

POK

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A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

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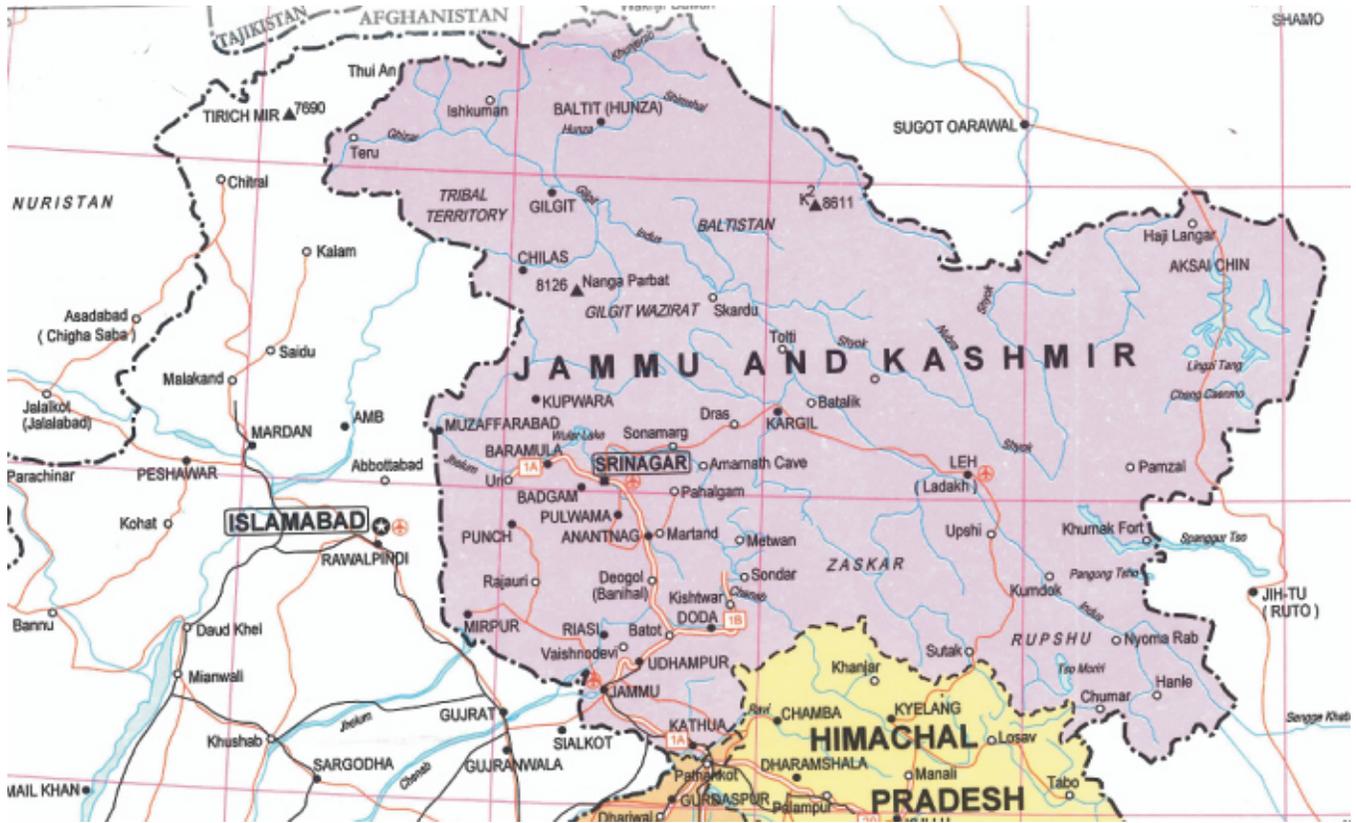
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Jammu & Kashmir

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

In this Edition

Over the last few years, the multibillion worth proposed Diamer Bhasha dam project has been a source of huge concern for the establishment in Pakistan. The proposed dam is slated to be built in the Diamer district of Gilgit Baltistan and the power houses for the same will be located in Kohistan district of the neighbouring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Apart from the prevailing dearth of funds (to support the mega hydropower project), the proposed dam is deeply mired in several controversies- important being a land dispute between Gilgit Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As noted in one of the reports included in the current issue, the dispute revolves around a stretch 10 kilometre land that lies at the border between the two regions and has, at the same time, being demarcated for the proposed Diamer Bhasha dam project.

