

INADEQUATE ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE, SURGE IN VEHICLE NUMBERS AND INSUFFICIENT PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS ARE THE MAIN FACTORS.

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KASHMIR CENTRAL



The Valley roads are facing traffic jams increasingly and the residents are inconvenienced daily. Srinagar, Baramulla, Anantnag and many other areas need a smart policy to deal with the crisis. E-buses are a great step but much remains to be done in the peripheral areas.



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ENSURE A SAFER JOURNEY

The recent bus accident killing 38 people in the Doda region is a rude reminder that there is a crucial need for better public transport with minimal fare and compatibility. And also, the tough terrains of J&K need scientific overhauling, better roads and signage.

THE overturning of a bus in the Doda region of Jammu and Kashmir led to the unfortunate deaths of 38 people. The bus was carrying 40 passengers when suddenly it skidded off the road and rolled into a 300-foot gorge. The aftermath was devastating, with casualties and numerous injuries reported. Emergency services rushed to the scene, working tirelessly to rescue survivors and provide medical assistance. The horrible video graphics show the bodies drenched in blood and how the locals immediately rushed to their rescue.



The news of accidents in these mountainous terrains of Jammu and Kashmir is not new. There have been several such incidents in which poor populace lost their lives to tragic accidents. Our roads & terrain are not suitable for the passage of long buses but people of the region still prefer these private buses due to a low fare.

This unfortunate incident highlights the pressing need for a comprehensive review of the region's road infrastructure and transportation safety measures. Residents have long voiced their concerns about the conditions of the roads, inadequate signage, and the lack of proper maintenance, all of which contribute to heightened risks of accidents.

The announcement of ex-gratia by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the LG administration is a welcome step. The UT administration must ponder and work to reduce such accidents in the future.

The local authorities must collaborate with transportation experts and conduct a thorough audit of the road network in and around Doda. This audit should focus on identifying hazardous spots, improving road conditions, and implementing necessary safety measures such as speed limits, warning signs, and regular maintenance checks for public transportation vehicles. The government must provide public transport in the region with minimal fare and compatibility. These accidents are a reminder that the tough terrains of J&K need scientific overhauling.

Bashir Assad

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STUCK & SORE



The Valley residents are increasingly sore over the rising incidence of traffic jams gripping Srinagar, Baramulla, Sopore and Anantnag, among other areas. There is an urgent need for smart policy to deal with the crisis. E-buses are a welcome improvement but much remains to be done in the peripheral areas.

by **Mian Tufail**

In a disconcerting turn of events, major towns and Srinagar city of Kashmir are grappling with an unprecedented traffic mess, leaving commuters frustrated and authorities scrambling for solutions. The persistent congestion has brought to light critical concerns regarding the region's infrastructure and urban planning, with

citizens expressing growing dissatisfaction.

Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, along with key towns like Baramulla, Sopore, Anantnag and Shopian are witnessing chaotic traffic conditions, particularly during peak hours. The situation has escalated to a point where daily commuting has become a gruelling ordeal.

Experts point to several factors contributing to the escalating traffic woes. Inadequate road infrastructure, surge in vehicle numbers, and insufficient public transportation options have been identified as primary issues. The outdated road network struggles to accommodate the burgeoning population and increasing vehicular density.

FRUSTRATION HANGS THICK

The locals are increasingly vocal about their frustrations, citing daily struggles to navigate through the labyrinth of congested roads. Talking to KC, Bisma Rashid, a lawyer who travels regularly from Chadoora to Srinagar for her daily cases in lower district court of Srinagar, says the 20-minute travel has turned into the nightmare due to rampant traffic jams in Srinagar and outer arteries. “What should be a 20-minute commute often turns into a two-hour ordeal,” laments Bisma, adding, “the traffic situation has gone from bad to worse, and it’s affecting our daily lives”.

