

POK

News Digest

A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

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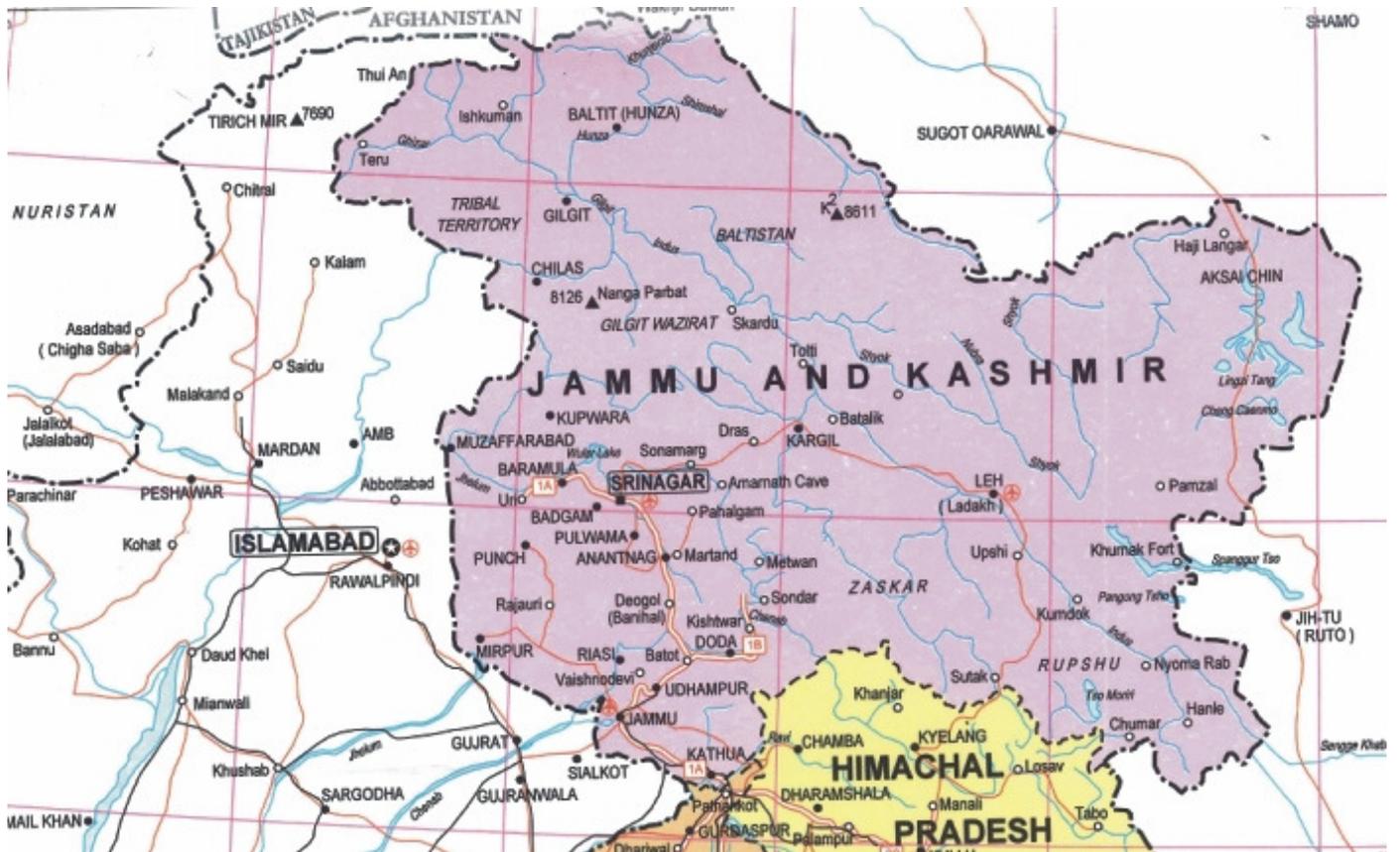
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Jammu & Kashmir

In this Edition

The debate around possibility of making Gilgit Baltistan a province of Pakistan is eliciting protests from several quarters as reports in the current issue indicate. The issue concerning provincial status for Gilgit Baltistan has been in news not only in Pakistan and India but reactions have been pouring in internationally and at various forums. The provincial proposal has become contentious considering the negative impact it may have on Pakistan's Kashmir policy and also on the future of the Kashmir issue. It is argued that making Gilgit Baltistan a province of Pakistan would amount to undermining the Kashmir issue as Gilgit Baltistan is one of the essential and larger unit of what comprised the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir back in 1947. India has a legal claim on the territory given the Instrument of Accession was signed in India's favour by the then Maharaja of Kashmir Hari Singh. Pakistan's proposal to convert Gilgit Baltistan into a province has caused great dissention across the spectrum and it is probably due to such quarters of resistance that no decision on the proposal has been taken so far. The committee formed to deliberate upon the issue and come out with suitable measures was constituted long ago and it is also known to have submitted its report to the government of Pakistan. However, the decision is still pending in view of the complexities it involves. India too has raised a strident objection against any change in the status of the region. As a result, Pakistan is now finding itself in a serious dilemma on how to politically empower Gilgit Baltistan without really hurting its Kashmir strategy.

Making Gilgit Baltistan a province would require Pakistan to make constitutional adjustments. Apart from this, this would also mark a significant shift in Pakistan's Kashmir policy which has always considered Gilgit Baltistan a part of the Kashmir issue. It was owing to this Kashmir link that the region's political and constitutional status has been kept under suspension for nearly seven decades. Secondly, the wide support base Pakistan enjoys amongst the separatists in J&K also stands threatened by this bid to elevate Gilgit Baltistan as a province. The separatist constituency in J&K has clearly conveyed its reservations on the matter to Pakistan at the highest level. Not only the separatists in J&K but the political leadership in the so called AJK is also very critical of Pakistan's proposal to make Gilgit Baltistan a province. The leadership in the so called AJK believes this could harm their broader political objectives vis a vis Kashmir.

Priyanka Singh

Political Developments

“Government Evolves Strategy to Upgrade Institutional Infrastructure in State: Masood”

Radio Pakistan, April 1, 2017

Azad Kashmir President Sardar Muhammad Masood Khan stated that the government has evolved a comprehensive strategy to upgrade the institutional infrastructure in the state. Addressing a briefing by AJK Information Technology Board in Muzaffarabad, he noted use of modern technology is dire need of the time to enhance performance and accuracy in the institutions. Sardar Masood Khan also stated computerization of land records would significantly reduce public grievances in this regard.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/01-Apr-2017/government-evolves-strategy-to-upgrade-institutional-infrastructure-in-state-masood>

“Body pledges to highlight Kashmir issue”

The Nation, April 1, 2017

Newly-formed AJK Television Journalists’ Association (TJA) pledged to enhance professional capability of young journalists to enable them highlight Kashmir freedom movement at international forums. Talking to media, AJK TJA spokesperson Jalaluddin Mughal stated that the office-bearers of the organisation elected include: President Muhammad Arif Urfi, senior vice president Amiruddin Mughal, vice president Sardar Raza, general secretary Asif Raza Mir, additional secretary MD Mughal, joint secretary Faiza Gillani, finance secretary Ashfaq Shah and information secretary Ch Naseer. On the occasion, he pledged to expand the organisation activities to the entire state and enrol members from all districts of AJK. He stated that senior journalist Imtiaz Awan has been nominated as chairman coordination committee to organise divisional and district level bodies. He stated that the elected leadership of the organisation is committed

to achieve all objectives regarding highlighting Kashmir issue at international forums and preparing newcomers for the mission.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/01-Apr-2017/body-pledges-to-highlight-kashmir-issue>

Khadija Zahid, “Fate of Gilgit Baltistan under CPEC”

Pakistan Today, April 2, 2017

With the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) progressing at full steam, the strategic significance of the region, in terms of trade and investment, has increased more than ever. The fate of Gilgit Baltistan is interlined with the Kashmir issue in respect to the provision of constitutional rights and provincial autonomy. However, the current scenario is most likely to change because of the rising concerns of GB under the umbrella of CPEC. Two concerns, in particular, have been voiced by GB locals; one, the right to compensation for the acquisition of community land and two, constitutional rights. Secondly, Gilgit Baltistan demands the government of Pakistan to determine its constitutional status. Although GB is given semi-provincial status under the Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009, it is deprived of the basic right to vote and representation in the constituent assemblies of Pakistan. And, certainly, this has given rise to identity crisis and a sense of political deprivation among GB masses. The Gilgit Baltistan council comprises 15 members, six of whom are directly elected through GB legislative assembly and remaining members are nominated by the PM, who is the head of the council. Other members include the federally appointed governor as vice-chairman and chief minister. Thus, the region’s legislative assembly is toothless since it is governed by the civil-military bureaucrats. Also, it has no representation in the National Finance Commission. The National Finance Commission is constitutionally established which ensures equal

distribution of revenues between the federal and four provincial governments of Pakistan.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/04/02/fate-of-gilgit-baltistan-under-cpec/>

