

POK

News Digest

A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

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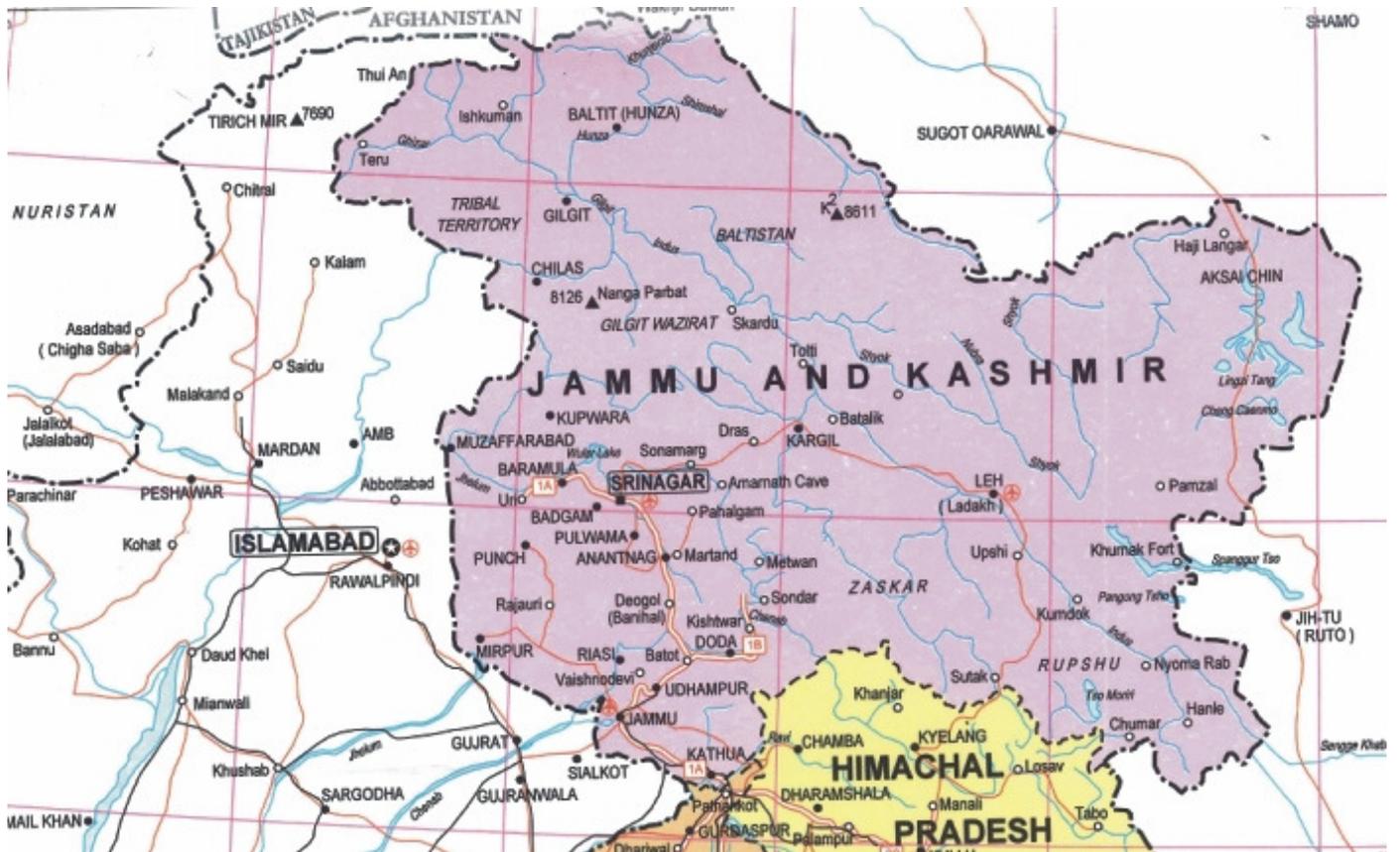
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Jammu & Kashmir

In this Edition

There is great deal of speculation on the future of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) not only in Pakistan but also in Gilgit Baltistan- the region that forms the crucial land link between China and Pakistan. Gilgit Baltistan is salient to a connectivity project like CPEC. However, there is widespread uncertainty amongst people in the region regarding their actual stakes in the Chinese helmed multibillion project. While Islamabad has time and again stressed how CPEC will benefit Gilgit Baltistan economically, there is no sign to convey if the local population actually believes in these high sounding projections made by the government of Pakistan. As a report in the current issue indicates, people are holding serious grievances against Pakistan authorities for the prices that are being offered to those people in Gilgit Baltistan whose land is being acquired for the purpose of building the corridor. Local people in fact offered stiff resistance against what they believe is unfair prices that is being given for their land and houses situated along the Karakoram Highway. Left without any option than to protest, people have reportedly warned the state apparatus that they would be forced to stall the construction work under CPEC if they were not adequately compensated as per existing market rates.

The reverberations of political tumult happening inside Pakistan has been increasingly felt in both parts of PoK. Post Nawaz Sharif's ouster after being held guilty in the Panama case, the PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz) headed leadership in both parts of PoK has expressed loyalty towards their leader. There have been several instances of the PML-N leaders in PoK often appaluding how Nawaz Sharif has served the Kashmir cause by persistently raising the issue at international platforms including the United Nations. It is interesting to note that immediately after Nawaz Sharif was made to quit after being pronounced guilty, the prime minister of the so-called AJK, Raja Farooq Haider Khan, was hounded from all across for his reaction in which he scathingly noted that the so-called AJK may have to rethink its accession to Pakistan.

Priyanka Singh

Political Developments

Jamil Nagri, “Journalist asked to appear before ATC”

Dawn, October 1, 2017

An Anti-Terrorism Court asked Shabbir Saham, an Islamabad-based journalist, to appear before it on October 7 for the hearing of a case registered against him for allegedly defaming some PML-N members of the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly in a newspaper column. The notice sent by Judge Raja Shahbaz Khan warned Mr Saham of an ex parte decision if he did not attend the hearing. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), the Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists and the National Press Club, Islamabad, have called upon the GB government to withdraw the case. Mr Saham, a resident of Skardu based in Islamabad, had written a story for the Daily Times in November 2017, which stated some members of the GB Legislative Assembly were involved in women trafficking from Gilgit-Baltistan for prostitution. The region’s government registered a case against the journalist, accusing him of fabrication. Later police carried out raids on Mr Saham’s residence in Islamabad.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1360965>

“Oppressed Gilgit Baltistan residents will vote for India: Abdul Hamid Khan”

DD News, October 2, 2017

Chairman of the Balawaristan National Front (BNF), Abdul Hamid Khan, stated that the oppressed people of Gilgit Baltistan will vote in favour of joining India as they are fed up with Pakistan’s colonial rule. “There are only two options - either you can vote to India or you can vote to Pakistan. After the long 69 years of experience, the people of Gilgit Baltistan believe we are living under Pakistani occupation in a prison of 72,000 square kilometers (area). By keeping

that in our mind, if we have only two options, we will not give our vote to Pakistan, we will vote for India” stated Khan, who lives in Belgium in political asylum. Criticising Islamabad for violating the UNCIP Resolution and for falsely framing political activists, religious persons and students of Gilgit Baltistan under the controversial anti-terrorist Act of Schedule IV, Khan stated access to justice is denied because there is no legal, constitutional high court or Supreme Court in the region. He claimed that the judicial system of Gilgit Baltistan is under Pakistan and its armed forces’ firm control. “Pakistan is the first country which violated the UNCIP resolution. If you are demanding a UN resolution, first you perform yourself, your obligation - you withdraw your forces from the area, and then, you can ask the United Nations to ask India to withdraw the bulk of its forces from that area. However, Pakistan is violating the rights of the people of Gilgit Baltistan.

<http://www.ddinews.gov.in/international/oppressed-gilgit-baltistan-residents-will-vote-india-abdul-hamid-khan>

“CPEC to boost tourism industry: Barjees”

Pakistan Observer, October 2, 2017

Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Muhammad Barjees Tahir on October 2 stated China Pakistan Economic Corridor would help boost the tourism industry in the country. He also stated that tourism was one of the important sectors for the growth of the economy. He noted that in 2017, the tourism industry continued to make a real difference to the lives of millions of people by driving growth, creating jobs, reducing poverty and fostering development and tolerance. The minister noted that the Tourism industry contributed \$7.6 trillion to the global economy, which was 10.2 per cent of global GDP and generated 292 million jobs in 2016. He further stated that government of Gilgit Baltistan introduced a tourism policy with an aim to create job

opportunities for the locals. He noted that government had issued a number of permits during current season to the foreign tourists.

