

POK News Digest

A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

Compiled & Edited by Dr Priyanka Singh

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Jammu & Kashmir

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

In this Edition

The unresolved issue of restoring the subsidy on wheat prices dominated the politics in Gilgit Baltistan during May 2014. Protesters from across the region gathered in Gilgit to put forward their demand to the government. The protests over the weeks gathered momentum to assume the shape of a full-fledged movement. The protesters threatened to block the Karakoram Highway. The Awami Action Committee (AAC), a coalition of nationalist, religious and political groups, is at the forefront steering the movement and organized a historic march as the demands were not met by the authorities.

The AAC representatives negotiated with the government authorities including the Federal Minister of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan (KAGB), Chaudhary Bargees Tahir, to resolve the issue. While popular protests continued, Bargees noted that the government is still giving Gilgit Baltistan a 73 percent subsidy on wheat prices. Before this, the AAC called for a shutter down strike and transport strike in Gilgit Baltistan to pressurize the government to meet their demands.

The issue of unresolved boundary between Kohistan and Diamer district of Gilgit Baltistan is noted to exacerbate during the grazing season. In February 2014, seven people died in clashes regarding the boundary issue between the residents of the two sides. The piece of land adjoining the Basari post (nearly 10 kilometer stretch) has been disputed between Kohistan and Gilgit Baltistan. The piece of land has been demarcated for the mega Diamer Bhasha dam project which has been delayed inordinately due to lack of funds. During summers, residents of Diamer take their livestock for grazing to this piece of land and it is feared that this could lead to clashes between the people.

Meanwhile, while the significance of the United States' (US) role in supporting the Diamer Bhasha dam project has been reiterated, US Ambassador to Pakistan, Richard Olson, paid a visit to the so called AJK. During this visit, he met president AJK, Sardar Yaqoob Khan and also local people. The visit was mainly to renew ties and emphasize US commitment to work towards betterment of the so called AJK.

Priyanka Singh

Political Developments

“Ties between India and Pakistan flourish with faster clearance of transit permits”

ANI, April 22, 2014

POONCH: In a bid to strengthen ties with Pakistan, the transport department of the government of Jammu and Kashmir has welcomed the faster clearance of transit permits for the bus service to Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK). Nostalgia ruled hearts when long separated cousins from both countries got to meet each other due to the regular bus service that has emerged out of strengthened bonds between the two countries. Citing confidence from both nations that is apparent in the faster clearance of permits, Custodian of Cross Line of Control (LOC) Travel, Chakan Da Bagh in Poonch district, Mohammed Bashir Lone, predicted flourishing ties.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/ties-between-india-and-pakistan-flourish-with-faster-clearance-of-transit-permits-114042200651_1.html

“Hunger strike in support of affected people continues”

The News, April 4, 2014

RAWALPINDI: People of Potohar region, led by PML-N leader and social activist Jahangir Akhtar, continued their hunger strike for an indefinite period at Kallar Syedan to get their demands accepted, including due share in the Water User Charges (WUC) of the Mangla Dam. They stated that people of Potohar region have equal rights in the WUC of Mangla Dam, as that of the masses of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), because the dam was located between Potohar and AJK. Speaking to media at the hunger strike camp, Jahangir Akhtar stated that they would not surrender their right under any circumstances as economic stability of the region was at stake.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-6-242148-Hunger-strike-in-support-of-affected-people-continues>

Tariq Naqash, “Stranded Vietnamese man awaiting repatriation from AJK”

Dawn, April 3, 2014

GILGIT: The legislative assembly of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) on March 11 enacted a special law to regularise nearly 180 contract employees of grade 1 onwards to grade 18.

MUZAFFARABAD: A man whose nationality could not be ascertained by law-enforcement agencies in Azad Jammu and Kashmir for months has finally been declared to be a Vietnamese citizen. Belonging to the Hmong ethnic minority of Vietnam, Vu Gia Po, who had earlier been wrongly referred to as Wu Ta Puma is desperately awaiting completion of procedural formalities for repatriation to his country. The 37-year old was kept in a police station in Athmuqam, district headquarters of Neelum valley, about 74 kilometres northeast of Muzaffarabad, in November 2013 and his hosts have since been finding it difficult to decide about their inadvertent guest. “We feel relieved that his birthplace has been traced and hopefully he will soon be reunited with his family,” SHO Athmuqam Mohammad Yasin noted on April 2. Po was taken into custody by the Military Intelligence (MI) from Sharda, in the upper belt of the valley that straddles the Line of Control, assuming that he might have sneaked into AJK from the J&K.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1097373/stranded-vietnamese-man-awaiting-repatriation-from-ajk>

Tariq Naqash, “Nepotism continues in AJK legislative assembly”

Dawn, April 1, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: Already faced with a contempt of court notice, for the alleged violation of the status quo, on inductions and postings in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Legislative

Assembly secretariat, Speaker Sardar Ghulam Sadiq recently recruited a minister's brother in BPS-17. This induction is one of the several steps taken, by the Peoples' Party government in AJK, to woo the parliamentary party members, almost all of whom are holding ministerial positions, amid the renewed efforts to topple Prime Minister Chaudhry Abdul Majeed. Sources in the Legislative Assembly (LA) secretariat noted, on condition of anonymity, that Raja Daniyal Rathore, the brother of Raja Faisal Rathore, the minister for electricity, had been clandestinely recruited as a reporter in BPS-17.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1096993/nepotism-continues-in-ajk-legislative-assembly>

“Precariously perched: Landslide-hit AJK village awaits help”

The Express Tribune, April 1, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: Around 200 households of Karli village, some 60 kilometres from Muzaffarabad, are still living in the landslide prone area as government could not relocate them to temporary shelters. On March 26, 10 houses were damaged by the landslide and more than 100 villagers including women, children and elderly took refuge in the nearby villages of Hatian Bala and Chakar. Saad Akbar, whose house was partially damaged stated, “We are unable to sleep due to fear of landslide in the rainy weather.” Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) Secretary Farhat Ali Mir stated they provided tents to the landslide victims of Karli but they preferred to stay with their relatives. Mir stated that more than 200 households need immediate evacuation. Mir further stated they need time to shift them to safer locations adding authority will use all available resources to provide relief to the affected population before the start of the monsoon season.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/689697/precariously-perched-landslide-hit-ajk-village-awaits-help/>

“Fresh start: PPP looks to renew strategy prior to elections in G-B”