“Country Put on Path of Progress: Barjees”

Radio Pakistan, April 2, 2017

Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Barjees Tahir stated that the performance of PML-N led government is a guarantee for its victory in 2018 general elections. Addressing a gathering in Nankana Sahib, he noted that the vision of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is being acknowledged by world and he has put the country on the path of development and prosperity. He also stated that the country is moving to zero-load shedding and ten thousand megawatt electricity will be added into the national grid till December 2017. He further stated the government will hand over a developed country to the nation before general election.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/02-Apr-2017/country-put-on-path-of-progress-barjees>

“Pakistan’s Karot Dam reaches \$1.7b financial close”

Deal Street Asia, April 2, 2017

China Three Gorges South Asia Investment Limited noted on March 31, that it has achieved a financial close on the \$1.7 billion 720-megawatt Karot hydroelectric power project and the second phase of a 100MW wind power project, from a group of Chinese investors and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). This is also marked as the first infrastructure deal under China’s One Belt One Road initiative. Other investors include Export-Import Bank of China, China Development Bank and Silk Road Fund. The wind power project costs \$250 million, resulting in an aggregate cost of \$1.95 billion. The project is partially funded by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group. Currently, China Three Gorges is developing six energy projects with an investment of \$6 billion in

Pakistan. The Karot hydropower project and the wind power initiative are part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative and is also the first hydropower project being developed in Pakistan by China Three Gorges. It is located on the Jhelum River and it is the fourth among five hydroelectric power projects to be developed along the river. The project includes the construction of a 95m high dam, four headrace tunnels and a new public bridge across the river, as well as a substantial spillway structure to manage flood flows. Construction of the Karot scheme is due to be completed in 2021.

<https://www.dealstreetasia.com/stories/69258-69258/>

“From PM Secretariat: New chief secretary for AJK”

The Express Tribune, April 2, 2017

The federal government appointed Dr Ijaz Munir as Chief Secretary of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, official source noted. Dr Munir was serving as additional secretary at the PM Secretariat, Islamabad before his new assignment. He will replace Sikander Sultan Raja, a BS-21 officer of Pakistan Administrative Service, who has been transferred and posted as additional secretary in-charge of the Aviation Division, a senior official of the AJK government stated on April 1.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1371881/pm-secretariat-new-chief-secretary-ajk/>

“India has kept control on Kashmir at gunpoint: Siraj”

The News, April 3, 2017

Jamaat-i-Islami Ameer Sirajul Haq stated that a total strike in Kashmir during Indian Prime Minister Modi’s visit there has proved that not a single Kashmiri was ready to support India. He was addressing the 15th annual convention of PIMA at Mirpur in Azad Kashmir. The JI chief noted that some world powers wanted the Line of Control to become permanent border between India and Pakistan but that was not the solution of the Kashmir issue. He further

stated veteran Kashmiri leader Ali Geelani and Asiya Andrabi despite their old age were fighting Indian brutalities and were demanding that Pakistani rulers do not to yield to Indian pressure. Siraj, however, noted the Pakistani rulers who lived like Moghul princes were a divine curse for poor people. He also stated those surrendering to Obama and Trump and the IMF could not bring revolution.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/196172-India-has-kept-control-on-Kashmir-at-gunpoint-Siraj>

“UN observers probing LoC ceasefire violations”

The Nation, April 4, 2017

The United Nations military observer group mandated to monitor the ceasefire violations in the disputed Jammu and Kashmir region is investigating the reported violations in the Azad Kashmir side of the Line of Control, a spokesman for the UN Secretary-General stated on April 3, while urging India and Pakistan to find a peaceful solution of the issue through dialogue. “Alleged ceasefire violations are being investigated by the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) in the Pakistan administered side of the Line of Control at Domel, Kotli and Bhimber, where the security situation has been tense,” Spokesman Stephne Dujarric stated in a statement while answering a question at the regular noon briefing. The UN has been voicing concerns over the continuing tensions between India and Pakistan. “We continue to underline the need for the parties to find a peaceful solution through engagement and dialogue,” the statement added. UNMOGIP was deployed in January 1949 to supervise the ceasefire between India and Pakistan in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. While Pakistan allows UN observers to monitor the LoC, India does not. The group, based in Rawalpindi, is composed of 44 military observers, supported by 25 international civilian personnel and 47 local civilian staff.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/04-Apr-2017/un-observers-probing-loc-ceasefire-violations>

Ashiq Hussain Bhat, “CPEC: Boon or Bane for Kashmir?”

Kashmir Reader, April 4, 2017

For some years now, the talk of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been ringing the air in South Asia, in general, and Kashmir, in particular. Kashmiris are happy that Pakistan and Pakistan administered parts of Kashmir state would achieve economic prosperity with the help of China that is funding the project. Since the geo-politically ambitious trade Corridor passes through Kashmir State territory of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) before entering mainland Pakistan; and since Azad Jammu Kashmir is also going to be linked with it, the people of the rest of the state, especially the people of Kashmir Valley have already expressed their desires to be connected with it. CPEC enthusiasts have set up “think tanks” for highlighting its advantages, and its potential for final resolution of long-pending Kashmir dispute. These “think tanks” maintain that people of Kashmir also have a right to share the benefits of trade like the people of AJK and GB so that the evils of poverty and unemployment could be addressed.

<http://kashmirreader.com/2017/04/04/cpec-boon-or-bane-for-kashmir/>

Sardar Sikander, “PML-N to turn up the heat on PPP”

The Express Tribune, April 5, 2017

Turning up the heat on the PPP, the ruling PML-N has decided not only to extend full support to the top officials deputed in Sindh but has also sped up in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) anti-corruption drive that primarily focuses on alleged graft of the PPP’s last regime in the region. Apparently, these developments negate the earlier impression of a secret deal between the PPP and the PML-N, reports of which surfaced after return of the PPP’s former minister Sharjeel Memon to Pakistan and release of model Ayyan, Hamid Saeed Kazmi and Dr Asim Hussain. Sources noted the federal government has

decided that it will extend complete support to the top officials deputed in Sindh – the PPP’s political powerhouse – on behalf of the Centre. These include inspector general police (IGP), Rangers’ director general and chief secretary.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1374524/pml-n-turn-heat-ppp/>

“Strong, Stable Pakistan in Interest of Kashmiris: Haider”

Radio Pakistan, April 5, 2017

The trainee officers of Command and Staff College Quetta called on AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan in Muzaffarabad on April 5. Talking to the delegation, he noted a strong and stable Pakistan is in the interest of Kashmiri people. The AJK Prime Minister stated that people of Kashmir are struggling to achieve their internationally recognized right to self-determination. Referring to development of Azad Kashmir, Raja Farooq Haider noted there is a great potential of hydro-power generation and tourism in the state. He stressed the need to exploit these resources for the development and prosperity of the area.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/05-Apr-2017/strong-stable-pakistan-in-interest-of-kashmiris-haider>

“India underlines claim over PoK, Gilgit-Baltistan”

The Indian Express, April 5, 2017

India on April 5 underlined its claim over territories of Jammu and Kashmir under Pakistani occupation amid moves by Islamabad to declare Gilgit- Baltistan as a new province. External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj asserted in the Lok Sabha that it would be wrong to think that India will let go off any part of its territory. She made the statement after BJD leader Bhartruhari Mahtab wondered if the government has even properly responded to Pakistan’s move to make Gilgit-Baltistan its fifth province. Noting that some Western countries had criticised it, he asked, “What is our government’s response?” He asked the government to not forget history or it will be

condemned to repeat it. In her response, Swaraj noted the Indian government had opposed Pakistan’s move the very day it got to know about it. “Even raising a doubt over this government that it will let go of some area will be wrong,” the minister added.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-pakistan-occupied-kashmir-gilgit-baltistan-4600568/>

Tariq Naqash, “British MPs call themselves ‘advocates of Kashmir’”

Dawn, April 7, 2017

A six-member group of British parliamentarians on April 6 called for an early solution to the Kashmir issue in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions and as per the aspirations of its people. Calling themselves advocates of Kashmir, they asked the UN to send an independent commission to ascertain the situation on the ground. These views were shared during a reception given by President Sardar Masood Khan of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) to the visiting UK MPs. British lawmakers went to Muzaffarabad for a daylong visit to meet officials, people and Kashmiri refugees living in camps. Group leader MP Rehman Chishti, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Pakistan, stated: “It’s important for the parliamentarians of the United Kingdom to come to Kashmir, meet people and ask them about their problems and that how can they (MPs) help resolve the Kashmir issue in accordance with their wishes,” noted the MP, who was born in a suburban area of Muzaffarabad.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1325381/british-mps-call-themselves-advocates-of-kashmir>

“Government to introduce reforms in state institutions: PM”

Business Recorder, April 7, 2017

Minister of Azad Jammu & Kashmir Raja Muhammad Farooq Haider Khan stated on April 7 that the elements involved in corruption, malpractices and irregularities in public sector institutions will be made accountable. The Prime Minister made these

remarks while talking to Minister for Sports, Youth and MDA Affairs Chaudhry Muhammad Saeed, who called on him at the PM house. Ch. Saeed briefed the Prime Minister of MDA affairs besides the measures initiated by the government for the reformation of institutions on a war-footing basis. Raja Farooq stated, he wants to see MDA a transparent and corruption-free institution serving the people with sincerity. He also stated that a large number of overseas Kashmiri's have started investing at other places after being affected by the corrupt practices of MDA officials. He assured that government would take measures to restore the confidence of the investors by providing them a conducive environment to attract investment in Mirpur by the expatriates. The Prime Minister noted that the outgoing government had put state resources on loot sale.

