashi Bala Singh, gave a digital presentation on the multipurpose Himalayan plant Seabuckthorn, also known as Leh Berry, its properties and magical medicinal values for humankind.

Seabuckthorn grows wild in the cold deserts of Ladakh. Its berries have high concentrations of vitamins A, B2 and C, far higher than in other fruits and vegetables such as orange, carrot and tomato.

Dr. Singh's presentation highlighted the vision of the Seabuckthorn project in Ladakh, which is aimed at improving the living standards of people of the region by enhancing their entrepreneurship capacity in the collection, processing, production and marketing of Seabuckthorn products through technological intervention and skill upgradation.

So far, more than 2000 value added products of Seabuckthorn have been introduced into the market, which are in great demand and fetch good revenue.

To explore Seabuckthorn trade in Leh in an appropriate way with ISO certification, the Leh Council has already formulated a regulation for its harvesting, processing and marketing and is expected to benefit over 500 families of Seabuckthorn in the near future.

DIHAR has pioneered the processing of Seabuckthorn fruit to manufacture fruit juice and fruit nectar. It has also come up with herbal tea, a jam, a sauce and an herbal anti-oxidant supplement prepared from the plant.

The Divisional Forest Officer, Leh, Dr. B. Balaji, also gave a presentation regarding the potential of Seabuckthorn in Ladakh and demands for its products in the international market.

The Executive Councilor, Agriculture, Tsewang Tondup, said that the Mongolian team's visit would go a long way in bringing Ladakh and Mongolia together and there was great hope for collaboration in many sectors.

Governor Erdenesuren expressed pleasure over the presentation on Seabuckthorn, which is also found in abundance in Mongolia.

He said Mongolia and Ladakh had great affinity in terms of geography, culture and topography and, there is a great future for exchanging knowledge and experiences in various fields, mainly in agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry.



Kani shawl gets Geogra

Kashmir's Kani Shawl has got the Geographical Indication (GI) status that would legally prohibit people from selling shawls made at other places under the same name.

The GI status corresponds to a specific geographical location or origin, and, its use acts as a certification that the product possesses certain qualities, or, enjoys a certain reputation due to its geographical origin.

Weavers of Kani shawls are concentrated in Kanihama village, which is located 15 kilometers from Srinagar.

They make shawls, famous for their texture and intricate designs, on looms with the help of kanis', which are small eyeless bobbins that are used instead of shuttles.

A Kani shawl is produced from Pashmina fiber, which is known the world over as Cashmere wool and is obtained from goats bred at altitudes between 12,000 to 14,000 feet.

Nearly twenty-five coloured threads are used for weaving a Kani shawl and, sometimes as many as 50 Kanis are used with different coloured threads for a single weft. The artisans seldom weave more than an inch a day.

As a stamp of originality, the shawls will now be tagged with a digital microchip; a measure that it is hoped will help the shawls regain their rightful place in



Geographical Indication (GI) tag

domestic and foreign markets.

“Many people have started making fake Kani shawls. So, we thought about the steps to be taken to stop such practices and set up an association, ‘Tahafuz’, which means protection. Through ‘Tahafuz’, we have asked the government to give Geographical Indication (GI) status to Kani shawls. Now, every Kani shawl will have a microchip,” said Showkat Zargar, Director of Handicrafts, Kashmir.

The state government has allocated a financial assistance of Rs.332, 000 to help Kani shawl weavers purchase new looms or renovate and modernize their old handlooms.

The price of a Kani shawl varies from 80,000 to 100,00,00 rupees, depending on its design and size. It takes five months to make one Kani shawl.

According to the Ain-e-Akbari, a detailed gazetteer of Mughal Emperor Akbar’s reign (1556-1605) written by Abul Fazal, one of his nine Navratnas, priceless Kani shawls were offered as tax.

Kings and merchants from several countries traveled to Kashmir in the 18th century to buy them and aristocratic European women considered them fashionable.

Two other shawls – the Pashmina and the Kashmiri Sozni have also got the Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

Reaching out



The state government and the administration are sparing no effort towards reaching out to people living in remote areas.