The Express Tribune, April 10, 2014

GILGIT: As elections in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B)

draw closer, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has formulated a strategy to rebuild the party's image that has been tarnished by allegations of corruption and illegal appointments. Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Chief Minister Mehdi Shah recently met the party's co-chairperson Asif Ali Zardari at Bilawal House in Karachi to discuss the future of his party in G-B. “We are done with the strategy of turning the tables on our opponents,” claimed a senior leader of PPP, who spearheads the coalition government in G-B. Though PPP won with an overwhelming majority in the 2009 elections, it accommodated parties like Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q), Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) and Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in the government under Zardari's policy of reconciliation, making them part of the Mehdi Shah cabinet. “Given the scams of corruption and illegal appointments, followed by the 'media trial' of PPP, it became necessary for the party leadership to devise a plan to turn challenges into opportunities,” stated the senior leader, requesting anonymity. Over the years, the PPP government came under repeated criticism, even from its own lawmakers, including Wazir Baig and Mohammad Naseer. Last year, Baig demanded setting up the National Accountability Bureau in G-B to investigate the alleged corruption of ministers.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/693448/fresh-start-ppp-looks-to-renew-strategy-prior-to-elections-in-g-b/>

Shabbir Mir, “Job security: G-B governor yet to sign 'controversial' regularisation act”

The Express Tribune, April 9, 2014

GILGIT: The fate of nearly 180 employees of the Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) government hangs in the balance as the G-B Contract Employees Regularisation of Service Act, 2014 is yet to be endorsed by the governor. The act was unanimously passed by the G-B Assembly on March 11 and calls for the regularisation of contract employees of the government from basic pay scale 1 to 18. Tabling the bill in the house, Law Minister Ali Madad Sher had stated the law would only be applicable to those government servants who fulfilled required protocols during their induction.

“Of those 180 employees, some have fulfilled the

required protocol while many others haven't. Their services will not be made permanent," stated an official privy to the matter. He added that there are elements in the government that want to regularise all government posts under the garb of the act. However, up till now, Governor Pir Karam Ali Shah has declined to sign the act, which will then make it part of the legislation and thus binding on the government. According to officials, if the law is signed by the governor, many other employees of the government will also benefit from it.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/692987/job-security-g-b-governor-yet-to-sign-controversial-regularisation-act/>

“Kashmiri refugees plead PM for assistance”

Dawn, April 7, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: The post-1989 refugees from the J&K, on April 6, appealed to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to pay attention towards the resolution of their longstanding problems, following the alleged failure of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government in this regard. The appeal was made by the representatives of the refugees, at a press conference, held at the press club, where they suggested that Mr Sharif should send the federal minister for Kashmir affairs to the camps of the Kashmiri refugees, to get a firsthand account of their plight. According to Uzair Ahmed Ghazali, the leader of Kashmiri refugees, the total number of refugee families, living in the 13 camps manned by the AJK rehabilitation department or elsewhere, stands at 7,400, comprising of more than 36,800 people.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1098276/kashmiri-refugees-plead-pm-for-assistance>

“Reconstruction in AJK: Erra joins hands with NGO to build six schools”

The Express Tribune, April 9, 2014

ISLAMABAD: Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) has signed memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Friends Welfare Association Pakistan (FWAP) to reconstruct six schools in Muzaffarabad in 10 months period. The MoU was signed at ERRA headquarters. ERRA's Director Donors and

Sponsor Lt-Col Farooq Shah and Executive Director Javed Iqbal inked the MoU, stated a press release. Shah stated that Kokkyo Naki Kodomotachi, a Tokyo based International Japanese Organization will provide Rs65.65 million for the construction of six schools in Muzaffarabad suburban area.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/693040/reconstruction-in-ajk-erra-joins-hands-with-ngo-to-build-six-schools/>

Abrar Saeed, “Zardari gives AJK PM a new lease of life”

The Nation, April 9, 2014

ISLAMABAD: Azad Kashmir Prime Minister Abdul Majid Chaudhry has secured a new lease of life when PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari scraped the move to make change of guards in AJK government by bringing in some new face to replace the incumbent premier. Asif Zardari further snubbed supporters of change within the PPP Azad Kashmir parliamentary party while chairing the meeting of PPP AJK chapter at Bilawal House in Karachi on April 8, party sources and some of the participants of the meeting informed. The in-charge of party affairs Faryal Talpur and AJK President Sardar Yaqoob were also present on the occasion.

Some two separate sessions of AJK parliamentary party and its allies in AJK Legislative Assembly were held wherein the ruling party's MLAs and a few cabinet members had opened up plethora of complaints against the incumbent Premier Ch Abdul Majid and pressed for bringing in some new face from the cabinet members to replace him, a party MLA in AJK Assembly informed.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/national/09-Apr-2014/zardari-gives-ajk-pm-a-new-lease-of-life>

“US participation in Dasu, Diamer-Basha projects important: Dar”

The Express Tribune, April 10, 2014

WASHINGTON: Pakistan on April 9 underscored the importance of US participation in various energy related projects especially Dasu and Diamer-Basha hydel projects during the working group meeting on economy and finance in

Washington. According to a statement on the meeting, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to expanding bilateral trade ties and business links.

Pakistan side was represented by a delegation led by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar while the US side was represented by Under Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, Catherine Ann Novelli. Senior officials from the concerned Ministries and departments from both sides were part of their respective delegations. The discussions, part of the US-Pakistan strategic dialogue, focused on how the two sides could best work together to deepen economic cooperation with a view to realising the vision outlined by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Barack Obama in their joint statement of October 23, 2013.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/693672/us-participation-in-dasu-diamer-basha-projects-important-dar/>

Shabbir Mir, "Making cuts: G-B works dept officials face demotion over illegal appointments"

The Express Tribune, April 22, 2014

GILGIT: At least two senior engineers from Gilgit-Baltistan's (G-B) Works Department may be demoted for ignoring protocol and wrongfully awarding public positions. Superintendent Engineer Wazir Tajwar and Executive Engineer Nazeer Hussain were accused of making over 3,500 illegal appointments in the works department across several districts in previous years. These positions reportedly account for Rs1.2 billion in salaries every year. This issue has been raised many times in the G-B legislative assembly and officials demanded the appointments be investigated. A recent enquiry concluded the suspected inductions were illegal and were causing a huge burden on G-B's financial resources.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/698580/making-cuts-g-b-works-dept-officials-face-demotion-over-illegal-appointments/>

"Diamer-Bhasha to get top priority"

The Frontier Post, April 20, 2014

Chairman designate, Wapda Zafar Mehmood in an interview briefly explained his working agenda, placing construction of the 4,500MW Diamer-

Bhasha Dam project on top of his priority list. "Diamer-Bhasha Dam project is vital for the country in terms of power generation and overcoming the prevailing energy crisis; therefore, it will be on top of my priority list," he stated. This project is the need of the hour to meet energy requirements of household consumers and industry as well as to avert droughts. Recently, the nation has witnessed Thar tragedy where scores of children have died and hundreds of thousands residents are suffering due to drought. If large reservoirs like Diamer-Bhasha are not constructed on war-footing, other parts of Pakistan could also be affected by the drought especially Cholistan in Punjab province. It was criminal negligence on the part of our successive governments that they did not build any major reservoir after Mangla and Tarbela dam whose storage capacity is shrinking due to silt each passing day. Kalabagh dam has been abandoned because of reservations of Sindh and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Various governments took the plea that it will create disharmony in the country. One should not ignore the reality that our four provinces are desperately calling for sufficient water to cultivate their lands, and are suspicious of each other on the distribution of water. Will it not be a source of disharmony?

