

POK News Digest

A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

Compiled & Edited by Dr Priyanka Singh

• Political Developments

Gilgit-Baltistan Quagmire

Mush Asks GB People to Vote For 'Third Force' Says PML-N, PPP Looted Country, Disappointed Masses

Mirpur By-Polls: PML-N Fields Ghazi Against Sultan

Alleged Sedition: Nationalist Leaders Held in G-B Granted Bail

G-B Jailbreak: Escaped Militants Break Siege, Elude Capture

ECNEC Meeting: Govt Approves Funding for Diامر-Bhasha Dam

Most Lawmakers Know Nothing About G-B: Imran

GB Youth Dissatisfied With Governance: Survey

• Economic Developments

Double Rates of Taxes: AJK Tax Officials Approach FBR

Cross-LoC Trade: Plea to Crack Illegal Dry Coconut Barter

• International Developments

Exiled Leaders From PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan Blame Pakistan for Human Rights Violations

AJK Powering Up With 102MW Hydro Project

• Other Developments

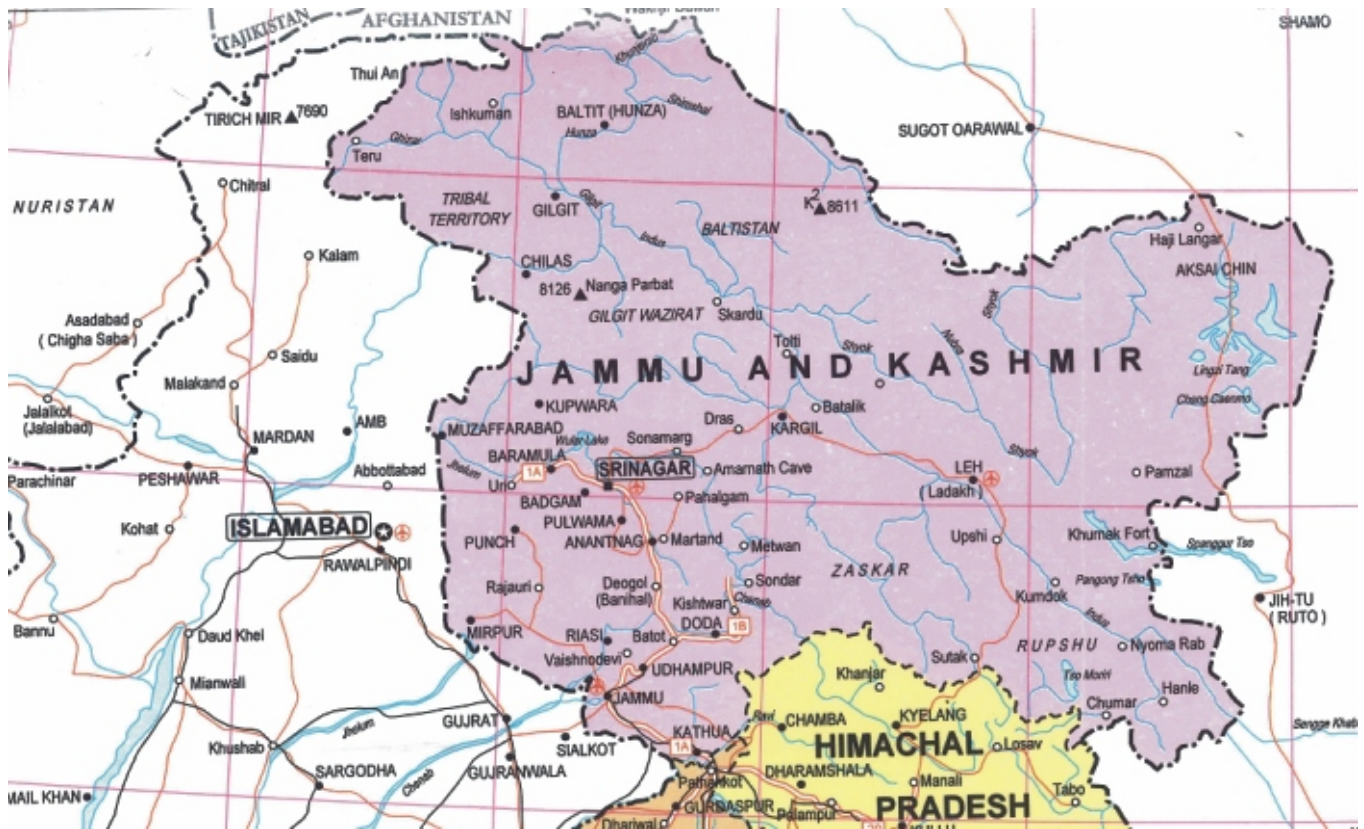
Women's Day Observed in AJK With Renewed Pledge

Geo News Transmission Restored in AJK

Irsa Starts Filling Mangla Dam on River Jhelum



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Jammu & Kashmir

(Source: Based on the Survey of India Map, Govt of India 2000)

In this Edition

The countdown to the second general elections in Gilgit Baltistan to be held in June 2015 has begun. The mainstream political parties, including the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) are gearing up to participate in the electoral process. Widespread fears have been expressed by section of the political parties on the possibility of the elections being rigged by the ruling party in Islamabad, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), to be able to wield a majority in the Gilgit Baltistan elections. The chairperson of the APML (All Pakistan Muslim League), former President Pervez Musharraf, while addressing a gathering in Gilgit Baltistan over telephone, called upon the people to vote for a 'third force', as indicated in a report included in the current issue. Musharraf noted that both the PPP (Pakistan Peoples Party) and the PML-N have not performed well having caused considerable damage to the democratic process, and therefore, people should opt for change.

The fact that a caretaker set was hurriedly installed in Gilgit Baltistan even as the Empowerment and Self Rule Order of 2009 did not have a provision for it, has not gone down well with the opposition parties and people at large. There is great deal of political resentment that amendments were initiated by the PML-N led federal government to suit its objectives in the forthcoming elections. The act of appointing the federal Minister of Kashmir Affairs, Muhammad Barjees Tahir as the caretaker Governor of the region is being considered unlawful. It is feared that the appointment of a PML-N minister could impact the eventual outcome of the elections.

The Centre for Peace, Development and Reforms (CPDR) conducted a survey which revealed the growing dissatisfaction amongst the youth in Gilgit Baltistan vis a vis governance, politics and constitutional uncertainty of the region.

Priyanka Singh

Political Developments

Tahir Mehdi, “Gilgit-Baltistan quagmire”

Dawn, February 28, 2015

The first Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly completed its tenure on Dec 10 last year. The prime minister appointed a caretaker chief minister the same day. The presidential order of 2009 that had instituted a new governance system in this long ignored area did not provide for such appointment, so the order was amended. Since it was an order, the prime minister did not have to go through any parliamentary procedures. No debate on its pros and cons ensued and no political wrangling was witnessed; a simple note drafted by a section officer of the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs did the trick. The original order also called for fresh elections within 90 days of completion of the tenure of the assembly i.e. March 10. This 'problem' was solved too by the same section officer by the addition of another clause to the amendment saying that the election may be delayed by an additional 90 days.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1166326/gilgit-baltistan-quagmire>

“Date for LA-III Mirpur city by-poll extended to 29th”

The Nation, March 2, 2015

MIRPUR: Azad Jammu and Kashmir Chief Election Commissioner Justice Munir Ahmed Chaudhry extended date for the scheduled March 15 by-election to LA-3 Mirpur city seat of AJK Legislative Assembly to March 29 under the Delimitation Act. Now the by-poll to LA-3 Mirpur city seat will be held on March 29 instead of March 15 according to the revised schedule, AJK CEC Justice Munir Ahmed Chaudhry noted.

The CEC continued that polling date for the by-election had changed after consulting with all the candidates belonging to all political parties and independent candidates to facilitate thousands of registered voters - residents of New Mirpur City.