<http://pakobserver.net/cpec-boost-tourism-industry-barjees/>

“BSF camp attack: Terror is Pakistan’s policy, says Gilgit leader”

Outlook India, October 3, 2017

One of Gilgit Baltistan’s most influential leaders, who lives in exile in Brussels, Belgium, Abdul Hamid Khan, stated on October 3 that the terror strike on an Indian Border Security Force camp near Srinagar Airport early this morning has categorically confirmed that Pakistan is using terror as an instrument to not only create instability in neighbouring India, but also to subjugate the people of Gilgit-Baltistan who want nothing less than freedom. “Pakistan wants to intentionally change its demography by providing shelter to terrorists. It is also known to be providing weapons to them. The indigenous people of Gilgit Baltistan have no right to keep arms. And, if they are found carrying any weapon, they are put behind bars under the Terrorist Act. Pakistani citizens on the other hand are allowed to possess any kind of weapon. If any issue erupts, Pakistani citizens, who are working as ISI agents, can commit genocide on the people of Gilgit Baltistan. Our indigenous people are in danger”, claimed Khan. He squarely blamed Islamabad for using terrorists to create a divide among the people in the name of religion and sect. He noted, “After 1998, General Zia used the Mujahideen, the so-called terrorists which are today referred to as IS and Taliban, to attack the indigenous people of Gilgit Baltistan. They were mostly Shias.”

<https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/bsf-camp-attack-terror-is-pakistans-policy-says-gilgit-leader/1159301>

Altaf Hamid Rao, “Masood advises forging complete unity”

Pakistan Observer, October 3, 2017

AJK President Sardar Masood Khan emphasised on October 2 that the people of Pakistan, Azad Jammu

and Kashmir and the Diaspora community must unify on a common stance on Kashmir and not deviate from our national security policy. The President expressed his views while addressing the seminar on “Role of Overseas Kashmiris for Kashmir Cause and development of AJK” held under the auspices of the state-run Mirpur University of Science and Technology (MUST), Mirpur. Besides, the seminar was also addressed by the Kashmir-origin member of the British Parliament Ms. Naz Shah, AJK minister for Sports, Culture, MDA and MDHA Ch. Muhammad Saeed, Vice Chancellor of Mirpur University of Science & Technology Prof. Dr. Habib ur Rehman – Sitara e Imtiaza, Chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Self-determination Movement Europe Raja Najabat Hussain, Director Students Affairs MUST Prof. Shahid Amin and others. The visiting Kashmir-origin Councillors of UK Councilors of various city councils of UK were also present on the occasion. The VC MUST Prof. Dr. Habib ur Rehman highlighted the curricular and extra-curricular activities of the varsity for the delivery of quality higher education harmonious to the need of the modern age besides particularly for raising the Kashmir cause through seminars and symposiums.

<http://pakobserver.net/masood-advises-forging-complete-unity/>

“AJK premier to visit Europe from 6th”

Dawn, October 3, 2017

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider will proceed on a two-week visit to some European countries later this week “to highlight Kashmir issue and interact with the Kashmiris living there,” according to an official notification circulated on October 2. The notification states that the three-member delegation led by the prime minister would visit UK, France, Belgium, Spain and Italy from October 6 to 18. “The delegation shall visit London to meet with Kashmiri community. Later on, the Prime Minister will move to France to participate in Kashmir Conference on the invitation of Ms Binet Stephanie from October 7 to 8. The PM will then participate in ‘2017 Kashmir-EU Week’ from October 9 to 10 in Brussels. The event was

arranged by Kashmir Council-EU. “The PM will also visit Spain and Italy to interact with Kashmiri community from October 13 to 16,” reads the notification.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1361413/ajk-premier-to-visit-europe-from-6th>

“MUST acknowledges expats’ role on Kashmir”

The Nation, October 4, 2017

The state-run Mirpur University of Science & Technology (MUST)’s vice chancellor Dr Habibur Rehman urged the Kashmiri expatriates to vibrantly play their key role abroad for highlighting the Kashmir issue at all international forums. He urged the expats to muster maximum sympathies of the international community, especially the British and Europe for early grant of the legitimate right to self-determination to the people of Jammu & Kashmir through free and fair plebiscite under the spirit of the international norms and commitments in line with the UN resolutions. AJK President Sardar Masood Khan, who is also Chancellor of the MUST Varsity and the Kashmir-born Member of the British Parliament Ms Naz Shah were the chief guest on this occasion. Prof Habibur Rehman continued that the role of the Kashmiris in European and British parliaments were projecting the Kashmir issue and bringing it up at the parliaments’ floors and world human right organisations forums, and their efforts need wide recognition.

<http://nation.com.pk/04-Oct-2017/must-acknowledges-expats-role-on-kashmir>

Shoab Ur Rehman, “AJK cabinet expresses confidence in Nawaz’s leadership”

Business Recorder, October 4, 2017

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) cabinet on October 3 expressed confidence in the leadership of newly elected president of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. According to an official press release, the cabinet, which met at Kashmir House Islamabad

with Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan in chair, unanimously adopted a resolution moved by Minister Information and Tourism Mushtaq Minhas expressing confidence in the leadership of Nawaz Sharif. The resolution paid tribute to the former prime minister for his struggle for strengthening of democracy, supremacy of law and dispensation of justice in the country and noted Nawaz Sharif was the most popular leader of the people of Pakistan and Kashmir. The resolution further stated that following the footsteps of Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi had effectively raised the Kashmir issue in the United Nations’ General Assembly for which the cabinet expressed gratitude to him.

<http://www.brecorder.com/2017/10/04/372886/ajk-cabinet-expresses-confidence-in-nawazs-leadership/>

“GB govt utilising all resources for welfare of people, says minister”

Pakistan Today, October 4, 2017

The Gilgit Baltistan (GB) Legislative Assembly Provincial Minister Rana Farman Ali noted on October 4 that the provincial government of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), in collaboration with the federal government, is tirelessly working for the welfare and development of the area. Talking to reporters, the provincial minister noted the government was utilising all its resources to ensure the welfare of the local population. He also stated that Pakistan Sweet Homes have been constructed in GB with the help of Baitul Mal and all necessary facilities have been provided therein for the uplift of the locals. The minister further noted that unemployed people of the region would be provided suitable jobs through different government initiatives. The GB government was also making efforts to strengthen local institutions which would automatically create employment opportunities for the local population, he added.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/10/04/gb-govt-utilising-all-resources-for-welfare-of-people-says-minister/>

“People seek higher price for CPEC project land”

Dawn, October 5, 2017

The locals on October 4 warned that if the government did not pay them market value of their lands and houses being consumed by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project by October 10 they would launch a protest drive and forcibly stop construction works. Addressing a press conference, they stated the district administration had issued notices to landowners to vacate their houses without any prior notice. They also stated that lands between Kas Pul and Chanjal areas along the Karakoram Highway were treated as commercial and thus, the government should pay them the market value of land and houses. They further stated that CPEC-related works in Battagram district had damaged water supply schemes and water channels as the government had no policy to protect the environment. The press conference was attended by members of CPEC action committee, including former DIG Riaz Khan, Maulana Atta Mohammad Deshani, Anwar Baig, Mohammad Rafique and Mohammad Khan along with CPEC-affected people. Riaz Khan rejected the survey carried out to assess the damage and demanded a fresh survey so that the affected people could be properly compensated. Anwar Baig noted that the owners of the houses to be demolished should be provided alternative shelter where they could live with dignity. He added that their lands and houses along the Karakoram Highway had commercial value, but the government was not giving them the market rates.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1361787/people-seek-higher-price-for-cpec-project-land>

“Pakistan needs to revisit Kashmir policy: President AJK”

The Nation, October 6, 2017

President of Azad Jammu & Kashmir Sardar Masood Ahmed Khan stated that Pakistan is an incomplete state without Jammu & Kashmir and similarly J&K has no identity and persona without Pakistan. “Dispute of Kashmir is alive due to Azad Jammu &

Kashmir”, he noted while addressing a seminar on ‘Kashmir Issue: Role of Pakistani Academia and Way Forward’ organised by the Department of Governance and Public Policy of National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad on October 5. Rector NUML Major General Zia Uddin Najam (Retd), Director General Brig Muhammad Ibrahim, Deans, Heads of Departments faculty and students were also present on the occasion. President AJK noted, “When we talked about the role of academia, we have to see that how many research articles on the dispute have been published and how many research papers or thesis have been produced in international journals.” He stressed that it is the responsibility of the academia to educate the youth and provide them a counter narrative to counter Indian propaganda regarding the dispute.