Recently, the Deputy Commissioner of Leh, Ajeet Kumar Sahu, accompanied by a large team of district officers and engineers and the Councilor of the area, Rigzin Spalbar, visited Rumbak village, 35 kilometers from Leh, which is located at an altitude of 4900 meters, for an on-the-spot assessment of peoples’ problems.

Residents of the village demanded early completion of a road up to the village, which is already sanctioned under NABARD, the construction of a protection bund along the Rumbak Nalla to tackle the threat of soil erosion to irrigated land in the wake of flooding during summer, construction of the headwork of the main irrigational khul of the village, a new water supply scheme, a chain link fence to protect crops from wild animals, providing tree plants to the villagers to propagate forestation, the establishment of a wildlife café and inclusion of Rumbak in a tourist incentive program.

They also sought improvement of the trekking route from Rumbak to Stok in view of the high influx of tourists. Women folk, who run guesthouses for the visiting tourists, said they wanted an additional room to be sanctioned for each guesthouse and an exposure tour to upgrade their skills in dealing with tourists.

Deputy Commissioner Sahu assured that Rumbak would soon be connected with a Kachcha-Pakka road. He also said he would get permission and financial assistance provided for an additional room for guesthouses.

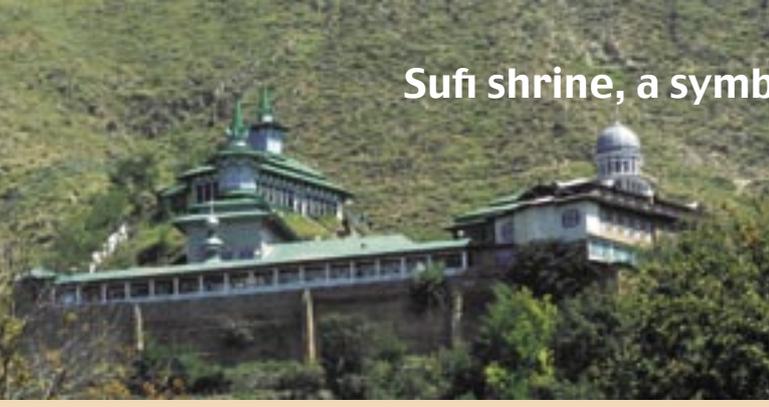
In addition, he said, solar showers, solar power plants, solar cookers and solar green houses would be provided as part of a tourism promotion drive.

He said the protection bund would be constructed through the NREGA scheme and solar fencing would be installed on an experimental basis to protect crops. He promised the women of Rumbak an exposure tour.

To fulfill all the important demands of the people, the Deputy Commissioner issued on the spot instructions to the district officers and the engineers to attend to their demands on a priority basis keeping in view that the area is backward and still not connected with a motorable road.

The Deputy Commissioner also visited Jingchan and Rumchung villages. He met the people there and received their demands as well.

Sufi shrine, a symbol of Kashmiriyat



The socio-cultural ethos of Kashmir or Kashmiriyat is steeped in a tradition of religious tolerance, social harmony and brotherhood.

It was influenced by the advent of Sufism in Kashmir in early 14th century.

Sufi saints were both popular and influential because they identified themselves with established traditions and never opposed the blending of different religious customs, practices and beliefs. As a result, they attracted many followers.

Even today, several Sufi shrines dot the state, drawing people from different religions in large numbers.

Tourists are thronging Patnitop, which is situated at a distance of 110 kilometers from Jammu at a height of 2024 meters, to beat the scorching heat of the plains.

Patnitop, perched on a beautiful plateau, across which the Jammu-Srinagar Highway passes, is one of the best-developed tourist spots in the state. Its natural beauty, dense pine forests and flourishing green landscape make this hill resort a popular tourist destination.

"I have come to Patnitop for the first time. It is very pleasant here. Gujarat is very hot and temperatures sometimes go up to 50 degrees. But here, the weather is cool and we are having fun," said Mita Vyas, a tourist from Gujarat.

Once in Patnitop, just sitting under the sun in the green meadow can be the highlight of one's holiday.

Patnitop offers a rich selection of scenic spots for picnics. It is also a good starting place for many short or long treks into the nearby mountains. The magnificent view of the mountains in the backdrop of the Chenab River basin and the Pir Panjal range beyond it are among the main attractions of Patnitop.