<http://thefrontierpost.com/article/90462/Diamer-Bhasha-to-get-top-priority/>

Shabbir Mir, "Wheat subsidy protests: G-B protesters threaten to block Karakoram Highway, hold long march"

The Express Tribune, April 20, 2014

GILGIT: Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) continues to be in the grip of protests after the federal government's refusal to restore the region's wheat subsidy. The shutter-down strike announced by the Awami Action Committee (AAC) entered its fifth day on April 19. The strikes were launched to pressure the government into restoring G-B's wheat subsidy which was put in place by Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto owing to the region's remote location and poor economy. The AAC, an alliance of around 23 religious, nationalist and political groups formed earlier this year with the single objective of lowering wheat prices, says it will continue the

strike till its demands are met. "Our demands remain unchanged and we will call off the strike after we get written orders from the government," stated Maulana Sultan Raees, a member of the AAC's executive body, on April 19.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/697795/wheat-subsidy-protests-g-b-protesters-threaten-to-block-karakoram-highway-hold-long-march/>

"Suspension of Gilgit-Pindi bus service threatened"

The Express Tribune, April 20, 2014

GILGIT: Office bearers of the Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Transport Association and Kohistan Transport Association (KTA) on April 19 threatened to suspend the bus service between G-B and Rawalpindi over their disapproval of the 'convoy system'. At least 30 buses are escorted together on the Karakoram Highway (KKH) from Gilgit to Rawalpindi and made to stop at several check posts for clearance. As a result, people travelling on passenger buses have to travel for at least 26 hours instead of 13 to reach Rawalpindi from Gilgit. The system was introduced as part of official security measures following terrorist attacks on the KKH in 2011-12, when selected passengers were made to disembark and were then shot dead on the strategic highway. In case transporters go through with their threat, the plight of passengers will be exacerbated as they will be forced to spend extra on private vehicles. We go on strike from April 24 if the convoy system is not abolished, threatened presidents of GTBA and KTA on April 19.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/697917/suspension-of-gilgit-pindi-bus-service-threatened/>

"17 persons from PoK detained in UP"

The Indian Express, April 19, 2014

MAHARAJGANJ: Seventeen persons, including three women and 10 children, from Pakistan Occupied Kashmir were detained for illegally crossing into India from Nepal through Sonouli border, SSB sources noted. Four men, three women and 10 children were detained for illegally crossing into India after reaching Kathmandu from Pakistan, Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) Deputy Commandant

of Sonouli Mithul Kumar stated. Kumar stated all of them hailed from POK's Muzaffarabad town and had left Jammu and Kashmir in 1989 and 2009 in separate groups. It is suspected that some of them had been involved in terrorist activities, Kumar stated. The group, accompanied by SSB personnel, has been sent to Jammu and Kashmir cell in Delhi from where the central intelligence agencies would take over, he added.

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/17-persons-from-pok-detained-in-up/>

"Environmental conservation: one percent of Diamer-Bhasha Dam project cost must be allocated: Prime Minister"

Business Recorder, April 18, 2014

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on April 17 stated that the construction of Diamer-Bhasha Dam will not only cater for energy requirements of the country but at the same time, it would be a source of development for Gilgit-Baltistan. The Dam will prove to be an economic milestone for the country, he stated while reviewing progress on Diamer-Bhasha Dam Project at the PM House. The Prime Minister directed that one percent of the project cost should be allocated, specifically for environmental conservation so that local vegetation and wildlife resources are not affected. He stated the first preference for un-skilled jobs, should be given to locals of the project area.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-stories/0/1174331:environmental-conservation-one-percent-of-diamer-bhasha-dam-project-cost-must-be-allocated-prime-minister/?date=2014-04-18>

Shabbir Mir, "Overcoming sectarianism in G-B"

The Express Tribune, April 18, 2014

Strikes and counter strikes along sectarian lines had what described Gilgit-Baltistan's (G-B) politics in the recent past. The trend escalated especially after 2011-12 when passengers travelling by bus on the strategic Karakoram Highway between Gilgit and Rawalpindi were attacked and killed. While the sectarian motivated murders strengthened the clergy, it widened the existing gap between Shiites

and Sunnis. Subsequently, Gilgit city stood divided between the two sects, making life hell for the commoners.

But in 2014, G-B witnessed a change. Inhabitants of G-B set aside sectarian differences and waged a joint struggle for a common cause. That happened due to efforts from Awami Action Committee (AAC). Formed this year by a group of comparatively little known politicians, including advocate Ehsan Ali and Baba Jan, the AAC made 'restoration of wheat subsidy' the centre of its politics. It was in 2013 when the prices of wheat began escalating. The regional government of G-B gradually started lifting the subsidy that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had sanctioned for the G-B at least four decades ago sanctioning rampant poverty in the administrative region.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/697184/overcoming-sectarianism-in-g-b/>

"Kashgar-Gwadar corridor to bring prosperity to Gilgit-Baltistan people"

Business Recorder, April 18, 2014

Construction of Kashgar- Gwadar economic corridor would help Pakistan to earn billions of rupees every year through export of fruits and livestock to China and other neighbouring countries. The main strength of economy of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) depends largely on fruits and horticulture, and after the construction of the stated economic corridor, GB would be able to introduce locally produced items in international markets besides earning foreign exchange, stated Deputy Director Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP)- Gilgit, Sabz Ali Khan.

There is an increasing demand of fruits and vegetables in China it would be a great opportunity for GB to export local produce to big Chinese market. He stated efforts have to be made to improve the livelihood of the mountaineers in the years ahead, and added that one of the options available is to process the fruit locally to increase its shelf life and to add to its value, so that it may be transported economically.

<http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/1174354/>

Roshan Din Shad, "Kashmir sets up environment tribunals to curb pollution"

Thomson Reuters Foundation, April 25, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: Gazing at smoke from the engines of decades-old buses and trucks, mingling with the dust spat out by stone-crushing machines near his bookshop on a busy road in Muzaffarabad, Shoukat Awaz Mir has the satisfaction of knowing that people like him finally have a way to fight pollution: They can sue. The government of Pakistan-administered Kashmir (Azad Jammu and Kashmir, or AJK) has inaugurated tribunals dedicated to hearing cases against violators of the northern region's environmental laws. The courts were authorised by the legislative assembly 12 years ago. But officials at the AJK Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) say lack of money prevented it from setting them up until now.

