





## Elderly Woman Dies After Allegedly Jumping In Jhelum

Observer News Service

Srinagar: An elderly woman died after allegedly jumping into the River Jhelum from a footbridge in the Sonwar-Rajbagh area of Srinagar on Wednesday morning.

Officials said that the woman, a resident of Palpora Sonwar, allegedly jumped into the river from the Aramwari footbridge.

He said following the incident, rescue teams of River Police Srinagar and the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) launched a search operation.

He added that her body was later recovered from the river and shifted to a hospital for medico-legal formalities.

Meanwhile, police have taken cognisance of the incident and started further investigation.

## 1617th Tree Talk Event Organised At IIIM Srinagar

Observer News Service

Srinagar: Indian Institute of Integrative Medicine - IIIM Srinagar on Wednesday hosted 1617th Tree Talk wherein noted Biodiversity specialist, expert on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests J&K OP Sharma Vidhyarthi gave a detailed talk on different medicinal plants and their edible and medicinal value. Several researchers, scientists and environmentalists participated in this event.

The tree talk was held in the botanical garden of the IIIM Srinagar campus located at Sanathnagar wherein OP Sharma explained the importance of at least one dozen herbs grown in the said garden.

He appreciated the staff especially Director of IIIM Srinagar Dr Zabeer Ahmad and Scientist Dr Parvez Qazi for their work in promoting these medicinal plants and conducting in-depth research. Several biodiversity experts, naturalists and environmentalists spoke on the occasion and hailed the efforts of OP Sharma for his sustained work to disseminate information on biodiversity, taxonomy and indigenous knowledge systems through his tree talks. Activist and writer Dr Raja Muzaffar Bhat welcomed OP Sharma and gave the introductory lecture. He appealed IIIM Srinagar to continue with such programmes for school students especially. Former Mass Media Officer Environment & Ecology Department Ghulam Hassan Mir, Eco Tourism expert and entrepreneur Jagjit Singh also spoke on the occasion and hailed the work of OP Sharma Vidhyarthi.

Dr Parvez Qazi Senior Scientist IIIM Srinagar gave vote of thanks and assured that such events would be held at least three to four times a year. The CEO of IIIM Srinagar's Atal Incubation Centre Dr Shahid Jibrán also participated in this event. Later on OP Sharma and other participants visited Atal Incubation Centre as well and hailed the work taken up by Dr Shahid Jibrán.

## Police Urges Public To Shun IM, AAC

Observer News Service

Srinagar, Apr 30: In a significant public outreach campaign, Srinagar Police have launched an intensified drive across the summer capital, urging residents to disassociate themselves from the Itihad-ul-Muslimeen (IM) and the Awami Action Committee (AAC).

Police vehicles equipped with loudspeakers were seen moving through prominent city areas including Lal Chowk, Karan Nagar, and adjoining localities on Wednesday, making public announcements that called upon citizens to stay away from the two organisations. In addition to loudspeaker-based awareness, the police also initiated a poster campaign, with printed advisories pasted on walls, electric poles, market spaces, and residential buildings. These posters reportedly carried

messages warning the public against associating with IM and AAC, reiterating the authorities' call for distancing themselves from these groups.

According to police officials, the initiative is part of a broader awareness campaign aimed at educating people about certain organisations and their affiliations. "The objective is to inform the public and ensure community safety by keeping them aware of the risks associated with particular groups," a police spokesperson said.

Eyewitnesses confirmed the presence of police units across several zones of the city in recent days, with teams actively putting up posters and making repeated announcements in public areas. The campaign, which has been underway for the past several days, is expected to continue and possibly expand in the days ahead.

## CAT Refutes SM Reports Regarding Warning To Speaker

Observer News Service

SRINAGAR: The Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT), Srinagar Bench, has refuted the reports circulating on social media about a stern warning to J&K Legislative Assembly Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather and Assembly Secretary, Manoj Kumar Pandit, by the CAT over non compliance of its earlier

judgment, terming the same as false and malicious.

According to a communiqué received by the CAT, a contempt petition number 225 of 2024 is indeed pending before the tribunal, listed for hearing on April 28, 2025. The document added that no such order has been passed by the tribunal and the public is advised to rely on official sources for accurate information.