<http://nation.com.pk/06-Oct-2017/pakistan-needs-to-revisit-kashmir-policy-president-ajk>

Jamil Nagri, “CPEC special protection unit approved for GB”

Dawn, October 6, 2017

The federal government approved the establishment of a special protection unit in Gilgit-Baltistan for providing security to foreigners working on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project, stated GB home secretary Bilal Ahmad Memon on October 5. The home secretary noted that the appointment of 700 security personnel and release of Rs2.66 billion had been approved for the CPEC special protection unit. He also stated that the country’s enemies were hatching conspiracies against the CPEC project but those conspiracies would be foiled through excellent security measures. Mr Memon noted the prime minister had also approved the purchase of bulletproof vehicles for GB Chief Minister Hafeezur Rehman and Governor Mir Gazanfar Ali Khan for their security. Home secretary noted that the registration, regulation of seminaries is underway. He further stated that the National Action Plan on security was being strictly implemented in the region.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1362042>

“PML-N wants peaceful Kashmir resolution: Nawaz”

The Nation, October 8, 2017

PML-N President Nawaz Sharif stated that party’s manifesto calls for peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations. Nawaz Sharif noted this while talking to Azad Kashmir Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider, who called on the PML-N chief in London on October 7. “We support government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) on diplomatic level; AJK government’s performance is satisfactory, federal government will take all necessary measures for the betterment of AJK state and its resources,” Nawaz added. Nawaz noted that he will personally look after the matters of Azad Kashmir besides increment of development budget; Kashmir diaspora in Europe is an asset to highlight Kashmir issue internationally. He assured the AJK prime minister that it is their core duty to support Kashmiris politically, diplomatically and morally.

<http://nation.com.pk/08-Oct-2017/pml-n-wants-peaceful-kashmir-resolution-nawaz>

“GB hoteliers oppose levy of income tax”

Dawn, October 9, 2017

The Gilgit-Baltistan hotel owners association on October 8 opposed levy of income tax on them by the federal government, terming it violation of the Supreme Court of Pakistan’s verdict. The association’s leaders announced to approach the apex court against the GB Council’s order. Concern was expressed at a meeting of the association in Gilgit on October 8, which was chaired by its president Raja Nasir. The participants noted without determining GB’s constitutional status and providing it representation in parliament, the imposition of taxes on local people was unacceptable. They expressed fear that collecting income and sales taxes from hotel owners was tantamount to their financial murder, saying the measure would result in closure of hotel industry in the region. Members of the association

further stated the government had its eyes on the feeble incomes earned by the hotels during the five-month tourism season.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1362668/gb-hoteliers-oppose-levy-of-income-tax>

“Devastated areas’ rehab still a distant dream”

The Nation, October 9, 2017

The 12th anniversary of the devastating earthquake which hit the region in 2005 was observed across Azad Jammu & Kashmir on October 8. This is while thousands of projects for their rehabilitation have been left incomplete due to lack of funds. The government had identified about 800,000 projects for the reconstruction work in the earthquake-hit areas of AJK at a cost of Rs210 billion. 12 years down the line, thousands of projects are still incomplete due to lack of funding or other reasons. The anniversary was observed as the National Disaster Awareness Day and as ‘day of firmness and determination for reconstruction in memory of earthquake martyrs’. Special prayers were held for the rest of the departed souls in eternal peace. The people expressed complete solidarity and sympathies with the survivors of the history’s worst natural catastrophe. The 7.6 magnitude earthquake jolted Azad Kashmir and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at 8:52am on October 8, 2005. Muzaffarabad, the regional capital, was ground-zero in the catastrophic temblor.

<http://nation.com.pk/09-Oct-2017/devastated-areas-rehab-still-a-distant-dream>

“Bilawal announces names of party office-bearers for AJK, southern Punjab”

The Nation, October 9, 2017

Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on October 8 announced the names of party office-bearers in six districts of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) and South Punjab. According to a notification issued from PPP Media Cell, presidents and general secretaries of the party in six districts of Azad Jammu and Kashmir would be as under: In

Muzaffarabad, Syed Bazil Ali Naqvi was appointed President and Muhammed Pervaiz Mughal Advocate as General Secretary; in district Neelum, Nazir Danish Advocate as President and Muhammed Mushtaq Swati as General Secretary, in District Hattianbala, Raja Muhammed Pervaiz Advocate as President and Malik Muhammad Nawaz as General Secretary, in district Mirpur, Ch Qasim Majeed as President and Farid Anwar Advocate as General Secretary, in district Bhimber, Ch Waleed Ashraf as President and Imamullah Advocate as General Secretary and in district Haveli, Shaikh Khurshid Ahmed as President and Syed Nazar Gillani as General Secretary.

<http://nation.com.pk/09-Oct-2017/bilawal-announces-names-of-party-office-bearers-for-ajk-southern-punjab>

“CM directs master plans for DHQs Hospital Gilgit, Shaheed Saif hospital”

Pakistan Observer, October 10, 2017

Chief Minister Gilgit Baltistan, Hafiz Hafeezur Rehman on October 10 directed Departments of Health and Construction and Works (C&W) to immediately prepare the master plans for District Headquarters Hospital (DHQs) Gilgit and Shaheed Saifur Rehman Hospital and convened the meeting of concerned officials on October 16 in this regard. He noted construction work on state of the art Trauma Centre at DHQ Gilgit would start this year and would be completed with an estimated cost of Rs 50 million whereas a parking area would also be set up at the hospital. The Chief Minister noted Shaheed Saifur Rehman hospital was being constructed with assistance of Punjab Government and directed the C&W Department to prepare PC-I for it on war footing basis so that work could be started. He was addressing a high-level meeting regarding preparation of master plans for the two projects and resolution of people’s problems in public sector hospitals in the province.

<http://pakobserver.net/cm-directs-master-plans-dhqs-hospital-gilgit-shaheed-saif-hospital/>

“Local bodies’ election in GB after census results: Speaker Fida Muhammad”

Pakistan Observer, October 11, 2017

Speaker Gilgit Baltistan Assembly, Fida Muhammad on October 11 noted that population census in Gilgit Baltistan has been completed while results from far-flung areas were awaited. As soon the same were received, local bodies’ elections will be held in the province. Talking to media persons, he noted that the Chief Minister Gilgit Baltistan has already announced that local bodies’ election will be ensured by next June and arrangements were underway to hold these elections in a fair and transparent manner.

<https://pakobserver.net/local-bodies-election-gb-census-results-speaker-fida-muhammad/>

“GB legislators criticise govt ‘inefficiency’”

Dawn, October 11, 2017

The Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) members from both the opposition and treasury benches on October 10 lashed out at the PML-N-led regional government for its failure to resolve the public issues during its two and a half years in power. They unanimously passed a resolution demanding the government to set up tourism department in the Karakoram International University and establish its campuses in Skardu and Ghizer for promotion of tourism industry. The resolution was tabled by opposition member, Rehana Ebadi, during a session of the GBLA held in Gilgit on October 10. Speaking during the question hour, deputy speaker Jaffarullah Khan noted that the repair of water channels to Gilgit city had not been carried out for last two years, nor the main water channels cleaned due to which residents of the city were consuming polluted water. Opposition leader Shah Baig noted that not only in Gilgit city but water management in other areas of the region, too, was in bad shape.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1363035/gb-legislators-criticise-govt-inefficiency>

Murtaza Ali Shah, “AJK PM says Nawaz’s disqualification ‘damaged Pakistan’”

Geo TV, October 11, 2017

Prime Minister Azad Jammu and Kashmir Raja Farooq Haider stated that it’s an open secret now that former prime minister and PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif was disqualified on weak and unjustified grounds of Iqama [work permit] and not the Panama Papers. Speaking to the media, he noted Nawaz’s disqualification has been rejected by Kashmiris because it is a well-known fact now that his ouster has nothing to do with accountability and that it has damaged Pakistan. The AJK prime minister along with senior minister Tariq Farooq is visiting European capitals to apprise them about the human rights violations of Kashmiris. Haider noted that the case against Nawaz started on the basis of Panama but ended up on Iqama because no evidence of any kind of wrongdoing in public office was found against Nawaz. However, Iqama was used to oust him to ‘damage Pakistan’. The AJK premier noted that Kashmiris on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) are suffering.

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/162161-ajk-pm-says-nawazs-disqualification-damaged-pakistan>

“GB lawmakers condemn US official’s remarks on CPEC”

Dawn, October 12, 2017

Both the treasury and opposition legislators in the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) on October 11 condemned the comments of the US Defence Secretary James Mattis that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passed through a ‘disputed’ territory, an obvious reference to the mega project’s route through GB. They urged the federal government to decide the GB’s long-awaited constitutional status and declare it a constitutional part of Pakistan to stop the enemies of the country from propagating against the multibillion dollar project. They noted that the comments of the US Defence Secretary were incendiary and that he spoke the language of India, the arch-rival of Pakistan. Speaking

at a calling-attention notice during the ongoing session of the GBLA, opposition Islami Tehreek Pakistan lawmaker Mohammad Shafi noted that the international powers were hatching conspiracies against Pakistan to foil the CPEC.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1363278/gb-lawmakers-condemn-us-officials-remarks-on-cpec>

“APHC-AJK holds protest rally in Islamabad”

Kashmir Images, October 12, 2017

The All Parties Hurriyat Conference Azad Jammu and Kashmir (APHC-AJK) Chapter on October 12 held a protest rally at D-Chowk in Islamabad against the braid-cutting of women in Kashmir. The speakers on the occasion urged the international community to play role in granting Kashmiris their right to self-determination. They also denounced continued detention and house arrest of Hurriyat leaders including Syed Ali Gilani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, Muhammad Yasin Malik, Mukhtar Ahmad Waza and Zafar Akbar Butt and demanded their immediate unconditional release. The Hurriyat leaders noted that complete peace in region is impossible without resolving the lingering Kashmir dispute in accordance with the aspirations of Kashmiri people.

