

Insights of 23 women artisans from J&K shared at Yakjah peacebuilders convention in Colombia

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Srinagar, July 30: Yakjah Reconciliation and Development Network 7 peacebuilders working on the 'Culture and Conflict' project, one of the 39 projects across 6 primary streams of Gender, Justice and Security Hub by the London School of Economics, participated in the third convention held by the Hub from July 15 to 22, 2023 in Colombia. The convention brought together practitioners and academicians including researchers, scholars, professors,

The hub which includes more than 130 members also explored the hub model as a way of researching gender, justice and security through feminist ethics and practice.

Speaking at the Convention, Yakjah researchers in a joint session on 'Reflections; Research, Practice and Ethics' shared their insights from their project involving 23 women artisans from Jammu and Kashmir.

Sharing their personal stories of stepping into the craft ecosystem, Anamika Bharti from Jammu and Urzeeba Bhat from Kashmir highlighted how design innovation training of the women artisans was a transformative experience for them.

"Collaboration between artisans, designers, technologists, businesspeople, non-profits, etc for developing the existing crafts to meet the market demands is crucial. When innovation is discussed, transformation occurs. Transformation results in ecosystem change," said Bharti.

Bhat too emphasized the need for training women in skill enhancement and exploring new markets. "The most important thing that I learned in this project was to visualize and create new designs for that I learned how to print them, a skill dominated by men known as chapawalas".

Aamir Ganie, Yakjah's communication and design lead in the project presented the similarities women artisans have like the challenges of patriarchal structures and resilience. "Women artisans across cultures, religions and ethnicities in Jammu and Kashmir have common aspirations of sustainable livelihood and self-autonomy," he said.

Akshay Kumar Sharma, Yakjah's strategic and policy lead spoke about the critical value of building strategic partnerships and networks. "One of the primary challenges observed was the lack of recognition and opportunities for craftswomen in the industry. We leveraged the project's mandate to build local, national and international partnerships to build a resourceful ecosystem for advancing women-led development," he said.

Sharma added that a critical aspect of their journey was recognizing the importance of the Handicraft/Handloom department in addressing regional cultural conflicts in Jammu and Kashmir. We created a collective safe space for them by using the medium of craft.

Tanya Bhat and Zakir Hussain shared a policy perspective urging for adopting feminist approaches to achieving development goals. "We recognized the ethical implications of collaborating with women who had experienced socio-political and religious violence, and in response, we adopted a dialogical and participatory approach to our engagement with women artisans. "This inclusive approach played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of the project, contributing to its current state of progress," Tanya said.

Concluding the presentation Zakir spoke about the inter-personal dynamics of the Yakjah researchers,

Ashima Kaul, Founder of Yakjah, leading the project in the project in India, summed up the project goals as those aligned with the national policies. "With India holding the G20 presidency, its vision is aligned with those of SDGs goals and the UN's agenda for gender equality which are our project goals too," she said.

She remarked that this opportunity also comes at an appropriate time when Jammu and Kashmir is transitioning from unrest, turmoil, and violence to development activities, institutional and peacebuilding. "It is the right time to bring critical intervention like Yakjah's craft project for advancing justice, gender equality in the region, and policy impact," Kaul remarked.

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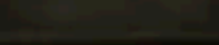
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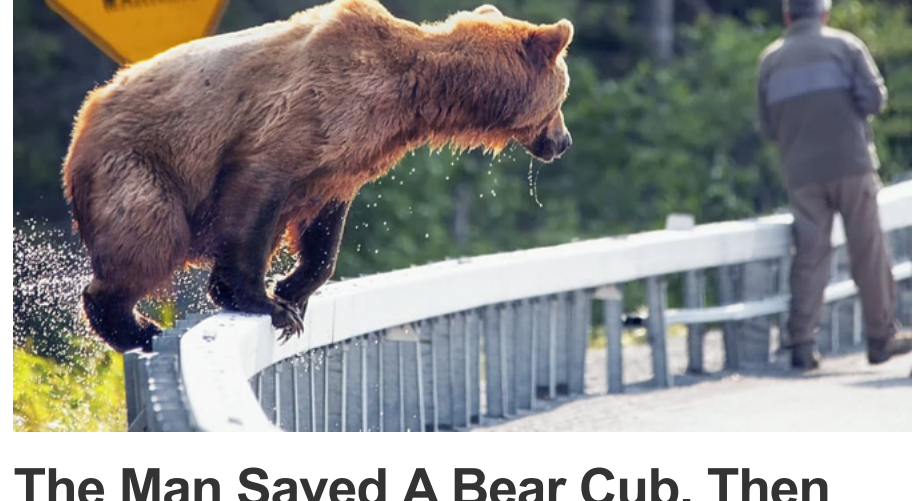