<http://www.brecorder.com/2017/04/07/342464/government-to-introduce-reforms-in-state-institutions-pm/>

“Not aware of move to make Gilgit-Baltistan province: Pak envoy”

The Economic Times, April 7, 2017

Pakistan's envoy to India Abdul Basit today noted he is not aware whether Gilgit-Baltistan was being announced as the country's fifth province, even though the region is part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. Basit stated he has not seen any proposal pertaining to the matter and was unaware if it was “really happening”. “I have to be very frank and honest with you I have not seen any proposal to this effect so I would not like to comment on that because I have not seen any proposal to this effect,” he noted in an interview. Asked about dialogue between the two neighbours, he noted Pakistan does not believe in preconditions and as “mature nations” both countries must avoid them. “In past whenever we engaged with each other, we were able to lead good positive results,” he stated.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/not-aware-of-move-to-make-gilgit-baltistan-province-pak-envoy/articleshow/58071915.cms>

“AJK to Build a Tourism Corridor under CPEC”

PKKH, April 7, 2017

Reports from Muzaffarabad note that the government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir have planned to build a tourism corridor in the valley to make it easier for travellers to come to visit scenic spots in the region. This is another project that is going to be part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The tourism corridor will be around 190 kilometres long and built “under the CPEC project”, according to a statement on April 6 made by President of AJK, Masood Khan. The President revealed this while talking to a deputation of investors who had gone from Karachi to Muzaffarabad that this project is part of a bigger project to lay down 1450 kilometres of new roads in the valley. He also told the investors that the AJK government had estimated the cost of the infrastructure project and found it to be around Rs.22 billion. Besides this, the Azad Jammu and Kashmir government is also taking measures to build the infrastructure in other parts of the territory. CPEC is becoming a hot hub for all sorts of investments – private and governmental – from a lot of different countries. Just yesterday there was news about private businesses of the United Kingdom and its government being interested in investing in CPEC and the surrounding region, especially Pakistan. This is particularly because of Pakistan's recent economic growth.

<http://www.pakistankakhudahafiz.com/travelogue/ajk-build-tourism-corridor-cpec/>

Tariq Naqash, “PTI doubts ‘sincerity’ of PML-N govt in AJK”

Dawn, April 7, 2017

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) on April 7 raised serious doubts about the “sincerity” of PML-N government to bring about long due amendments in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Interim Constitution Act, 1974. PTI alleged that the PML-N governments in Islamabad and Muzaffarabad were using constitutional reforms as a “ploy” to convert

Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) into a province of Pakistan in a move which could “demolish the case of Kashmiris” at United Nations. “Lately (AJK) Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider visited me to garner support on constitutional amendments but I have strong reservations about the intentions of the PML-N leadership in this regard,” noted PTI regional chief Barrister Sultan Mahmood at a press conference. Mahmood further stated that the AJK Council was constituted under the interim constitution to ensure “coordination” between Muzaffarabad and Islamabad but it had turned out to be a “state within the state.” He also alleged that not only the council funds were being brazenly squandered on lavish expenses and so-called development schemes, recruitments against the council posts had always been made by its federal in-charge minister from among his electorate instead of the Kashmiri State Subjects.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1325510/pti-doubts-sincerity-of-pml-n-govt-in-ajk>

“SCO pledges latest info-tech facilities in AJK”

The Nation, April 8, 2017

State-run Special Communications Organisation (SCO) is all set to provide latest internet services soon. It has conducted successful experiment of swift internet providing 3G and 4G domain in Azad Jammu & Kashmir on its S.Com Cell Service. It will launch the service in the coming days soon after the formal approval by the government of Pakistan, stated Sector Commander of the SCO Azad Jammu & Kashmir Maqbool Ahmed while talking to journalists. Senior SCO officials including Commanding Officer of the SCO Mirpur division Lt-Col Syed Ayad Hassan, Major Muhammad Mufeed, Media Advisor Jehangeer Shehzad and Zonal Sales Head Syed Zakiul Hassan Gillani were also present. The Sector Commander also revealed to launch SCO Easy Paisa, S-Load, Triple-Play and other identical services besides at subsidised tariff in S.Com Cell service for its valued customers. Time is swiftly getting nearer to furnish entire Azad Jammu & Kashmir including all three districts of Mirpur division with the fast-paced domain of information technology - the 3G and 4G, meeting the long-standing demand of the

local internet users for swift linking with rest of the world through this latest internet service.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/08-Apr-2017/sco-pledges-latest-info-tech-facilities-in-ajk>

“China tightens grip on Gilgit-Baltistan”

Sunday Guardian, April 8, 2017

Both China and Pakistan are not only ignoring the legitimate concerns raised by the GB local population, but are also violating their human rights to achieve the CPEC objectives. GB is a pathway to CPEC, yet according to GB residents, participatory development is non-existent. One of the concerns voiced by GB locals is right to compensation for the acquisition of community land. Resentment is also growing amongst the local population over Chinese presence in the GB region. The locals feel Pakistan and China are exploiting their resources. Several local NGO delegations and intellectuals who study the region are voicing these concerns in the United Nation Human Right sessions. Pakistan has very recently made a move to declare GB its new province. China is running several projects in the area—from mining exploration to highway construction. And hence, there are a lot of Chinese workers in the GB region. The striking concern is that the locals are not allowed to do mining and they do not get many jobs. At the same time, China has posted its soldiers to protect its objectives and assets in GB, something that has been strongly opposed by India. These soldiers and the fact that most of the workers are also from the People’s Liberation Army have perturbed and petrified native people. While Mandarin language and its script have been introduced as an optional language in schools in the region, there is a complete ban on the teaching of the native Balti language, which is like Tibetan. Thus, the region is under virtual Chinese occupation due to military presence and hyperactive economic activity. Through expansion of its proxy occupation of Gilgit Baltistan along with CPEC, China is getting a step closer to its strategic vision of “Zhong Guo (Mandarin)” the Central Kingdom.

<http://www.sundayguardianlive.com/world/8990-china-tightens-grip-gilgit-baltistan>

“Huge public sector corruption annoys AJK PM”

The Nation, April 9, 2017

Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider noted that the elements involved in ill deeds, corruption, malpractices and irregularities in the public sector institutions have to face ruthless accountability. At the Prime Minister House, Minister for Sports, Youth and MDA Affairs Chaudhry Muhammad Saeed briefed him about the MDA affairs and the measures initiated by the government for the reformation of the institution on a war-footing. Raja Farooq stated that he wanted to see the MDA absolutely transparent and corruption-free institution serving the people with fair and sincere approach. He also stated that a large number of overseas Kashmiris have started launching investments at other places after having been utterly sick and perplexed of the corruption and malpractices prevailing in the MDA. He noted that the government would move to restore the lost confidence of the investors by giving them conducive atmosphere to attract maximum investment in Mirpur. The AJK prime minister underlined that the past government put the state resources on loot sale. He further stated that his government stopped the unlawful exercise through executing stringent steps for the betterment and uplift of the common man in AJK.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/09-Apr-2017/huge-public-sector-corruption-annoys-ajk-pm>

“Development of rural areas to be prioritised in next budget: AJK PM”

Daily Times, April 11, 2017

Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister (PM) Raja Farooq Haider Khan stated that top priority will be given to the development of rural and far-flung areas of the state in the next budget. Talking to various delegations in Muzaffarabad on April 11, he noted that the cabinet has been directed to prepare projects according to needs of the people. Raja Farooq Haider stated that sufficient funds will be allocated for promotion of tourism in Azad Kashmir.