Justice Munir Chaudhry stated that the New Mirpur City had been shifted into electoral constituency LA-3 from the electoral constituency LA-4 under the Delimitation Act for providing due right to dwellers of the New City to cast their vote.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/02-Mar-2015/date-for-la-iii-mirpur-city-by-poll-extended-to-29th>

Abrar Saeed, “Mush asks GB people to vote for 'third force' Says PML-N, PPP looted country disappointed masses”

The Nation, March 1, 2015

ISLAMABAD: Stressing the need of a third political force in the country APMIL chairman and former president Gen(r) Pervez Musharraf has stated that both PML-N and PPP disappointed the masses during their successive rule in the country and also caused irreparable damage to the democratic order through their faulty policies. Addressing a convention on Gilgit-Baltistan organised in Islamabad on February 28 via telephone from Karachi, former military dictator, who ruled the country for over a decade, termed change in the prevailing rotten system vital to keep the trust of the people in democratic order and to steer the country out of host of crises.

<http://nation.com.pk/islamabad/01-Mar-2015/mush-asks-gb-people-to-vote-for-third-force>

“A needless controversy”

Business Recorder, March 1, 2015

Whilst the Nawaz League-PTI dispute over the 2013 elections remains unresolved, the federal government has managed to create an unnecessary controversy regarding upcoming elections in Gilgit-Baltistan. Both the PPP and PTI expressed apprehensions over appointment of the entire new political setup, from the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) to governor and caretaker chief minister as well as caretaker cabinet dominated by the Nawaz League nominees. Leader

of the Opposition in the National Assembly, Syed Khurshid Shah, recently raised the issue in a letter to the Prime Minister and also publicly gave vent to his worries saying "rigging in elections would definitely lead to a new crisis in the country." At a press conference on March 1, PTI Chairman Imran Khan accused the government, even more vehemently, of having planned "blatant pre-poll rigging in Gilgit-Baltistan".

Notably, the last PPP-led coalition government granted full internal autonomy to the Northern Areas under the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order, 2009. The formula used for national elections was to be replicated in GB for appointments to the office of CEC, and the caretakers. Accordingly, the present government selected CEC and caretaker CM after consultations with the PPP's sitting CM. The party, therefore, has a problem not with the appointment of a GB banker as caretaker CM but wants him to resign from the bank instead of seeking a three-month leave to take up his new assignment. The more serious objections raised by both the PPP and the PTI are: one, that the federal government has appointed its Minister for Kashmir and GB Affairs from Punjab as governor; and second, that of the 10-member caretaker cabinet, seven ministers belonging to the PML-N. These ministers have their own relatives participating in the legislative assembly elections, and are likely to be favoured by the former. Both objections are a valid ground for questioning the government's intentions.

<http://www.brecorder.com/editorials/0/1156438:a-needless-controversy/>

“Mirpur By-Polls: PML-N fields Ghazi against Sultan”

The Express Tribune, March 3, 2015

MUZAFFARABAD: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) chapter of the PML-N is fielding Arshad Ghazi against Sultan Mahmood of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in the LA-3 Mirpur by-elections. Mahmood recently left the Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) to join PTI. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has given his nod for the PML-N ticket for Ghazi to contest the by-polls. PML-NAJK

President Raja Farooq Haider stated Ghazi will beat Chaudhry in the by-polls, to be held on March 15. He added that Ghazi had defeated Mahmood in 1991 as well, saying the candidate had also won the 2001 polls but the result was changed at the eleventh hour by the PPP government in Islamabad. Haider urged voters to reject PTI's candidate. He reiterated that PML-N has won three consecutive by-elections in the region by defeating the PPP.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/846743/mirpur-by-polls-pml-n-fields-ghazi-against-sultan/>

Shabbir Mir, “Alleged sedition: Nationalist leaders held in G-B granted bail”

The Express Tribune, February 27, 2015

GILGIT: A local court in Gilgit on February 26 granted pre-arrest bail to 19 nationalist leaders booked under treason charges. Taruf Abbas and Mumtaz Nagri, among others, were granted bail by an additional sessions court in Gilgit after they submitted an appeal through their lawyers Ehsan Ali and Amjad.

The nationalist leaders had earlier allegedly spoken against the state for keeping Gilgit-Baltistan deprived of constitutional rights over the past six decades. They delivered the speeches at a seminar titled G-B in the Light of Kashmir Dispute, organised this week by Karakoram National Movement (KNM) and All Parties National Alliance (APNA), an alliance of various parties having representation from Kashmiri parties.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/844838/alleged-sedition-nationalist-leaders-held-in-g-b-granted-bail/>

Shabbir Mir, “G-B jailbreak: Escaped militants break siege, elude capture”

The Express Tribune, March 1, 2015

GILGIT: A day after breaking out of Gilgit's district prison, two fugitives managed to break a siege of security forces after they were pinned down in suburban Gilgit on February 28. The militants Habibur Rehman and Liaquat alias Akhtar fled from the prison in a daring pre-dawn jailbreak on which also left one militant, Bilal, dead and another, Dilbar, injured. Habibur Rehman was involved in the 2013 slaying of nine foreign climbers and their

Pakistani guide at a base camp of Nanga Parbat mountain. Liaquat was accused in a deadly attack on investigators of the massacre in Chilas region.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/845955/g-b-jailbreak-escaped-militants-break-siege-elude-capture/>

Shahbaz Rana, “ECNEC meeting: Govt approves funding for Diamer-Bhasha dam”

The Express Tribune, March 3, 2015

ISLAMABAD: After months of foot-dragging and delays, the federal government on March 2 finally approved Rs101 billion for land acquisition for the construction of Diamer-Bhasha dam as well as the rehabilitation of people who would be displaced, clearing one of the biggest hurdles to completing the \$14 billion, 4,500-megawatt hydroelectric power plant, the largest infrastructure project in Pakistan since the construction of the Tarbela dam in 1974. Headed by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) the country's highest authority for development spending approval cleared the Water and Power Ministry's funding request for the project, despite having termed this level of cost to be “exorbitant” in its October 2014 meeting.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/846820/ecnec-meeting-govt-approves-funding-for-diamer-bhasha-dam/>

“Runaway inmates had 'brainwashed' GB jail officials”

Dawn, March 4, 2015

An ongoing investigation into the escape of two prisoners from Gilgit Baltistan (GB) revealed that the captives had managed to 'brainwash' the jail officials who also helped them in their escape from the prison facility, BBC reported. The prison break took place February 26 when four suspects of Nanga Parbat attack case tried to break free from the district prison. One prisoner was killed while another was arrested in an injured condition, however, two captives managed to break free and are still on the run. Following the incident, authorities have arrested three head wardens, five wardens, dispensary in charge and two security officials.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1167344/runaway-inmates-had-brainwashed-gb-jail-officials>

“Mangla Dam staff goes on pen-down strike”

The Nation, March 5, 2015

MIRPUR: The contractual employees of Mangla Dam Resettlement Organisation went on indefinite pen-down strike to press the AJK government for early regularisation of their services. The protestant employees staged "dharna" (sit-in) in front of the offices complex of the Mangla Dam Resettlement Organization on March 4 besides displaying banners and placards bearing the slogans of their long-standing single demand of regularization of their over 11-year-long services. A spokesperson of the protesters told the media persons at their sit-in camp that 22 of the contractual employees were constrained to perform their duties without salary since January 1, 2015. “Besides, 70 other contractual employees of the same organisation have been served the notices about dispensation of their services from July this year”, the spokesperson noted adding that it has caused an immense tension and unrest among the contractual employees and their families.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/05-Mar-2015/mangla-dam-staff-goes-on-pen-down-strike>

“AJK HC directs govt to hold LB polls in five months”

The News, March 7, 2015

MUZAFFARABAD: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir High Court (AJK HC) on March 6 directed the government to hold local bodies (LB) poll within five months which were postponed since 1990. A Judge of the High Court Justice M Tabbasam Aaftab Alvi issued the direction while hearing a writ petition filed by senior advocate Raja Sajjad Ahmad Khan. In a petition he prayed that non-existence of local bodies was violation of fundamental rights of the citizens. The judge also directed the government to appoint a local government's election commissioner within a month to hold the elections in the state. It may be recalled that the local bodies elections could not be held since 1991 in Azad Kashmir when these were postponed by the then prime minister Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-305524-AJK-HC-directs-govt-to-hold-LB-polls-in-five-months>