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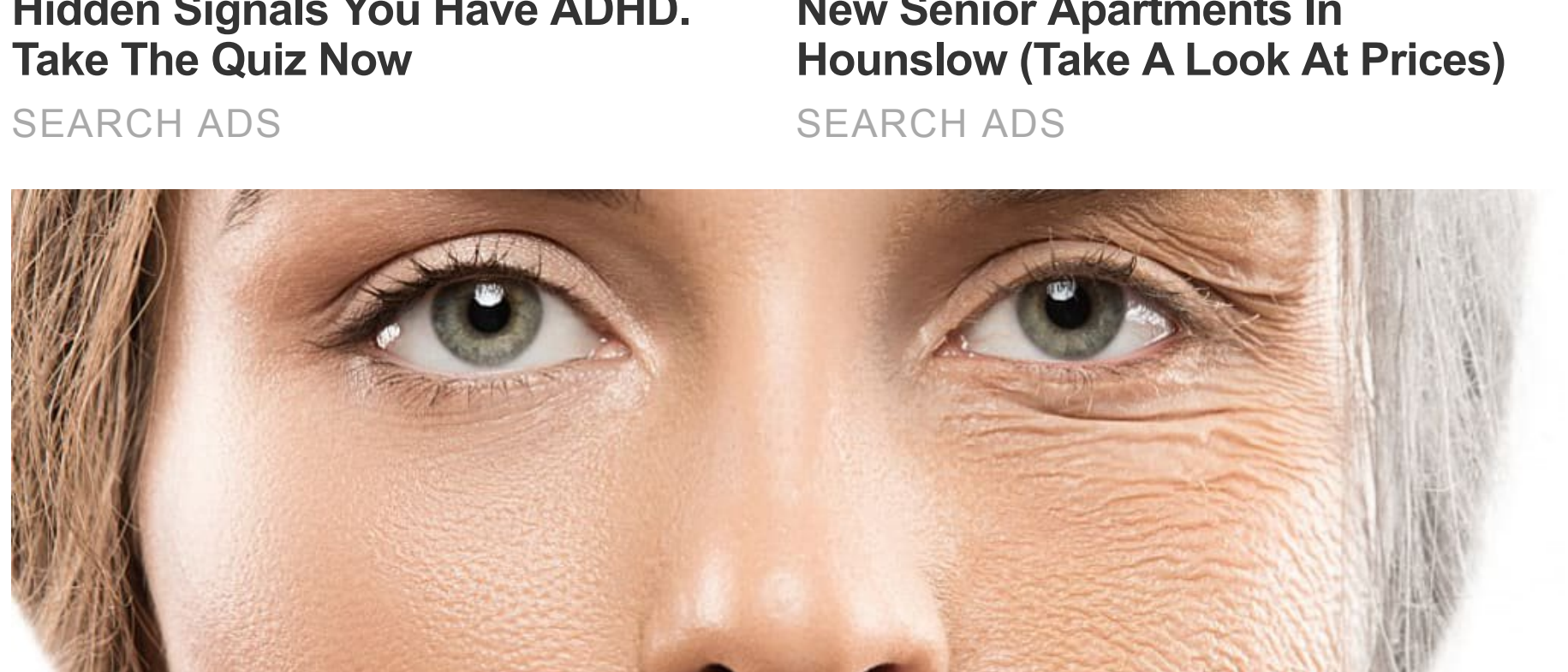
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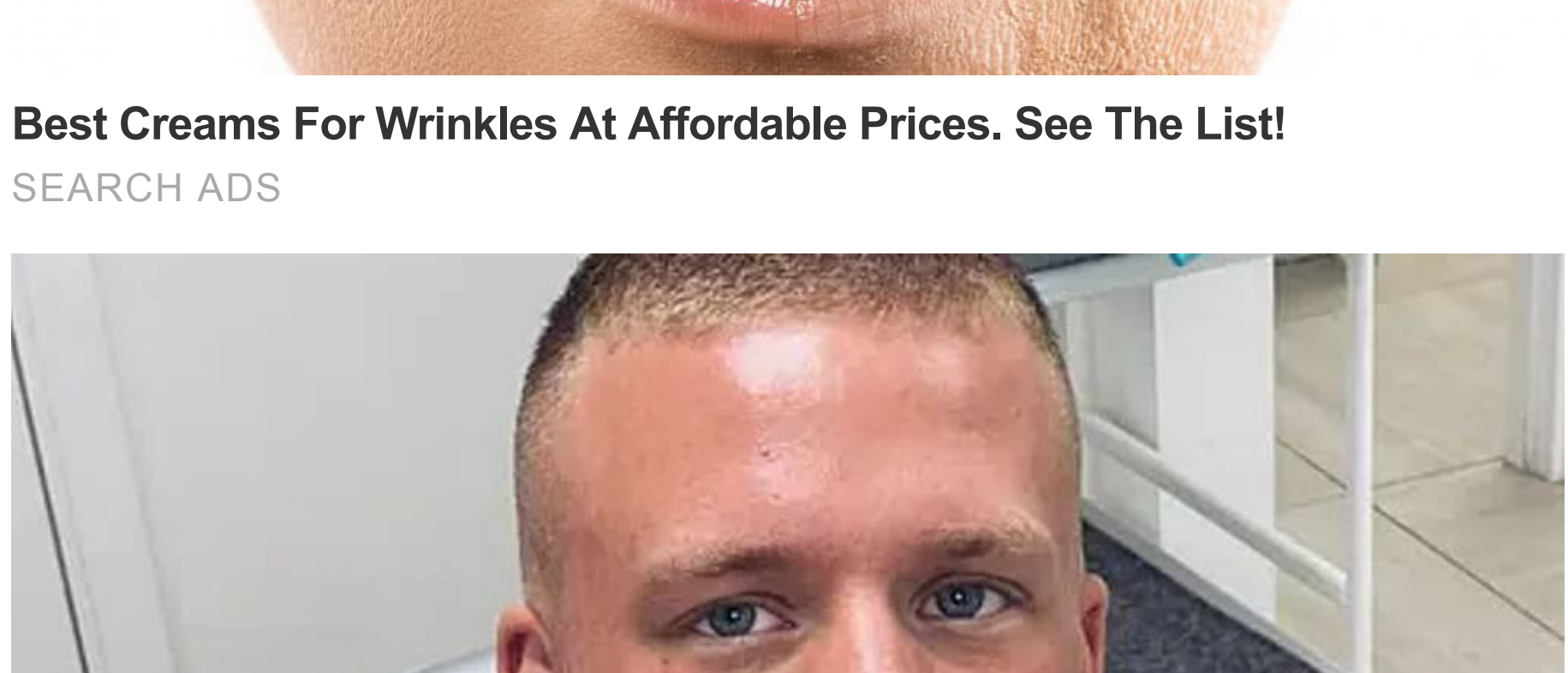
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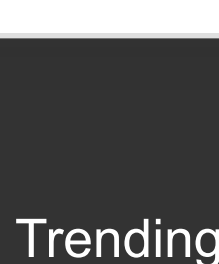
0194 2477887
9971795706

editor@risingkashmir.com
adv@risingkashmir.com

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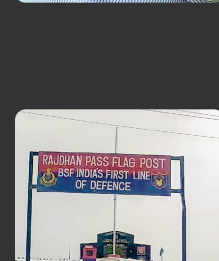
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