## Khalida Shah Condemns Pahalgam Attack

Agencies

Srinagar: Jammu and Kashmir Awami National Conference patron Begum Khalida Shah has strongly condemned the recent terror attack in Pahalgam that claimed 26 lives, describing it as a grave assault on national unity and Kashmir's cultural identity.

Addressing a press conference on Wednesday, Shah called for a united political response, stressing the need for all parties to seek accountability.

Shah demanded regulatory measures against media outlets promoting divisive coverage and highlighted the humane response of locals who rushed to assist the victims.



A young balloon seller balances dreams and duty — her colorful balloons dancing in the breeze as she steals a moment with her mobile phone. KO Photo Faisal Khan.

## Congress, NSUI Demand Protection For Kashmiri Students

Observer News Service

Srinagar: The Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee (JKPCC), along with the National Students Union of India (NSUI), on Wednesday staged a protest march in Srinagar, calling for urgent measures to safeguard the dignity and security of Kashmiri students studying in other parts of India amid a spike in harassment cases.

The protest follows a recent terror attack in Pahalgam that claimed the lives of 26 people, mostly tourists, which has since triggered a wave of hostility against Kashmiri students across various Indian states. Reports have emerged of students being assaulted, threatened, and subjected to hate campaigns, sparking alarm among political leaders and civil society.

The demonstration began at the Congress headquarters in Srinagar and drew participation from senior Congress leaders, NSUI members, and student activists. Holding placards with slogans such as "Stop Harassing Kashmiri Students" and "Ensure Safety Across India," the protesters condemned



**The protest follows a recent terror attack in Pahalgam that claimed the lives of 26 people, mostly tourists, which has since triggered a wave of hostility against Kashmiri students across various Indian states**

what they described as an orchestrated campaign of profiling and intimidation.

Speaking to reporters, protesters said, "Our students are being labelled and attacked for no fault of theirs. This is unacceptable in a democratic country." They urged the Central Government to intervene immediately and ensure that Kashmiri students are not made scapegoats in the name of nationalism.

They further noted that the wave of harassment faced by students outside the Union Territory raises serious questions

about the atmosphere of hate and discrimination that has taken root. "We are witnessing a pattern of targeted attacks post the Pahalgam incident. In states like Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, our students are being branded as terrorists, assaulted, and forced to vacate hostels and rented accommodations," the protesters said.

Reports of similar incidents have surfaced from Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand as well, where students have expressed fear for their safety and well-being.

Meanwhile, Jammu and Kashmir's former Chief Minister Omar Abdullah also voiced concern over the rising cases of harassment. In a statement, he said his administration is actively communicating with authorities in the affected states. "I'm also in touch with my counterpart Chief Ministers in these states and have requested they take extra care," Abdullah said.

The Congress and NSUI have vowed to continue their campaign until concrete assurances are provided for the protection and dignity of Kashmiri students nationwide.

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**HIGHWAY STATUS**  
 Sgr-Jammu highway - (Open)  
 Mughal Road - (Open)  
 Srinagar-Leh - (Open)