<https://kmsnews.org/news/2017/10/12/aphc-ajk-holds-protest-rally-in-islamabad/>

Usman Hanif, “AJK, Gilgit-Baltistan to get 3G/4G services by Feb 2018”

The Express Tribune, October 12, 2017

Pakistan Telecommunication Authority’s (PTA) plan to bring fast-paced information technology services – 3G/4G – in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) is expected to materialise by February 2018, reveals an official. The arrival of 3G/4G in these far-off areas will bring socio-economic change in the entire region and also benefit those situated along China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) routes in AJK and G-B. PTA has already sought expressions of interest (EoI) for hiring a consultant or consultancy firm for working out the

base price and design of the auction process for the next generation mobile services (NGMS).

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1528976/ajk-gilgit-baltistan-get-3g4g-services-feb-2018/>

“Kashmiri activists hail U.S. Defence Secretary Mattis’ remarks on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor”

Outlook India, October 12, 2017

Kashmiri activists hailed the remarks by U.S. Defence Secretary James Mattis, who recently told the Senate Armed Services Committee that the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was controversial as it passed through a disputed territory. The USD 56 billion CPEC project, which is part of China’s grand vision, known as the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, passes through Pakistan’s northern areas, which India says is part of the undivided state of Jammu and Kashmir. Jamil Maqsood, Central Secretary, Foreign Affairs of the United Kashmir People’s National Party (UKPNP), noted, “We appreciate his (Mattis) statement that he has warned Chinese imperialists forces that they are crossing from a disputed territory.” While criticising Pakistan’s and China’s investment in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit-Baltistan, Jamil added, “They are diverting Neelam River near Muzaffarabad, which will have dire consequences for the water shortage in the lower areas, including the Muzaffarabad city. The United States should not only relay on the press statements, but they should take pragmatic steps to stop the Chinese and the Pakistani designs to colonise natural resources of the region. They are changing the demographics of the region.” The CPEC aims to connect Kashgar, in China’s western province of Xinjiang, with the port of Gwadar in the Pakistani province of Balochistan. The road and rail network under the project also traverses through Gilgit Baltistan, Khyber Phakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh, before terminating in Balochistan.

<https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/kashmiri-activists-hail-us-defence-secretary-mattis-remarks-on-chinapakistan-economic-corridor/1166984>

“Govt fails, NGO provides potable water in Mirpur”

The Nation, October 13, 2017

The government has failed to ensure adequate supply of potable water to the local population but a non-profit organisation has taken steps to address the masses’ grievances in this regard. UK-based NGO – ‘Muslim Hands’ mass public welfare drive has taken impetus for phased installation of water filtration Plants in various localities of Mirpur city and the areas in its outskirt to facilitate the citizens with the supply of filtered water in line with the international standard. This was observed during a consultative workshop titled “Water Quality Related Issues and the Way Forward” that was hosted by the Britain-based NGO at its Mirpur AJK region office. AJK Minister for Sports Ch Saeed was the chief guest on this occasion.

<http://nation.com.pk/13-Oct-2017/govt-fails-ngo-provides-potable-water-in-mirpur>

“GB traders protest imposition of taxes”

Dawn, October 13, 2017

The traders observed shutter down strike in Skardu against imposition of taxes on the residents of Gilgit-Baltistan without determining constitutional status of the region. The protesting traders announced to boycott transactions in private and government banks for five days. The protest call was given by Anjuman-i- Tajeeran Skardu. The markets, shops and bazaars in Skardu remained closed from 10 am to 12 noon. People faced difficulties in purchasing daily use items. A large number of traders and workers of political parties including PPP and PTI gathered at Hussaini Chowk and staged a sit-in. The protesters then started moving toward the press club. They were chanting slogans against the federal and regional governments for imposing withholding taxes, income taxes and other taxes on local people without declaring Gilgit-Balgistan a constitutional part of the country. Sartaj Ali Kamal and other leaders of traders stated that taxes could not be imposed on people of Gilgit-Baltistan until the region was declared a

constitutional part of the country. They also stated that without representation in National Assembly and Senate, collecting of taxes from people of the region was unjust. The protesters demanded that Gilgit-Baltistan should be declared a tax-free region.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1363544/gb-traders-protest-imposition-of-taxes>

“Opp urges AJK to bring corrupt mafia to book”

The Nation, October 14, 2017

Sardar Khalid Ibrahim Khan, an opposition member of the Azad Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly, on October 13 demanded indiscriminate accountability of corrupt officials across the state. He was addressing a gathering of local lawyers hosted by Azad Jammu & Kashmir Supreme Court Bar Association. Sardar Khalid Ibrahim Khan, who also heads Jammu & Kashmir People’s Party, continued that the historical declaration of October 24, 1947 unequivocally and clearly determined the status and role of Azad Jammu & Kashmir as the base camp of the Kashmir freedom struggle. He stated we have to move ahead in the line of this historical declaration. He also stated that those involved in massive corruption, malpractices and irregularities in plundering the national assets during the previous and sitting AJK governments be brought to justice through an indiscriminate process of accountability to recover the digested public money and to deposit it to the public exchequer. Referring to the ongoing accountability process in Pakistan, the Kashmiri leader observed that the ongoing process of accountability could change the fate of the country if it was exercised with good and sincere faith.

<http://nation.com.pk/14-Oct-2017/opp-urges-ajk-to-bring-corrupt-mafia-to-book>

Muhammad Ibrahim J., “Baltistan through my lens”

Dawn, October 14, 2017

The past couple of years have brought a positive boom in Pakistan’s tourism industry. This has predominantly been due to the massive increase in

local tourism with Pakistanis venturing out and choosing to explore their own country. The likes of Murree, Naran and Hunza are closing in on their maximum capacity to facilitate tourism. However, one such region which is far from its tourism potential is Baltistan. I say this because Baltistan is a mystical land unlike any other, being blessed with crystal clear alpine lakes, quaint little mountainous towns, roaring rivers and towering snow-topped peaks. It is also notable for attracting a fairly appreciable number of local and foreign adventure seekers owing to the fact that it has 20 peaks with an altitude of over 20,000 feet! Apart from the road leading to Skardu, the administrative centre of Baltistan, there are regular flights as well between Islamabad and Skardu.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1363154/baltistan-through-my-lens>

“Unfair taxation in GB”

Dawn, October 14, 2017

Once again, Gilgit-Baltistan’s business community is protesting against the taxes imposed on them, without an increase in their representation at the central decision-making level and without further empowering the GB government, which remains a ‘sub-federating unit’. And once again, they have a point. One of the taxes at issue is the withholding amount on bank transactions of non-filers of income tax returns, which has been a challenge since residents here are not required to file tax returns with the federal government. Each time they conduct bank transactions, an amount is deducted from their account and there is no remedy. This is only one example of the myriad costs imposed upon the citizens of these areas. The government can argue that most of the resources to fund the Rs54bn budget of GB comes from federal resources, as well as the Rs18bn development programme and the Rs3.3bn under the PSDP. But the fact of the matter is that these resources are paltry by comparison to the requirements of the area, especially given the heightened significance the region is going to acquire as CPEC makes headway. The region is the only overland entry point for the corridor, and the rapid pace at which the centre has committed funds for

CPEC-related projects, such as the Gilgit-Shandoor road and the Gilgit-Jaglot road, shows that when its own interests are involved, the federal government can suddenly locate the funds and pass them off as being used for the benefit of the inhabitants of the area. But the real sentiments of GB's inhabitants were evident in the protest in Gilgit, launched from Skardu.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1363623/unfair-taxation-in-gb>

“Govt focusing on less developed areas of Gilgit-Baltistan: CM Gilgit-Baltistan”

Such TV, October 15, 2017

Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Hafiz Hafeez-ur Rehman noted that the government is focusing on less developed areas of Gilgit-Baltistan. Addressing a public gathering in Astore on October 14, he stated 1.87 billion rupees are being spent on construction and repair of roads. The Chief Minister noted PML-N government will complete these projects during its tenure to facilitate the masses. The Chief Minister announced Tehsil status for Mini Marg and assured creation of required posts for new setup. Later, the Chief Minister paid visit to the District Headquarter Hospital in Astor. He met with patients and inquired about their health. Chief Minister directed the authorities concerned to address the issues of hospital immediately.