<http://www.trust.org/item/20140424145453-rhvkb>

"Matter of survival: 'Govt must extend wheat subsidy to Gilgit-Baltistan'"

The Express Tribune, April 24, 2014

LAHORE: "The issue of wheat subsidy for the people of Gilgit-Baltistan has been left to fester too long. The government must do something about it as soon as possible," Pakistan Peoples Party Punjab secretary general Tanvir Ashraf Kaira stated on April 23. He was commenting on the formation of a committee, led by Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan, Chaudhry Barjees Tahir, to look into the matter. Kaira questioned the wisdom of the government's inaction on the issue. "The minister's explanation was unfortunate...he passed the blame onto the local administration saying it was a matter between the people of Gilgit-Baltistan and their government." He noted wheat subsidy was a federal subject.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/699525/matter-of-survival-govt-must-extend-wheat-subsidy-to-gilgit-baltistan/>

"Gilgit-Baltistan alienation"

Dawn, April 25, 2014

The ongoing popular protests that have roiled Gilgit-Baltistan over the past 10 days are reflective

of the growing sense of alienation the region's people are beginning to feel. Thousands have taken to the streets in various towns of GB, with major sit-ins taking place in Gilgit and Skardu. The ostensible trigger for the protests was the recent withdrawal of the wheat subsidy, which has sent prices of the essential food item spiralling in the underdeveloped region. However, the demonstrations, organised under the banner of the Awami Action Committee, an umbrella group bringing together over 20 political, religious and nationalist parties, are about more than just the price of wheat.

The protesters have issued a charter of nine demands, which range from reduction in the prices of other basic items to bringing down load-shedding. The demonstrations are also being seen as a manifestation of popular frustration with the regional government for alleged corruption, especially in the GB education department, where jobs were reportedly doled out through questionable means. It is also noteworthy that protests have cut across sectarian and sub-regional lines, as both the Shia and Sunni communities are participating and people from all districts in the region are marching for their demands.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1102203/gilgit-baltistan-alienation>

Shabbir Mir, "Day nine: AAC's protest over wheat prices sees renewed vigour"

The Express Tribune, April 24, 2014

GILGIT: Agitation across Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) over the wheat subsidy gained momentum as delegations from other parts of the region reached Gilgit on April 23. Convoys from Skardu and Astore valleys reached the protest camp at Ghari Bagh by April 22 night, injecting new life into the movement which entered its ninth day on April 23.

They stayed in the camp overnight while residents extended hospitality by providing them food and water. Well-fed and rested, the speakers kept a crowd of nearly 20,000 engaged. They criticised the government, bureaucracy and ministers for being unable to resolve their issues and even demanded resignations from ministers, saying they have failed the public time and again over the past four years.

"Listen to us our so-called rulers!" shouted one of the leaders of Awami Action Committee (AAC) from the crowd. Amid loud jeers, he added: "We are not going to withdraw at any cost. Subsidy is our right and we will get it by hook or by crook."

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/699566/day-nine-aacs-protest-over-wheat-prices-sees-renewed-vigour/>

"Govt providing 73pc subsidy on GB wheat: Barjees"

Pakistan Observer, April 24, 2014

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Chaudhry Barjees Tahir rejected the notion that the federal government has lifted subsidy on wheat in Gilgit Baltistan, clarifying that still the government was providing 73 per cent subsidy on wheat. Addressing a press conference at ministry on April 24, the minister stated that government of Pakistan annually giving Rs 7753.33 million wheat to the people of Gilgit-Baltistan while receiving Rs 2.1 billion as price. He stated that a total of five billion and 75 crore subsidy is annually given. He noted that only 14 flour mills are operational in Gujranwala for city of six million population.

<http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=240470>

"AJK PM reposes full trust in Pak Army ISI"

The Nation, April 25, 2014

MIRPUR: AJK Prime Minister Abdul Majeed on April 23 posed full confidence in the Pak Army and its intelligence wing Inter-Services Intelligence, and demanded end to criticism on the institutions. Addressing a press conference in Kashmir House, he stated that the nation hailed the sacrifices of Pakistan.

The premier stated that the allegations on the biggest intelligence agency without any substantial proof had tarnished the country's image. "The armed forces of Pakistan have laid incalculable sacrifices to guarding every inch of Pakistan's land. Our agencies are the guarantors of national security. All the institutions should be given due reverence and one must think before humiliating the institutions and putting the national security at stake," he added. He also condemned the cowardly

attack on senior anchor Hamid Mir and prayed for his early recovery.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/national/25-Apr-2014/ajk-pm-reposes-full-trust-in-pak-army-isi>

“Sikandar new GB chief secy”

Dawn, April 24, 2014

ISLAMABAD: Sultan Sikandar Raja, director general immigration and passport, has been posted as chief secretary Gilgit-Baltistan, stated a notification issued in Islamabad by the federal government. Mr Sikandar has been secretary of three departments in Punjab including communication and works, Services and GAD and local government. He has also served as deputy commissioner Islamabad and DG Excise and Taxation Punjab. He enjoys good reputation and has brought positive reforms in the passport department.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1101978/sikandar-new-gb-chief-secy>

“PPP demands restoration of wheat subsidy for GB province”

The Nation, April 24, 2014

LAHORE: The PPP has demanded restoration of wheat subsidy for the people of Gilgit Baltistan. Though the government has formed a committee led by Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Northern Regions Barjees Tahir to resolve the issue, the PPP has called upon the government to resolve the issue at the earliest. PPP Punjab Secretary General Tanvir Ashraf Kaira, in a statement, questioned the rationale presented by the federal minister Barjees Tahir who had stated that it was a matter between the local population and the government of GB.

He stated this was not the case as the federal government had withdrawn wheat subsidy for the people of GB and the federal minister's statement was highly misplaced. “The withdrawal or restoration of wheat subsidy is purely federal government's subject and a matter between the local administrations is highly misplaced,” Kaira maintained. He argued the people of the region were poor and the wheat subsidy made the difference in their subsistence level. “The IMF conditionalities

should not be implemented at the expense of lives of the poor”, he insisted.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/lahore/24-Apr-2014/ppp-demands-restoration-of-wheat-subsidy-for-gb-province>

“Gilgit-Baltistan ruthlessly exploited by Pakistan”

ANI, April 28, 2014

GENEVA: Gilgit Baltistan that was annexed from the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir is located strategically between Pakistan, India, China and Afghanistan. It has been controlled by Pakistan for decades now, and suffers from sectarian violence, militancy, poverty and unemployment. Senge Sering, president of the U.S. based Institute for Gilgit Baltistan Studies, blamed Pakistan for exploiting the region and fulfilling its own strategic interests. Many mega dams are under construction by Pakistan, including the Diamer-Bhasha Dam on the River Indus, which has been facing criticism from locals.

<http://www.aninews.in/videogallery8/22827-gilgit-baltistan-ruthlessly-exploited-by-pakistan.html>

“For better produce: Training launched for farmers in G-B”

The Express Tribune, April 27, 2014

GILGIT: A recently initiated project aims to increase the quality and production of various fruits of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B). “We have launched separate courses for apple, potato and apricot farming so farmers can better understand how to increase their yield,” stated Muhammad Irfan, the project's coordinator, while talking to journalists in Gilgit. In this connection, renowned experts have been invited to train farmers in Ghizer, Gilgit, Hunza-Nagar and Bagrote areas with comparatively better climatic conditions and potential for increased yield of fruits. The project has been launched by Star Farm Pakistan, an agro-consultancy firm, with the support of USTATED's Small Grants and Ambassador's Fund Programme, to improve quality and increase production of G-B's key fruit species.