**PRAYERS**

FAJR 4:12  
 ZUHR 12:28  
 ASR 5:18  
 Magrib 7:17  
 ISHA 8:45

**HIJRI CALENDAR**  
 03 Zil-Qadah  
 1446

**This Day In History**

- 1756 - France and Austria sign alliance
- 1757 - Austria and France divide Prussia
- 1759 - British fleet occupies Guadeloupe, West Indies, capturing it from France
- 1908 World's most intense shower (2.47" in 3 minutes) at Portobelo, Panama
- 1909 - Netherlands begins unity with Belgium
- 1923 - Adolf Hitler and Ernst Rohm attempt to break up socialist May Day demonstrations, inviting Nazis from as far away as Nuremberg to take part in the violence
- 1934 - Austria signs pact with Vatican
- 1937 - US President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Neutrality Act, banning travel on belligerent ships and imposes an arms embargo on warring nations
- 1945 - About 1,000 citizens of Demmin in Germany, commit suicide provoked by occupation by Soviet Red Army
- 1947 - Radar for commercial & private planes 1st demonstrated
- 1948 - North Korea proclaims itself Democratic People's Republic of Korea
- 1949 - Gerard Kuiper discovers Nereid, (2nd satellite of Neptune)
- 1951 - 600,000 march for peace & freedom in Germany
- 1956 - A doctor in Japan reports an "epidemic of an unknown disease of the central nervous system", marking the official discovery of Minamata disease.
- 1960 - India's Bombay state split into Gujarat & Maharashtra states
- 1962 - 1st French underground nuclear experiment in the Sahara
- 1965 - USSR launches Luna 5; later impacts on Moon
- 1965 - Battle of Dong-Yin, a naval conflict between ROC and PRC, takes place.
- 1966 - US troops shooting targets in Cambodia
- 1972 - North Vietnamese troops occupy Quang Tri Activities Committee
- 1977 - 36 people are killed in Taksim Square, Istanbul, during the Labour Day celebrations.
- 1978 - Naomi Uemura became 1st to reach North Pole overland alone
- 1984 - Great Britain performs nuclear test at Nevada Test Site
- 1985 - US President Reagan ends embargo against Nicaragua
- 1986 - Russian news agency Tass reports Chernobyl nuclear power plant mishap
- 1991 - Angolan civil war ends
- 1991 - Last day of Test cricket for West Indian batsman Gordon Greenidge.
- 1993 - Bomb attack on Sri Lankan president (26 die)
- 1997 - Tony Blair elected Prime Minister of the United Kingdom
- 2000 - President of the Philippines Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo declares existence of "a state of rebellion", after thousands of supporters of her arrested predecessor, Joseph Estrada, storm towards the presidential palace at height of EDSA III rebellion.
- 2003 - In what becomes known as the "Mission Accomplished" speech, U.S. President George W. Bush declares that "major combat operations in Iraq have ended" on board the USS Abraham Lincoln off the coast of California
- 2008 - The London Agreement on translation of European patents, concluded in 2000, enters into force in 14 of the 34 Contracting States to the European Patent Convention.
- 2011 - Pope John Paul II is beatified by his successor, Pope Benedict XVI
- 2012 - China and Russia sign \$15 billion dollar trade deal
- 2012 - Guggenheim Partners make the largest ever purchase of a sports franchise after buying the Los Angeles Dodgers for \$2.1 billion
- 2013 - 15 people are killed by multiple bomb attacks across Iraq
- 2013 - 16 people are killed in a flash flood in Saudi Arabia

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### KO VIEW

## Tourists Will Return

The terrorist attack in Pahalgam that left 25 tourists and a local pony operator dead has not only sent shockwaves through the country but has also dealt a serious blow to tourism in the Valley. For a while, the tourists from across the country may avoid Kashmir until they have regained confidence in the Valley's security situation. With the government shutting down nearly 50 destinations, including some of the Valley's most scenic and emerging attractions, the Valley's tourist economy is going to take a further hit. Already some western countries, including the US have issued fresh advisories in the wake of the Pahalgam attack. This also is going to dissuade from visiting the Valley. In recent years, the arrivals of foreign tourists to the Valley had picked up. Last year alone, 43,000 foreign tourists visited the Valley - the highest in years - among the 2.95 million visitors. There is fear now that the numbers will dwindle to a few lakh visitors this year, with the arrival of foreigners reduced to a trickle. For a region where tourism has become both a symbol and sustainer of normalcy, this is a major setback.

Over the last few years, Kashmir's tourism industry has witnessed a remarkable turnaround. Following the disruption of COVID-19, the Lieutenant General Manoj Sinha's administration, with support from the central government aggressively promoted the Valley as a year-round destination. Kashmir was repositioned not just as a traditional retreat but also as a hub for adventure tourism. The opening of 75 new destinations and the rise of homestays across remote areas reflected both state intent and the hard-earned normalcy.

This growth in tourism was also a sign of stabilisation. Full hotels, packed houseboats, and bustling markets were seen as evidence that Kashmir was moving beyond the shadow of violence. In fact, the tourist influx has been a metric of success. It reflected peace and development in the region, which needs to be protected.

The brutal strike in one of the most popular and well-patrolled tourist areas has rightly forced the government to take earnest corrective measures. And the government has swiftly gone about its job. And there's hope that the situation will get back to normal sooner than later.

To restore confidence, authorities must quickly complete security assessments and deploy adequate personnel in high-footfall zones. Simultaneously, better coordination between tourism planners and the security establishment is essential before new areas are thrown open. The new government steps do point in that direction. The LG administration - now followed by the hybrid government - is singularly responsible for transforming the situation over the past five years. And they can be counted on to face and overcoming the current challenge as well.