“AJK's schools: New head for Rs5b education project”

The Express Tribune, March 8, 2015

MUZAFFARABAD: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government appointed Zaheer Hussain Gardezi as the project director of the “Education for All” project. Gardezi, who is currently working with the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) on deputation, will head the Rs5 billion project funded by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). Official sources noted AJK Chief Secretary Abid Ali and Secretary Education Raja Abbas Khan played a crucial role in appointing Gardezi on merit while refusing to give-in to political pressure to make the appointment on favouritism. Under the new project, more than 330 schools would be constructed across AJK within five years to boost enrolment at the primary level.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/849711/ajks-schools-new-head-for-rs5b-education-project/>

“Marvi Memon vows to fight against manipulators and exploiters”

Business Recorder, March 8, 2015

MIRPUR: Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) and Minister of State, Marvi Memon on March 7 vowed to wage a war against middlemen, exploiters and manipulators of the system and to protect the self-respect of the beneficiaries. She was addressing a group of BISP beneficiaries and journalists. In her opening remarks, Marvi Memon showed gratitude to the beneficiaries of BISP who had travelled far and wide to greet the new Chairperson of the Programme.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/1-front-top-news/230607-marvi-memon-vows-to-fight-against-manipulators-and-exploiters.html>

“Alleged plot: Govt set to rig upcoming G-B polls, claims Imran”

The Express Tribune, March 8, 2015

ISLAMABAD: The government has made all arrangements to rig the upcoming elections in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B), stated Pakistan Tehreek-e-

Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan on March 7. Addressing the G-B Youth Convention, Khan stated he was happy that “people want change”. He vowed that if elected to power, his party would revamp the prevailing system. The PTI chief expressed reservations about the government's decision to install a caretaker government, comprising over a dozen ministers, as well as the decision to appoint the federal minister of Kashmir affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan as G-B governor.

Imran stated he would introduce a new system in G-B, where, he claimed, a “bureaucratic government” was ruling after winning the elections. He promised to transfer power to the people through the local government polls. Recalling the 1971 fall of Dhaka, he stated the then East Pakistan had separated from Pakistan because the people were denied their rights.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/849765/alleged-plot-govt-set-to-rig-upcoming-g-b-polls-claims-imran/>

Nasir Iqbal, “Law on GB governor's appointment challenged”

Dawn, March 8, 2015

ISLAMABAD: The Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self Governance Order, 2009 under which Kashmir Affairs Minister and PML-N leader Mohammad Birjees Tahir was recently appointed governor of GB was challenged before the Supreme Court on March 7. The challenge was made by Supreme Appellate Court Gilgit Bar Association General Secretary Mohammad Iqbal, through his counsel Rai Mohammad Nawaz Kharral, by filing the petition in the Supreme Court under its original jurisdiction of enforcement of fundamental rights.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1168080/law-on-gb-governors-appointment-challenged>

Mumtaz Alvi, “Most lawmakers know nothing about G-B: Imran”

The News, March 8, 2015

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan on March 7 claimed a majority of those sitting in parliament knew nothing about Gilgit-Baltistan, saying the regions away from the Centre are overlooked by the rulers. The

erstwhile East Pakistan, he pointed out, became Bangladesh after its people were denied their fundamental rights by the then rulers. He alleged major political parties during their tenures did not conduct local bodies polls, as they were opposed to devolving power to the grassroots level. Speaking to a Gilgit-Baltistan Youth Convention under the aegis of the PTI, he contended that the intentions of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) were evident from the appointment of a federal minister from Punjab as governor of Gilgit-Baltistan.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-36283-Most-lawmakers-know-nothing-about-G-B-Imran>

Shabbir Mir, “Unity in G-B: Tahir urges politicians not to 'divide' region”

The Express Tribune, March 7, 2015

GILGIT: Newly-appointed Gilgit-Baltistan Governor Barjees Tahir asked politicians on March 6 not to divide the region based on “locals and non-locals”. His visit to Gilgit was punctuated by protests by political parties, including Pakistan Peoples Party, over his non-local status.

Tahir's comments and the protests came a day after local politicians, especially those from PPP, declared his appointment unacceptable as he is not a resident of the region. Tahir hails from Punjab. “Those dividing society on the basis of locals and non-locals are spreading hatred and chaos,” Tahir stated while addressing a gathering in Gilgit.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/849127/unity-in-g-b-tahir-urges-politicians-not-to-divide-region/>

Mariana Baabar, “GB youth dissatisfied with governance: survey”

The News, March 9, 2015

ISLAMABAD: The young people of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) aged between 18-35 drawn from across the society have expressed deep concerns and dismay over poor governance and malpractices of the elected government and political leadership in a survey conducted by the Centre for Peace, Development and Reforms (CPDR), a peace-building organisation of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

The survey was published in the CPDR's recently published report titled 'Unheard voices of Hamalayas: engaging youth of Gilgit-Baltistan' authored by Syed Waqas Ali and Taqi Akhunzada. Ershad Mehmud, who heads the CPDR, furnished the findings of the report which according to him “reflects the opinion of young people against the backdrop of the Kashmir conflict and its constitutional limbo. Gilgit-Baltistan's youth talk about the pressing socio-political and economic problems they face without any fear and enjoy freedom. On the current system of governance, almost 70 percent of the total 425 young people surveyed believe that it has given them their identity and, at least, a space where they can legislate on a range of local issues for better governance and development.”

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-36298-GB-youth-dissatisfied-with-governance-survey>

“Starting point for GB”

The News, March 10, 2015

The young people of Gilgit-Baltistan believe the GB Empowerment and Self-Governance Order of 2009 should be a starting point from which the process of granting the territory representation in the Senate and National Assembly can begin. There is a strong desire for equal rights as citizens among people aged 18-35 years in GB, who resent years of poor governance and seek an end to the constitutional uncertainty over the status of the region. These are the findings of a new survey conducted by an Azad Kashmir-based NGO. The findings are significant given the problems of cohesion faced by the federation of Pakistan. We have over the past decades paid insufficient attention to the situation of people in GB, who do not enjoy Pakistani citizenship or the rights that come with this. While the majority of those surveyed welcomed the 2009 legislation that granted them an assembly and a sense of identity, they also wanted more. The issue of GB is also tied in to that of Kashmir. Historically a part of the state of Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan was not amalgamated after 1947 into Pakistan, on the premise that its future would be settled along with that of Kashmir.

The plebiscite under which Pakistan hoped this would happen has never taken place and as a consequence the two million people of GB have remained without nationality or the right to representation for no fault of their own. The ordeal of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan needs to end.

<http://www.indiagazette.com/index.php/sid/230920695>

“4500MW Diamer-Bhasha Dam: Govt to buy 18,300 acres land, pay Rs49b to affectees”

Customs Today Report, March 12, 2015

ISLAMABAD: The federal government decided to purchase over 18300 acres of land for the construction of 4500MW Diamer-Bhasha Dam project and pay Rs49 billion to the affectees against land compensation within the next six months, reported Radio Pakistan. According to the report, the government has already purchased over 3000 kanal land from three villages in Chilas and also paid compensation to the owners. Three model villages are also being set up at Chilas to provide one kanal land to each affected person free of cost. A 35-kilometre-long by-pass road is also being constructed from Chital to Chilas which will be used for transportation of machinery for the dam and also smooth traffic on Karakorum Highway during the construction of dam project.

<http://www.customstoday.com.pk/4500mw-diamer-bhasha-dam-govt-to-buy-18300-acres-land-pay-rs49b-to-affectees/>

Shabbir Mir, “105 development projects incomplete in G-B”

The Express Tribune, March 12, 2015

GILGIT: At least 105 development projects payments of which were made in advance during the previous regional government's tenure are incomplete, stated Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Governor Barjees Tahir on March 12. While addressing a news conference at his office in Gilgit, the governor stated he was really perturbed about this revelation. “The projects remain incomplete even though payments have been made in advance, this is tantamount to corruption,” stated Tahir who is on a two-day official visit to Gilgit.