Businesses are also feeling the impact, as delivery schedules are disrupted and customers find it challenging to access shops and services. The ripple effects are being felt across various sectors, raising concerns about the long-term economic implications if the traffic situation is not swiftly addressed.

A group of students at the Sopore Degree College tell KC about how much they are suffering due to regular traffic congestion. Among them, Athar Ali says: “The Sopore bypass road connecting to Kupwara a picture of congestion. The whole stretch has been occupied by loaded trucks at peak hours of the morning and the evening. We can neither reach college on time nor reach home before dusk”.

In Baramulla district, the most frequent spots which continue to witness frequent



traffic jams are Sangrama, Pattan, Sopore Bypass and Delina and as one gets out of the mess while heading towards the city, one gets halted again at Qamarwari

and then at Batamaloo. And when one heads further in the city, things are worse. Similar is the situation at other places like Anantnag, Shopian, Kulgam and





Handwara. When complete breakdown happens, the police personnel and Army men regulate the traffic at different routes in Kashmir.

WHAT SAYS THE TRAFFIC POLICE?

Penalising the traffic violators alone can't smoothen the traffic management system in the Srinagar city and major towns of the Kashmir Valley, but improving facilities in the public transport system could be the right way to reduce the increasing traffic congestion in cities and towns. A traffic police official says, "We have a clear roadmap with us to regulate the traffic management in the Valley. There are unregistered vehicles which ply on roads and sometimes careless driving at prominent junctions leads to traffic mess in which our personnel work promptly to regulate the traffic. We get reports of congestion and we look into the complaints and get into action without delay".





THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE AND FUTURE PLANS

▼

In response to the growing crisis, the local administration has taken up large scale road building and widening to alleviate the traffic jams. In this regard, Baramulla-Srinagar highway is being widened to maximum width and flyover bridge construction has been started at numerous important junctions in the City and major towns like Pattan and Sangrama. Plans for the expansion of the

existing roads, the construction of new thoroughfares, and improvements in public transportation infrastructure are reportedly in the pipeline.

The infusion of public transport is at a nascent stage at present. Public vehicles travel along specific routes only and they are overcrowded. The launch of e-buses in Srinagar is certainly an improvement. They will create a harmonious balance between ecology and physical mobility. These e-buses would ply on 15 intra-city routes and two inter-city routes and would run a minimum of 200 km per day from 8 am to 8 pm. The e-buses are equipped with universal access and an HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) system, an on-board vehicle tracking system, CCTV, and an emergency stop facility. A dedicated mobile app and online ticket payment facility have been developed for the convenience of the passengers. All the buses are integrated with Srinagar Smart City's Integrated Command and Control Centre. A bus depot is coming up at Pantha Chowk and charging substations have been developed for smooth operation of e-buses.

These e-buses will surely bring a sigh of relief to the residents and commuters travelling to Srinagar but the government must think of the peripheral areas which are badly muddled under traumatising experiences of traffic congestion these days and a policy must be worked out to ease congestion in the rural and major towns of the Valley.



Down with the **BIG D**



The war with the menace of drugs is on in the Valley and we, as a society, need to stand up together and do our bit to kill this killer before it eats into us and leaves us hollow and destroyed. We stress the appeal, yet again.

by **Mareaya Fayaz**



The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment released a data showing that in J&K in 2022, 1.08 lakh men and 36,000 women were discovered to be cannabis users; 5.34 lakh men and 8,000 women were found to be opioid users; 1.6 lakh men and 8,000 women were found to be abusing sedatives; and 1.27 lakh men and 7,000 women were addicted to inhalants.

THE EFFORTS

In an effort to stop the drug problem from worsening quickly, religious centres and educational institutions in Kashmir are taking on a new role by acting as testing and counselling locations. These infrequent actions coincide with the Valley's ongoing battle with drug addiction; this year, the Jammu and Kashmir

government officially classified nearly ten lakh individuals as drug addicts.