<https://www.suchtv.pk/pakistan/gilgit-baltistan/item/61286-govt-focusing-on-less-developed-areas-of-gilgit-baltistan.html>

“Satpara Dam Project to be handed over to G-B Government”

Business Recorder, October 16, 2017

Satpara Dam project would be handed-over to the government of Gilgit-Baltistan within six months as per the framework decided by WAPDA and G-B government. Secretary Water and Power Gilgit-Baltistan informed the National Assembly Standing Committee on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan on October 16 regarding this. The meeting was held at Old PIPS Hall, Parliament Lodges under the chairmanship of MNA Malik Abrar Ahmed. Members of the committee including Maj. Tahir Iqbal, Abid

Zia, Sardar Mumtaz Khan, Dr. Shazia Marri Sobia, Nasir Khan Khattak, Saeed Waseem Hussain, Molvi Agha Muhammad, Junaid Akbar, Khalil Joerge and Shamsu Nisa also attended the meeting. The committee was informed that the issues of Satpara dam was resolved by the officials of WAPDA and Gilgit-Baltistan Government as per directives of Standing Committee. The Committee Chairman and Members lauded the officials for resolving the issue related to Satpara Dam. The committee observed that people of the area are facing losses due to delay in the project.

<https://www.brecorder.com/2017/10/16/375092/satpara-dam-project-to-be-handed-over-to-g-b-government/>

“969-MW Neelum Jhelum project begins filling reservoir”

Hydro World, October 17, 2017

The Pakistan Water & Power Development Authority (WPDA) begun filling the reservoir for the 969-MW Neelum Jhelum hydropower project. According to the utility, the project has completed constructing the 160-meter-long by 60-meter-high concrete gravity dam allowing reservoir impoundment that began with regulating closure of spillway gates. Water level will be raised at a rate of 1 to 3 meters per day, and WAPDA estimates it will take about a month to fill the reservoir. Total storage of the reservoir is 8,207 acre feet, up to the design reservoir operating level of 1,015 meter above mean sea level. After successfully filling the reservoir, the water will be diverted into the waterway system by the end of 2017. The project, estimated to cost more than US\$4.5 billion, is part of a run-of-river scheme designed to divert water from the Neelum River to a powerhouse on the Jhelum River. The powerhouse is located in Azad Kashmir, 22 km south of Muzaffarabad, Azad Jammu and Kashmir. About 90% of the project is underground and will generate power using four 242.25 MW Francis turbines. The first unit is scheduled to go into operation by the end of February 2018 followed by the second unit in mid-March and the third and fourth units in April 2018. According to WAPDA, when completed, the project will provide annual revenues estimated at \$769 million. In June

2016, HydroWorld.com reported that Neelum Jhelum has sparked controversy throughout its development—most notably due to conditions established between Pakistan and India by the 1960 Indus Water Treaty. With India developing its 330-MW Kishanganga project on the same waterway, the agreement dictates that whichever country completes its plant first will have priority rights to the river.

<http://www.hydroworld.com/articles/2017/10/969-mw-neelum-jhelum-project-begins-filling-reservoir.html>

“Govt vows to purge AJK of all ills”

The Nation, October 18, 2017

Acting AJK Prime Minister Raja Nisar Ahmed Khan disclosed on October 17 that the local bodies elections in Azad Jammu & Kashmir will be held in December 2017. Addressing a news conference at the PWD Rest house, Nisar noted that the sitting government was very serious for holding local bodies polls on time under the auspices of AJK Election Commission. He underlined that the civic polls were delayed because of the re-determination of the chief election commissioner after the induction of CEC Ghulam Mustafa Mughal as the judge of the Supreme Court of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. He made it clear that the government had no intention to induct political heads as administrators in the civic institutions in Azad Jammu Kashmir and instead the government was seriously contemplating to hold local bodies elections in AJK in December 2017.

<http://nation.com.pk/18-Oct-2017/govt-vows-to-purge-ajk-of-all-ills>

“Membership of 25 GB lawmakers suspended”

Dawn, October 18, 2017

The Gilgit-Baltistan Election Commission on October 17 suspended membership of 25 lawmakers, including the GBLA speaker, opposition leader and six ministers, over their failure to submit statements of their assets and liabilities for the year 2017. Only the membership of eight members, including the chief minister, of the total 33-member of GBLA, remained intact. According to an election commission

notification issued on October 17, noted among those whose membership was suspended included GBLA speaker Fida Mohammad Nashad, opposition leader Haji Shah Baig, senior minister Mohammad Akbar Taban, and ministers Dr Mohammad Iqbal amongst others. Meanwhile, addressing a press conference, GB Election Commissioner Abid Raza noted the suspended memberships of lawmakers would not be restored till filing of the statements of assets and liabilities with the election commission.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1364596/membership-of-25-gb-lawmakers-suspended>

“G-B NAB working on 11 investigations”

The Express Tribune, October 19, 2017

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Gilgit-Baltistan chapter was working on 11 investigations cases, 14 inquiries and seven verifications, top official of the bureau in the region noted. NAB Director General Nasir Jamil stated that owing to the efforts of the anti-graft body five accused were sentenced in Big Board Advisory Service corruption case, while property of an accused worth Rs20 million was also seized. Jamil, while talking to the media, stated the bureau was taking swift actions against corruption on the basis of solid evidences and bringing corrupt elements under clutches of law without caring of their financial position, relations and socio-economic status in the society. The DG NAB also stated that investigation on different cases in the departments of PWD, education, forests and agriculture were underway and 30 new cases were registered since March 2016 till date. He further stated NAB was taking swift action against corruption cases and was fully active in G-B.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1536051/g-b-nab-working-11-investigations/>

“Senators briefed on GB development projects”

Dawn, October 20, 2017

The Senate Standing Committee on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan on October 19 assured the GB government that it would recommend ways and

means to the federal government for the effective resolution of the problems of the region's residents. The committee met in Skardu with its chairman, Senator Professor Sajid Mir, in the chair and members Haji Momin Khan Afridi, Najma Hameed, Hameed Hassan and Khalida Parveen in attendance. The committee members reached the city on a three-day visit. GB senior minister Akbar Taban, GB Legislative Assembly members retired major Mohammad Amin and Kacho Imtiaz Haider, GB council member Wazir Ikhtlaq, GB home secretary Bilal Ahmad Memon, GB water and power secretary Waqar Taj, Baltistan division commissioner Asim Ayub and other GB officials attended the meeting. The relevant officials informed lawmakers about the ongoing development projects in the region. The visitors reviewed the law and order situation, governance system, power generation, progress on Gilgit-Skardu road schemes and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project and tourism activities in GB.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1365016>

Tariq Naqash, “Rare LoC officialdom compassion after woman’s death in AJK”

Dawn, October 20, 2017

In a rare show of compassion, civilian and military officials from both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) in the disputed Himalayan region facilitated the transfer of a woman's body from Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) to India-held Kashmir within 12 hours of her death on October 19. Salima Begum, who was in her early 60s, had travelled to Muzaffarabad along with her spouse Ghulam Hassan Pandit on October 2 through the Chakothi-Uri crossing point to offer condolences on the death of her brother-in-law, Khawaja Muhammad Yousuf Zargar, who was once a key leader of a pro-independence political group. The couple planned to return to their home in Sopore, which is famous for the cultivation of and trade in apples on October 16 but had to stay back because of suspension of trade and travel activities this week owing to Diwali holidays across the LoC.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1364952/rare-loc-officialdom-compassion-after-womans-death-in-ajk>

“Wapda to start construction on Diamer-Basha, Mohmand dams in 2018”

The Nation, October 21, 2017

Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) Chairman Lt Gen (r) Muzammil Hussain stated that water and energy securities are the key components of national security. For this, he stated, we need to make a list of critical development plans in both water and energy sectors and there has to be a strategy that puts words in actions. He was addressing a delegation of the participants of National Security and War Course of National Security College, Islamabad. He informed the delegation that WAPDA constituted ‘turn-around teams’ and has achieved success to bring delayed projects back on track and initiate new projects in the shortest possible time. WAPDA is planning to start construction work on Diamer-Basha Dam and Mohmand Dam in 2018. Phase-I of Kachhi Canal, a much needed project for development of irrigated agriculture in Dera Bugti Balochistan, has recently been completed. In addition, three hydropower projects namely Neelum Jhelum Hydropower Project, Tarbela 4th Extension and Golen Gol, with total generation capacity of 2487 MW, will also be completed in phased manner from early 2018 to mid-2018. Stage-I of Dasu Hydropower Project will come on line in 2022, while Stage-II will be completed in 2025, both stages will add 4320MW to the national grid.