“I had heard about the sale of jobs in G-B but I have now learnt that development schemes have also

been sold here,” he stated, referring to the previous Mehdi Shah government which faced corruption allegations in the education and works departments.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/852222/105-development-projects-incomplete-g-b/>

Shahzad Anwar, “Timber trouble: Karakoram forest cover vanishing”

The Express Tribune, March 13, 2015

ISLAMABAD: Though some efforts are afoot at national level to conserve and add to existing forests, the situation in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) would suggest that the battle is being lost. Widespread deforestation and felling of trees has denuded large swathes of forest area in G-B. According to experts, the continuous illegal felling of trees such as pine, kail and deodar, forest cover in G-B has eroded more than 50 per cent in the last 20 years down from 640,000 hectares to just 295,000 hectares.

This widespread deforestation and cutting of trees is not only impacting glaciers, which are receding faster than normal, but also impacting biodiversity, as rare animals such as of snow leopards, black bears, markhor, Himalayan ibex, blue sheep, Marco Polo sheep, and urial are disappearing from the region.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/852410/timber-trouble-karakoram-forest-cover-vanishing/>

“Wapda to offer asset shares to general public”

Dawn, March 14, 2015

LAHORE: The Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) at a meeting has decided to re-evaluate its assets according to the present market value and offer a part of them as shares to the general public. The meeting presided over by Wapda Chairman Zafar Mahmood noted that the value of assets owned by the authority ran into billions but it's still facing tremendous difficulties in playing its due role due to financial crunch.

As a result of difficulties in arrangement of funds, Wapda has failed to attain Financial Close for ongoing 969-MW Neelum-Jhelum, 106-MW Golen Gol and other hydropower projects. Due to narrowing down of fiscal space both locally as well as internationally, financial constraints are creating

hurdles in the execution of other projects such as Diamer-Bhasha Dam, Dasu and Bunji hydropower projects.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/853597/five-rangers-personnel-injured-in-attack-on-check-post-near-diamer-bhasha-dam/>

Mushtaq Ghuman, “Diamer Bhasha's revised PC-I: acquisition of land, resettlement approved by Ecneec”

Business Recorder, March 16, 2015

Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecneec) has approved acquisition of land and resettlement envisaged by Diamer Bhasha project's revised PC-I at a total cost of Rs 101.34 billion. According to official documents, the committee was informed that the proposed project envisages the acquisition of 37,419 acres of land and the resettlement of people affected by the construction of Diamer Basha Dam Project (4500 MW).

<http://www.brecorder.com/market-data/stocks-and-bonds/0/1161633/>

Parvez Jabri, “GB offers vast investment opportunities: CM”

Business Recorder, March 13, 2015

ISLAMABAD: Provincial government was taking steps for utilization of natural resources for the human development. This was stated by Caretaker Chief Minister Gilgit Baltistan Sher Jehan Mir while talking to the member of Gilgit Baltistan Council Ataullah Shahab who called on him in Gilgit, reported Radio Pakistan.

<http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/general-news/231807-gb-offers-vast-investment-opportunities-cm.html>

“PTI challenges appointments of GB's interim CM, CEC”

Samaa TV, March 14, 2015

GILGIT: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) challenged appointments of Gilgit-Baltistan's interim chief minister and chief election commissioner on March 14. Amna Ansari, PTI leader from Gilgit Baltistan, filed a petition in the court challenging appointments of caretaker CM Sher Jahan Mir and CEC Syed Tahir Ali Shah. The

petitioner made Chairman of Gilgit Baltistan Council, Ministry for Kashmir Affairs, Governor Barjees Tahir, caretaker CM and CEC respondents in the case.

<http://www.samaa.tv/pakistan/14-Mar-2015/pti-challenges-appointments-of-gb-s-interim-cm-cec>

“Shifting of prisoners”

Dawn, March 16, 2015

In Pakistan, ensuring that dangerous suspects and convicts are kept in detention is a major task, especially considering the several high-profile jailbreaks that have occurred in this country in the recent past. The last such incident was the jailbreak in Gilgit-Baltistan, in which some inmates suspected of involvement in 2013's Nanga Parbat massacre managed to escape. With this bitter experience in mind, the GB authorities have sought to transfer 20 high-profile inmates to detention facilities in Punjab. What is troubling is that officials noted they feared a fresh jailbreak was possible. Considering the remoteness of the region and its limited resources and infrastructure, it appears to be a good idea to shift dangerous prisoners to Punjab, which has relatively better facilities.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1169746/shifting-of-prisoners>

“People living in PoK deprived of fundamental human rights: Political analyst”

The News, March 13, 2015

GENEVA: Political analyst and Institute of Kashmir Affairs director Dr Shabir Choudhry, speaking in a seminar during 28th session of the UN Human Rights Council, on March 12 stated that people living in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) are deprived of fundamental human rights. "We people living in areas of the state occupied by Pakistan are still deprived of fundamental human rights. How sad that despite being a member of the United Nations and a signatory to different declarations on human rights, Pakistani officials openly defy all their obligations on human rights," stated Dr. Shabir.

<http://news.webindia123.com/news/Articles/World/20150313/2552728.html>

Sohail Khattak, “No change in Pak-China Economic Corridor routes: Ahsan Iqbal”

The Express Tribune, March 17, 2015

PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal on March 16 moved to quell speculation that routes of the Pak-China Economic Corridor had been altered, and dismissed news reports to the contrary as “rumours”. Speaking to the media after attending a workshop on reforms in Civil Services for achieving the Vision 2025 goals in Peshawar on March 16, Iqbal stated the Pak-China Economic Corridor was a “destiny-changer” as it features projects worth billions, which will benefit all the four provinces of the country. “It is not a name of a road but has many routes, which will connect Gwadar to Khunjerab, and Pakistan will become a bridge between the central Asian countries and China.”

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/854382/no-change-in-pak-china-economic-corridor-routes-ahsan-iqbal/>

Shabbir Mir, “Basari check post assault: Forces continue manhunt for perpetrators”

The Express Tribune, March 16, 2015

GILGIT: Security forces remained in search of Basari check post attackers and raided several houses in areas bordering Gilgit-Baltistan and Kohistan district on March 16. Unidentified men had launched an assault on the checkpoint situated on the Karakoram Highway in the early hours of March 15, leaving five Rangers personnel injured. The attackers opened indiscriminate fire using automatic and semi-automatic weapons from a distance of about 200 metres, and later fled following retaliatory fire from the Rangers.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/854282/basari-check-post-assault-forces-continue-manhunt-for-perpetrators/>

Shabbir Mir, “Going nowhere: ‘Over 100 projects incomplete in G-B’”

The Express Tribune, March 12, 2015

GILGIT: At least 105 development projects payments of which were made in advance during the previous regional government's tenure are incomplete, stated Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Governor Barjees Tahir on March 12. Addressing a

news conference at his office in Gilgit, the governor stated he was really perturbed about this revelation. “The projects remain incomplete even though payments have been made in advance; this is tantamount to corruption,” stated Tahir who is on a two-day official visit to Gilgit.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/852248/going-nowhere-over-100-projects-incomplete-in-g-b/>

“No hurdle in way of Zarb-e-Azb to be tolerated: Barjees”

Daily Times, March 18, 2015

GILGIT: Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Barjees Tahir on March 18 stated determination of Pakistan armed forces and law enforcement agencies will not waver with the cowardly attack on the check post of Rangers in Chilas. He expressed these views while visiting the injured Rangers personnel getting treatment in Gilgit Baltistan. He stated that no hurdle in the way of operation Zarb-e-Azb would be tolerated, adding till elimination of last terrorist, war will continue against terrorism and extremism.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/national/18-Mar-2015/no-hurdle-in-way-of-zarb-e-azb-to-be-tolerated-barjees>

“Govt striving hard to enhance water storage capacity: Abid”