Recently, in the Baramulla area of Jammu and Kashmir, the police apprehended three drug dealers, among them being a wanted female drug dealer, and seized illegal substances from them.

One woman was detained this week by a police party from the police station at Baramulla at a checkpoint set up at Dewanbagh close to Grid Station, according to the police.

Anti-terror operations by the security services in Jammu and Kashmir are well-known. They have been effective in working in tandem with the local government to undermine Pakistan's operations and the forces of their allies in the Valley. Since the insurgency backed by Pakistan is under control, the security authorities have directed their attention towards the problem of narcotics & their dealers. The Narcotic Drugs Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 2022 saw 1,021



police reports and the arrest of 1700 drug dealers, including 138 infamous ones. Massive amounts of illegal goods were apprehended by the security services during the period, including 1.567 tonnes of fukki, 4.355 tonnes of poppy straw, 13 kg brown sugar, 56 kg heroin, and 212 kg charas.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment initiated the Nasha-Mukt Bharat Abhiyan on August 15, 2020, and it is being implemented by the local administration to end drug addiction in 272 districts of India. Numerous awareness campaigns have been carried out by this programme in communities, institutions, and universities.

There are no indications that the problem of drug usage is getting any better. Reports of police apprehending drug dealers from all around the Valley are common seen in the daily newspapers. As recent as last Monday, the J&K police detained ten well-known drug dealers in Kashmir.

LET EACH DO ONE'S BIT

Well, all our efforts need to be directed towards the drug problem and we should be offering help to the police working on ending the menace. It's so crucial to continually raise the topic of how these drug dealers obtain illegal drugs and psychoactive substances. This is a major issue that poses as a great risk to individuals, particularly

the younger generation.

Other organisations and the administration must step up their efforts to combat drug misuse, even though it is the J&K police's job to confiscate, destroy, and prosecute anyone found selling illegal drugs or substances. Additionally, the people of Kashmir must reflect and discover treatments for the illness that has severely damaged the community. The government must take a more active role since drug and substance abuse can be addressed with a few better laws and policy initiatives.

Drug addiction has impacted the family unit and led to a number of social issues, including violence and crime. It is impossible to avoid or overlook this horrible problem's negative consequences.

THE KILLER

No news that drug addiction and the rising crime rate in Kashmir are related. Social issues including violence, crime, and the disintegration of families – they are all connected to this menace.

Addiction to drugs in Kashmir is directly proportional to crimes like theft, robbery, and even murder. In Baramulla, a man suspected of being a heroin addict, killed his mother. The tragedy happened in the Dangarpora region of the Sopore township in north Kashmir, where a drug-addled son killed his own mother.

Due to the epidemic-like prevalence of drug misuse, many crimes can be linked to



the addicts, who are constantly in need of money. It's possible that some of them will turn on their relatives, which means they could also kill other people.

The effects of drug addiction are profound on the people involved and the society as a whole. Addiction can also cause health problems like breathing difficulties, liver damage, mental health conditions like anxiety, sadness, and psychosis, as well as other physical and psychological disorders.

STRATEGIES

A multifaceted strategy is needed to address the drug problem in Kashmir. First and foremost, more people need to be educated about

the risks associated with drug addiction. Community-based awareness initiatives need to be started to encourage drug-free lifestyles, and drug education programmes need to be incorporated into the syllabi of schools and universities.

Secondly, more people need to have access to support services and treatment for addiction. The creation of detoxification, rehabilitation, and counselling centres, among other addiction treatment

facilities, should be funded through public funds. All people, even those from low-income households, should be able to use and afford these amenities.

Thirdly, stronger law enforcement tactics are required to stop the distribution and trafficking of drugs. To stop drugs from being smuggled into the area, the government needs to improve border controls and collaborate with law enforcement to take down drug



trafficking networks.