<http://dailytimes.com.pk/pakistan/11-Apr-17/development-of-rural-areas-to-be-prioritised-in-next-budget-ajk-pm>

May 2017

“AJK lawyers flay President House’s response”

The Nation, April 12, 2017

The Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) expressed dismay over the alleged hostile response of the President of Pakistan’s office to AJK SCBA’s request for a meeting with President Mamnoon Hussain. An emergency meeting of the AJK Supreme Court Bar Association, chaired by its President Syed Nishaat Hussain Kazmi Advocate, expressed extreme regret over the alleged negative response by the office of the President of Pakistan to the request by the AJK SCBA seeking his meeting to discuss the current situation of Kashmir and its proposed plan to highlight the Kashmir issue at national and international level. Through a unanimously passed resolution in the meeting, the AJK SCBA declared to give a befitting response to the visit of the President of Pakistan to AJK whenever he manages in the future.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/12-Apr-2017/ajk-lawyers-flay-president-house-s-response>

“CM Approves Establishment of Gilgit Baltistan Development Authority”

Radio Pakistan, April 12, 2017

Gilgit Baltistan Chief Minister Hafiz Hafeez-ur-Rehman has given approval for establishment of Gilgit Baltistan Development Authority (GDA). He granted the approval while presiding over a meeting in Gilgit. Now Gilgit Development Authority and Skardu Development Authority will function under GB Development Authority. Addressing the meeting, Chief Minister stated that urban intercity Transport system will be introduced in Gilgit for which international transport company Volvo has showed interest. He also noted in this regard that a development project would be included in Annual Development program next year.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/12-Apr-2017/cm-approves-for-establishment-of-gilgit-baltistan-development-authority>

Ghulam Abbas, “AJK govt ‘backs’ reforms for Gilgit-Baltistan”

Pakistan Observer, April 13, 2017

As the government moves forward to introduce constitutional reforms in Gilgit Baltistan (GB), Kashmiri leaders have stood to oppose any move of making the region fifth province of Pakistan through constitutional amendments. Addressing an All Parties Conference (APC) organised by a local daily at the National Press Club on April 12, Kashmiri leaders including former prime ministers Sardar Attique Ahmad Khan and Sultan Mahmood, Chaudhry Lateef Akbar, Abdul Rasheed Turabi and others stated that any move to change the constitutional status of the region would tantamount to divide the state of Kashmir. Attique noted that merging GB with Pakistan would have implications on the dispute over Jammu Kashmir. “If Pakistan imposes its sovereign writ over Gilgit-Baltistan, New Delhi will then have a political and moral right to integrate Kashmir with India. Thus with one stroke, Pakistan will be helping India to consolidate its writ on Kashmir,” he noted. The mode of the conference was suddenly changed when AJK Minister for Information Mushtaq Minhas indirectly favoured the reform package, saying that the area was deprived of rights for 70 years.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/04/13/ajk-govt-backs-reforms-for-gilgit-baltistan/>

Shabbir Mir, “Rs2b released for road projects”

The Express Tribune, April 14, 2017

The Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) government on April 13 noted it will conduct a fresh survey in the region to identify who were the people who deserved to receive subsidised wheat. G-B has been receiving a subsidy on wheat for the past four decades ever since former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto introduced a package for the people owing to rampant poverty in the region and high costs in transporting the grain to the remote, mountainous region. However, the subsidy has become a bone of contention in G-B’s power corridors after the federal government hinted last year that it may withdraw the subsidy. “The first

step will be to identify an organisation capable of carrying out the survey for us,” G-B Parliamentary Secretary on Law and Justice Aurangzeb Khan noted before media on April 13. “The cabinet today gave the approval for starting a search and shortlisting survey organisations,” noted Khan in his talk before the media following the six-hour long cabinet meeting. However, Khan assured that the government had not yet decided to withdraw the facility completely. Instead, he explained that the matter would be discussed in the G-B Legislative Assembly to make it a targeted subsidy.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1383132/g-b-mulls-limiting-provision-subsidised-wheat/>

“Steps Being Taken To Address Problems of Overseas Kashmiris: Haider”

Radio Pakistan, April 14, 2017

The Azad Kashmir Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan noted that concrete measures are being taken to address problems of overseas Kashmiris. Talking to British Lord Qurban Hussain in Islamabad on April 14, he lauded the role of overseas Kashmiris and Pakistanis for highlighting Kashmir issue in its true perspective at various international forums. Lord Qurban Hussain on this occasion assured to extend his support for highlighting Kashmir issue at international fora.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/14-Apr-2017/steps-being-taken-to-address-problems-of-overseas-kashmiris-haider>

“Three RAW operatives nicked in AJK”

The Nation, April 15, 2017

The police on April 14 successfully busted a group of terrorists, working for notorious Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). The arrested suspects confessed to have been involved in several acts of terror on the directives of RAW. DIG Police Poonch Division Chaudhry Sajjad told the media personnel that the arrested terrorists were behind Abbaspur blast in September, 2016. Sajjad further stated that RAW had assigned tasks to the

three terrorists aimed at targeting Combined Military Hospitals (CMHs), CPEC projects, Chinese engineers and other sensitive facilities. The police officer further narrated that the detained terrorists had crossed the Line of Control (LoC) several times to meet Indian army and RAW's officers. "These terrorists were in contact with Major Ranjit, Major Sultan and Subedar Sandeep", claimed Ch Sajjad. The DIG Poonch disclosed that RAW offered heavy monetary reward to them for carrying out appalling acts of terrorism across Pakistan. Apart from espionage, the arrested miscreants smuggled wine from Jammu & Kashmir to Azad Kashmir. The main accused Khalil was nabbed from Dheerkot whereas others two were arrested upon a tip-off. Police have seized pictures of sensitive facilities and other espionage stuff from their possession.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/15-Apr-2017/three-raw-operatives-nicked-in-ajk>

Afzal A. Shigri, "Land ownership rights"

Dawn, April 15, 2017

Given that Gilgit-Baltistan is strategically located at the entry point of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) route, it has assumed enormous strategic importance. Hence, any misstep in the governance of GB can have serious ramifications for the project. Given the high literacy rates in the region, its people are keenly aware of and sensitive to their hereditary rights to GB's resources. Their experiences have also made them wary; the Karakoram Highway, rather than bringing them the promised benefits, resulted in the transformation of Gilgit city to such an extent that it endangered the tranquillity of the entire area. Against this backdrop, it was expected that the authorities would have a greater awareness of the locals' sensitivities and prioritise their concerns. But in the very first case of acquisition — of a small piece of land for the special economic zone at Maqpun Das in Gilgit — a serious controversy has already been generated. It is observed that the government has been trying to take over the land in question without due compensation for the community, which has rights to this common land. Indeed, the decision is being taken on the basis of an

archaic law introduced by the Dogra ruler of yesteryears. The government of GB is acquiring land, without any compensation, by classifying it as state land. Paradoxically, in the adjacent district of Diamer, compensation for acquired land for public-sector projects has been paid.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1327031>

"AJK premier seeks India's economic blockade by OIC"

Dawn, April 17, 2017

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider on April 16 called upon the government of Pakistan to convince the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to carry out economic blockade of India because of rising atrocities in Kashmir. At a press conference, he noted India had been applying the same tactics that Israeli forces used against Palestinians. "We call upon the prime minister of Pakistan, Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, to reach the OIC for India's economic boycott so as to put pressure on her for the settlement of lingering Kashmir dispute as per the wishes of Kashmiri people," he noted. "Initially the government of Pakistan should send emissaries to all Islamic countries to update them about unrelenting state terrorism unleashed by Indian troops," he stated. The AJK premier further stated that Islamabad should also approach the United Nations to convene a special session of the Security Council on the rising human rights violations in held Kashmir.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1327449/ajk-premier-seeks-indias-economic-blockade-by-oic>

Muhammad Arshad, "Dar assures full support to AJK PM for development works"

Pakistan Observer, April 17, 2017

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, on April 1, stated that the Federal Government would extend all possible support to the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government for economic progress and undertaking development projects. In a meeting with Prime

Minister of AJK, Raja Muhammad Farooq Haider Khan, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar appreciated the development works being undertaken by the AJK Government and assured that full consideration would be extended to financial needs in this realm. Raja Farooq Haider apprised the Finance Minister about the ongoing and planned development projects for AJK and also informed him about the budgetary requirements in this regard. He further stated that preparations for the AJK budget 2017-18 were already underway and due focus would be paid to wellbeing of the people along with a spate of development works Finance Minister directed for preparation of proposals by the Finance Department AJK in consultation with the Finance Division for appropriate decisions prior to finalization of budget 2017-18. Constitutional matters pertaining to AJK also came under discussion and the Prime Minister informed that detailed proposals had already been prepared and presented for review of the Committee formed for the constitutional reforms.