## Stock Market Syndrome: Why Most Traders Lose?

Irshad Mushtaq

The stock market can seem thrilling and full of potential, but for many, it ends in loss. SEBI, India's financial regulator, reports that over 93% of people who trade in futures and options lose money. The situation worsens when leverage is involved, with individuals risking more than they can afford. Simply put, nine out of ten traders walk away with less than they started.

However, investing is a different story. More than half of investors make a profit, especially those who take a long-term, strategic approach. The key difference lies in mindset. Traders seek quick wins, while investors focus on steady growth.

Smart investing is about balance. It's not about throwing money into whatever seems promising, but building a diversified portfolio. Spreading investments across sectors—stocks, gold, mutual funds, and ETFs—helps cushion against losses and increases chances of growth. This mix of assets lowers risk while unlocking new opportunities.

A successful strategy requires patience, research, and consistency. Risk is inherent, but investing in multiple assets spreads that risk. Avoid the temptation to put all your money into a single stock or sector. Diversification and discipline are essential.

Staying the course through market fluctuations is crucial. Investors should avoid emotional decisions, sticking to their plan. Seeking advice from financial mentors or professionals can help improve decision-making and enhance returns.

Ultimately, the stock market rewards preparation and strategy, not impulse. Understanding risks, setting clear goals, and learning the ropes can transform investing from a gamble into a long-term growth opportunity.

Writer is a Srinagar-based reputed financial advisor.

# Kashmir's Green Disruption

Many agriculture graduates leave the field behind for safer jobs. But with innovation and mindset shifts, farming can be the most rewarding enterprise of our time.



Dr. Waseem Ahmad

“  
**Graduates need to see that farming is not the fallback plan—it's the frontier. Climate change, food insecurity, and sustainable development are global challenges, and agriculture is central to all three. That means the field is wide open for smart, motivated young people to make a real impact.**

In Kashmir's fertile land, a man with no degree is growing something bigger than crops. He's building a future. Every morning he's in the field by sunrise, sowing seeds, tending soil, and making decisions that will feed his family, and likely others too. He didn't sit through lectures on soil science or write papers on climate-resilient farming. He just did the work. And the land responded.

Meanwhile, many graduates with degrees in agriculture are miles away from the field, literally and figuratively. They're in banks, stamping passports at airports, working retail counters or stuck behind government desks. Their education was rooted in agriculture, but their careers are not.

It's not just about individual choices. There's a deeper problem in how agriculture is taught, perceived, and practiced.

Start with the classrooms. Agricultural education still leans heavily on textbooks, formulas, and the occasional field trip. Students know how to calculate irrigation needs or write a pest control plan, but many have never actually run a farm, sold produce, or faced a failed crop. They're trained to be technicians, not entrepreneurs.

That gap between knowledge and real-world readiness is widening. When these graduates step out, the idea of starting a farm feels risky and unfamiliar. So they chase what feels safer: government exams, salaried roles, and the stability of office jobs. Even if that means leaving their field of study behind entirely.

It doesn't help that farming still carries a stigma in many parts of India, including Kashmir.

It's often seen as a last resort, not a bold first step. Parents push their children toward “respectable” careers. Society sees agriculture as the domain of the undereducated, not the ambitious.

But here's the truth: farming today is as much about innovation as it is about tradition. It's a business that demands planning, investment, marketing, and resilience. It involves data and drones, logistics and branding. From vertical farms to organic labels, from direct-to-customer supply chains to precision irrigation—agriculture is changing fast. And it needs people who understand both the science and the business.

Institutions like SKUAST-K are beginning to shift that narrative. There's growing emphasis on agripreneurship, on building start-ups around farm technology, sustainable practices, and smart food systems. But we still have a long way to go. Most students graduate with knowledge, but little mentorship or hands-on business experience. Many don't see farming as a viable enterprise—because no one showed them how to turn an idea into income.

And yet, back on the ground, local farmers without degrees are doing just that. They're adapting to market shifts, experimenting with methods, and quietly growing small-scale empires from their soil. They don't have pitch decks or prototypes. But they have instincts, grit, and direct feedback from the land.

This is where education must meet experience. Graduates need to see that farming is not the fallback plan—it's the frontier. Climate change, food insecurity, and sustainable development are global challenges, and agriculture

is central to all three. That means the field is wide open for smart, motivated young people to make a real impact.