A police official tells KC that the forces are determined to eradicate the menace from the roots. He says, “We have proper mechanism in place to track the movements of peddlers and their contacts. The drug penetration is so deep that with the arrest of a single handler, we get the whereabouts of the chain of contacts. But even with all our efforts, it is very tough to deal with the situation at present. Personally, I believe that society needs to up the ante to help and support the police and only then we can arrest the rampant usage.”

Breaking the supply chain is necessary, even if the police have been prosecuting suppliers, primarily stores, and making daily arrests. Authorities have maintained that the supplies originate from both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) and that several gangs, including those affiliated with the security grid, have been apprehended. Still, the drug trade is booming and generating large sums of money every day, and in the process, hundreds of families are being destroyed.

So, we can never stress enough, that we need to kill this killer before it eats into our system completely and leaves us hollow and destroyed.





That **Warm** **space** of **Sharing** & **Caring...**

Winters in Kashmir bring about a very special tradition – that of the *hamam*. These are the places of public get-togethers during winters where people of different ages, ideologies and sects sit together and discuss everything under the roof. And they are even more relevant today when technology and the idea of privacy are driving us towards loneliness.

by **Sheikh Abid**



KASHMIR is right now bracing for the chilling sub zero temperatures ahead. Preparations for harsh winters are a necessity in the Valley.

Kashmiris have a way of coming up with their own defense mechanism to combat the bone chilling cold, blending traditional with the modern techniques. Amongst these is the frequent use of the traditional *hamam*, one among the most cost-convenient and reliable modes of warmth.

The *hamam* traces its origins to a Turkish innovation apparently brought in by the Mughals to Kashmir. Historians and writers have a general consensus that *hamam* was brought to Kashmir with its

Mughal conquest during the 16th century, though a few attribute it to the era of Shah Mir dynasty king - Sultan Zainul Aabideen (he ruled for 50 years from 1420 to 1470); while others maintain

that Mughal conqueror Mirza Haidar Dughlat (1499 - 1551) was responsible for introducing *hamams* in Kashmir. But, there are no concrete evidences to prove this narrative. In the first



place, these royal institutions of luxury were solely reserved for the nobles and the royals. Later, during the 19th century, the architectural marvel found its place alongside mosques and khanqahs of our Valley. Of late, it has spread to far-off villages and towns. Now, most of the residential houses are equipped with *hamams*.

HAMAM – AN ARCHITECTURAL WONDER

▼ This architectural wonder has a huge potential for creativity as well as of providing employment to artisans, labourers, drivers, masons and many others associated with it.

It is an entire room lined with lime mortar and with a two-tiered floor, with the upper tier made of handmade limestone blocks. It is made of thick, hand-hewn rectangular slabs of limestone, laid over a hollowed-out floor. Columns of brick support the slabs at the joints, which are sealed with cement. Each slab is sculpted from blocks of rock commonly called ‘devri kaen’ extracted from a quarry from different parts of the Valley, mostly Pampore in south Kashmir & Saderkoot in Bandipora north, though now imported from outside the Valley too.

The inside walls of the *hamam* are lined with bricks sealed with lime mortar. The floor is strewn with sand, bits of glass and boulders, to absorb and retain heat. Firewood is

placed in the *hamam* through a small iron door. The smoke escapes through a chimney that goes right up to the roof, through all levels of the house.

THE HAMAM & THE LESSONS IN LIFE

▼ *Hamams* become places of public get-togethers during winters. People of different ages, ideologies and sects sit together and discuss everything.

From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Palestine to Bosnia, from US to Ukraine, from Europe to Australia, you will find everything being discussed here with an expert sitting and trying to make his point over others while audience listens in keenly!

What with the rising generational gap, winter mosque *hamams* can act as a good medium for bridging that gap. This can be a place where the young can mix with their octogenarians and brainstorm

over social, emotional, political and psychological issues. Experiences of the aged could be gathered in the warmth of these small cubicles along with a pinch of some harsh realities of life and lovely laughter.