“The soil here is fertile and best suited for mass production,” stated Irfan, adding the produce can be

increased considerably by helping farmers with technicalities.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/700700/for-better-produce-training-launched-for-farmers-in-g-b/>

“Committee report: ‘The power lies in Islamabad’”

The Express Tribune, April 30, 2014

GILGIT: The power lies in Islamabad, rendering the Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Legislative Assembly toothless. This was one of the findings of the nine-member senate committee investigating human rights issues in the region. “What we have found out is that the powers lie in Islamabad through the G-B Council, which is headed by the prime minister, and not with the G-B Assembly,” shared Senator Afrasiab Khattak on April 29 at a news conference at the Gilgit Press Club where the other senators were also present. “Even a peon cannot be appointed here without prior permission from Islamabad,” stated Khattak, who is heading a nine-member Senate Functional Committee investigating human rights violations in G-B. The finding is in stark contrast to earlier statements made by G-B Chief Minister Mehdi Shah who often boasted about the devolution of power, giving credit to former president Asif Zardari.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/702044/committee-report-the-power-lies-in-islamabad/>

“Senators demand financial autonomy for GB”

Dawn, April 30, 2014

GILGIT: Members of the Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights on April 30 urged the federal government to give full administrative and financial powers to Gilgit-Baltistan to improve governance in the region. Addressing a press conference on April 29, the committee's chairman Afrasiab Khattak stated that Pakistan's economic future depended on uplift of Gilgit-Baltistan. He further stated construction of railway track between Pakistan and China through Karakoram Highway was important. Mr Khattak stated that during the three-day visit, the committee members interacted with social and political representatives and held meetings with different religious and ethnic groups

and got their input about improving human rights situation in the region.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1103238/senators-demand-financial-autonomy-for-gb>

Ponum Humza, “Role of Gilgit in Pak economy”

Pakistan Observer, April 30, 2014

Gilgit is situated at the north of Pakistan. It is the hometown of beauty, various cultures and numerous languages. Gilgit region has been given many names, like Jewel of Pakistan, Asia's wonderland and Roof of the world. It is considered to be paradise when it comes to explaining the beauty of this region. Strategically speaking, Gilgit is one of the most important regions of Pakistan as it borders the territory of Azad Kashmir to the south, the Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to the west, the Wakhan Corridor of Afghanistan to the north, China to the east and northeast and the Jammu and Kashmir state of India to the southeast. It is only 15 km away from Central Asia. However, despite the efforts of the local government of Gilgit-Baltistan to officially become a part of Pakistan as its 5th Province, the Pakistani Government has put in little or no efforts to declare this region Pakistan's official Province. Gilgit play a vital role in economy of Pakistan as its mountains are full of minerals and precious stones. These are the main source of economy but unfortunately Pakistan cannot get benefit as much as it should. K2 is the second-highest mountain on Earth.

<http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=240808>

“GB action committee meets officials to resolve subsidy issue”

Dawn, April 26, 2014

GILGIT: The Awami Action Committee, a grouping of 22 religious, political and regional parties, on April 25 stated that it would announce the future course of action once the parleys between an AAC delegation and the federal government officials got completed regarding resolution of the wheat subsidy issue. AAC leader Gulam Abbas told Dawn here that the executive body of the committee had given all powers to Maulana Abdus Sami, regional emir of Jamaat-i-Islami, to take up the wheat

subsidy issue with the federal government. He added a delegation led by Mr Sami had met with Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Birjis Tahir in Islamabad to sort out the issue.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1102408/gb-action-committee-meets-officials-to-resolve-subsidy-issue>

“PUCM urges SC to take notice”

The Nation, April 27, 2014

MIRPUR: Pakistan United Christian Movement Chairman Albert David alleged that non-Muslims were being forced to convert to Islam across the country, and appealed to the chief justice of Pakistan to take notice of the alleged forced conversion. Mr David expressed deep concern over a report released by Movement for Solidarity and Peace, saying that an estimated 1,000 Christian and Hindu women were married by Muslims after their conversion every year in the country. In a press statement issued on April 25, the PUCM chief demanded that special measure should be taken to ensure that the conversion were not forced, and if the allegation proved, the perpetrators should be tried and sentenced according to the local laws. He also stressed a need for a specific ordinance to stop “forced” conversion. He urged the non-Muslims parliamentarians to work towards bringing in a law in this regard.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/national/27-Apr-2014/pucm-urges-sc-to-take-notice>

Parvez Jabri, “147mw capacity Patrind Hydropower Project to be completed in 2017”

Business Recorder, April 30, 2014

ISLAMABAD: The 147 mw capacity Patrind Hydropower Project would be completed in year 2017 with the cost of US 362 million. The run-of-river Patrind Hydropower Project is being constructed on river Kunhar. The project will generate, on average, 632.6 GWh of electricity annually. Since the project is being developed by SHPL as an IPP, the SHPL has entered into a 30 year Power Purchase Agreement with National Transmission and Despatch Company (NTDC), Pakistan's gird system operator, for the sale of

electricity generated from the Project. The project is located on the boundary of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJ&K) and District Abbottabad of Pakistan, near Muzaffarabad. The majority of the project structures, including the powerhouse, are located in the territory of AJ&K. However, the diversion tunnel will be located within territorial limits of District Abbottabad.

<http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/industries-a-sectors/170015-147mw-capacity-patrind-hydropower-project-to-be-completed-in-2017.html>

“Chairman WAPDA visits Diamer Bhasha Dam site, reviews progress”

Business Recorder, April 25, 2014

The Pakistan Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) Chairman Zafar Mahmood visited Diamer Bhasha Dam site to have first-hand knowledge about the project and witness the progress on the preparatory works that are underway there. Speaking on the occasion, the Chairman stated that Diamer Bhasha Dam is of immense importance because of its water storage capacity, generation of much-needed low-cost hydel electricity and flood mitigation.

He stated that initiation of construction work on the main dam in the shortest possible time is one of his priorities in view of the project's strategic importance for economy, especially food and energy security of the country. During his visit, the Chairman had a detailed round of the dam site, under construction model village for affectees at Harpin Das, WAPDA colony at Thor Valley and Shatial Bypass.