Daily Times, March 18, 2015

ISLAMABAD: State Minister for Water and Power Abid Sher Ali on March 18 stated that maximum efforts were underway to enhance water storage capacity in the country to meet agriculture needs of Pakistan. Responding to a calling attention notice moved by Shaista Pervaiz, he stated that the prime minister has released billion of rupees for completing the acquisition of land for constructing Diamer-Bhasha dam. He stated that Pakistan needed at least 147 million acre feet storage. Kalabagh dam has been made controversial. Consensus has to be evolved with the provinces for constructing more dams. Bhasha Dam would help enhancing the storage capacity of water. The funds have already been released for constructing Munda Dam,” he stated.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/national/18-Mar-2015/govt-striving-hard-to-enhance-water-storage-capacity-abid>

“Baltistani Shia Welfare organization condemn attack on Christian Community in Lahore”

March 19, 2015

The Baltistan Shia Welfare Organization U.S in a Joint Statement of Khalid Baltistani, Haider Baltistani, Babar Ali, Akbar Baltistani, Zahid Changezi, Khawar Baltistani, Shahid Shigri, Sajjad Baltistani, Mehdi Baltistani, Aijaz Shigri and Shaukat Baltistani have condemned the brutal Taliban attack on Youhanabad Churches in Lahore (Pakistan), in which 15 innocent lives have been taken and more than 68 people were injured. Baltistan Shia Welfare U.S demanded Government of Pakistan to immediately stop supporting defined extremist group, like Taliban and Lashker-e-Jhangvi and their associate group who are danger to other religions.

Same mindset was also involved in blowing up the World Trade Center where thousands of innocent lived were lost. They are also murdering innocent Christian, Hindu, Shia, Sunni (Berhalvis) and Ahmedis in Pakistan.

<http://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/headlinenews.php?newsid=5249>

Shabbir Mir, “Four arrested in connection with check post attack”

The Express Tribune, March 20, 2015

GILGIT: Security forces have arrested four men suspected of sheltering militants who attacked a Rangers check post on the Karakorum Highway near the site of Diamer-Bhasha Dam. Suspected militants opened fire on the post during the early hours of March 15, leaving five Rangers personnel injured. Security forces launched a manhunt in the mountainous areas of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's Kohistan district and Gilgit-Baltistan's Diamer district following the assault.

“Four people have so far been arrested for providing shelter to the militants. They are being interrogated,” stated a police official on March 20. Action was taken after receiving a tip-off from shepherds who graze their animals in the area.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/855938/four-arrested-in-connection-with-check-post-attack/>

Nokhaiz Sahi, “Funds delay affecting AJK cities' projects”

The Nation, March 20, 2015

ISLAMABAD: The delay in release of Rs 3 billion funds has put the fate of AJK's three cities development projects by two Chinese companies in doldrums as timely completion of these projects is not possible.

The issue was discussed in detail at 29th Projects Steering Committee meeting at Earthquake Reconstruction Rehabilitation Authority [ERRA] Headquarters.

The meeting was presided over by Deputy Chairman Major General Muhammad Azeem Asif. During the meeting, Chief Secretary AJK, Director General State Earthquake Reconstruction, Rehabilitation Authority (SERRA) Ghulam Nabi Butt, nominated representatives from the public, authority officials, NESPAK representatives, senior member board of revenue, AJK government official, Projects Directors Muzaffarabad, Bagh and Rawalakot discussed progress of the ongoing projects.

<http://nation.com.pk/islamabad/20-Mar-2015/funds-delay-affecting-ajk-cities-projects>

“AJK court moved against March 29 by-poll”

The Nation, March 22, 2015

MIRPUR: The by-election scheduled for March 29 in a constituency of Mirpur city has been challenged in the Azad Jammu Kashmir High Court. Accepting the writ petition filed by independent candidate Raja Munheeb Thaker, a full bench headed by Chief Justice Ghulam Mustafa Mughal directed the AJK government to respond to the objections raised in the petition on March 24.

The petitioner contended that under the interim Act 1974, the Interim Constitution of AJK, the AJK Election Commission cannot make any change or amendment in the delimitation or demarcation of the electoral constituency.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/22-Mar-2015/ajk-court-moved-against-march-29-by-poll>

Shoaib-ur-Rehman Siddiqui, “Governor has no role to play in elections: Barjees”

Business Recorder, March 23, 2015

ISLAMABAD: Governor Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) Chaudhry Barjees Tahir on March 22 stated governor was just a representative of the federal government having no role to play in elections in Gilgit-Baltistan. Talking to a news channel, he stated an additional responsibility was given to him by the Prime Minister in the form of Governorship of GB and he was making all out efforts to fulfil that responsibility.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/1-front-top-news/233835-governor-has-no-role-to-play-in-elections-barjees.html>

“Mirpur by-polls: AJK govt agrees to deploy army”

The Express Tribune, March 20, 2015

MUZAFFARABAD: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government has given approval to deploy Rangers or Pakistan Army during Mirpur by-elections on March 29. This was decided in a meeting chaired by the AJK Prime Minister Chaudhry Abdul Majeed in Mirpur. “It is our duty to ensure transparent by-polls in LA-3 and the government will follow the demand of Election Commission of AJK to deploy Rangers or Pakistan Army on polling day,” he stated. The AJK premier further stated that all resources have been provided to AJK Election Commission for ensuring transparent, fair and peaceful by-elections.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/856123/mirpur-by-polls-ajk-govt-agrees-to-deploy-army/>

Shabbir Mir, “Election date announced without my input”

The Express Tribune, March 23, 2015

GILGIT: Gilgit-Baltistan chief election commissioner (CEC) Tahir Ali Shah has denied he was consulted to finalize the date for legislative elections. Shah's comments come in response to a statement made by Caretaker Chief Minister Sher Jehan Mir on March 20 in which he stated elections will be held on June 8 as decided in consultation

with the CEC. “I have not been consulted by anyone, including the caretaker chief minister,” stated Shah during a press conference at his office on March 22. “The interim chief minister has not visited my office even once.”

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/857454/election-date-announced-without-my-input/>

Aamir Saeed, “Given new powers, Pakistanis take on illegal loggers”

Thomson Reuters Foundation, March 23, 2015

ISLAMABAD: For decades, illegal loggers have been hacking away at the forests of Gilgit-Baltistan in northern Pakistan while facing few penalties. But that is now changing as local people, armed with new powers to confront and fine illegal loggers, and to oust problematic local officials, fight back. In Diamer, one of the nine districts of Gilgit-Baltistan, forests of chilgoze and shah balut trees once covered 35 percent of the district. Today, that has fallen to 20 percent after timber smugglers in 1980 began cutting large swathes of forest.

"If the illegal cutting of trees continues at the same pace, the forest cover in the region will be reduced to just five percent in the next 20 years," predicted Khan Muhammad, chairman of the Himalayan Conservation Welfare Movement, which works for the rights of the area's forest communities.

<http://af.reuters.com/article/energyOilNews/idAFL6N0WP1NW20150323>

“Khan says he caused Nawaz-Zardari 'split', aims at Altaf”

Pakistan Today, March 25, 2015

Addressing a public meeting in Mirpur, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief Imran Khan stated on March 25 that he has broken the longstanding Zardari-Nawaz partnership. “I am not going to break Zardari and Nawaz partnership he noted, I have already done it,” stated Khan during his first major political event in Kashmir after former AJK Prime Minister Barrister Sultan Mehmood joined the party. The public meeting was held in connection with the upcoming by-elections on Barrister Sultan's seat. Khan stated that the

decisions of AJK will be taken in AJK and his party will bring a local bodies system where every village will make its own decisions. “The Mirpur community abroad works hard and these people loot your money and take them out. We are here to free you from these corrupt people,” he stated, while deeming 2015 to be the year of elections during which he claims will prove as to how Sharif is sitting in government by “stealing the mandate”.