It also means we need structural changes. Universities must embed real-life farming challenges into their curriculum. Incubators and innovation labs need to move closer to the soil. Grants and seed funding should target student-led agricultural ventures. Mentorship programmes must pair graduates with experienced farmers who've learned by doing.

Most of all, the mindset needs to shift. Farming isn't about waiting for ideal conditions. It's about starting small, solving problems, and growing into it—season after season.

The land doesn't check your CV. It doesn't care about your GPA. It responds to work. It rewards persistence. And in a time when global food systems are under strain, the value of that work has never been higher.

To the agriculture graduates who feel stuck: don't let your degree gather dust. Collaborate with those already in the field. Learn what they know. Bring your science to their system. Build something.

And to the policymakers and educators: don't waste this generation's potential. Equip them with tools, not just theories. Give them land access, business training, and most importantly, belief.

Because agriculture is not yesterday's industry. It's tomorrow's opportunity. And the land is ready. Are we?

Author is working at Ambri Apple Research Centre, Pahnoo Shopian SKUAST-K, Shalimar.



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## This Time, Kashmir's Humanity Deserved Headlines

The April 22 Pahalgam terror attack has left Kashmir deeply shaken. But alongside the horror, it revealed something powerful: Kashmiris' humanity in the face of dehumanisation.

While mainstream news focused on selective narratives like “they asked for religion,” stories of bravery and compassion by ordinary Kashmiris were conveniently ignored. A young Kashmiri horseman lost his life trying to snatch a gun from an attacker. Another saved 11 tourists. One even rescued a visiting BJP leader. Locals carried injured tourists on their backs and opened their

homes to those stranded, offering food, shelter, and transport without asking who they were or where they came from.

Yet major news channels chose to question Kashmiris rather than acknowledge their courage. A tourist later revealed in a viral video that he was pressured by TV anchors to speak against Kashmiris. When he refused, his interview was cut. This manipulation is not just dishonest journalism, it's dangerous. It fans hatred, fuels stereotypes, and puts innocent lives at risk.

In the days following the attack, reports of Kashmiri students and

workers being harassed across Indian cities poured in. Threats and assault videos went viral. In one disturbing case, a Kashmiri woman received rape threats online simply for wearing a burqa. While action was later taken, the damage to community trust remains.

No media house has questioned the security lapses, despite reports of intelligence inputs before the attack. Accountability has been replaced by noise. While Delhi shut down the Wagah border and cracked down on online voices, no one asked why the dispensation failed to prevent this tragedy.

Terrorism is a crime against humanity, and so is collective punishment. Civilians, no matter their faith, must never become scapegoats. Human rights are not selective. They are universal.

Let us not forget the 26 lives lost. But let us also not forget the Kashmiris who risked their own lives to save others. Truth deserves light, even when it doesn't fit a headline.

Sincerely,  
Raafiq Makhdoomi  
Rights Activist

# Cake Queens of Kashmir

With flour on their hands and a dream in their hearts, three young Kashmiri women created a bakery that is winning fans across the Valley.

Syed Mohammad Burhan

On Shab-e-Qadr, the sacred night Muslims believe destinies are written, three Kashmiri women were not in prayer or rest. In a modest kitchen with flour-dusted hands and tired eyes, they were racing against time to fulfill their biggest cake order yet.

For Ahtisam Majeed Bhat from Rawalpura, Farheena Bashir Lone from Sopore, and Syed Rafia Lateef from Kupwara, that night was not a sacrifice—it was a beginning.

"We were physically exhausted," Ahtisam says, "but there was this energy that carried us. We felt like we were baking our future into those cakes."

That future took the shape of Bake O'Clock, a bakery brand born from resilience, friendship, and an unshakable work ethic. What started as a college stall is today a celebrated name among Valley's food circles and an emerging symbol of women-led enterprise in Kashmir.

The trio met during their Diploma in Food Technology at Bemina College. Toward the end of their course, they began thinking aloud about starting a venture. The idea of a bakery sparked something in all three, and they approached the college authorities. With support from their mentor, Hakim Mohammad Ilyas, and internships at Just Baked and IHM Srinagar, their plan slowly turned into something real.

"We learned how things actually run in a professional setup—how to scale, maintain consistency, manage supplies," recalls Farheena. "It changed our thinking from passion to profession."