<http://www.brecorder.com/agriculture-a-allied/183/1176600/>

“US forms cultural bridge with Pakistan through Lincoln Corner at AJK University”

Associated Press of Pakistan, April 25, 2014

ISLAMABAD: U.S. Public Affairs Counselor Angela Aggeler and University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Vice Chancellor Prof Syed Dilnawaz Ahmad Gardezi have signed a three-year agreement to continue their partnership with the Lincoln Corner Muzaffarabad.

http://www.app.com.pk/en/_index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=278297&Itemid=2

“PoK border villages still live in darkness”

ANI, April 18, 2014

POONCH: The dull orange of the bulb's filament flickers uncertainly against the chilly dusk of the muted mountains. The grimy but warmly-clad figure, limping from a decade-old bullet injury in his leg, thinks nothing of the virtually unlit bulb in the setting darkness as he goes about lighting the rudimentary kerosene lamp that throws eerie shadows on the mud walls of his two-room hutment. To a first time visitor, the setting is surreal. But to the slightly-bent man with a flowing beard, looking older than his years, it is simply the end of another hard day. Life-as-usual in the lives of those who call the Pir Panchal ranges their home.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/pok-border-villages-still-live-in-darkness-114041800351_1.html

“Unpopular policies: G-B govt continues to take flak over decision to charge patients”

The Express Tribune, April 13, 2014

GILGIT: A year on, the government's decision to charge patients at hospitals in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) continues to attract heavy criticism in the region. “This is sheer injustice with the poor people of G-B,” stated former G-B President of Pakistan Medical Association Dr Muhammad Zaman, while addressing a news conference at Gilgit Press Club on April 12.

Zaman runs a non-governmental organisation by the name of G-B World Forum. “If we take up this matter with the United Nations Commission for Human Rights (UNCHR), it will be a huge embarrassment for the G-B government,” stated Zaman. “I suggest they consider this decision before that happens.” He demanded an independent audit be conducted of the money collected, saying that the flawed system at hospitals offers many chances for corruption. Zaman called on doctors to take the interests of patients into consideration as well, adding that it is something that their profession demands.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/694763/unpopular-policies-g-b->

govt-continues-to-take-flak-over-decision-to-charge-patients/

“GB demands 5 FC platoons from centre”

Dawn, April 12, 2014

GILGIT: The Gilgit-Baltistan government has requested the federal government to send five additional platoons of Frontier Constabulary (FC) to help arrest precarious security situation in the region. Through a letter sent on April 1, the GB home department requested the interior ministry to arrange five additional platoons of FC to the area, which has experienced violence, including sectarian and terrorist attacks, in the past. “Law and order situation in GB remains vulnerable due to sectarian strife and terrorist attacks,” notes the letter. According to it, the GB will need reinforcements to ensure smooth holding of the upcoming elections.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1099308/gb-demands-5-fc-platoons-from-centre>

Shabbir Mir, “Territory dispute: Opposition leader fears more clashes this grazing season”

The Express Tribune, April 11, 2014

GILGIT: Opposition leader in the Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Assembly, Janbaz Khan has warned that more clashes between the residents of Diamer Valley and Kohistan can follow if the territorial dispute remains unsolved. At least seven people were killed and a dozen others injured in an exchange of fire between residents of Thor in G-B and Harban in Kohistan in February. The nearly 10-kilometre stretch of land on both sides of the Basari check post, which separates Kohistan from Gilgit-Baltistan, has long been a bone of contention between Thor Valley, Diamer and Harban Nala, Kohistan. The disputed land is among the areas being demarcated for acquisition for the much-awaited Diamer-Bhasha dam project. “Diamer residents will be taking their livestock to the pastures on this land, as grazing season has begun in G-B. This might lead to more clashes,” the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) lawmaker told reporters on April 10.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/693908/territory-dispute-opposition-leader-fears-more-clashes-this-grazing-season/>

“The balancing act: A new face of Kashmir women's long struggle”

The Express Tribune, April 17, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: She believes women need to be empowered through education and financial independence, yet feels strongly that women need to do so while balancing their cultural values with emancipation. A success story to say the least, Farzana Yaqoob, Minister for Social Welfare and Women's Development in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is helping bring about change but with a sense of balance.

The younger daughter of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) President Sardar Muhammad Yaqoob Khan, she hails from a middle class family of Ali Sojal village, in Rawalakot district. She graduated in 2000 from Punjab University and after marriage settled down in Switzerland. In 2011, she came back to AJK and won the by-election from LA-19 Rawalakot constituency that remained vacant after her father Sardar Yaqoob was made the President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/696707/the-balancing-act-a-new-face-of-kashmir-womens-long-struggle/>

Shabbir Mir, “Shutter down strike: Businesses in G-B come to a halt in protest against wheat prices”

The Express Tribune, April 16, 2014

GILGIT: Staying true to its word, the Awami Action Committee (AAC) succeeded in its call for a shutter down and transport strike in parts of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) on April 15. In hopes of pressuring the government into reinstating the subsidy and reducing the price of wheat, AAC has threatened to continue the strike unless their demands are met. The AAC is an alliance of around 23 religious and political groups, which was formed earlier this year to fight for lower wheat prices. This was the second strike of its kind in less than 40 days and the AAC has hailed it a success. Traffic remained at a standstill in most areas, while markets were closed in Gilgit, Hunza-Nagar, Ghizer, Skardu and Chilas. Groups of lawyers also lent their support to the strike and boycotted courts. G-B Supreme Court

Bar Association President Shahbaz Khan noted the boycott was observed to express solidarity with the AAC.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/696037/shutter-down-strike-businesses-in-g-b-come-to-a-halt-in-protest-against-wheat-prices/>

“18 Kashmiris visit divided families”

The Nation, April 16, 2014

MIRPUR: Eighteen people belonging to divided families of Azad Kashmir and J&K travelled through the weekly trans-Line of Control bus service between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar, official sources stated. Those travelled included AJK four women who travelled to Srinagar through the bus. Similarly, five Kashmiris from J&K crossed over to Pakistani side to visit their AJK-based relatives, separated in 1947. They crossed the sides through Chakothi-Uri sector on Muzaffarabad-Srinagar historic route in north Kashmir, noted the sources. They further stated the four women reached Kaman post after crossing the Aman Setu, (Peace Bridge) by foot. The six residents of AJK also returned to their homes after completing stay. They also included two women and a child.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/national/16-Apr-2014/18-kashmiris-visit-divided-families>

Shabbir Mir, “Undeterred: 'Either the prices of wheat will fall, or the govt will'”

The Express Tribune, April 14, 2014

GILGIT: Days before the planned region wide strikes, the Awami Action Committee (AAC) vowed to continue its movement till either the “fall of the government or of wheat prices.” The AAC has called for a complete shutter down and wheel jam strike in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) from April 15 for an indefinite period. This is to press the government to reduce the price of wheat. To mount further pressure, the AAC has threatened to block Karakoram Highway (KKH) till their demands are met. “By the time we announce the end of the strike, either the government or the wheat prices must fall,” stated AAC Chairman Ehsan Ali. The AAC is an alliance of more than a dozen religious, nationalist and

political groups formed earlier this year with the exclusive objective of lowering wheat prices to that of 2009. It later expanded its charter of demands to include complete end to electricity load-shedding and corruption in G-B.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/695247/undeterred-either-the-prices-of-wheat-will-fall-or-the-govt-will/>

“Section 144 enforced across Gilgit Baltistan to maintain law and order situation”