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/03/25/national/khan-says-he-caused-nawaz-zardari-split-aims-at-altaf/>

“Imran declares to turn AJK into Niya Azad Kashmir”

Daily Times, March 25, 2015

MIRPUR: Without uttering a single word about the freedom of Kashmir on the soil of Kashmir, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan on March 25 announced to make ‘Niya Azad Kashmir’ simultaneously with his party’s proposed broad-based program of turning the country into a ‘Niya Pakistan’. Imran stated that the local bodies elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, will be held after two months under the spirit to give powers to the representative of masses at grass-root level. He stated that the people of Jammu Kashmir would be given with the same due rights of power from the grass root level by the PTI after coming into power through the elections. The PTI chairman called for waging jihad to get the country rid of the alleged corruption, malpractice and other irregularities.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/national/25-Mar-2015/imran-declares-to-turn-ajk-into-niya-azad-kashmir>

Adnan Lodhi, “Gilgit-Baltistan makes way to cultural hub”

The Express Tribune, March 25, 2015

LAHORE: The Lahore Arts Council (LAC) has been a clarion call for preserving arts in Pakistan, serving as a platform for artists from different areas to showcase their talent in the cultural capital of the country. In the wake of the spring season, LAC has scheduled a series of events for the next two months, with the aim of entertaining art-lovers in the city. Paving the way for artists from Gilgit-Baltistan (G-

B) to prove their mettle, the council organised an event at Alhamra Hall 2 on March 24.

Titled 'Gilgit-Baltistan Cultural Show', the event was jointly organised by LAC and Pakiza Arts and Culture Council Gilgit-Baltistan. It featured renowned artists from the region, including Fida Hussain, Ghulam Nabi, Naveed Tanha, Abdulmajid Barcha, Maraj Alam Maraj, Zahid Hussain, Mubarak Ali, Islam uddin, Wajahat Ali, and Iqbal Hussain Iqbal. Extending a warm welcome to the guest artists, the LAC decorated the hall with posters and banners of G-B performers.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/858806/gilgit-baltistan-makes-way-to-cultural-hub/>

Sohail Khan, “Appointment of CEC Gilgit Baltistan challenged in SC”

The News, March 25, 2015

ISLAMABAD: A constitutional petition challenging the appointment of Justice (retired) Tahir Ali Shah as the Chief Election Commissioner, Gilgit Baltistan, was filed in the Supreme Court on March 24. Ameer Khan, Provincial President of Aam Admi Party of Pakistan in Gilgit Baltistan, filed the petition in the apex court under Article 184(3) of the Constitution through his counsel Syed Sardar Hussain, making the Federation through the Cabinet Division, Pak Secretariat Islamabad, chairman Gilgit Baltistan, secretary Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Kashmir Affairs Gilgit Baltistan and Justice (retired) Tahir Ali Shah, Chief Election Commissioner Gilgit Baltistan as respondents.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-36601-Appointment-of-CEC-Gilgit-Baltistan-challenged-in-SC>

Shabbir Mir, “Keep shining: Ban on gemstone trade lifted after four years in G-B”

The Express Tribune, March 26, 2015

GILGIT: A four-year old ban on the trade of gemstones in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) was lifted on March 26, restoring the income of nearly 10,000 families associated with the sector. The directives came from Chief Secretary Sikandar Sultan, overturning the ban which was imposed by the

previous government on the recommendations of the bureaucracy “in order to streamline the trade” by forming mining laws. The mining laws, however, were never drafted during the erstwhile government's tenure, even as gemstone dealers left no stone unturned in hopes of the ban being abolished.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/859461/keep-shining-ban-on-gemstone-trade-lifted-after-four-years-in-g-b/>

“PPP ups the ante, holds mass gathering in AJK”

Dunya News, March 26, 2015

MIRPUR: Pakistan People's Party (PPP), in a display of power, organized a mass gathering in Mirpur on March 26. Former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani stated on the event that only PPP possesses the solution to problem of Kashmir. Preparations for local body elections are underway with full vigour in Mirpur, Azad Kashmir. PPP's workers were delighted at the prospect of a mass gathering in their town. Addressing the crowd at Mirpur, former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani stated that the current gathering is a proof of PPP's vote bank.

<http://dunyanews.tv/index.php/en/Pakistan/270054-PPP-ups-the-ante-holds-mass-gathering-in-AJK>

Shabbir Mir, “Questioning charges: Activists look to Nawaz for justice for Baba Jan”

The Express Tribune, March 30, 2015

GILGIT: Activists of the Progressive Youth Front (PYF) in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) are hopeful Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government will revisit its predecessor's decisions that led to the imprisonment of political leaders under terrorism charges. Baba Jan, Iftikhar Hussain, Shakoorellah and nine others were sentenced to life in prison by an anti-terrorism court in October 2014 for ransacking police stations and torching government property in Hunza in 2011.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/860970/questioning-charges-activists-look-to-nawaz-for-justice-for-baba-jan/>

“Promoting tourism in Gilgit-Baltistan”

The Express Tribune, March 29, 2015

GULMIT: Pakistan has been suffering from the war on terror and its consequences for a decade. This war has taken a huge toll on our tourism sector. The inflow of foreign tourists has witnessed a decline since the 9/11 attacks. Currently, the security situation does not allow even domestic tourists to visit tourist spots. The issue is of serious concern for tour operators and hotel owners. About 25 per cent of the total population of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) was directly or indirectly engaged in the tourism business but now, this is not the case due to terrorism in the country. The government needs to take concrete steps to promote the tourism business in Pakistan, especially in G-B.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/860932/promoting-tourism-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

“AGP's absence cited: PAC puts off meeting on Kashmir G-B affairs”

Business Recorder, March 25, 2015

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) March 24 postponed its meeting on Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan affairs at the eleventh hour for unknown reasons. Sources stated the reason may be absence of Auditor General of Pakistan (AGP) Akhtar Buland Rana. The PAC had many a time expressed annoyance over the continued absence of the AGP from the proceedings of the committee despite directive by the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) to attend the meeting, sources stated.

<http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172/1164874/>

Hamza Ehsan Khan “The army may be helping Gilgit-Baltistan but where is the Pakistani government?”

The Express Tribune, March 28, 2015

Trekking is my craze, hiking is my pastime and mountaineering is my obsession. And to observe and do research about the conditions of people belonging to Pakistan's neglected regions is something that I like to do. So you can understand my excitement when, last summer, I availed the opportunity of visiting Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B), also largely known as the northern areas of Pakistan.

I went up to a height of 17,000 feet, well beyond

tree-line, whereupon I came across something spectacular. I witnessed the glory of the Pakistan army, helping its people out even so far above ground. I saw officers of the military doing everything they could to play a constructive part in the region and improve the dismal state of security in the area, particularly along the Line of Control (LoC) between G-B and Jammu & Kashmir.

<http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/24189/the-army-may-be-helping-gilgit-baltistan-but-where-is-the-pakistani-government>

Tariq Naqash, “Controversy over appointment of AJK Shariat Court judges”

Dawn, March 30, 2015

MUZAFFARABAD: The Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) Bar Council called a meeting of presidents and members of all bar associations on March 31 to discuss their reservations regarding the appointment of judges at the AJK Shariat Court.

“A majority of the legal fraternity believes that the notification for appointment of judges has been issued in contravention of the Supreme Court judgement,” AJK Bar Council vice chairman Manzoor Qadir noted on March 29.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1172783/controversy-over-appointment-of-ajk-shariat-court-judges>

“PTI wins Mirpur by-election”

The Nation, March 30, 2015

MIRPUR: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf candidate Barrister Sultan Mahmood won the LA-III Mirpur by-election by securing 15,691 votes, defeating PPP AJK candidate Ch Muhammad Ashraf who got 12,811 votes in the by-election held on March 29, according to unofficial results. According to AJK Election Commission the final result will be announced on March 30. The seat had fallen vacant after the former AJK prime minister and sitting Member of the AJK Legislative Assembly Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry resigned from the assembly seat leaving the ruling PPP AJK fold and joined the PTI.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/30-Mar-2015/pti-wins-mirpur-by-election>

“PML-N backs PPP-AJK in by-poll against PTI”

Dawn, March 28, 2015

MUZAFFARABAD: The opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz in Azad Jammu and Kashmir withdrew its candidate for the Mirpur by-election on March 27 in favour of the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP-AJK), causing resentment among its workers. The withdrawal of Arshad Mahmood Ghazi in favour of PPP-AJK's Chaudhry Mohammad Ashraf was announced by regional PML-N president Raja Farooq Haider at Ghazi Manzil, hardly 36 hours before the polling. The announcement angered the PML-N workers who had gathered at Mr Ghazi's residence to hold a rally.