Returning to college with a renewed sense of purpose, they asked for a space to launch their idea. The college gave them a



small room in the incubation centre. Their mentor advised them to start within the campus, serving the 400-odd staff and students. They set up a small stall outside the college gate every day.

"We baked all night, then sold all day," says Rafia. "Sometimes we'd attend class still wearing our aprons."

Then came the test. With Eid approaching, orders were piling up. Their cake machine was stuck in transit, and panic set in. They turned to Ilyas again, who offered

campus space and machinery. That night, which happened to be Shab-e-Qadr, they worked through every hour without rest. By dawn, they had delivered every order.

"That night gave us belief," says Ahtisam. "We realised we could handle pressure. That's when Bake O'Clock truly began."

From there, the journey picked up momentum. The trio formalised Bake O'Clock and moved operations to a government-supported MSME centre

in Srinagar. Today, their brand offers over 20 products, from soft cupcakes to elegant pastries. But their signature product remains the tea cake—rich, moist, and unmistakably homemade in feel.

"We never compromise on ingredients," says Farheena. "That's the soul of our product."

Each of the three brings something unique to the table. Ahtisam is the brand's creative core, developing recipes and designing packaging. Farheena, the com-

municator, handles customer relationships and outreach. Rafia balances production and coordination. Together, they run the entire show.

But challenges remain. Despite supplying to major stores across Kashmir, the team is struggling to enter new markets. Manpower is their biggest issue.

"We're doing everything ourselves—baking, packaging, delivery," says Rafia. "We want to hire people now, focus more on marketing, expand our reach."

The girls don't see themselves as just bakers, they call themselves food technologists. That identity drives their commitment to quality and innovation. Aware that Kashmir has one of the highest rates of diabetes in the country, they are developing low-sugar cookies and health-conscious alternatives.

"People are turning away from bakeries due to health concerns," says Ahtisam. "But we believe taste and nutrition can go hand in hand. That's what we're working on."

Bake O'Clock has not gone unnoticed. Their work recently caught the attention of startup promoters in the region. Officials even took a group of budding entrepreneurs to visit their unit, showcasing the startup as a local success story. When the Prime Minister of India acknowledged their journey in a public forum, it felt surreal.

"We were stunned," says Farheena. "It was more than recognition. It was encouragement."

The women have never aimed to compete with big brands. Their focus is on building a brand that reflects Kashmiri craftsmanship and care. Their dream is to create curated gift boxes, launch a direct-to-consumer model, and eventually open their own outlet.

"We want Bake O'Clock to be a Kashmir-made brand that stands proudly on any shelf in India," says Ahtisam.

For these three only daughters from different corners of Kashmir, Bake O'Clock is more than a business. It's a legacy of risk, resolve, and the power of shared belief.

"Our biggest reward," says Rafia, "is when someone tastes our cake and says, 'Yeh toh kuch different aur amazing taste hai.' That's the when we know we're on the right path."

## Truth Hurts, But This Kashmiri Doctor Said It Anyway

He took his oath in the Welsh Parliament in Kashmiri. But what does Dr Altaf Hussain really think about the valley he left behind?



Dr. Ashraf Zainabi

Spent Earth Day this year with Dr Altaf Hussain, in the open lawns of Nature University in Pampore. There were no speeches or media. Just a few of us, invited by environmentalist Nadeem Qadri, talking under a soft April sun.

Dr Altaf, now a Member of the Senedd in Wales, didn't speak right away. But when he did, he didn't hold back.

"Kashmir has lost it," he said quietly. "There is no way of revival, at least in this century."

It wasn't drama. It was raw honesty from someone who has lived far away but never looked away.

Born in Kashmir, Dr Altaf earned his Master's in Surgery here in 1972 before heading to the UK for another degree in Liverpool. He taught at a medical college in Kashmir for a while, but was removed for overstaying leave while studying abroad. He was later invited back, but the appointment never came. That door stayed shut.

He moved on, built a new life in

the UK, joined the Welsh Conservative Party, and now represents South Wales West in the Welsh Parliament. Yet Kashmir, it's clear, never left him.

When he was sworn into the Senedd, he chose to take his oath in Kashmiri. That moment said a lot. Not just about identity, but about memory.

Our conversation wasn't about politics, though. It was about what Kashmir has become, and what it's lost.

"People here are morally, socially, ethically, religiously, and monetarily corrupted deep down," he said. "They live under the shade of power, prestige, and personal wellbeing."

