

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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CPEC Gilgit-Baltistan **POK**
Economic Initiative
Transformation irrigation channels
provincial status



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No. 1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg
New Delhi-110 010

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Political Developments

'Political uncertainty in Centre hampers GB's transitional plan'

The Express Tribune, March 16, 2022

The “political unrest”, triggered by opposition parties’ no-confidence move against Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan, is believed to have hampered progress on the transformation of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) into a provisional constitutional province. The temporary constitutional setup was proposed for GB to increase its representation in parliament without affecting the larger “Kashmir cause.” It has been noted that the attention on GB's constitutional status has been diverted due to the tug of war at the centre, as there is no seriousness in the proceedings as all eyes are on the PM and the no-confidence motion. These developments came in the backdrop of the formation of a “transitional plan committee” consisting of 13 GB's parliamentarians to chalk out modalities once the region enters into the “constitution and becomes part of Pakistan.” The former law minister Aurangzaib Khan said that the GB government is only interested in securing a full five-year term, not the provincial status. He further noted that the committee working on the transitional plan simply “lacks authority” because it was not formed by the federal government, adding that only an official committee formed by the federal government could be authorised to work on subjects such as constitutional matters. However, the minister for planning

and development, Fatehullah Khan denied that the political turmoil in the centre had anything to do with the transitional plan towards “integration of GB into Pakistan’s constitution.” The minister also said that they are working to ensure GB has tax exemption and existing subsidies in the long term while its financial requirements could be met from sectors including hydropower, mines, minerals and tourism development. Meanwhile, it has also been noted that the federal government has finalised a transition plan which requires the funding of 500 billion over the next 10 years, in addition to other changes in taxation and revenue laws.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2348269/political-uncertainty-in-centre-hampers-g-bs-transitional-plan>

'AJK PM urges people to participate in Kashmir rally'

Daily Parliament Times, March 16, 2022

The Prime Minister (PM) of “Azad’ Jammu and Kashmir” (AJK), Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi has appealed to the people of the state to fully participate in the Kashmir rally being organized by the All Parties Kashmir Conference on March 17. The ‘AJK’ PM noted that, after the success of Kashmir solidarity rally in Islamabad, a grand Kashmir rally is being organized in Muzaffarabad to draw world attention towards the “fast deteriorating political and human rights situation in the Indian occupied Kashmir.” While terming it as a national cause, the PM said that people should rise above their

party politics and participate fully in the Kashmir solidarity rally.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2022/03/16/pm-niazi-urges-people-to-participate-in-kashmir-rally/>

‘APKC rally at Muzaffarabad calls for end to Human Rights Violations, early solution of Kashmir dispute’

Daily Parliament Times, March 17, 2022

The Kashmiri leaders hailing from “both sides of the Line of Control” (LoC) called on the international community to discharge its legal and moral responsibilities to help “stop unabated human rights violations being committed by the Indian occupation forces” in the United Nations (UN) recognized disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. While addressing a massive rally held under the aegis of All Parties Kashmir Conference (APKC) at Muzaffarabad, the “Kashmiri leaders” condemned “India’s policy of oppression” and demanded the international community to take effective notice of the “Indian state terrorism in the region.” They said that it was high time that the UN must take concrete steps to get its unanimously adopted resolutions on Kashmir implemented so that the Kashmiris could be able to decide their political faith. While expressing their solidarity with the Kashmiri in the “occupied Kashmir”, the AJK leadership across the political spectrum assured them that the people of “Azad Kashmir” stand shoulder to shoulder with them in their just struggle for the right to self-

determination. They also rejected all the actions the Indian government had taken in “occupied Kashmir” since August 5, 2019, and stressed that the day is not far when the “blood of Kashmiris will come to fruition.” While speaking on the occasion, the AJK president, Sultan Mehmood Chaudhary thanked people and the APKC leadership for organizing a grand solidarity rally and said that he had arranged massive rallies in different European and western countries and the reason behind holding a rally in Berlin was to convey a message to world powers that if German people could trample down the Berlin wall under their feet, why not the Kashmiris?. The president said that he had consulted the leadership of “Azad Kashmir” as well as the Hurriyat leadership of “occupied Kashmir.” He said that the final decision to march towards the LoC would be taken after taking all stakeholders on board.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2022/03/17/apkc-rally-at-muzaffarabad-calls-for-end-to-hros-early-solution-of-k-dispute/>

‘Kashmiris neither accept Shimla agreement nor do they recognize LoC:’ AJK president

Daily Parliament Times, March 18, 2022

The president of “Azad Jammu and Kashmir” (AJK), Sultan Mehmood Chaudhry has said that “people of Kashmir neither accept Shimla agreement nor do they recognize the Line of Control” (LoC) because Kashmiris had not been “party to this

agreement.” The president said that the Shimla agreement has no binding whatsoever on Kashmiris as “the agreement had practically lost its applicability and relevance as more than 50 years had passed since it was signed by the then leadership of India and Pakistan.” The ‘AJK’ president said that “at this critical phase of the Kashmir issue”, it is the responsibility of all of us to highlight the Kashmir issue and expose “India’s relentless and brutal suppression at international level.”