[http://www.dawn.com/news/1172430/pml-n-backs-pppajk-in-by-poll-against-pti?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+dawn-news+\(Dawn+News\)](http://www.dawn.com/news/1172430/pml-n-backs-pppajk-in-by-poll-against-pti?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+dawn-news+(Dawn+News))

Shoaib-ur-Rehman Siddiqui, “ERRA owes its success to int'l partners, dedicated team: Official”

Business Recorder, March 31, 2015

ISLAMABAD: ERRA Deputy Chairman Maj Gen Azeem Asif on March 30 stated the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) owed its success not only to a dedicated expert team but also over 200 international partners, who stood by Pakistan in time of need. Speaking at a weekly briefing, he paid tribute to the international partners, he stated his recent meetings with Charge'd 'Affaires of the Netherlands Frans Van Rijn and Senior Policy Advisor had opened avenues for future collaboration at the European Union forum as ERRA's role was not only commended at international level, but its programmes were a model for the international community, stated a press release.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/1-front-top-news/235682-erra-owes-its-success-to-intl-partners-dedicated-team-official.html>

Economic Developments

Sohail Sarfraz, “Double rates of taxes: AJK tax officials approach FBR”

Business Recorder, March 23, 2015

Tax authorities of the Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) have approached the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) for resolving taxation issues of taxpayers, registered with the AJK's Board of Revenue, who have to pay double rates of taxes while clearance of their taxable transactions within the territory of Pakistan.

Sources told Business Recorder here on March 22 that AJ&K Council is facing problems in clearance of their taxable transactions within the territory of Pakistan. Due to non-existence of Active Taxpayer List of AJ&K on FBR database, the taxpayers of AJ&K are forced to pay higher rate taxation. The FBR's Active Taxpayers filing returns have to pay normal rate of taxes as compared to double rates of withholding taxes on the non-filers, whose data is not available on the FBR's Active Taxpayer List. The FBR uses its own Active Taxpayer List as per return filing database

<http://www.brecorder.com/taxation/181:pakistan/1163993:double-rates-of-taxes-ajk-tax-officials-approach-fbr/>

“Cross-LoC trade: Plea to crack illegal dry coconut barter”

The Express Tribune, March 21, 2015

KARACHI: Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) President Iftikhar Ahmed Vohra has requested Finance Minister Ishaq Dar to stop the illegal barter of dry coconut on the Line of Control (LoC) between Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Jammu & Kashmir. Vohra, in a letter sent to Dar, stated some KCCI member firms had complained about the misuse of cross-LoC trade that had brought businesses of dry coconut importers to the

verge of collapse. “Dry coconut can be removed from the barter list to save local traders from severe losses.”

He stated under the cross-LoC trade, barter of goods being produced and manufactured in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Jammu & Kashmir was only allowed but nowadays terms and conditions were being violated as dry coconut, which was not produced in any of the two regions, was being bartered.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/856578/cross-loc-trade-plea-to-crack-illegal-dry-coconut-barter/>

Zafar Malik, “Rs 5.78b arrears: Committee set up to settle matter between AJK, Gepco”

Custom Today, March 17, 2015

SIALKOT: The federal government formulated a committee to resolve the issue of outstanding arrears to the tune of Rs 5.78 billion, payable to the Gujranwala Electric Power Company (Gepco) by the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government. According to Gepco officials, the committee would also resolve the issue of the per unit rate of electricity between Gepco and the AJK government. Gepco has been supplying electricity to as many 11 feeders in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) since 2007. Despite issuance of notices time and again, the AJK government has not paid liable amount of Rs 5.78 billion for the last several years, sources stated.

<http://www.customstoday.com.pk/rs-5-78b-arrears-committee-set-up-to-settle-matter-between-ajk-gepco/>

International Developments

“Kashmiri delegation leaves for Geneva to attend HRC session”

The Nation, March 10, 2015

MIRPUR: A six member Kashmiri delegation left for Geneva to attend the 28th session of Human Rights Council, it was officially declared. “Delegation will take part in discussions and debates in the main sessions of Human rights council and will organize seminar and round table discussions on the sidelines of the session”, Altaf Hussain Wani, leader of the delegation noted.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/10-Mar-2015/kashmiri-delegation-leaves-for-geneva-to-attend-hrc-session>

S. A. Khan, “British Kashmiris presented their Manifesto for social justice in the UK and just peace in Jammu Kashmir”

March 29, 2015

UNITED KINGDOM: Six weeks ahead of the General Election 2015 in the United Kingdom a leading Kashmiri Diaspora community development organisation Kashmir Development Foundation (KDF) has launched an innovative community campaign to put Kashmir on the agenda. For the first time British Kashmiri Manifesto has been launched for social justice in the UK and Just Peace in Jammu and Kashmir in an impressive KDF Parliamentary reception hosted by Simon Danczuk MP and chaired by Sardar Aftab Khan, Executive Director, Kashmir Development Foundation on 24th March at the Parliament House.

<http://groundreport.com/british-kashmiris-presented-their-manifesto-for-social-justice-in-the-uk-and-just-peace-in-jammu-kashmir/>

“Exiled leaders from PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan blame Pakistan for human rights

violations”

ANI, March 15, 2015

GENEVA: The leaders from Pakistan occupied Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan raised human rights issues at a side event in the United Nations during the 28th session of Human Rights Council in Geneva. The event titled 'Human Rights in South Asia' was organized by the United Kashmir People's National Party (UKPNP) and supported by other political parties and human rights organizations from PoK and Gilgit Baltistan. The speakers criticized Pakistan for human rights violations, extra-judicial killings and allowing of external forces to exploit resources of PoK and Gilgit Baltistan.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/exiled-leaders-from-pok-and-gilgit-baltistan-blame-pakistan-for-human-rights-violations-115031500175_1.html

“AJK powering up with 102MW hydro project”

Pakistan Today, March 17, 2015

Three major agreements were signed between a South Korean power company, Mira Power Limited, and Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) government at Mirpur for the construction of the 102 MW Gulpur Hydro Power Project on March 16. The agreements were signed for implementation, water use and land lease for the project being built at Kotli district in the presence of AJK Prime Minister Chaudhry Abdul Majid, Senior Minister Chaudhry Muhammad Yasin, Ambassador of South Korea Jong Hwan Song, Public-Private Investment Board (PPIB) Managing Director Shah Jahan Mirza and other dignitaries.

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/03/17/business/ajk-powering-up-with-102mw-hydro-project/>

Other Developments

“Women's Day observed in AJK with renewed pledge”

Daily Times, March 9, 2015

MIRPUR: Universal Women Day was observed in Azad Jammu & Kashmir on March 8 with the renewed pledge to ensure equal rights and dignified status besides to maintain respect, honour, dignity of womenfolk in all segments of society. Special ceremonies, seminars and symposiums were held throughout AJK like rest of the world. The World Women Day is observed on March 8 since the year of 1900 across the globe in the light of charter of United Nations to highlight the importance of women's role in the society.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/national/09-Mar-2015/women-s-day-observed-in-ajk-with-renewed-pledge>

Sarmad Ishfaq, “Comparative Analysis of Primary Education at NGOs, Private and Public Schools in Muzaffarabad”

Azad Kashmir, March 8, 2015

This research is a comparative study between three types of primary education schools in the region of Muzaffarabad, Azad Kashmir. The paper draws comparisons between NGO, Private, and Public schools based on quality of education, access, and affordability. The factor of quality of education was drawn from Pakistan National Education Policy of 2009 while access and affordability were added based on the chosen region. The research has been conducted through semi structured interviews with parents, principal (School Administrator) and teachers. The results show that NGO schools displayed good results for quality of education in terms of infrastructure and textbooks. The public schools are perceived to have better qualified and trained teachers but our research showed contrasting results at the primary level. The public schools also lacked most basic facilities and were

very low on quality. The private schools struck the middle ground with mediocre facilities, quality and fee structure.