<http://nation.com.pk/21-Oct-2017/wapda-to-start-construction-on-diamer-basha-mohmand-dams-in-2018>

“G-B special force gets Rs2.5b”

The Express Tribune, October 21, 2017

The Centre Development Working Party (CDWP) approved Rs2.5 billion for Special Protection Unit (SPU) force for Gilgit-Baltistan after which 700 people from all districts of G-B would be recruited soon on merit. Talking to the media people, the G-B Inspector General of Police (IGP) stated Rs280 million would be spent on purchase of equipment for the SPU force and its personnel would be trained by the top institutions of the country. The IGP noted that

residential buildings and offices for the SPU would be constructed at Gilgit, Hunza, Diamir, Skardu and this project would be completed in two years, adding SPU force was raised for protection of CPEC and non-CPEC projects in G-B. The force would help eradicate unemployment and enhance capacity of G-B police besides protection of CPEC and Non-CPEC projects.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1537176/1-g-b-special-force-gets-rs2-5b/>

Murtaza Ali Shah, “Anyone going against Nawaz will only disgrace himself: AJK PM”

Geo TV, October 22, 2017

Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Raja Farooq Haider on October 22 stated that there is no replacement of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the whole party is united under his leadership. Addressing a press conference, Raja Farooq Haider noted that a concerted campaign is being run to break Pakistan Muslim League-N into many factions but he stated that all such efforts have failed so far and will not succeed in future. He further stated that the PMLN leadership and workers are well aware of the conspiracy against the PMLN and Pakistan’s interests. Haider warned that Pakistan has paid a heavy price for the mistakes made in its 70 years history. The premier noted that he travelled with Nawaz Sharif on GT Road from Islamabad to Lahore and witnessed the love and affection masses showered on him. “Anyone who leaves him at this time will end up with humiliation,” added the AJK PM.

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/163906-anyone-going-against-nawaz-will-only-disgrace-himself-ajk-pm>

“Senate Committee reviews Baltistan uplift work”

Pakistan Observer, October 23, 2017

Members of Senate Standing Committee on Gilgit-Baltistan visited Baltistan on October 21 and reviewed the pace of work on various developmental schemes including ongoing electricity generation projects. On the occasion, Chairman of the Committee, Senator Professor Sajid Mir and its

members including Senator, Haji Momin Khan, Senator Ahmad Hassan, Senator Najam Hameed and Senator Rubina Khalid was briefed by officials regarding work on Harpo Power Generation Projects, Satpara Dam Project, Shatong Naala Diversion Power Project, Sermik Power Project and Kachura Power Project. The members directed to ensure quality of work and complete these projects within stipulated time limit.

<http://pakobserver.net/senate-committee-reviews-baltistan-uplift-work/>

“JKLF to support Kashmir protest in Germany”

Kashmir Reader, October 24, 2017

Chairman Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) Muhammad Yasin Malik on October 23 stated that the “bloody red line” called LoC is dividing the “nation of Jammu Kashmir” like Berlin Wall was used to divide the East and West Germans. In a statement, Malik noted, “Kashmiris on either side of this bloody red line are fighting for the just cause of freedom and national independence besides striving for the reunification of their motherland just like Germans.” He noted JKLF has decided to support a program by former Prime Minister of “Azad Kashmir” Barrister Sultan Mehmood Choudhary at the site of erstwhile Berlin Wall in Germany on October 27, 2017.

<http://kashmirreader.com/2017/10/24/jklf-to-support-kashmir-protest-in-germany/>

“Independent Kashmir is our destiny: Sardar Masood Khan”

Kashmir Watch, October 24, 2017

The main event of the 70th Foundation Day of the Azad State of Jammu and Kashmir was held in a spectacular and grand fashion at the university grounds in Muzaffarabad. Sardar Masood Khan, President Azad Jammu and Kashmir was the chief guest at the occasion. Raja Farooq Haider, Prime Minister AJK, Shoaib Dastagir Inspector General Police AJK, Cabinet Ministers, members of the Legislative Assembly senior officials of the police service were also present at the event. The event

started with the National Anthem of Pakistan and was followed by the inspection of the parade by the President AJK. Various platoons of the AJK police and civil defense presented their honorary salute to the Chief Guest. A splendid tactical display was also presented by the elite forces of the AJK police.

<http://kashmirwatch.com/independent-kashmir-is-our-destiny-sardar-masood-khan/>

“BISP to expand project to two more AJK districts”

The Express Tribune, October 24, 2017

The apex social safety net programme in the country is poised to expand its education project to two additional districts of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The expansion will ensure that the Waseela-e-Taleem (WeT) project of the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) operates in five districts of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), bringing an additional 26,816 students under the project. The WeT financially supports the primary education of children between the ages of five to 12-years-old from families already benefiting from the BISP programme. The project aims to help enrol these children and keep them in schools by providing them with cash grants when they achieve certain milestones. The expansion will see the project operate in Neelum and Haveli districts of AJK. The project already operates in Mirpur, Bagh and Kotli. There are 106, 193 beneficiaries of BISP in Mirpur, Poonch and Muzaffarabad. According to a BISP official, enrolment for the project is expected to start in March 2018.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1539586/1-bisp-expand-project-two-ajk-districts/>

Afzal Ali Shigri, “A new status for GB”

Dawn, October 24, 2017

Historically, Gilgit-Baltistan was designated as part of the princely state of Kashmir, but over the course of almost seven decades since Independence, the clamour for integration with Pakistan by GB residents has grown louder. At the time of Partition in 1947,

the residents of this region struggled against the regular Kashmir state army to join Pakistan. However, the government of Pakistan, in view of the UN resolution for a plebiscite to determine the disputed status of the princely state, allied Gilgit-Baltistan with the territory. To date, the plebiscite has not taken place, and it is not likely to be held in near future either. Hence, the fate of GB hangs in what is effectively a constitutional limbo. In 2009, the PPP government took the first significant step towards self-rule for the area by creating a local Legislative Assembly, which was afforded limited powers for selected subjects of governance along with the semblance of a provincial administrative structure.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1365854>

“GB to be the most developed region in near future: PM”

Geo TV, October 25, 2017

Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on October 25 expressed his complete confidence that Gilgit and Baltistan (GB) will be one of the most developed areas in the country in coming times. “The China-Pak Economic Corridor will develop these areas for centuries to come,” Abbasi noted. “It will provide employment opportunities by way of industrial zones that will be set up in the region.” The premier, who was addressing the inauguration ceremony of the Baltistan University, stated that he was happy about the university’s inauguration as it would benefit the area and its residents for years to come. “We have undertaken a few national and domestic projects including the Diamer Bhasha Dam, Dasu Dam, Skardu and Naltar Hydel Power Projects,” Abbasi noted.

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/164423-pml-n-govt-keeps-its-promises-pm-abbasi>

“PPP wants CPEC fruit for GB: Bilawal”

The Nation, October 25, 2017

Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) chief Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on October 24 stated that his party wanted the fruits of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

(CPEC) for the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. Speaking to a PPP delegation from Gilgit-Baltistan led by President PPP GB Amjad Hussain, Bilawal noted that measures should be taken to hold elections all over Pakistan including GB on the same day. He also instructed the delegation to take measures to strengthen the party in GB. Bilawal noted that the former president Asif Ali Zardari fulfilled the promise made by Benazir Bhutto by giving identity to the people of GB. He further stated that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto loved GB immensely. Senior Vice President PPP GB Jamil Ahmed, Secretary Information GB Sadia Danish, former ministers Aftab Ahmed and Mohammed Ali Akhtar were part of the delegation. President PPP GB apprised chairman of the political situation in GB and the party organisation.

<http://nation.com.pk/25-Oct-2017/ppp-wants-cpec-fruit-for-gb-bilawal>

“AJK focuses on defusing Indian propaganda”

The Nation, October 25, 2017

AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider on October 23 pledged to gear up Kashmir freedom movement. He noted, “The world is listening to our voice, the condition is that we should present our case properly; under an organised strategy, voice of oppressed Kashmiri will be presented to the world with the help of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan.” He further noted that Pakistan is the destination of Kashmiris who in 1944 cleared their relationship before the independence of Pakistan on Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s visit to Kashmir. The strategy to unite Kashmir Diaspora on a platform has been adopted to effectively highlight the movement of Kashmir, he also noted.

<http://nation.com.pk/25-Oct-2017/ajk-focuses-on-defusing-indian-propaganda>

“Nawaz allocated huge amount for Azad Kashmir’s development: PM”

Business Recorder, October 27, 2017

Chairing a meeting of the Kashmir Council, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi

stated that Pakistan expressed solidarity with its Kashmiri brethren and had always extended moral and diplomatic support to the Kashmiri people. He further stated that the Kashmir cause was a heroic struggle which would be remembered for times to come. Pakistan had raised the issue of Kashmir at every forum, he added. The prime minister reiterated Pakistan’s commitment and support for the development of Kashmir. He also stated that former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had allocated unprecedented amount of resources for the development of Kashmir. “We need to prove with our actions that we are focused on the development and welfare of the Kashmiri brethren,” the prime minister remarked and directed for holding the sessions of Kashmir Council regularly.