<http://pakobserver.net/dar-assures-full-support-ajk-pm-development-works/>

Meraj Alam, “Powerhouse built in GB through trophy-hunting money”

The Nation, April 17, 2017

A community-based hydropower project in Gilgit-Baltistan in Sassi Haramosh area, which has been built through the Markhor Trophy fund, was inaugurated on April 16. In this connection, a ceremony of was held at Sassi Haramish. Dr Iqbal, minister for Law and Works was the chief guest on the occasion. Sajad Haider, secretary forest and wild life, Zafar Waqar Taj, secretary water and power, Deputy Commissioner Shigar Wali Khan and other officials also attended the ceremony. The 350 kilowatts powerhouse, which has become operational, would provide electricity to around 4,000 people of Haramosh valley in district Gilgit. Dr Iqbal while addressing the ceremony stated that the project would bring about a big change in the lives of the residents of the area. “Development cannot change the lives of people but it is thinking that changes the lives of people” he added. The money generated

through trophy hunting could be distributed among people of the area like past practice but the community of Haramosh preferred to invest it in development, resulting in construction of the hydropower project, which would provide electricity to the local people round the clock, he noted.

<http://nation.com.pk/newspaper-picks/17-Apr-2017/powerhouse-built-in-gb-through-trophy-hunting-money>

“GOVT to Hold LG Polls Under AJK Election Commission”

Radio Pakistan, April 18, 2017

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir government decided to hold next Local Bodies Elections under the AJK Election Commission. The decision was taken during the AJK Cabinet meeting held in Muzaffarabad on April 18 with Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider in the chair. The Cabinet decided to establish a Food Authority and a Food Testing Laboratory to provide quality edibles to the masses and have a check on substandard food items. Cabinet also decided to increase compensation of labourers and skilled manpower from two hundred thousand to four hundred thousand rupees in case of death during the work. It also decided to form a committee to curb cybercrimes. Addressing the Cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan stated the federal government has taken concrete steps for solution of the problems being faced by people in Azad Kashmir.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/18-Apr-2017/govt-to-hold-lg-polls-under-ajk-election-commission>

“Crackdown against encroachers in Gilgit”

The Express Tribune, April 18, 2017

The district administration launched a crackdown against encroachment in Gilgit city on April 17. Encroachers were warned to remove their illegal structures immediately, otherwise, they would be sent to jail. Gilgit Assistant Commissioner Naveed Khan and building inspector Mazhar Hussain along with relevant staff tightened the noose around encroachers in the Gilgit and warned encroachment mafia to remove illegal structures or face dire consequences.

Talking to the media, Hussain noted encroachment in Gilgit would not be tolerated. Adherence to building codes, he noted, were imperative for the construction of residential and commercial buildings.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1386631/crackdown-encroachers-gilgit/>

“Efforts Underway To Overcome Energy Shortage from GB: Jaffarullah”

Radio Pakistan, April 18, 2017

Deputy Speaker Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly Jafarullah Khan stated that all over efforts are underway to overcome energy shortage in Gilgit Baltistan. This he noted while talking to delegations in Gilgit on April 18. He pointed out that consultant services has been acquired to make the feasibility report of 20 megawatt Hanzal Power project and the feasibility report of ten megawatt capacity hydro power project at Skarkoi is in progress. He further stated that the contract of Naltar 16 megawatt power project has been already awarded to heavy mechanical complex. He also stated these projects after completion will help to eliminate power crisis from Gilgit-Baltistan.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/18-Apr-2017/efforts-underway-to-overcome-energy-shortage-from-gb-jaffarullah>

Dipanjay Roy Chaudhury, “Islamabad designs face Shia hostility in Gilgit Baltistan”

The Economic Times, April 19, 2017

Pakistan’s recent efforts to alter the status of disputed Gilgit Baltistan (GB) region under PoK has been facing resistance from the locals, who are largely from the Shia community and facing discrimination for decades. Tensions are rising in GB as significant part of the Shia population in GB feels that Islamabad had systematically marginalised them for decades. According to Senge Sering, president of the Institute of Gilgit Baltistan Studies in the USA, Islamabad’s administrative measures for the region so far does not focus on basic rights like child education, literacy and other basic services. All top officers in GB

administration are outsiders and therefore locals consider the government apparatus as an alien one, claimed Sering. GB Human Development Index is among the lowest in the region. Literacy rates are at 14% below Pakistan’s average literacy rate of 31%, while women literacy stands at 3.5%. Hospitals are also scarce and only one doctor is available for 6,000 persons. GB does not host any industry and 85% of the locals live below the poverty line, according to experts on the region.

<http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/islamabad-designs-face-shia-hostility-in-gilgit-baltistan/articleshow/58249727.cms>

Ali Hazrat Bacha, “Kashmir issue will reach logical end soon: AJK president”

Dawn, April 19, 2017

Addressing a news conference at the Peshawar Press Club, the AJK president noted he was hopeful that the Kashmir issue would soon reach its logical end. He also stated the Kashmir issue should be resolved through negotiations among stakeholders, while the United Nations should play due role for the purpose and if that didn’t happen, possible clash would have very serious consequences. The AJK president stated the day was not far away when Pakistan would be among developed countries. He stated the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project would further strength economic and trade activities between Pakistan and AJK.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1327899/kashmir-issue-will-reach-logical-end-soon-ajk-president>

“GOVT Taking Steps for Development of Rural Areas: CM”

Radio Pakistan, April 19, 2017

Chief Minister Hafiz Hafeez-ur-Rehman stated that Gilgit-Baltistan government is taking steps for the development of rural areas. This he noted while presiding over the first meeting of Board of Directors of Gilgit Baltistan Rural Sports program in Gilgit. He also stated an accord will be signed between

WAPDA and GBRSP for the rehabilitation of the affectees of Diamer Bhasha Dam Project. The meeting decided to include Member Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly Imran Nadeem as a member of the board of Director of GBRSP.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/19-Apr-2017/govt-taking-steps-for-development-of-rural-areas-cm>

“G-B CM directs officials to seek PC-I approval”

The Express Tribune, April 19, 2017

Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Chief Minister Hafeezur Rehman on April 18 directed the regional planning and development department to seek quick approval of a PC-I from the concerned quarters for maintenance of roads and other uplift schemes in the region. Talking to the secretaries of the Local Bodies and Works Departments and a delegation from Jalkot, Rehman stated that every segment of the society should play their role in making development projects sustainable. He also directed the Works Department to task contractors to continue work on ongoing projects especially with regard to maintenance of roads during Ramzan to ensure their timely completion. The chief minister added that reforms had been introduced in the health sector and a comprehensive incentive package had been announced for doctors. He added that a policy to regularise the services of 186 contractual doctors was under consideration.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1387633/g-b-cm-directs-officials-look-for-approval/>

“Six-month ban on land allotment in G-B”

The Express Tribune, April 20, 2017

Noting that establishing industries was key for burgeoning economic activity in the region, Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Chief Minister Hafeezur Rehman on April 19 announced special incentives for investors. A six-month ban on allotment of land in the region was also announced. Rehman noted this while chairing a meeting of the G-B Board of Investment (BoI) in Gilgit on April 19. With one eye on the multibillion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic

Corridor (CPEC), Rehman explained that the BoI had been established to project opportunities to investors in the region. The G-B chief minister, who also heads the investment body, stated that once industries are set up in the region it would bring with it an increased demand for power and hence a need for setting up more independent power producers (IPPs) in the region. Noting that the region had vast opportunities for investment and business, he stated that the newly formed BoI would help facilitate exploit these opportunities. Apart from fostering industrial and business opportunities, Rehman noted that G-B residents would be sent abroad so that they can earn foreign exchange. Once remitted, this money would help develop the region.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1388474/six-month-ban-land-allotment-g-b/>

Shabir Choudhry, “Another “victory” for Pakistan army”

Northlines, April 20, 2017

Brave army of Pakistan has registered another great victory against ‘bloody civilians’. This time their task was to capture a playground, where the local people also hold Eid and funeral prayers. The target area was a ground near Poonch River in a village called Chhani, near Kotli town in the Pakistani occupied Jammu and Kashmir. This remarkable victory is much better than that of Red Mosque, because there were no casualties in the battle of Chhani playground. The brave army men took control of the playground and the surrounding area, and have established their check post to ensure that no ‘bloody civilian’ can enter the ground. The local community leaders who arranged demonstrations against the Pakistan army action, and demanded army to leave the area and hand back the conquered ground to the local people were also taken care off. All five of them are behind the bars and are facing sedition charges. Operation of arresting these people was also carried out in a commando style. At night time men in uniform jumped over the walls of these people and broke into the houses. There was no issue of sanctity or integrity of homes, women and households. They were rounded up, and anyone who challenged them were harassed, abused, pushed

and dragged. To demand the Pakistan army not to take over a land which does not belong to them, is sedition in areas of Jammu and Kashmir occupied by Pakistan; and anyone who dares to disagree with this logic, can also face charges of helping and supporting the ‘traitors’ and ‘trouble makers’.