The Nation, April 14, 2014

GILGIT: The Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) government imposed section 144 across the province for one month to maintain law and order situation. Director Information Department GB, Farooq Ahmed stated that decision was aimed at restoration of peace which was disturbed due to certain violence incidents. He further stated that section 144 had been enforced with immediate effect for next month. Farooq Ahmed stated that during this period displaying of arms, rallies and public gathering would be proscribed in all the six districts of GB and stern action will be taken against the violators. He urged the general public to comply with the provincial government orders to help in establishing an environment of peace in the region and remove the sense of insecurity among the people.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/national/14-Apr-2014/section-144-enforced-across-gilgit-baltistan-to-maintain-law-and-order-situation>

“Linkage: 'Telecom infrastructure in Neelum Valley soon’”

The Express Tribune, April 15, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: The Special Communication Organisation (SCO) is planning to lay telecommunication infrastructure in Neelum Valley of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) to link it with the rest of the country. SCO officials stated this while talking to a delegation of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) AJK chapter, led by its Secretary-General Shah Ghulam Qadir who called on them at the SCO headquarters in Rawalpindi. The SCO officials stated that they have already provided telephone facilities to the people in Shadra,

Kel and Athmuqam and very soon it would be extended to Taubutt in Neelum Valley. The SCO officials stated that landline telephony, cellular phones, DSL and LDI services will also be provided to the people in Neelum Valley. Qadir lauded the SCO's services in providing the state-of-the art telecommunication facilities to the people in AJK and other mountainous regions.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/695559/linkage-telecom-infrastructure-in-neelum-valley-soon/>

“India expresses concern over China-Pakistan Economic Corridor”

April 15, 2014

India voiced its concern to China over its plan to build a multi-billion dollar Economic Corridor from Xinjiang to Pakistan's Gwadar Port through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, even as it assured Beijing of its commitment to consolidate strategic bilateral ties. "We have raised this issue and raised our concerns not (only) this time, we have made them known earlier. They have noted our concerns," Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh told reporters after holding the sixth round of Strategic Dialogue with her Chinese counterpart Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin. The talks were held as the long-running Lok Sabha elections, hailed as the world's biggest democratic exercise, got underway in India that will form a new government at the Centre.

Asked whether the issue figured in the talks today, she stated it was raised this time too. The Corridor connecting China's Xinjiang with Pakistan's Gwadar Port with rail and road links raised concerns in India as it is being built through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. China argues that it would help redress the backwardness of the region. The two sides held most cordial discussions enhancing the scope of the relations which in recent years showed steadfast increase.

<http://www.sahasamay.com/nation-news/676551555/india-expresses-concern-over-china-pakistan-economic-corridor.html>

Economic Developments

“Goods worth over Rs 80 lakh traded across LoC Poonch”

Press Trust of India, April 3, 2014

POONCH: Goods worth over Rs eighty lakh were traded across the Line of Control (LoC) today between Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Jammu and Kashmir at Chakan-Da-Bagh crossing point, officials stated. As many as 25 trucks rolled out from the Trade Facilitation Centre (TFC) Poonch to PoK, they stated, adding, these trucks carried bags of banana and herbs worth Rs 70,96,470. From PoK, two trucks carrying bags of dry dates and almonds worth Rs 13,65,000 entered India, officials added. Officials from both sides monitored transportation of these goods twice during the day.

http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/goods-worth-over-rs-80-lakh-traded-across-loc-poonch-114040301174_1.html

“AJK Power Dept to recover Rs860m”

The Nation, April 7, 2014

MIRPUR: The AJK Electricity Department Mirpur Division formed mobile recovery teams to recover arrears of over Rs860 million from defaulters across Mirpur city division, official sources revealed. The arrears of the electricity

bills include Rs600 million against government departments, Rs160 million against domestic consumers and Rs100 million against the commercial consumers in the division, stated Tahir Ratayal, Executive Engineer, AJK Electricity Department, City Division. He stated that 15 mobile recovery teams headed by Sub Engineer in-charge of the areas concerned had been constituted for the recovery of the arrears. Meanwhile, in the first leg of the drive, stringent action will be taken against hundreds of power consumers who owe Rs50,000 each to the department in the head of monthly bill.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/national/07-Apr-2014/ajk-power-dept-to-recover-rs860m>

International Developments

“US ambassador on AJK tour”

The Nation, April 11, 2014

ISLAMABAD: US Ambassador Richard Olson visited Muzaffarabad on April 11 to highlight the United States' support for bilateral trade opportunities, educational exchange, and development programmes in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. According to the US Embassy, the Ambassador's maiden visit was an opportunity to renew ties with the government leadership of AJK and to meet with local residents. “Today's visit is an important opportunity for me to see the enduring partnership of the US with the people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir,” Olson stated.

Olson called on AJK President Yaqoob Khan, and also met with a delegation of senior officials of the AJK government. He discussed investment and trade opportunities during a meeting with Chamber of Commerce leaders and entrepreneurs from the AJK region. “The US is the largest export market and one of the largest sources of foreign investment for Pakistan,” stated Olson. “We want to see this continue to grow, including right here in the AJK region,” he maintained. Jointly with AJK's President, Olson broke ground on a new building that will house the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Faculty of Education at the Muzaffarabad old city campus.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/islamabad/11-Apr-2014/us-ambassador-on-ajk-tour>

Abdul Majeed, “US vows to prop up AJK economy, Richard Olson meets”

The Nation, April 12, 2014

MIRPUR: US Ambassador in Pakistan Richard Olson assured the AJK government of propping up agriculture and education sectors in Azad Jammu and Kashmir through USTATED. The US envoy, currently on a visit to AJK, made the announcement while he was addressing a

reception hosted by AJK Prime Minister Abdul Majeed at the latter's house in Muzaffarabd. The ambassador also pledged to persuade American investors to invest in hydel and tourism sectors. “Kashmir offers great scenic beauty and fascinates a lot. The people and the government of United States will continue their support for the prosperity and development of AJK particularly in promoting education, agriculture, tourism and hydel power generation,” he observed.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/national/12-Apr-2014/us-vows-to-prop-up-ajk-economy>

“Kuwait Fund to provide Rs 806.4m for AJK”

Daily Times, April 29, 2014

KUWAIT CITY: Kuwait Fund (KF) management has agreed to provide Rs 806.6 million for the completion of eight educational facilities including Rawalakot Chotta Gala university campus, girls and boys colleges in Azad Jammu Kashmir. While giving the details Deputy Chairman Earthquake, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) Maj Gen Muhammad Asif Azeem stated that all projects related loan issues discussed in. During the meeting KF officials appreciated completion of 23 educational institutions out of 31 which they declared as KF best rating projects. He stated KF has approved Rs 4.962 billion for the 31 projects in AJ&K and among these 23 projects have been completed while for the remaining eight projects Kuwait Fund agreed to provide Rs 806.4 million. During the meeting KF funds management acknowledged the pace of work and appreciated ERRA Management for amicable removal of hurdles including litigation by some land owners which caused delay of eight projects including state of art university Rawalakot Chotta Gala campus.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/national/29-Apr-2014/kuwait-fund-to-provide-rs-806-4m-for-ajk>

Other Developments

Shabbir Mir, "Profitable vegetation: 'Plantation drive' transforms Diamer Valley's landscape"

The Express Tribune, April 5, 2014

CHILAS: The otherwise barren landscape of Diamer Valley of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) has literally turned over a new leaf because of a 'mass plantation drive' being carried out by residents. However, this drive is not meant for gaining ecological benefits, instead, it is reportedly being carried out as a means to make money when the government finally doles out compensation for the Diamer-Bhasha Dam.