Says Mohammad Sultan, a retired government teacher: “These *hamam* discussions can be an ample opportunity, playing the role of public institution. Masjid *hamams* can prove to be a productive affair of personal as well as intellectual growth through the medium of socialising, discussion and brainstorming. The new generation should make sitting in *hamams* a routine”.

A SPACE FOR LAUGHTER AND SARCASM

▼ *Hamams* needn't be only for serious discussions. There can always be a lighter side to these *hamam* gatherings in mosques. Frequent jokes, funny memoirs,





nasty sledging and heated yet meaningless arguments over political or ideological differences make the experience an interesting package.

From expert commentaries on the ongoing Gaza-Israel skirmish, mentioning the failure of Muslim nations in playing their part, to someone calling it an “Amreekech chaal”, you will find everything here. Not to forget the ever on-going, most discussed yet incomplete issue of Kashmir where every Kashmiri claims to offer a unique solution! You would also find discussion on the politics of Kashmir and India. From the NC-PDP-BJP conundrum, to who is going to win this time, to what went wrong last time to who ‘should’ win; the topic can suddenly shift to mohalla drains left unfinished, followed by the usual ‘zameen tanaaz’ debates which, mind you, can never be calm and composed.

“Kashmiris get very little opportunity for social mixing and entertainment as compared to others who may meet at cafes, cinema halls, standup shows, theatres etc. *Hamams* here can fill that gap,” feels Mohammad Zubair, a youngster.

MORAL & RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS

▼ *Hamams*, particularly in mosques, can also serve as an apt place for imparting moral and religious understanding, especially to the youth and the children. Our young need to be encouraged to visit masjids along with their elders to enjoy leisure and warmth in *hamams* where they will get to access so much religious wisdom, guiding them through life.

Besides, these places can also become cluster centres for infusing a rational, inquisitive,

unorthodox, enlightened perspective. And yes, not to forget, these *hamams* can act as de facto drug de-addiction/ counselling, de radicalisation centres to misguided youth.

“Drug abuse, along with other grave social evils, is rampantly rising among our young generation. *Hamams* can be positively utilised for eradicating this evil along with other social evils prevalent in our society,” Shabir Ahmad, a local mosque cleric, comments.

With the new-age gadgets including electric *hamams*, bukharis, heaters, blowers and similar appliances making their way into Kashmir households, the relevance of these traditionally cost-effective *hamams* cannot be overlooked given the wide contribution it can offer in socialisation, particularly in times when privacy-driven loneliness is becoming a norm.



Let's Talk About

Hokh Syun

NURTURING *beyond* SEASONS

by **Waheed Jeelani**



This week, we celebrae the Kashmiri tradition of *hokh syun*, which is more than just drying and preserving vegetables. It's a cultural legacy, an ode to sustainability, and a journey through Kashmir's rich agricultural tapestry.

▼
In the verdant valleys of Kashmir, where the changing seasons paint the landscape in hues of green, a silent culinary tradition lives on, transforming the bounty of summer into treasures that will warm hearths during the harsh winter months.

Hokh Syun, the art of drying vegetables, is more than a preservation technique; it's a cultural legacy, an ode to sustainability, and a journey through Kashmir's rich agricultural tapestry.



HOKH SYUN THROUGH THE AGES

To comprehend the significance of *Hokh Syun*, we must traverse the corridors of time, where this practice found its roots in the agrarian rhythms of Kashmir. Centuries ago, when refrigeration was but a distant dream, Kashmiri households ingeniously turned to the sun for assistance. The practice of drying vegetables emerged as a pragmatic solution to ensure a year-round supply of nutrition, transcending the seasons and echoing the wisdom of generations past.

The sun-drenched fields of summer became a bustling canvas where families, young and old, gathered to harvest the abundance of the season. Tomatoes, turnips, radishes, and more were meticulously sliced, laid out to bask in the generous Kashmiri sunlight, and transformed into vibrant, nutrient-packed *hokh syun*. This method not only preserved the essence of the vegetables but also created a culinary tradition that would endure through the ages.