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2022/03/18/kashmiris-neither-accept-simla-agreement-nor-do-they-recognize-loc-ajk-president/>

‘Kashmir being on OIC foreign minister’s conference agenda is a significant development:’ PM of ‘AJK’

Daily Parliament Times, March 20, 2022

While welcoming the upcoming Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) foreign minister’s moot, the Prime Minister (PM) of “Azad’ Jammu and Kashmir” (AJK), Abdul Qayyum Niazi has expressed the optimism that the OIC would raise its voice for the Muslim Ummah especially for the people of the “Indian occupied Kashmir” (IoK), who have been reeling under “India’s relentless and brutal suppression.” The ‘AJK’ PM further said that “Kashmir being on the list of the agenda” of the OIC conference was a significant development and added that holding the second OIC conference, in a row, within a short period is a great diplomatic achievement of the PM of Pakistan

Imran Khan. Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi said that the world community’s silence over the sufferings of the people of Palestine and ‘IoK’ is a matter of serious concern. He said that under the given circumstances there was a dire need that Muslim countries should get united and noted that a “unity within the Muslim nations” was the key to resolving the “Kashmir issue” and Palestine.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2022/03/20/kashmir-being-on-oic-foreign-ministers-conference-agenda-a-significant-development-pm-ajk/>

Economic Developments

‘CPEC and geo-strategic significance of GB’

Editorial, Pakistan Observer, March 16, 2022

Due to the presence of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) among the “eastern powers” of the world, no one can deny the “geostrategic and socio-economic significance” of the region. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project has further boosted the “strategic importance” of GB to its highest levels. Consequently, in the eyes of several “defence analysts”, it has become a fact that in the coming years, the region would prove as a “battle-field for the regional and non-regional powers.” GB is located at a place where three great mountain ranges, Karakorum, Himalayas and Hindukush meet. It is the home of the world’s highest peaks, glaciers, coldest deserts, beautiful lakes, lush green valleys, rich cultures, attractive

historical tourist points, ancient routes and multi-ethnic societies. GB has always remained an attractive point for “foreign invaders, travelers and tourists” due to its unique topography as well as geostrategic position. China has devised the new mega road-map to transport its goods and commodities to the rest of the world by its new giant One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, known as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI project is a network of several highways and routes that connect China to every continent and almost the majority of the countries in the world. Pakistan’s part of the BRI project is known as CPEC and GB is the gateway of the project.

GB borders the new economic superpower China to the northeast, Afghanistan to the north-west, “India-occupied Kashmir” and Ladakh to the east, Khyber Pakthunwala (KP) province of Pakistan to the south and Russia is almost on its northern borders. Thus, the existence of GB on the world’s map hints us to ponder on the geo-strategic attraction of the region that is a huge flashpoint for the region. But, sadly, the socio-political conditions of GB has deteriorated. On one hand, the region lacks any defined “political identity” and remains in a “constitutional identity crisis” for almost seven decades. On the other hand, “disunity due to sectarian and lingual basis” has impeded the development of the region and less progress in socio-economic and political arenas has been made.

All segments of GB must deliberate and comprehend the political face of the region in the context of frequently changing scenarios. Gone are the days when we used to be a remote, undiscovered and underdeveloped part of the world. Now we have become a crucial and almost “integral part” of the world and our region weighs much value in the eyes of both regional and non-regional powers. The fast-emerging Chinese development has irritated the USA and there are vivid chances of converting the decades-long cold war to the hot war between the USA and China with their allies. The clash of two giant elephants will crush dwellers of lush green fields of GB as our real situation is quite miserable and we are divided into many sects, tribes and nations. We must develop the sense of a single nation and we must think over the backwardness of the people of GB both mentally and economically. We must pursue the real causes of disunity.