<http://thenorthlines.com/another-victory-pakistan-army/>

“PM Nawaz to visit mega power project in AJK”

Pakistan Today, April 24, 2017

Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif is scheduled to visit the state capital of Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) on April 29. During the visit, Prime Minister Nawaz will chair a meeting of the Pakistan Muslim League-N Kashmir chapter in addition to other engagements. He would also visit site of the Neelam-Jhelum hydro-power project. On this occasion, Prime Minister Nawaz will be briefed about the pace of progress on this mega hydel project which was scheduled to be inaugurated early 2018. He will also be briefed by the Planning and Development Department about the development projects. Besides President Masood Khan and Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan, members of federal and state cabinets would also be accompanying Prime Minister Nawaz during his visit to the state capital.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/04/24/pm-nawaz-to-visit-mega-power-project-in-ajk/>

“Kashmiri Pandits protests in front of Pak HC against Sharif’s move on Gilgit-Baltistan”

Daily Excelsior, April 24, 2017

Opposing the Nawaz Sharif Government move to make Gilgit-Baltistan fifth province of Pakistan, the Kashmiri Pandits United Forum (KPUF) staged a protest on April 24 and handed over a memorandum to the officials of the Pakistan High Commission in this regard. The memorandum, while stating that Pakistan had no locus standi to make any change in its status, stated, “Any change in the status of Gilgit-Baltistan will be a provocative step on behalf of Pakistan which will not be tolerated by the people of

J&K at any cost. Gilgit-Baltistan is and will remain part of J&K”.

<http://www.dailyexcelsior.com/kashmiri-pandits-protests-in-front-of-pak-hc-against-sharifs-move-on-gilgit-baltistan/>

“GBLA Passes Gilgit-Baltistan Probation of Interest on Private Loans 2017 Bill”

Radio Pakistan, April 26, 2017

Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) unanimously passed the Gilgit-Baltistan probation of interest on private loans 2017 bill during its proceeding in Gilgit. The bill was presented in the house by the law minister Dr. Muhammad Iqbal for approval. Taking part in the debate the members thanked the Gilgit Baltistan Government for getting approval of such important bill. During the session, Major Amin presented special committee report in which the committee recommended regularization of service of the contractual employees in Health department in Gilgit Baltistan. The house unanimously passed two resolutions. In the first resolution the house demanded to implement thirty two megawatt hydel power project of Attabad Hunza under public sector development program.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/26-Apr-2017/gbla-passes-gilgit-baltistan-probation-of-interest-on-private-loans-2017-bill>

Shabir Choudhry, “Why apprehensions about CPEC?”

Northlines, April 26, 2017

Chinese presence in Pakistan and in parts of disputed Jammu and Kashmir under the control of Pakistan is a great cause of concern not only to the local people but also to those who are concerned about peace and stability of the region and future ambitions of China in this region. Pakistani officials and media systematically churn out this message that India, America and some other countries are determined to derail the CPEC which is a ‘game changer for Pakistan.’ To these people, Pakistan’s future, security and prosperity is strongly linked with the CPEC. If the CPEC is completed, then Pakistan is saved; and

God forbid if the CPEC fails to materialise then future of Pakistan is in serious danger. This thinking and approach is dangerous for future of Pakistan. A country's future which has nearly 200 million people, with nuclear weapons and the 6th largest army is not, and must not be hemmed with one project, no matter how important that is. This strategy is not new. In the past Pakistani governments, in order to obtain political mileage, or to acquiesce people to their line of thinking have made the issues as a matter of life and death for Pakistan. Pakistan Muslim League-N is facing many problems and challenges, and among them is the forthcoming general election due to be held in 2018. They want to win it at any cost. Whether the CPEC is as fruitful to Pakistan as the government want people to believe or not, they will make it appear that the future and security of Pakistan hinges on the success of the CPEC.

<http://thenorthlines.com/why-apprehensions-about-cpec/>

“AJK MLAs repose confidence in Nawaz”

The Express Tribune, April 27, 2017

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly (AJKLA) on April 26 reposed full confidence in the leadership of Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif. According to Radio Pakistan, six resolutions expressing satisfaction over the performance of the Federal Government of Pakistan were presented in the assembly. The speaker put a combined draft of the resolutions before the House, which was adopted by the majority members. The joint resolution stated the country has taken off towards progress and prosperity as all indicators are positive. It stated any attempt to destabilise the government will be harmful for the growing economy and efforts to root out terrorism. The resolution asked the opposition parties to avoid any agitation that could destabilise democracy in the country. The resolution also lauded the efforts of PM Nawaz Sharif for raising Kashmir issue at United Nations and other international forums.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1394460/ajk-mlas-repose-confidence-nawaz/>

“AJK Legislative Assembly Passes Four Draft Bills”

Radio Pakistan, April 27, 2017

AJK Legislative Assembly, on April 27 unanimously passed four draft bills. The bills include, The Azad Panel Code (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017, The Zakat and Ushr (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017, The Power Development Organization (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017 and The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Ehtesab Bureau (Fourth Amendment) Act, 2017. Responding to call attention notice of MLA Riffat Aziz, AJK Minister for Education Barrister Syed Iftikhar Gillani stated bio-metric system is also being installed in educational institutions to ensure attendance of teachers. Replying to another call attention notice of MLA Chaudhary Shehzad Mehmood, he noted that funds are being allocated for construction of four kilometer roads in Chatter Domel. Later, the Speaker Shah Ghulam Qadir adjourned session sine die.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/27-Apr-2017/ajk-legislative-assembly-passes-four-draft-bills>

“GOVT to Ensure Protection of Life, Property of Citizens: Hafeez”

Radio Pakistan, April 27, 2017

Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Hafeez-Ur- Rehman stated protection of life and property of citizens would be ensured at any cost. This he stated while presiding over a meeting in Gilgit. The meeting expressed satisfaction over prevailing law and order situation. The Chief Minister directed law enforcement agencies to take action against those using black glasses, fancy number plates in vehicles and bikers who avoid use of helmet.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/27-Apr-2017/govt-to-ensure-protection-of-life-property-of-citizens-hafeez>

“Gilgit-Baltistan government to boost tourism”

The Nation, April 28, 2017

The Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) government decided to

put curbs on demonstrations and protests on main thoroughfares so as not to disturb the tourist traffic. Tourism is a major source of income for the territory, G-B CM Hafeez ur Rehman stated, adding that improved security situation had increased the footprints of visitors in the scenic valleys. However, to make sure that the visitors come and spend time and money in G-B, the local authorities should keep the roads open and not allow any group to block roads and highways to stage protests, he told a meeting held to review the law and order situation and the tourism sector. Chief Minister Rehman stated that tourism is thriving owing to peace in the region. "Inflow of visitors will benefit the common people of G-B," he noted elaborating that tourism generates economic activity in the valleys. From porters to tea vendors, jeep drivers, and resort owners everyone benefits from the arrival of tourists. Rehman attributed this growth in tourism to the improved law and order situation which he stated was the result of effective policies and continued efforts of the government and law enforcement agencies.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/28-Apr-2017/gilgit-baltistan-government-to-boost-tourism>

“NOC mandatory for foreigners visiting G-B”

Pakistan Today, April 29, 2017

Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan asked his ministry to ensure that foreigners travelling to Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) do not face unnecessary problems without compromising security. The ministry backed the issuance of no objection certificate (NOC) to foreigners for travelling to G-B stating that the measure has been in place since 1994. The interior minister has directed the ministry to simplify the process of issuance of NOC to foreigners, a spokesman from the ministry noted in a statement. As per the issued statement, boosting tourism and the people whose livelihood is associated with it in G-B is the government's priority. However, the security of the tourists must be taken care of, it added. As per various media reports, the interior ministry banned foreigners from visiting GB without NOC, which is obtainable from the ministry in Islamabad. A letter recently sent by the ministry to the G-B

government revealed that on several occasions, foreigners have been reported to have visited G-B without obtaining an NOC or security clearance from the ministry, which is in violation of the rules. The letter directed the authorities to ensure measures to stop the practice.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/04/29/noc-mandatory-for-foreigners-visiting-g-b/>

Tariq Naqash, “AJK opposition parties accuse PML-N govt of ignoring Kashmir issue”