<http://www.dnd.com.pk/comparative-analysis-of-primary-education-at-ngos-private-and-public-schools-in-muzaffarabad-azad-kashmir/88830>

“Civil society for compliance with court orders”

The Nation, March 10, 2015

MIRPUR: The Centre for Peace, Development and Reforms (CPDR), leading civil society organization of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, welcomed the recent momentous decision of the AJK High Court wherein the court ordered the AJK government to ensure Local Bodies (LB) elections in the AJK till September, 2015. The court also ordered appointment of the election commissioner for the LB elections within next four weeks. Welcoming the AJK HC decision, the CPDR Executive Director and eminent Kashmiri writer Ershad Mahmud termed the verdict landmark in the civic history of AJK and true reflections of the public aspirations.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/10-Mar-2015/civil-society-for-compliance-with-court-orders>

Jamil Nagri, “Italian man hunts blue sheep in Hunza”

Dawn, March 11, 2015

GILGIT: An Italian man hunted a blue sheep with 32-inch-long horns in the wildlife conservatory at Gojal valley of Hunza-Nagar district near the Pak-China border. Boieti Gian Carlo hunted the sheep in Khunjrab Village Organisation's (KVO's) wildlife conservatory at Sukhterabad Nullah, some 20 kilometers from Pak-China border on March 8, the organisation's secretary information Rahimullah Baig noted on March 10. He stated that the blue sheep was the Pakistan's longest and the world's second longest animal. He stated the Italian hunter

had secured hunting permit paying 8,000 US dollars to the Gilgit-Baltistan wildlife department. Blue sheep is a rare species, found only in Nepal and Pakistan. He stated that the foreign hunter spent three days in KVO's wildlife conservatory looking for the blue sheep. Mr Baig stated that hunter was accompanied by his local guide, Mahboob Ali, local community members and officials of GB wildlife department to ensure that the hunt was carried out according to the rules. "The hunter fired a single gunshot at the blue sheep from a distance of 275 meters as was allowed under the law." According to rules, only one shot at the animal is allowed, and the second attempt would render the permit invalid.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1168793>

“Geo News transmission restored in AJK”

The News, March 22, 2015

MUZAFFARABAD: Transmission of Geo News has been restored in different districts of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), including Muzaffarabad, after the orders of the Azad Kashmir High Court on March 21. Press Foundation Chairman and Azad Kashmir High Court Justice M Tubassam Aftab Alvi issued the orders and after that the Geo News transmission was restored to various districts.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-36561-Geo-News-transmission-restored-in-AJK>

“Lok Virsa to celebrate Nowruz festival tomorrow”

The News, March 27, 2015

The National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage (Lok Virsa) would officially celebrate the Spring festival of Nowruz on March 28 with a number of colourful activities. The event is being organized under the supervision of Executive Director, Lok Virsa Dr Fauzia Saeed. Nowruz means 'New Day' and it marks the arrival of Spring. Pakistan celebrates this Spring Festival with countries like Afghanistan, India, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-6-309120-Lok->

Virsa-to-celebrate-Nowruz-festival-tomorrow

M Rafique Goraya, “Irsa starts filling Mangla dam on River Jhelum”

Business Recorder, March 26, 2015

The Indus River System Authority (Irsa) started filling the almost emptied Mangla dam on the River Jhelum and reduced the outflow from 37,000 cusecs to 15,000 cusecs, Punjab Irrigation engineers noted on March 25. They stated since river Kabul and river Chanab are contributing more than enough water to meet needs of the Sindh province for sowing of early Kharif crops, the water regulatory body has reduced outflows both from the Tarbela and Mangla dams for the time being.

<http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/1165112/>

Fact sheet on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir

| | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Total area of Jammu and Kashmir | 222,236 sq kms |
| Area of under illegal Pakistani occupation (PoK = AJK + Gilgit Baltistan) | 78114 sq kilometres |
| Area of J&K under Chinese occupation <i>Area ceded to China by Pakistan</i> | 42,685 sq kms 5,180 sq kms |
| Together Pak-China | 120,799 sq kms |
| Area with India | 101437 sq kms |

Administrative Divisions: Two, namely Mirpur-Muzaffarabad (referred to as Azad Jammu & Kashmir or AJK by Pakistan) and Federally Administered Gilgit-Baltistan (FAGB).

Area ceded to China by Pakistan: 5180 sq. kilometres (Area of Shaksgam Valley)

(Source: Jammu & Kashmir Government website at <http://www.jammukashmir.nic.in/>, accessed on November 14, 2010)

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)

Area: 13,297 square km

Population: 2.973 million (1998 population census), Male, 1.850 million; Female, 1.832 million

Capital: Muzaffarabad

Kashmir (Muzaffarabad Division) comprises of 3 districts: Bagh, Muzaffarabad and Neelum, Hattian

Jammu (Mirpur Division) comprising of 5 districts: Bhimber, Kotli, Mirpur, Sudhnati/Pallandari and Rawalakot/Poonch, Haveli

President: Sardar Yaqoob Khan

Prime Minister: Chaudhry Abdul Majeed

AJK Council: Total 12 members

AJK Legislative Assembly: Total seats are 49

Ethnic Groups: Gujjars, Jats, Mughal, Rajputs, Sudhan, Awan, Qureshi, Pashtuns, Shins, Ladakhi, Baltis etc.

Religious Groups: Sunni, Ahlehadith, Shia, Nurbakhshi, Christians, Qadianis, Hindus

Languages: Punjabi, Hindko, Pahari, Kashmiri, Balti, Puriki, Shina

Political Parties and Groups: United Jammu and Kashmir Peoples' National Party, AJK Muslim Conference, International Kashmir Alliance, JK National Party, Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (Amanullah), Peoples United Action Committee, All Parties National Alliance (APNA)

(Source: Azad Jammu & Kashmir Government website at <http://www. www.ajk.gov.pk/>, accessed on November 14, 2010)

Gilgit-Baltistan

Area: 72,496 sq. kilometers

Population: 870,347 (1998 population census)

Capital: Gilgit

Districts: Nine

Baltistan Region (part of Ladakh) is divided into Ghanche, Skardu, Kharmang and Shigar districts

Gilgit Region is divided into Astore, Diamer, Ghizer, Hunza-Nagar and Gilgit districts

Ethnic Groups: Shin, Balti, Puriki, Ladakhi, Wakhi, Yashkun, Tibetan, Mongol, Tatar, Mon, Pashtun, Khowar, Dom, Gujjar, Rajput and Kashmiri

Religious Groups: Shia (Twelvers), Nurbakhshi (Twelvers), Ismaili, Sunni, and Ahlehadith

Languages: Shina, Balti, Wakhi, Khowar, Gujjari, Burushaski, Puriki, Kashmiri, Pashto

Gilgit-Baltistan Council: Total 15 members

Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly: Total 33 members (24 members directly elected)

Governor of G-B: Pir Karam Ali Shah

Chief Minister G-B: Syed Mehdi Shah

Political Parties and Groups: Balwaristan National Front (BNF), Gilgit-Baltistan Thinkers Forum, Gilgit-Baltistan, United Movement (GBUM), Baltistan National Movement, Karakoram National Movement, Gilgit Baltistan Democratic Alliance (GBDA), Gilgit Baltistan National Alliance (GBNA), All Parties National Alliance (APNA)

(Sources: Jammu & Kashmir Government website at <http://www.gilgitbaltistan.gov.pk>, & website of the Balwaristan National Front, <http://www.balawaristan.net>, accessed on November 14, 2010)

Disclaimer

PoK News Digest is a collection of news reports and press releases published in various newspapers and local media related to Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK), referred as 'Azad Kashmir' and 'Gilgit Baltistan' by the government of Pakistan. The news reports have been abridged to provide clarity. IDSA is not responsible for the accuracy and authenticity of the news items.

POK NEWS DIGEST



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