<https://fp.brecorder.com/2017/10/20171027229879/>

“GB to raise force to man border with KP”

Dawn, October 28, 2017

The Gilgit-Baltistan security establishment decided to raise a force to be deployed at the region’s border with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to keep watch over the movement of suspected persons. The GB government in this regard has allocated Rs32 million for purchasing drone cameras and setting up a security force to man the border with KP mostly at mountainous areas. An official of GB police on October 27 noted that as GB shared long border with KP and suspected persons sneaked through each other’s territory without any hindrance, fool proof manning of the boundary was a must. The police official also stated a security force comprising local volunteers would be raised to deploy at 48 police check posts at areas in Gilgit, Ghizer and Hunza districts. The deployed forces would be provided drone cameras to monitor suspected people’s movements across the border, and take urgent actions.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1366824/gb-to-raise-force-to-man-border-with-kp>

“Allaying Concerns: Work on project shrouded in controversy”

The Express Tribune, October 29, 2017

Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Raja Farooq Haider Khan directed Wapda to initiate immediate steps to resolve the glitches aroused by the completion of the AJK-based 969-megawatt Neelum Jhelum Hydro Power Project (NJHP). Haider expressed these views while addressing a meeting of Wapda officials in Jammu and Kashmir House. He asked the officials to undertake required measures on an urgent basis. The autonomous region's prime minister exhorted allaying of environmental concerns before work is started on the dam. Wapda Chairman Muzammal Aslam, Chief Secretary Azad Kashmir Ejaz Munir and other officials were also present. “The people of Azad Kashmir have sacrificed a lot to curtail the energy crisis in Pakistan,” Haider noted, adding that it is important for them not to feel deprived.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1544169/2-allaying-concerns-work-project-shrouded-controversy/>

“NHA Planning to Build Gilgit-Shandur-Chitral Road”

Such TV, October 30, 2017

National Highway Authority is planning to build Gilgit-Shandur-Chitral road to provide an alternative route to China Pakistan Economic Corridor. NHA Spokesperson Kashif Zaman noted on October 29 that detailed design and feasibility study of the Shandur-Chitral section and pre-feasibility study for Gilgit-Shandur section have been completed. This new all-weather road will provide an alternative route to CPEC during the winter season when the Silk route is closed due to snowfall. After Lowari Tunnel, the new project will be another best possible route for travelling to the region and will save travel time as well. The estimated cost of three hundred and forty-five kilometers long road is forty five billion rupees.

<https://www.suchtv.pk/pakistan/gilgit-baltistan/item/61864-nha-planning-to-build-gilgit-shandur-chitral-road.html>

“Gilgit varsity to hold moot on CPEC prospects for GB”

Dawn, October 31, 2017

The Centre for Research on CPEC at the Karakoram International University (KIU) and the Centre of Excellence on CPEC Islamabad are jointly holding a daylong conference on ‘China-Pakistan Economic Corridor – Prospects and Opportunities for Gilgit-Baltistan’ at the varsity's Gilgit campus on November 3. The conference aims to develop awareness and emphasise avenues of pragmatic cooperation into various dimensions of CPEC, including economic, political, strategic, social aspects paradigm shifts that will accompany the multibillion dollar project. The conference will also seek to explore universities' role in this mega project and to strengthen academic networking, extensive discussions and threadbare analysis of a wide range of subjects of interest and concern to all-weather strategic partnership between China and Pakistan. Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Interior Ahsan Iqbal will be the chief guest at the conference.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1367425>

Economic Developments

“Rubies, the buried treasures of Azad Kashmir”

Geo TV, October 15, 2017

The people of Azad Kashmir are sitting on a treasure chest: Millions of rubies, estimated to be worth up to half a billion dollars, are lying beneath them. But archaic tools and a lack of investment in infrastructure and techniques are hampering efforts to transform the area into a significant player in the gem industry. “We have rubies that are at least as good as the Burmese, but their mining techniques are more sophisticated”, noted Huma Rizvi, a dealer in precious stones. Kashmir has just one mine and one exploration site, where miners dig to assess the potential of the jewels below. But the region has proven reserves of more than 40 million grams of rubies, and inferred resources of nearly 50 million grams, according to geological surveys commissioned by the provincial executive. “Mining is done manually or by small blasts — and we lose 40 to 50 percent of the value of the stones,” he acknowledged. “Due to lack of investment, we are not making the most of our resources.” For Kashmir’s rubies and other mineral resources — such as copper, gold and silver — to contribute more to Pakistan’s economy, there must be more investment in local expertise and development of a legal framework to support the mining sector, dealer Rizvi noted. However, private firms are discouraged by the very rugged terrain and proximity to the Line of Control (LoC), the de facto border with India, where cross-border firings and scuffles are frequent. Even the major international mining companies are reluctant to invest in Pakistan, which has been plagued by legal disputes over major copper and gold concessions in the southwest of the country.

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/162784-rubies-the-buried-treasures-of-pakistani-kashmir>

“Projects worth Rs14 billion approved for GB”

Dawn, October 19, 2017

Gilgit-Baltistan Departmental Development Working Party (DDWP) on October 18 approved 73 projects in various sectors, costing over Rs14 billion. Of the approved projects, 18 would be executed in the education sector, 13 in power and 9 in health sector. Other projects relate to the infrastructure development like roads and bridges. The DDWP meeting held in Gilgit was chaired GB planning and development department secretary, Babar Amaan Babar. The meeting also discussed the 32.5MW Attabad hydropower project which would cost Rs10 billion, and decided to refer the project to the relevant forum. Meanwhile, GB chief secretary Dr Kazim Niaz directed preparing the PC-1 of the proposed projects to be carried out in the region.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1364814>

“Jhelum hydel power project: cost soars to Rs 500 billion from Rs 88 billion, NA body told”

Business Recorder, October 27, 2017

The chairman water and power development authority (WAPDA) on October 26 stated that Neelum Jhelum Hydel Power Project’s whose cost has gone up to Rs 500 billion from Rs 88 billion, will start producing electricity by February 2018. Briefing National Assembly Standing Committee on Water Resources chaired by Khalid Hussain Magsi, Chairman WAPDA Lieutenant General Muzammil Hussain (retd) stated that Neelum Jhelum hydel Power Project would be operational by February 2018. He also stated that the project was reshaped after the 2005 earthquake and it has 68 kilometer tunnel and four turbines. The cost of the project

initially estimated in PC-I at Rs 88 billion increased to Rs 500 billion, Hussain added. The meeting was informed that the first unit of Golan Gol Hydro Power Project will become functional in December 2017

which will help reduce the load shedding in Chitral. The Chairman WAPDA also noted that there is a need to make Diamer Bhasha Dam operational by 2018.

<https://fp.brecorder.com/2017/10/20171027229814/>

International Developments

“British MP for early solution to Kashmir issue”

The Nation, October 7, 2017

The Kashmir-origin member of the British Parliament Ms Naz Shah called for early grant of the right to self-determination to the people of Jammu and Kashmir to let them decide their destiny and pave the way for early peaceful solution to the Kashmir issue. “Solution to Kashmir issue is the key to emergence of everlasting peace in South Asia in general and the world-over in particular as it involves two nuclear arch rivals.” Naz, a lawmaker in lower house - the House of Commons who belongs to the opposition Labour Party from Bradford, expressed the views while speaking at a reception hosted in her honour. Dr Amin Chaudhry, Chairman Professional Board of PML-N AJK and Chairman Jinnah Foundation JK hosted the reception, which was also attended by members a British Parliamentary delegation. AJK Minister for Sports and Culture, Ch Muhammad Saeed chaired the ceremony which was also addressed among others by the chair, Kashmir-born Councillor from Bradford City Council Chaudhry Arshad Hussain, MDA Director General Ch Ejaz Raza and senior Kashmiri journalist Altaf Hamid Rao.

The speakers called for a more vibrant role of the UK-based Kashmiri Diaspora to muster maximum sympathies of the international community and raise importance of early settlement of Kashmir issue. The seven-member British Delegation is currently on a visit of Azad Jammu & Kashmir on the invitation of the AJK President Sardar Masood Khan.

<http://nation.com.pk/07-Oct-2017/british-mp-for-early-solution-to-kashmir-issue>

“World leaders ask United Nations to play leadership card to resolve Kashmir conflict”

Outlook India, October 7, 2017

In a memorandum submitted to the secretary general of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, the former prime minister of Azad Kashmir, Barrister Sultan Mehmood Choudhary, and the secretary general of the World Kashmir Awareness Forum, Dr. Ghulam Nabi Fai, urged the United Nations to play the leadership card in resolving the 70-year-old Kashmir conflict.