Dawn, April 29, 2017

Leaders of three main opposition parties in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Legislative Assembly lashed out on April 28 at the PML-N governments in Islamabad and Muzaffarabad for “pushing the opposition to the wall and ignoring Kashmir issue for personal interests”. They particularly cited the visit of Indian business tycoon Sajjan Jindal to Murree and stated it not only made a “mockery of the National Action Programme but had also hurt the sentiments of Kashmiris”. These observations were made at a press conference addressed by Leader of the Opposition, Chaudhry Mohammad Yasin and former AJK premier Chaudhry Abdul Majeed of the PPP, Malick Muhammad Nawaz of the Muslim Conference (MC) and Abdul Majid Khan of the PTL. “The PML-N had made tall claims about good governance, but they cannot cite a single step over the past nine months that falls in this category,” Mr Yasin stated. He alleged that statements of PM Raja Farooq Haider about the opposition were marked by “prejudice and calumny, in sharp disregard to the decorum of the office he is holding”.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1329972>

“Pakistan imposed war on us, India never occupied our land: Gilgit-Baltistan”

Business Standard, April 29, 2017

Asserting that India has never committed any atrocities on the people of Gilgit or forcefully occupied its land like Pakistan, senior leader from

Gilgit Baltistan Abdul Hamid Khan stated that if a referendum was to take place then the people from the disputed territory would chose New Delhi over Islamabad for governance any given day. He further noted that Pakistan must follow United Nation resolutions, withdraw its forces from Gilgit province and let a referendum take place under the world body's supervision. "I think if referendum happens people will vote for India as it has never committed any atrocities against our people," Khan, Chairman of Balawaristan National Front (BNF) stated. He further stated that Pakistan has used the Gilgit province and imposed war upon their people while India never occupied any of their land. The remark comes close on the heels of Pakistan's Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination Riaz Hussain Pirzada forming a committee headed by Advisor of Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz in order to declare Gilgit-Baltistan as its fifth province. However, India has flatly rejected this move claiming that Gilgit-Baltistan is an integral part of its territory.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/international/pakistan-imposed-war-on-us-india-never-occupied-our-land-gilgit-baltistan-117042900413_1.html

Meraj Alam, "GB asks Centre to end NOC condition for foreign tourists"

The Nation, April 30, 2017

Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Hafizur Rehman approached the federal interior ministry against its decision of making no-objection certificate (NOC) compulsory for foreign tourists. Earlier, the federal interior ministry had imposed a ban on visits of

foreign tourists to Gilgit-Baltistan without obtaining a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the ministry of interior Islamabad. The chief minister in a letter addressed to the Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, asked for the movement of the foreigners to Gilgit-Baltistan without prior NOC from the interior ministry Islamabad. The letter further added that the interior ministry notification seriously dented our efforts. Gilgit-Baltistan is a famous destination for international tourists, adding that the GB government and tours operators have worked hard to attract the tourists from all over the world. The letter further added that the government and tour operators have been attending almost all international tourism festivals, expos and meetings, and showcasing the beauty of GB. The letter stated very encouraging results are coming of the efforts made by the government and tourists operators in this regard.

<http://nation.com.pk/newspaper-picks/30-Apr-2017/gb-asks-centre-to-end-noc-condition-for-foreign-tourists>

Economic Developments

Altat Hamid Rao, “Call to withdraw extra taxes”

Pakistan Observer, April 3, 2017

Three of the most important segments of the civil society of Mirpur including traders, social workers and the entrepreneur affianced with the real estate on April 1 strongly protested over the recent imposition of new additional charges against the already allotted plots in various housing and commercial sectors by the Mirpur Development Authority. The leaders of the three segments, at the first leg of the their protest program in the city against the imposition of the new levies by the MDA, have demanded of the higher authorities of the MDA to immediately withdraw the additional development charges imposed on the already allotted plots. The new levy was imposed in March 21 meeting of the MDA’s Board, chaired by the Incharge Minister of the MDA and local Member of AJK Legislative Assembly, Ch. Muhammad Saeed.

<http://pakobserver.net/call-to-withdraw-extra-taxes/>

“ERRA Completes Over 5,300 Projects in AJK”

Radio Pakistan, April 9, 2017

The Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) completed more than five thousand three hundred projects in different sectors damaged in 2005’s fatal earthquake in Azad Kashmir. Official sources noted that these sectors include education, health, communication, environmental protection and governance. Sources noted that work on remaining nearly sixteen hundred projects is also in progress in the quake-hit areas.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/09-Apr-2017/erra-restored-over-5-300-projects-in-different-sectors-in-ajk>

“9 industrial zones to be built under phase-II of CPEC”

Dunya News, April 24, 2017

Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform stated that Pakistan will witness industrial revolution with the initiation of second phase of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). As per details, nine industrial zones will be built in all of the four provinces, Gilgit Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and FATA under phase-II of CPEC. Officials disclosed that work has been started in this regard on suggestions of four provinces and the stated industrial zones will be erected within three years. The sixth sitting of Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) has decided to build an industrial zone in every province of country. It should be recalled that under Phase-I of CPEC, infrastructure uplift projects have been completed across Pakistan.

<http://dunyanews.tv/en/Business/385154-9-industrial-zones-to-be-built-under-phaseII-of-CPEC>

International Developments

“Ex-Norwegian PM backs Kashmir cause”

The Nation, April 1, 2017

Former prime minister of Norway Kjell Magne Bondevik on March 31 visited AJK’s capital and supported the Kashmiris’ struggle for their right to self-determination. The former PM called on the AJK leaders and discussed the current affairs regarding the Kashmir dispute. AJK President Sardar Masood Khan and the Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan briefed the guest. After visiting the refugee camps, Mr Bondevik noted with concern what he heard about the grave human rights violations. He underscored that Jammu and Kashmir conflict is a long standing issue and needs a political solution taking into account the UN resolutions and will of the Kashmir people along both sides of the LOC. Mr Bondevik is on a two day visit to Pakistan and AJK at the invitation of President AJK. He has been the prime minister of Norway from 1997-2000 and 2001-2005. He is the founder and President of the renowned Norwegian think-tank, Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/01-Apr-2017/ex-norwegian-pm-backs-kashmir-cause>

“MEP Julie Ward seeks global campaign for Kashmir”

Pakistan Today, April 1, 2017

Julie Ward Member of European Parliament from Britain (MEP) flew from London to Geneva to join Kashmiri activists at the 34th session of United Nations Human Rights Council. Kashmir came into the spotlight when International Muslim Women’s Union organised a side-line event in the UN building where Julie Ward was a key speaker.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/04/01/mep-julie-ward-seeks-global-campaign-for-kashmir/>

“Anti-Pakistan protest in London over human rights violations in PoK”

DNA, April 11, 2017

Exiled Kashmiris held a demonstration outside the Pakistan High Commission in London to oppose Islamabad’s move to make Gilgit Baltistan the country’s fifth province. Held under the aegis of Jammu Kashmir National Independence Alliance (JKNIA), the protesters also raised the issue of gross human rights violations in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). They also stated that they were forwarding a memorandum to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan which states that Pakistan’s attempt to annex Gilgit-Baltistan into Pakistan is a clear violation of international laws and UNCIP resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan has no right to alter the geographical status of the region? A committee headed by the Pakistan Prime Minister’s Adviser on Foreign Affairs, Sartaz Aziz, had proposed giving the status of a province to Gilgit Baltistan, which is part of princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan would make a constitutional amendment to change the status of the region, through which the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes.

<http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-anti-pakistan-protest-in-london-over-human-rights-violations-in-pok-2396695>

Prasun Sonwalkar, “Valley Kashmiris in UK oppose Pakistan’s Gilgit-Baltistan move”

Hindustan Times, April 27, 2017

A newly formed organisation in Britain comprising individuals with origins in the Kashmir Valley met Pakistan High Commissioner Zahid Hafeez Chaudhri on April 26 to oppose Islamabad’s plan to declare Gilgit-Baltistan as its fifth province. Kashmir Voice International (KVI), formed in January 2017 to highlight the ground situation in Jammu and Kashmir

to the Western world, told the envoy that Gilgit-Baltistan is an integral part of Jammu and Kashmir. Any move by Pakistan to integrate it will be a negation of the country's stand at international level on the Kashmir issue, KVI told Chaudhri. It stated that advocating UN resolution for the whole state and choosing to integrate a part of it could not go together. According to KVI chairman MA Raina, Pakistan's plan is likely to encourage India to change the status of Ladakh to that of a Union Territory. He referred to a recent conference of thousands of people in Ladakh in this connection. Raina stated people from both sides of the Line of Control will resist the plan. The Pakistan government should not take any initiative that can weaken the Kashmir issue at the international level, a KVI statement noted. According to KVI secretary Javid Kakroo, the Kashmiri diaspora in Britain with origins in the valley number nearly 10,000. Another section of the Kashmiri diaspora here hails from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/valley-kashmiris-in-uk-oppose-pakistan-s-gilgit-baltistan-move/story-SKcXUqf2G5Uam0XpfOfqOI.html>

“Swedish envoy promises help for tourism, education in G-B”

