



**IDSA Research Project on PoK**  
**Round Table on 19 August 2010**

**Developments in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK): Options for India**

Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) consists of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)' and 'Gilgit Baltistan'. PoK is part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and integral part of India. PoK is now under illegal occupation by the government of Pakistan. Pakistan divided this occupied territory into two different regions, i.e., AJK and Northern Areas (which was renamed as Gilgit-Baltistan only in 2009). The territory called 'Northern Areas' was practically ceded to Pakistan and the 'AJK' was given the trappings of a country-like structure, but kept under the strict control of the Pakistani state. The nominal electoral process undertaken in AJK has been continually manipulated to suit the agenda of the establishment of Pakistan.

Due to the absence of any legitimate democratic structure of governance in PoK, there has been a perpetual demand from a large section of the people to grant them more autonomy and independence in managing their own affairs. However, Pakistan has not allowed these forces advocating independence to participate in the elections and dealt with them with a heavy hand. The European Parliament's report drafted by Baroness Emma Nicholson in 2008 took note of the situation in 'AJK' and held that the area under Pakistan control "suffers from extreme poverty and neglect, with enormous deficiencies in basic literacy, access to healthcare, lack of democratic structures and major deficiencies in the rule of law and justice".

The condition of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan has been even worse. As a Shia majority region, it has been the target of Sunni-sectarian violence since the 1980s. Moreover, until 2009, they had no representative system and were ruled directly from Islamabad. Pakistan has gone on exploiting the natural resources of the region without giving any attention to the legitimate demands of the people. Moreover, the region provides Pakistan with strategic access to China through the Karakoram Highway. The people of PoK have expressed their disillusionment with the Pakistani state quite forcefully in recent years. The popular resistance against the Diamer-Bhasha dam being built in this region with Chinese help is a clear indication of this. Pakistan's efforts to bring in nominal reforms in the system of administration have been met with widespread popular resistance. For example, the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self Governance Package 2009 was rejected by the people as mere eyewash. They argued that

these ordinances would not in any way contribute to the strengthening of the political processes and creation of meaningful and effective democratic institutions.

PoK is rich in water resources and has been a critical source for hydropower generation and irrigation for Pakistan. However, half of the population in PoK does not have access to power and potable water. Moreover, the construction of dams has adverse ecological effects for the people of the region especially because the region lies in an extremely sensitive seismic zone. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan have also raised concerns about the inundation of many rich archaeological sites due to the construction of the Diamer-Bhasha dam. While the reservoir would be in Gilgit Baltistan, the power-house is being deliberately built in Diamer, which is in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, to deprive them of their rightful share in the royalty.

The sense of alienation prevalent since the last sixty years has been further accentuated due to the flawed policy of the Pakistan government over the years. This region, which is rich in resources, has been subjected to ruthless economic exploitation by Pakistan. In recent years, a new generation of educated youth has started raising its voice against the policies of the Pakistani state and sought complete independence from its control. Many of them have raised the issue of illegal occupation of their territory by Pakistan in international fora and have even expressed their dismay at the way India has approached this region, over which it has sovereign claims.

Pakistan ceded the Trans-Karakoram Tract, part of the PoK, to China by in 1963. The Karakoram Highway was built through this territory to link Pakistan with China. China has gained considerable foothold in PoK by way of infrastructure development and helped Pakistan in exploiting the resources of this region. The Chinese presence in PoK is increasing steadily. China is involved in the construction and upgradation of numerous roads, bridges and hydro-electric projects. The Chinese link with Pakistan through the PoK lends strength to the China-Pak nexus which has been of great security concern for India.

India has consistently maintained that the occupation PoK by Pakistan is illegal. There is a parliamentary resolution which specifies India's stand, and moreover, twenty four seats have been reserved in the J&K legislature for the areas under Pakistani control. However, there is a view that the Indian position on PoK has not been articulated emphatically in recent years. The awareness in India about the legal and constitutional status of PoK is low.

Pakistan regards Kashmir as the "core issue" in Indo-Pak relations and would like to discuss it with India. However, Pakistan is reluctant to discuss PoK with

India. In fact, its recent actions have been directed towards separation of Northern Areas (Gilgit-Baltistan) from Kashmir. The Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self Governance Package actually weakens Pakistan's claims on Gilgit-Baltistan. This should be noted in India.

In this context, it is necessary for India to study and analyse the recent developments in the region and revitalize its claim on this territory. Having achieved a breakthrough in promotion of cross LoC trade and people to people contacts, India should make serious efforts to reclaim PoK before it is too late.

The one-day round table will seek to explore the following:

- What are the recent political developments in in both 'AJK' and Gilgit-Baltistan? What is the impact of the Empowerment and Self Governance package in Gilgit Baltistan?
- What are the main grievances of the people in both the regions and what is their attitude vis-à-vis Pakistan at the moment?
- How do people look at the increasing Chinese presence in the area and the Pakistan-China collaboration to extract the (mineral and hydel) resources of the region?
- What are the expectations of the people of PoK (AJK and Gilgit Baltistan) from the Indian state?
- What should India do to increase its leverages in the area which is legally its own?