The memorandum read that the Kashmir conflict is perhaps the most dangerous conflict in the world, because of the spiralling nuclear and missile race between India and Pakistan, coupled with historical enmities that have occasioned three wars between the two rivals. “It is implausible to believe that these two neighbouring countries will either cap or renounce their respective nuclear genies after they have escaped the South Asian bottle unless the chief source of antagonism between the two - Kashmir - is resolved. It is obvious that no settlement can last if it is not based on justice for the people of Kashmir and recognition of their inherent rights,” the memorandum added. Dubbing the bilateral interaction between India and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir issue as charades, the memorandum also read that a new negotiating formula is thus urgently required, in the name of international peace, security and human rights.

<https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/world-leaders-ask-united-nations-to-play-leadership-card-to-resolve-kashmir-conflict/1162948>

“CPEC violates rights of Gilgit residents, says Hague Centre for Strategic Studies”

The Economic Times, October 17, 2017

Europe’s leading think tanks have declared that the China Pakistan Economic Corridor or CPEC is violating the human rights of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, a disputed territory over which the highway passes, and its construction is causing immense ecological damage to the region. Willem Oosterveld, a strategic analyst at the Brussels-based Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, noted, “There are certain international legal provisions for when you can or cannot build in occupied territory. But this as a case is not easy to compare with say Israeli settlements in Palestine,” adding that the CPEC does not conform to international law. Rights activists across Europe have roundly condemned the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is being ruthlessly implemented against the will of the local population of Gilgit. Claudia Wädlich Heidelberg, a German activist and writer, noted, “China uses the OBOR (One Belt One Road) - economy to conquer strategic positions through Asia till Africa and Europe to gain world power. Democratic intentions and free world trade are not their goals.”

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/cpec-violates-rights-of-gilgit-residents-says-hague-centre-for-strategic-studies/articleshow/61115162.cms>

M A Mir, “Kashmir dispute: Copenhagen conference urges Pakistan-India talks”

The Express Tribune, October 22, 2017

In order for peace to prevail in South Asia, participants of an international conference on Kashmir in Copenhagen have appealed to the leaders of both Pakistan and India in order to resume dialogue to resolve the decades-old dispute. The conflict over Kashmir started primarily between Pakistan and India right after the partition of India in 1947. The International Kashmir Conference was organised by Tehreek-e-Kashmir Denmark at the Danish Parliament on October 21 and presided over by Secretary General of Tehreek-e-Kashmir Europe Ansar Manzoor.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1538221/1-kashmir-dispute-copenhagen-conference-urges-pakistan-india-talks/>

Other Developments

Zubair Torwali, “Preserving language”

The News, October 1, 2017

The government of Gilgit-Baltistan has been trying to chalk out a mechanism for the preservation and promotion of the languages spoken in the region. It has been working on this initiative for quite a long time now. To see how to proceed on the much needed proposal, the government of Gilgit-Baltistan recently invited heads of various language academies in other provinces along with language practitioners, academics, poets and writers for a two-day long consultation conference at the Karakoram International University. This is a task the concerned government must pursue, otherwise the cultural diversity of this knot of the three giant mountainous

ranges – Himalaya, Hindukush and Karakorum – will vanish soon. Gilgit-Baltistan is a highly diverse region in terms of landscape, culture, languages and faith. The majority of the inhabitants of this spectacular region follow four denominations of Islam: Shiite, Sunni, Ismaili and Noorbakhshia. Linguistically, the region is one of the most diverse in the world. One particular issue needs attention. The languages of Gilgit-Baltistan do not have any script. The scripts for these languages are very recent. While Shina uses the Arabic script, Burushashki, Balti and Wakhi use other scripts as well.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/233792-Preserving-language>

Extracts From The Urdu Media

“Panama affected Gilgit-Baltistan more than others”

Daily Salaam, October 4, 2017

Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Hafeez ur Rehman stated that the Panama case has affected Gilgit-Baltistan more than any other province in Pakistan. He made these remarks during his interaction with media persons. According to Chief Minister, the process of constitutional status has been hampered due to Panama proceedings. Nawaz Sharif has put more focus and energy on Gilgit-Baltistan than any other Pakistani ruler, stated Rehman. Nawaz Sharif and his vision on Gilgit-Baltistan would be PML-N's top priority in the province. According to Hafeez ur Rehman, Nawaz Sharif lives in the hearts of the GB people and that the PML-N is not just a party but a trust of the people as well.

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

“Make Gilgit-Baltistan Province if you want CPEC to succeed”

Daily Salaam, October 11, 2017

Imran Nadeem, a Legislative Assembly member warned the government of Pakistan that they must analyse the statement of the US Defence Secretary on CPEC. According to Nadeem, the US has now publicly opposed CPEC and may try its best to derail it. Pakistani rulers, Nadeem noted, should take the serious note of it. The best way to begin in this regard would be to make Gilgit-Baltistan a province and fully integrate it with the rest of country. Nadeem stated that people of the region are demanding to be given full provincial rights since long but Islamabad has failed to listen to these demands and does not pay heed to our legal demands. Sounding pessimist, Nadeem noted that CPEC cannot succeed without making Gilgit-Baltistan a province of Pakistan.

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

“Satpara Dam and other hydro power projects”

Daily K2, October 17, 2017

Secretary Gilgit-Baltistan recently briefed Senate on the Satpara Dam in Skardu and other power projects in the region. Secretary Gilgit-Baltistan noted that a committee of experts from WAPDA and Gilgit-Baltistan government has been formed to supervise work and finance of the Satpara dam in Skardu. The committee will present its report within two weeks. After the report is submitted, the project would be handed over to the government of Gilgit-Baltistan within six months. The Federal government will bear the cost of the project. However, one has heard about these projects in past too. Many projects were announced but nothing concrete has happened till now. People have now stopped in believing these stories which often do get published in newspapers. In past, work on few projects was started without feasibility study. After years of hard work on such projects, they were finally stopped citing technical problems. A couple of days ago, the Chief Minister also revealed that many projects were halted due to non-availability of workforce. The present government should take these issues into consideration before starting a new project.

<http://epaper.dailyk2.com/index.php?pid=4&eid=1&nid=1&tnid=7913&date=1508284800>

“Will distribute uncultivated land among people: Chief Minister”

Baade-e-Shimal, October 21, 2017

Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister stated that a new strategy is being adopted to address the food shortage in the province. He revealed that uncultivated land would be provided to people for cultivation. Hybrid seeds would be given to them. The Chief Minister also noted that his meeting with the Chinese

Ambassador to Pakistan was fruitful. The Ambassador was told that Gilgit-Baltistan does not need aid but requires transfer of technology, noted the Chief Minister. The Ambassador has given assurance to the Chief Minister that China will try its best to help the people of Gilgit-Baltistan.

http://www.dailybaadeshimal.com/popup.php?r_date=10-21-2017&img=10-21-2017page-1-1

“Prime Minister of Pakistan is revoking the order of taxation”

Daily K2, October 25, 2017

The Information Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan stated that Prime Minister has revoked the earlier decision of imposing tax policy in Gilgit-Baltistan region. Briefing the media on Prime Minister Abbasi’s visit to the region, the information minister, Iqbal Hassan, stated that although the Prime Minister revoked the tax policy, any decision on constitutional status is not possible yet. He further stated that any decision on constitutional identity will take time weighing the pros and cons. However, it does not mean that the prime minister is coming with empty hands, he is coming with many other things, noted Hassan. The traders union ditched the government. These comments were made by the Information Minister of Gilgit Baltistan.

<http://epaper.dailyk2.com/index.php?eid=1&nid=1&date=1508889600>

“Political Scoring on Taxation policy”

Baad-e-Shimal, October 25, 2017

Taxation policy on Gilgit-Baltistan was imposed by Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in 2012. However, presently they are opposing the new taxation policy adopted by the PML-N government both at the centre and in the province. Both PPP and PTI who are ruling in KP and Sindh opposed the Federal government’s decision of giving GB access to the NFC club. These two parties and their local leadership in GB are now opposing the tax policy of the government. One wonders why the PPP’s leadership is opposed to this idea which was first introduced by their own party at the centre. The basic rule of taxation policy is that when a tax is imposed on a particular region, the revenue generated from those taxes is spent on that very region. But constitutionally, Gilgit-Baltistan is not a part of Pakistan. It does not have any representation in any financial institution. More importantly, there is no mechanism available on how to impose and levy tax on GB and also how to return those revenues to GB.

http://www.dailybaadeshimal.com/popup.php?r_date=10-25-2017&img=10-25-2017page-4-4

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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