A CULINARY SYMPHONY

Far beyond a mere preservation technique, *hokh syun* is an intricate dance of flavours. As vegetables embrace the sun's warmth, their natural sugars intensify, creating a concentrated essence that elevates Kashmiri cuisine to unparalleled heights.

The process imbues the dried vegetables with a unique taste, a taste that whispers tales of sunlit fields and the hands that tended to them.

Come winter, as the chill sets in and the landscape transforms into a winter wonderland, these dried treasures find their way into kitchens across Kashmir. Rehydrated, they infuse stews, curries, and rice dishes with a burst of summer, a reminder that even in the coldest months, the warmth of *hokh syun* lingers.

A DELICIOUS HERITAGE

In the heart of Kashmiri homes, *hokh syun* isn't just a culinary technique; it's a cultural heritage passed down from one generation to the next. The ritual of slicing vegetables,

laying them out to dry, and the patience involved in the process are threads that weave the fabric of familial bonds. Elders impart their wisdom, sharing the secrets of when to harvest, how thin to slice, and the art of recognizing the perfect moment when the vegetables have absorbed the sun's essence.

The legacy of *hokh syun* extends beyond individual households. In bustling markets, the vibrant hues of dried vegetables create a tapestry of tradition. Families gather to select the choicest *hokh syun*, a practice that fosters a sense of community and connection with Kashmir's agricultural heritage. It's a moment where the past and present converge, where the act of purchasing *hokh syun* becomes a celebration of shared roots.



HARVESTING SUNLIGHT, SAVOURING HERITAGE

Embarking on a culinary odyssey that transcends seasons, *hokh syun* emerges as a living testament to the agricultural richness of Kashmir. As the sun casts its golden glow upon fields adorned with a myriad of vegetables, the art of drying becomes a sacred ritual. This journey, from the verdant expanses to the heart of kitchens, unravels the layers of tradition, heritage, and sustenance woven into every slice of sun-dried produce. Let's traverse the agricultural mosaic of Kashmir, where *hokh syun* is more than a culinary technique—it's a symphony of flavors orchestrated by the sun and embraced by a community.

HOKH SYUN IN MODERN TIMES

As the world pivots towards sustainable living, *hokh syun*



emerges as a culinary practice deeply aligned with ecological consciousness. The process requires no electricity or refrigeration, relying solely on the natural elements of sun and air. In a world grappling with food waste and carbon footprints, *hokh syun* stands as a testament to the simplicity and sustainability inherent in traditional practices.

Beyond its ecological merits, *hokh syun* reflects the resourcefulness of Kashmiri culture. It's a reminder that even in the face of modern conveniences, there's wisdom to be gleaned from practices



rooted in the land, the sun, and the cycle of seasons.

HOKH SYUN AND THE RHYTHMS OF KASHMIRI AGRICULTURE

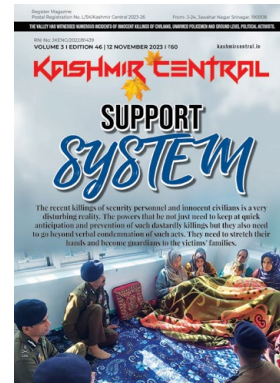
Understanding *hokh syun* requires embracing the rhythms of Kashmir's agricultural calendar. As the harvest season unfolds, kitchens come alive with the hum of activity. Vegetables, fresh from the fields, are transformed into *Hokh Syun* delicacies, ensuring that the bounty of summer sustains the households through the winter chill.

In the quietude of winter, as the snow blankets the land and rooftops, and the air carries a palpable chill, the kitchens of Kashmir come alive with the aroma of *hokh syun*. Each rehydrated slice of sun-drenched vegetable tells a story - a story of a community deeply connected to its roots, a tale of sustenance, and a reminder that the simplest culinary practices often carry the weight of centuries.

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