<https://pakobserver.net/cpec-and-geo-strategic-significance-of-gb-by-yawar-abbas-holla/>

‘Political interference blamed for stymieing GB’s development project’

The Express Tribune, March 16, 2022

An undue political interference has been blamed for one of Gilgit-Baltistan's (GB) most successful development projects, the Economic Transformation Initiative (ETI-GB), forcing sponsors to wind up operations in the region. The ETI-GB was a seven-

year development programme of the GB government, co-funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) with a total cost of 12 billion to boost regional economic activity through agriculture value-chain development. The project, however, started hitting snags towards the fag end of Hafeezur Rehman's government when it weakened and bureaucracy became stronger. The bureaucracy and the incumbent Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government allegedly attempted to replace the top management which ultimately put breaks on the project.

Recently, country director IFAD Pakistan, Hubert Boirard has written a letter to the ministry of economic affairs Islamabad, recommending a "winding up action plan" for ETI-GB. He further wrote that on November 9, 2020, the GB government formally expressed its interest to extend the activities of ETI-GB and IFAD supported this step with subject to (i) the ETI-GB agribusiness development component 2 is fully operational and that the 162 cooperatives already contractually engaged with ETI-GB, do not miss the 2022 agricultural campaign and (ii) the farmers benefitting from the 42,000 acres of new land developed under the ETI-GB will receive an official land titling letter as per agreement mentioned in both the IFAD and Government of Pakistan (GOP) financing agreement and the ETI-GB Principal Component 1 (PC1). He noted that "as of today and six months before the ETI-GB completion date, both

conditions are not satisfied," adding that the risk of losing the 2022 agricultural campaign for the 60,000 households supported through the 162 cooperatives is extremely high. The former Chief Minister (CM) of GB, Hafeezur Rehman in an interview said that the incumbent government was bent on ruining this project to discredit his government. It has also been observed that a former secretary planning initially created hardships for the ETI management in hiring staff and other matters and besides three regional coordinator posts, 18 other posts have been lying vacant for the past two years.

Similarly, in 3 years, some 20,000 acres of barren land received channel water through the construction of 50 irrigation channels while the rest is in the final stages of construction. Likewise, against the target of 400 kilometres (KM) road, 480 km roads were under construction at a rate of 2014 construction rates. It has also been noted that for the first time in the history of GB, 230 agricultural cooperatives were formed and registered covering about 50,000 households. The GB minister of planning and development, Fatehullah Khan said that he wasn't aware of the letter but emphasized that the GB government had almost fulfilled IFAD's demands on various sectors.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2348101/political-interference-blamed-for-stymieing-g-bs-development-project>

'The eleventh meeting of the 'Azad' Kashmir Development Working Party was held'

UrduPoint, March 17, 2022

The "Azad Kashmir" additional chief secretary, Dr Sajid Mehmood Chauhan chaired the 11th meeting of the "Azad Kashmir" development working party for the current financial year. The meeting was attended by representatives of the government of Pakistan and officers of the planning and development department. The meeting considered 10 projects of Kashmir development package worth over PKR 49 billion. Among the projects considered under the Kashmir project, the development package includes a project worth more than 21 billion for the rehabilitation of the affected population of the Line of Control (LoC). Similarly, plans worth over 95 crores for setting up of special protection unit in "Azad Kashmir" under physical planning and housing department, Kotli city sewerage line project worth 3.5 billion, 5.6 billion plans for the provision of basic medical facilities in 04 teaching hospitals, plan to provide basic medical services in 07 divisional headquarters hospitals in "Azad Kashmir" worth over 1 billion. Similarly, a plan for the establishment of a nursing college at Rawalkot with estimated 83 crores followed by a plan worth 5 crores for setting up service centres in "Azad Kashmir" to modernize the police department under government guidelines.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-3074778.html>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

'All parties Kashmir rally will be held to expose Indian measures in occupied Kashmir globally:' 'AJK' President

UrduPoint, March 15, 2022

The president of "Azad Jammu and Kashmir" (AJK), Sultan Mehmood Chaudhry, has said that the international community must take serious notice of the "Indian government's belligerence and its war frenzy attitude" that continue to pose a serious "threat to peace and stability in the region." The 'AJK' president made these views while addressing a press conference at Aiwan-e-Sadr Muzaffarabad. While referring to the recent incident of a missile "accidentally" being fired into Pakistan's Mian Channu area, the 'AJK' president said that the "missile mishap amply demonstrates the existing threat to the region's peace and security from India." He further said that India and Pakistan have fought three wars over Kashmir and leaving the two nuclear powers to their fate, was tantamount to endangering peace in the region. He stressed that the international community should not leave the two nuclear powers to their fate, but should play its effective role in resolving the "Kashmir issue" that has been the cause and consequence of tension in the region. He further said that "India was hell-bent on crushing the Kashmiris' struggle for the right to self-determination by using its military might", and added that "Indian state presence is an existential threat to

Kashmiris in the occupied Kashmir” with more than 900,000 Indian troops. He said that the “Indian army” were engaged in “war crimes” and the world was watching the “deaths and destructions” in Kashmir like a silent spectator. While stressing the need for “exposing Indian war crimes”, the president said that the government of the base camp had chalked out a comprehensive strategy to bring world attention towards the “widespread human rights violations being committed by the Indian occupation forces.”

