



SPENDY SPICE. Kashmiri farmers pluck crocus flowers — the stigma of which produces saffron — on a farm in Khrew, south of Srinagar, in Indian controlled Kashmir. At the end of autumn, families in the Muslim-majority region race against the clock to harvest the saffron crocus flowers, which bloom for only two weeks a year. (AP Photo/Dar Yasin)

From a flower in Kashmir comes a precious spice

By Dar Yasin
The Associated Press

SRINAGAR, India — Cradled by low mountains and spread across a vast expanse of small, fertile fields, a sea of purple flowers opens in Himalayan Kashmir to produce one of the world's most precious spices, saffron.

At the end of autumn, families in the Muslim-majority region race against the clock to harvest the saffron crocus flowers, which bloom for only two weeks a year. Men, women, and children stoop as they laboriously pick the delicate flowers and place them in wicker baskets.

They next separate the purple petals by hand, and from each flower comes three tiny, delicate stigmas which are then dried in the sun, becoming one of the most expensive and sought-after spices.

Across the world, saffron is used in products ranging from food to medicine and cosmetics. A kilogram (2.2 pounds) requires the stigmas of about 150,000 flowers and can easily sell for between \$3,000 and \$4,000.

In Kashmir, the spice is a source of pride and has fuelled the region's economy and culture for centuries. But over the years its

cultivation has faced troubles due to climate change, poor irrigation facilities, and imports of cheaper Iranian saffron.

Strife in the region has also impacted its production and export. For decades, a separatist movement has fought Indian rule in Kashmir, which is divided between India and Pakistan and claimed by both. Tens of thousands of civilians, rebels, and government forces have died in the conflict.

To boost saffron's cultivation and export, authorities in Kashmir have set up a high-tech spice park to increase production quality and quantity. But very few farmers find the latest technology lucrative and most still use century-old techniques for picking and drying the saffron.

Most of Kashmir's saffron is grown in Pampore, a tiny town south of the region's main city, Srinagar.

In Kashmir, the spice is mostly used in Kehwa, a slow-brewed sugary green tea infused with spices like cinnamon and cardamom and garnished with almonds. Saffron is also used in Wazwan, a traditional Kashmiri wedding meal cooked by special chefs that includes more than 30 dishes.

Indians in Harris' ancestral home woke up to her victory

By Aijaz Rahi
The Associated Press

THULASENDRAPURAM, India — After rooting for Kamala Harris as U.S. President-elect Joe Biden's running mate, people in her small ancestral Indian village woke up on a Sunday last month to the news of her making history.

Most of them had gone to sleep by the time Biden clinched the winning threshold of 270 Electoral College votes.

"Congratulations Kamala Harris. Pride of our village. Vanakkam (Greetings) America," one female resident wrote in color powder outside her residence.

"We all have been waiting for this day. Congratulations," Aulmozhi Sudhakar, a village councillor, said.

The village of Thulasendrapuram, population 350, celebrated Harris' success with singing, dancing, and firecrackers at a temple later that Sunday. Already in the morning hours, groups gathered at street corners reading newspapers and chatting about the Democrats' victory before moving to the temple for prayers.

Cutouts and posters wishing Harris a "grand success" adorned the village walls.

"Kamala Harris is the daughter of our village. From children to senior citizens, each one of us is awaiting the day she would take oath as the vice president of the U.S.," said Sudhakar.

J. Sudhakar, who organized prayers on Election Day, expressed his wish that Harris should now visit the village. As Americans voted, nearly 50 residents, with folded hands, lined up in the temple that reverberated with the sounds of ringing bells, and a Hindu priest gave them sweets and flowers as a religious offering.

Women in the village, located 215 miles from the southern coastal city of Chennai, used bright colors to write "We Wish Kamala Harris Wins" on the ground, alongside a thumbs-up sign.

The lush green village is the hometown of Harris' maternal grandfather.

Inside the temple where people had been holding special prayers, Harris' name is sculpted into a stone that lists public donations made to the temple in 2014,



INDIA CONNECTION. Indian women prepare a Kolam, traditional artwork created using colored powder, congratulating U.S. Vice President-elect Kamala Harris in the hometown of Harris' maternal grandfather, in Thulasendrapuram, south of Chennai, Tamil Nadu state, India. (AP Photo/Aijaz Rahi)

along with that of her grandfather who gave money decades ago.

Harris' late mother also was born in India, before moving to the U.S. at the age of 19 to study at the University of California. She married a Jamaican, and they named their daughter Kamala, Sanskrit for "lotus flower."

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a tweet described Harris' success as pathbreaking, and a matter of immense pride not just for her relatives but also for all Indian Americans. "I am confident that the vibrant India-U.S. ties will get even stronger with your support and leadership."

There had been both excitement — and some concern — over Biden's choice of Harris as his running mate.

Modi had invested in President Donald Trump, who visited India in February. Modi's many Hindu nationalist supporters also were upset with Harris when she expressed concern about the divided Himalayan region of Kashmir, whose statehood India's government revoked in August last year.

Harris stood by Pramila Jayapal, another U.S. congresswoman of Indian origin, when India's external affairs minister, S. Jaishankar, refused to attend a meeting in the United States over her participation last year. Jayapal had earlier moved a resolution on the Kashmir issue critical of India in the House of Representatives.

Rights groups accuse India of human rights abuses. *Continued on page 11*

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Difficulty level: Easy #54379

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

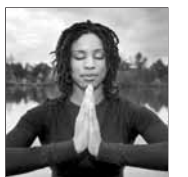
Solution to last issue's puzzle

Puzzle #36243 (Hard)
All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

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