"This is sort of an investment which locals are making in the hope that these trees would be included in the compensation paid for their land," stated Ghulam Rasool, a resident of Bunar Valley situated along the Karakoram Highway. The 'plantation drive' continues unchecked in areas from Chilas to Raikote Bridge, the area demarcated for Diamer-Bhasha Dam, ignoring a ban imposed by the government in 2007 under the Land Acquisition Act, 1984.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/691473/profitable-vegetation-plantation-drive-transforms-diamer-valleys-landscape/>

Rinchan Ali Mirza, "End of a cultural era: Rajas to ruins"

The Express Tribune, April 6, 2014

It might appear odd, even unbelievable, if one suggests a shared chapter in history between Gilgit-Baltistan and the Italian Renaissance. Like the Medicis family, which controlled Florence throughout much of the Renaissance and acted as patrons for writers, artists and thinkers in the region, the rajas or ruling families were the foundation for the cultural edifice of Gilgit-Baltistan. Art, poetry, music and folklore flourished during their rule and carved a distinct identity for the area. Shigar valley gateway to the mighty Karakoram. Once the

Medicis were ousted by a fanatical priest in the early 16th century, Florence never returned to its former glory. The royal families of Gilgit-Baltistan suffered the same fate after the introduction of land reforms in the region during the 1970s. And cultural deterioration in the region has been its biggest price.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/690434/end-of-a-cultural-era-rajas-to-ruins/>

Shabbir Mir, "Time for change: UNDP to help G-B enhance local government"

The Express Tribune, April 4, 2014

GILGIT: Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Assembly will get technical assistance from United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in forming legislation for local government. A select committee of G-B, headed by regional Law Minister Ali Madad Sher, has sought UNDP's support in accordance with constitutional provisions, provincial perspectives and best practices. Triggered by the introduction of the 18th Amendment in 2010, this initiative is one more chapter in the ongoing discourse and efforts regarding policy initiatives on the local administrative level. The UNDP has been playing an advisory role in discussing ways to make grassroots representation more effective. It launched its first development magazine in the country in January 2014, with the first edition focusing on 'A New Way Forward for Local Governance in Pakistan.' In helping G-B carve out a new way forward, UNDP identified a few areas where it could help, such as drafting local government law and organising multi-stakeholder consultations to get feedback in this regard, as well as reviews of other provincial laws and best practices. "The basic format for the assistance has been discussed and agreed upon," stated Altaf Hussain, Director Programmes at Gilgit-Baltistan Policy Institute (GBPI), a non-profit organisation

set up in 2009 to explore policy options for the region.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/691055/time-for-change-undp-to-help-g-b-enhance-local-government/>

“Mine awareness day: Speakers for educating people about explosives”

The Express Tribune, April 5, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: Speakers have called for educating vulnerable communities along the Line of Control (LoC) about landmines. They were speaking at an event held at the university ground on April 4 to mark the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action to raise awareness about landmines and progress towards their eradication. The event was jointly organised by the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) and the Civil Defence and State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). AJK Finance Minister Latif Akbar, who was the chief guest, stated that the people living along the LoC were the most victims of landmine explosions and both the government and NGOs should launch an awareness campaign to educate them.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/691466/mine-awareness-day-speakers-for-educating-people-about-explosives/>

“A green massacre”

The News, April 1, 2014

Mass-scale deforestation is taking place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan. Their respective governments seem to have surrendered to the timber mafia that has reduced the forest cover of the country from 18 percent to only 2.5 percent, thus increasing several risks including landslides, flash floods and threatening wildlife habitat and glaciers. The total silence of the authorities on such a huge national loss is beyond understanding. While travelling on the Karakoram Highway you only see thousands and thousands of trees logged by the roadside. The terrible view of this massacre starts from the Kohistan district of KP and continues up to the end of the Diamer distict in Gilgit-Baltistan.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-11-241519-A-green-massacre>

“AJK pledges healthy society afresh on Universal Health Day”

The Nation, April 8, 2014

MIRPUR: Universal Health Day was observed throughout Azad Jammu Kashmir on April 7 with renewal of pledge to work hard for materialising the dream of a healthy nation and serve the ailing humanity to make them useful and healthy members of society. The topic for Universal Health Day 2014 is vector-borne diseases. The day is celebrated on April 7, every year to mark the anniversary of the founding of WHO in 1948. Each year a theme is selected that highlights a priority area of public health. The day provides an opportunity for individuals in every community to get involved in activities that can lead to better health.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/national/08-Apr-2014/ajk-pledges-healthy-society-afresh-on-universal-health-day>

“Cultural crisis in GB, Aziz Ali Dad”

The News, April 16, 2014

Cultural crisis in Gilgit-Baltistan is home to diverse linguistic, religious and ethnic groups. During the last two decades the word culture has become very popular among the people there, the youth in particular. That is why culture is invoked by different sub-regional groups, nationalists and language communities to lend legitimacy to their respective causes. However, the debate about culture in Gilgit-Baltistan does not stem from a clear definition. Within localised discourse the very word 'culture' is employed to signify an assortment of things, ranging from history, tradition, mythology, rituals, folk literature, cuisine, material heritage, dance, art to entertainment and incompatible entities. That means that the word culture is internalised not in all its theoretical purity, rather it has been appropriated by different groups to provide a unifying point for their practices and ideas, which are not always shared by all people in society.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-9-244443-Cultural-crisis-in-GB>

Fact sheet on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir

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

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

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

(Source: Jammu & Kashmir Government website at <http://www.jammukashmir.nic.in/>, accessed on November 14,, 010)

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)

Area: 13,297 square km

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

Capital: Muzaffarabad

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

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

President: Sardar Yaqoob Khan

Prime Minister: Chaudhry Abdul Majeed

AJK Council: Total 12 members

AJK Legislative Assembly: Total seats are 49

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

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

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

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

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

Gilgit-Baltistan

Area: 72,496 sq. kilometers

Population: 870,347 (1998 population census)

Capital: Gilgit

Districts: Nine

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

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

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

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

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

Gilgit-Baltistan Council: Total 15 members

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

Governor of G-B: Pir Karam Ali Shah

Chief Minister G-B: Syed Mehdi Shah

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

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

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Disclaimer

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

POK NEWS DIGEST



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