For instance, there is the shrine of Hazrat Zain-ud-Din Wali. Located on a hillock in Aishmuqam village, which is about 20 kilometers from Pahalgam, the shrine attracts people from different communities.

Hazrat Zain-ud-din Wali lived in the 15th century. He was born into the royal family of Kishtwar and was a disciple of the highly revered saint, Sheikh Noor-uddin Noorani, who sent him to Aishmuqam, where he spent the rest of his life promoting harmony and brotherhood.

His message has been internalized and is visible in the form of devotees from different faiths coming from far and near throughout the year to pay homage.

"All our brothers Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians, visit this holy place," said Reyaz Ahmed.

On an average, 4,000 devotees of different faiths visit the shrine daily. During his Urs (anniversary), the number of visitors goes up to between ten and twenty thousand.

"We come to bow our head here. People are very good here, and, everyone should come here at least once in their lifetime," said Suresh Jain, a devotee from Gujarat.

The major attraction of the Urs is a special torch or Mashal procession taken out to pay obeisance to the saint.

"Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs who have been living in Kashmir for years, come together and reinforce what we call 'Kashmiriyat', said Hareesh Singh.

The shrine is a perfect example of Kashmiriyat, celebrating a seamless co-existence of various cultures and religious influences.

Tourists beat the



Leh hosts a 'Green' Rally

The WWF-India field office, the Department of Wildlife Protection, the State Pollution Control Board, the Department of Forests, the Women's Alliance and PAGIR jointly organized a 'Green' Rally in Leh on the eve of World Environment Day.

The rally commenced from the Women's Alliance office at Chubi, passed through the main market and ended at Conference Hall in the town.

A panel discussion with the theme "Opening of new areas in high Himalayas for tourism-putting monitoring mechanism for sustainability" was held along with a 'Green Hiker' campaign in the district.

The chief executive councilor of Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC), Chering Dorje, was the chief guest at the discussion, while Major General R K Yadav, the Chief of Staff of the Indian Army's 14 Corps, presided over the function.

Dorje highlighted the role of LAHDC in developing Leh District as an eco-friendly region. He said that in the next three years, all villages in the district would be electrified through eco-friendly micro-hydel, solar energy and wind energy projects.

Regarding tourist access to new peaks and new areas, he said Leh would attract more tourists, and therefore, the maintenance of trekking routes; tourist spots and infrastructures would become more important.

Referring to development projects in Leh town, Dorje said the LAHDC had prepared a 30-year perspective planning under the title "Greater Leh Master Plan" at a cost of Rs. 414 crores.



He said the main objective of plan was to achieve appropriate and balanced development of all types of physical infrastructure and public utility systems, besides the healthy functioning of the urbanized community.

Plans for improving the sewerage and drainage system, provision for drinking water, effective management of solid wastes, flood protection measures, construction of link roads, sports infrastructures, promotion of tourist-related facilities and parking etc. had been incorporated in the Master Plan, he added.

The panelists deliberated on a wide range of issues, including matters related to the conservation of the Himalayan environment.

The responsibilities of different stakeholders, including the army, paramilitaries, civil society, NGOs, tour operators, taxi operators, the police, the LAHDC and the local administration were also highlighted.

heat in Patnitop



"I came over here to roam. It's really a beautiful place. The atmosphere over here is peaceful and calm. So, people generally enjoy over here. So, it's a good place. All the people should come over here once and enjoy the beauty of nature," said Vidyat Panda, a tourist from Bihar.