The Express Tribune, April 29, 2017

Swedish Ambassador Ingrid Johansson on April 28 stated that every possible support would be provided to Gilgit Baltistan (G-B) government for promotion of tourism sector besides providing scholarships to students to get quality education in Sweden. She

stated a comprehensive tour to Sweden would be arranged for the staff of Karakorum International University for their capacity building purposes. During a meeting with the G-B Governor Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan at Governor House, Johansson appreciated the high literacy rate in the region. The governor told her that G-B was an important region of Pakistan and was a centre of tourism where hundreds of thousands of tourists come every year. He urged Johansson to use her office in convincing the Swedish government for providing scholarship to students of G-B in Swedish universities.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1396322/swedish-envoy-promises-help-tourism-education-g-b/>

Other Developments

Shabbir Mir, “Statistics indicate alarming high rates of stunting in G-B”

The Express Tribune, April 10, 2017

Chronic malnutrition causes debilitating effects, diminishing human intellectual capacity, physical growth and economic drainage, say nutrition experts. This was explained at a workshop organised by Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Department of Planning and Development’s Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) unit on April 9. The workshop was meant to provide information and data to provincial line departments including health, population welfare, agriculture, food, livestock, fisheries, education, social protection, women, civil society alliance, and academia of Karakoram International University about economic consequences of malnutrition in Pakistan as per the statistical indicators of National Nutrition Survey 2011. During the session, SUN Program Consultant Dr Nadir Shah told the participants that malnutrition caused 3% annual GDP loss to the national economy which was less than the 2% from energy crisis. He also stressed on the need to accelerate the currently cost effective process of intervention by flour fortification. An investment of one dollar earns eight dollars in return, while successful holistic interventions in global practices have shown that a dollar invested earns 16 dollars in return, he noted, explaining how nutrition improvement was the most suitable investment to sustain national economy and human capital.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1379323/statistics-indicate-alarming-high-rates-stunting-g-b/>

“HRCP condemns GB women ban from Qaqlasht Festival”

The Nation, April 19, 2017

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has taken serious exception to the banning of women from attending the traditional Qaqlasht Festival, stated HRCP spokesperson Asma Jahangir. This is discrimination and will send a negative message to tourism as well. Such violation of women’s rights is against the laws of the country and the women of Gilgit Baltistan should not be treated any differently to women living in Pakistan. The people of Gilgit Baltistan desire to gain freedom for themselves but without extending these freedoms to their women in letter and spirit, their society will not progress. The germs of intolerance were unknown to Gilgit Baltistan in the past. This new unacceptable trend of oppressing women should be checked now before the cancer of intolerance spreads in the beautiful land of Gilgit Baltistan.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/20-Apr-2017/hrcp-condemns-banning-of-gb-women-from-qaqlasht-festival>

Extracts From The Urdu Media

“Matter of Constitutional Rights, PPP has to clear its stance”

Daily Baade-e-Shimal, April 1, 2017

Senior leader of the PPP, Taj Haider, stated that Gilgit-Baltistan cannot be made a province because that move will dent the Kashmir cause. Making Gilgit-Baltistan a province is not a smart move. Senator Raza Rabbani opposed induction of Gilgit-Baltistan into NFC in view of provincial interest of Sindh, stated Taj Haider. It is not a secret that since the last 70 years people of Gilgit-Baltistan are asking for their constitutional rights and more importantly they are asking peacefully. It is also true that whatever G-B got over the years in terms of administrative powers, it was during the tenure of the PPP. Termination of FCR, other administrative reforms and the current status, all are gifts from the PPP to people of Gilgit-Baltistan. It is also a fact that it is the PPP that taught these people to speak up and demand political rights. However, people still have expectations from the PPP. But the recent statements from PPP's top leadership including Raza Rabbani have only disheartened the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. People are getting angry and, therefore, the PPP is losing fast its support in the region. It is unfortunate that PPP is opposing G-B's constitutional rights at the time when Prime Minister has formed a committee to give G-B its due rights. Some so called Kashmiri leaders are also opposing the move to declare GB a province. These few Kashmiri leaders are doing that because they cannot afford to lose privileges they are enjoying because of keeping Kashmir issues entwined with GB. They are holding offices at the centre but these Kashmiri leaders never raise GB's issues and crises.

<http://www.dailybaadeshimal.com/?page=cGFnZS00&dt=MDQtMDEtMjAxNw>

“Will start Movement against a move Making GB a Province : Sardar Attique”

Daily Mahasib, April 7, 2017

Sardar Attique, leader of Muslim Conference stated that Nawaz Sharif wants to divide the state of Kashmir. But his party will not let this happen, Attique made these statements in his address to Muslim Conference activists. He further noted that his party will start a movement to halt this move of making GB a province. According to Attique, Nawaz first wanted to make GB a province and then Azad Kashmir. By doing this, Pakistan will lose its stand on the Kashmir issue forever. The Muslim Conference is not against the people of GB. His party supports giving GB an internal autonomy and institutional reforms. But any move to integrate GB with Pakistan will face stiff resistance from people of Azad Kashmir and also from Jammu & Kashmir.

<http://mahasib.com.pk/epaper/page.php?id=1&edition=muzzaffarabad&dt=07-04-2017>

“Need to resolve Kashmir issue through Dialogue”

Daily Mahasib, April 10, 2017

The President of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Maulana Fazlur Rehman stated that they want to resolve Kashmir issue through talks with India. He was addressing his party workers on a three day convention at Nowshera. He aspires of having friendly neighbourly relations. Politically it was a very powerful show by Rehman. Rehman is the chairman of the Kashmir Committee. As Rehman stated good things about neighbours he should also have made a statement in favour of Kashmir. He should have signalled them of unity and support. At least half a sentence would have been enough.

<http://mahasib.com.pk/epaper/page.php?id=4&edition=muzzaffarabad&dt=10-04-2017>

“Kashmiri Leadership’s opposition against constitutional rights will spread hate”

Daily Baad-e-Shimal, April 16, 2017

A provincial minister for construction Dr. Mohammad Iqbal stated that the opposition from Kashmiri leadership on GB’s constitutional rights will be having no impact. He further stated that GB has no relations with them. Come what may GB will get its rights, stated the minister. These people opposed 2009 package also. On the contrary GB leadership always raised voice regarding ‘oppression’ on Kashmiris. These peoples are on a mission of spreading hatred only. Gilgit-Baltistan is not linked to Kashmir or Kashmir issue. Gilgit-Baltistan has its own identity. Dr Iqbal is apt when he stated that these leaders are political losers. They only want to create controversy so that they can again come into limelight. By doing this they are only creating hatred among people. History is evidence that these Kashmiri leadership had never supported GB’s legitimate grievances and problems it is facing. But they do only one thing- just to create hurdles in the development and progress of GB. By doing this they have created so much venom and hatred amongst the people of GB against them. There is also a possibility that people of GB will come out on the streets against Kashmiri leaders.

http://www.dailybaadeshimal.com/popup.php?r_date=04-16-2017&img=04-16-2017page-4-4

“CPEC and Kashmir issue: What is the relevance?”

Daily Mahasib, April 21, 2017

Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi made it clear that CPEC has nothing to do with the Kashmir issue. He further stated that CPEC is an economic project and it will not change China’s stand on Kashmir. India like other states should also join One Belt One Road, noted the minister. India is trying its best to isolate Pakistan but instead it herself got isolated diplomatically. China wants to make India understand the importance of OBOR but India does not want to understand. America wants India to play the role of policeman in the region and India thinks

that trade and connectivity in the region cannot succeed without its approval. However, it is a fact that Kashmir issue is a reality and attached with it are emotions, aspirations and responsibility of one nation. Many wars have been fought on Kashmir issue and still war is a lingering possibility on the South Asia region because of it. CPEC is an economic corridor between China and Pakistan and it would not be having any impact on the Kashmir issue. India has made CPEC an ego issue.

<http://mahasib.com.pk/epaper/page.php?id=4&edition=muzzaffarabad&dt=21-04-2017>

“Display of Weapons Banned in GB”

Daily Salaam, April 22, 2017

In order to main law and order, authorities have imposed ban on displaying weapons. The ban has also been extended to showing of weapons or firing shots during marriage ceremonies. Anyone found displaying weapons publically will be given one year imprisonment and will be charged with a fine. Authorities have also ordered law enforcement agencies to monitor marriage ceremonies and other festivals. These steps are being taken to ensure peace and stability is not being affected. Government wants to make sure that any untoward incident should not happen. These precautionary measures are also being taken to make CPEC successful.

<https://www.dailysalam.com/index.php>

Fact sheet on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir

Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK)

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 Muhammad Masood Khan

Prime Minister: Raja Muhammad Farooq Haider Khan

AJK Council: Total 17 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.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: Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan

Chief Minister G-B: Hafiz Hafiz-ur-Rehman

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 to 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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