He spoke of the walls that have risen—between homes, between brothers, between neighbours. Physical walls, yes, but also emotional ones. "When we built those concrete walls," he said, "we also built walls between our hearts and minds."

It stung to hear. Because he wasn't wrong. Still, I sensed no bitterness in him. Just a quiet grief. A kind of mourning for the Kashmir of an-

other time. He didn't come with big speeches or shiny solutions. He just offered a prayer. "Only God's wish, if it comes, can save Kashmir. People can never."

Those words have stayed with me.

A day with Dr Altaf Hussain didn't feel like an interview or an official visit. It felt like sitting with someone who still carries home in his bones. Someone who has nothing to gain by being honest, and everything to lose by staying silent.

In a world full of performance, his bluntness was refreshing, even healing. He didn't tell us what we wanted to hear. He told us what we needed to.

And in that moment, I realised: sometimes, a hard truth spoken with love is more powerful than a hundred promises.

*Writer is a Chadoora-based teacher-researcher. Views expressed in this article are author's own and don't necessarily reflect KO's editorial policy.*

## The Kashmir Crisis No One Talks About

Centuries of Kashmiri art, architecture, and tradition are under threat. Without urgent action, a rich legacy may vanish in silence.

Mohammad Hanief

While the world watches Kashmir through the lens of geopolitics, a quieter tragedy unfolds at home. The region's centuries-old cultural heritage is vanishing due to apathy.

This is not just about old buildings or regional cuisine. It is about a social system of knowledge, identity, and skills that once defined everyday life in the Valley. That system is unraveling.

Take architecture. Srinagar's 14th-century Jamia Masjid, made entirely of wood with nearly 400 deodar pillars, remains a landmark of Kashmiri Islamic design. The Shankaracharya Temple, built centuries earlier, stands as a reminder of Kashmir's ancient Hindu roots. Mughal gardens like Shalimar Bagh and Nishat Bagh were carefully planned, blending Persian design with local geography. These sites are vital links to history but many are poorly maintained. Preservation often begins only after visible damage, and support is inconsistent.

Craft traditions are under even more pressure. Pashmina shawls, once treasured by royalty, are now struggling to compete with cheap machine-made versions. Carpet weaving, which once supported entire communities, has seen a steep drop in artisan numbers. A 2023 report by the Jammu and Kashmir Handicrafts Department shows a 60 percent decline in registered artisans over the past two decades. Papier-mâché art, known for its intricate hand-painted detail, is now practiced by fewer people each year.

The reasons are many. Industrial manufacturing has made hand-made goods less competitive. Political instability and digital disparities have made it harder for artisans to sell outside the region. Raw materials, once easily available, are now scarce and expensive. Many younger Kashmiris are no longer interested in continuing these labor-intensive trades, choosing instead to pursue jobs in services or move outside the region for better income and stability.



Kashmir's famous cuisine is also losing its place in daily life. Wazwan, the traditional multi-course meal prepared by skilled chefs known as wazas, has become rare authentic outside of weddings and large events. Dishes like Rogan Josh, Yakhni, and Gustaba are seen more as ceremonial food than everyday fare. As the number of trained wazas drops and younger generations look elsewhere for work, this culinary tradition risks becoming a memory rather than a living practice.

There have been attempts to slow the decline. Government schemes support some artisan clusters with training and promotion. Nonprofits have organized exhibitions and workshops. But these efforts are often too small or too short-lived to make lasting change. Many artisans still lack access to online markets, basic financial support, or spaces to pass on their skills to the next generation.

The problem is also one of visibility. Kashmir's cultural decline receives little national or global attention. Travel brochures highlight natural beauty but rarely explain the depth of the region's cultural heri-

tage. Without regular storytelling, museums, or education programs, the people behind these traditions remain unseen.

Preserving this heritage will take more than one-time interventions. Schools should teach local history, arts, and crafts alongside modern subjects. Artisans should have easier access to loans, raw materials, and markets. Cultural sites must be restored with care, not just for tourism but for community engagement. And the public must hear these stories often enough to care.

Kashmir has weathered many storms over the centuries. But the erosion of culture through neglect and lack of investment is harder to see and easier to ignore. Once lost, these traditions will not return.

Saving them requires more than nostalgia. It calls for action, funding, education, and recognition. Without that, the next generation will inherit a Valley stripped of its voice and memory.

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