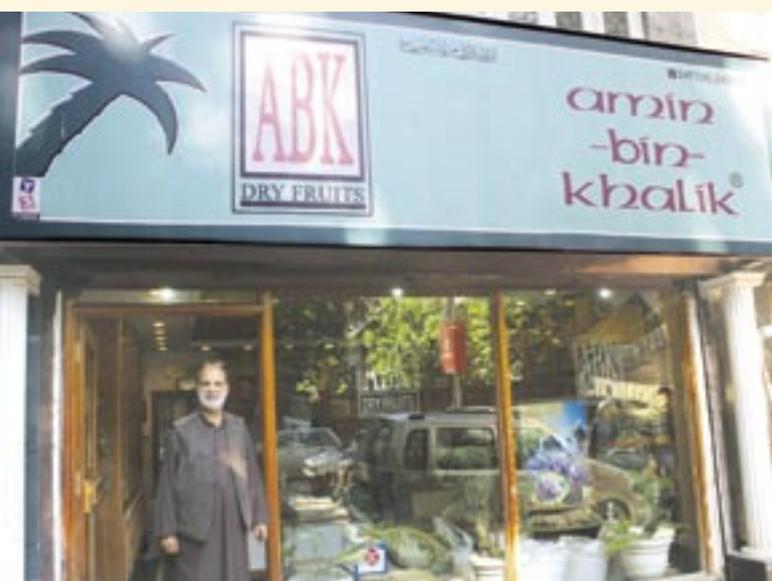
Pony rides along little known trails, camping and walks are for those who want to play it safe, whereas others can opt for paragliding at Sanasar.

Getting to Patnitop is easy. The nearest airport is at Jammu and the nearest rail station is at Udhampur, 35 kilometers away. Buses and taxis for Patnitop are easily available.

Although Patnitop can be visited anytime of the year, the best time for a visit is during the months of May and June, or, the months of September and October.

Patnitop also attracts many tourists when it snows during winters. The meadows with their gentle slopes are ideal for skiing and sledging. Skiing courses for beginners are conducted here.

A Kashmir success story



Noor-ul-Amin's dry fruits shop in Srinagar's Polo View market is not just extremely popular with locals, but also with businessmen and tourists from across the country, besides film celebrities like Juhi Chawla and Manisha Koirala and diplomats from America and Europe.

He sells the products under the brand name Amin-bin-Khalik and has earned the appreciation of customers

from all over the world for his quality products and salesmanship.

Sixty-three-year-old Amin comes from a middle-class family and, after completing his post-graduation, he was more interested in movies than starting his own business.

In the 1970s, he even worked as an assistant to Nasir Hussain who made films like *Teesri Manzil*, *Yaadon Ki Baraat* and *Hum Kisi Se Kum Nahin*.

However, things did not work out and Amin returned to Kashmir to set up his shop in 1973. It sold honey, saffron, almonds, walnuts, dried apricots and walnut kernels. Slowly, the business grew.

But the troubled nineties brought serious problems. "The entire business had gone to zero in early 90s and we had to face acute financial problems," said Amin.

However, things have changed now. And as normalcy returns, Amin says: "Every business in Kashmir will do well."

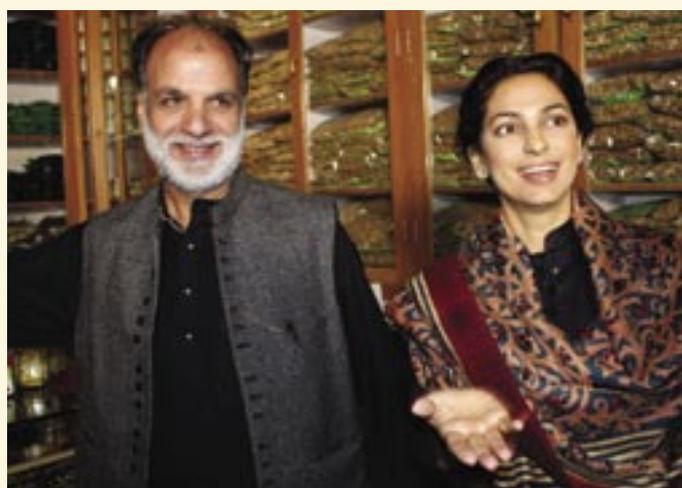
Today, he exports dry fruits of all kinds to customers outside the country.

"I'm selling Kashmir and its brand," says Amin, who wins awards and decorations by the government and NGOs for his "dedication and honesty" almost on a yearly basis.

"Honesty is the best policy," says Amin, adding that it has paid for him. "Every day I earn new customers," he said, "as I provide them the best."

"Life is good when there is family support," he says, with satisfaction on his face.

His three daughters are married, and his son, who was involved in the carpet trade in London, has now joined his business.



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