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-3073616.html>

‘Speakers in a Webinar condemn restrictions on freedom of expression in occupied Kashmir ‘

Urdupoint, March 17, 2022

The speakers at a webinar hosted by the Kashmir Institute of International Relations (KIIR) in collaboration with the World Muslim Congress (WMC) have voiced “concerns over the criminalization of dissent by the ruling regime in the Indian occupied territory of Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK).” The webinar titled “Criminalization of freedom of expression in IoK” was held on the sidelines of the 49th session of the United Nations Human Right Council (UNHRC). The panelists hailing from different parts of the world including Mary Scully, Robert Fantina, Naila Altaf Kiyani among others. The moderator of the event and the KIIR chairman Altaf Hussain Wani said that the right to freedom of

peaceful expression and assembly was a fundamental human right as enshrined in article 19 of the UN human rights bill among other international treaties. He said that “surveillance on print and digital media, ban on political activities, peaceful assembly and right to expression and witch-hunt against Kashmiri rights activists by the Indian occupation authorities go largely unnoticed at international level.” He said that the Press Council of India, a government body, in its report has documented evidence of many Kashmiri journalists that speak volumes about how the “Indian government was using repressive laws to stifle the dissent in the region.”

While citing article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and other international laws, the panelists stated that the law clearly states that “everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression.” They said that it was unfortunate that the “Indian regime” has been using these laws as a “tool to criminalize peaceful expression in the disputed territory.” The speakers further alleged that the unwanted curbs on media such as “surveillance, formal/informal investigations, harassment, intimidation,” restrictions in all the process of news-gathering have hugely “hampered the journalistic activities” and were amongst the tactics the “Indian government” has been using to “silence the independent media and people voices in Kashmir.” The panelists alleged that “the occupied territory has witnessed an alarming

increase in attacks on peaceful speech and expression, especially after August 5, 2019, when Indians in brazen violation of the international covenants stripped Kashmir of its special status."

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/islamabad/national-news/live-news-3074779.html>

'All Political Parties are on the same page on Kashmir Issue:' Sardar Tanveer Ilyas

Jammu and Kashmir Times, March 17, 2022

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), "Azad Jammu and Kashmir" (AJK) president, Sardar Tanveer Ilyas said that the time had arrived to resolve the "Kashmir dispute" in line with the aspirations of the Kashmiri people and the base camp fully stand with their brothers and sisters of "occupied Kashmir." He said that all parties Kashmir rally would be held in the capital Muzaffarabad in the light of the decisions of the all parties Kashmir conference held under the chairmanship of the president of 'AJK', Sultan Mehmood Chaudhry on 30th January. While stressing the need for expressing solidarity with the people of "occupied Kashmir", Tanveer Ilyas said that in addition to the entire organisation of PTI "Azad Kashmir", all political activists, civil society members would come out and join in the rally as everyone is on the same page on the Kashmir issue.

While commenting on filmmaker Vivek Agnihotri's "hatred and anti-Muslim film" 'The Kashmir Files', he said that "anti-Muslim" slogans had

started echoing in Indian cinemas after the release of the film which strengthened and widened the "hatred between Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims, which is nefarious agenda of India "Hindutva government." He further said that through demonstrations and rallies, the world's attention would be drawn towards "occupied Kashmir", and added that due to the growing ideology of "Hindutva in India, mosques and imambargahs were not safe." He alleged that "in India, our sisters and daughters cannot go out with their heads covered", and noted that the time had come to launch an aggressive campaign against "India's atrocities" so that the world could put pressure on India and implement the United Nations (UN) resolutions.

<http://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Resize-of-FRONT-PAGE-17.jpg>

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Compiled by
Mohd. Usman Bhatti

Edited By
Dr. Smruti S Pattanaik

Disclaimer

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MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

No. 1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg
New Delhi-110 010

Telephone: 91-11-26717983; Fax: 91-11-26154191

Website: www.idsa.in; Email: pokdigest@gmail.com