The land dispute between the two sides has been pending for a long time. The state has intervened on the matter by constituting a boundary commission. However, all such efforts have failed to resolve the deadlock. The Jirga also attempted to solve the issue and urged local people to entrust the state to amicably sort out all the differences regarding land dispute. So far the issue remains unresolved and this casts doubt on the Pakistan government's plan to start construction on the ambitious Diamer Bhasha dam by the middle of this year. No headway has been made on the actual work of construction on this ambitious project despite the fact that ground breaking has been held in past for the same on at least two occasions.

Positive reactions have poured in on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Lahore towards the end of December 2015. The leadership of the so called Azad Jammu and Kashmir, including the President Sardar Yaqoob Khan, welcomed Prime Minister Modi's visit to Pakistan. It was noted that the visible bonhomie during the visit between the prime ministers of India Pakistan would help creating a conducive atmosphere for dialogue and lead towards meaningful constructive engagement between the two sides.

Priyanka Singh

Political Developments

“AJK like setup to be introduced in GB”

Online International News, December 1, 2015

Gilgit Baltistan (GB) Chief Minister Hafiz ur Rehman submitted a consensus based proposal on December 4 in a committee headed by Sirtaj Aziz to introduce Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) like setup in GB. Earlier, a Committee was formed under the chairmanship of Advisor to Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif Sartaj Aziz to give a constitutional status to GB. The proposal will be presented in the said committee. All political and religious parties of GB will be attending committee session and are on one page. It is decided that GB will be given the same status as that of AJK without bringing constitutional amendment because it will affect AJK's status. GB will have its own judiciary setup, health, educational department and Auditor General. Designation of Governor will be changed to President, Chief Minister to Prime Minister, etc. Most importantly, GB will get rights and protections under the Constitution of Pakistan.

http://www.onlinenews.com.pk/index.php?page=newsdetail&news_id=1919

“NDMA Ensures Speedy Progress in Relief Activities”

Business Recorder, December 1, 2015

In the aftermath of earthquake on 26th October 2015, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) mobilized all possible rescue and relief efforts in collaboration with Pakistan Army, Navy, Air Force, SUPARCO, NHA, PTA and USAR teams. NDMA arranged three helicopters for PDMA Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to undertake for rescue/relief operations. NDMA monitoring teams were deployed in the earthquake hit areas while Chairman NDMA, Major General Asghar Nawaz also regularly visited various areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Gilgit Baltistan to oversee relief efforts.

The Federal Government through NDMA and Provincial Governments through their respective Disaster Management Authorities (DMAs) have ensured overall provision of 47,054 Tents, 80,088 Blankets, 12,094 Plastic Mats, 968.98 tons of Food Packs, 22,000 Tarpaulins, 14 tons of bottled water, 27 tons of medicines besides 49 Water Filtration Plants in earthquake affected areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Federally Administered Tribal Areas FATA and Gilgit Baltistan respectively. Moreover, NDMA has coordinated with Pakistan Air-Force and Pakistan Navy for transportation of Medical teams comprising male and female doctors and paramedical staff to Torghar and Dasu in Hazara Division. These medical teams have established two medical camps and are providing necessary medical support. These teams will remain stationed in Torghar and Dasu for the next 3 to 4 days to cater for the medical requirement of the earthquake affectees. The Federal government has released Rs. 2.5 billion to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government as part of payment for compensation while the tranches will be released to Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan and Federally Administered Tribal Areas subject to completion of verification surveys.

<http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/general-news/265206-ndma-ensures-speedy-progress-in-relief-activities.html>

“Khunjerab Pass closed for 4 months”

The Nation, December 1, 2015

The Khunjerab pass in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) International Border of Pak-China has been closed on November 30 for all types of traffic for a period of four months. The official source of immigration noted that the route will remain closed due to heavy snow fall at Khunjerab Pass during the winters, under an agreement between the government of Pakistan and China signed in 1985 by both countries. Hundreds of containers are reportedly left in China because of the closure. According to a

source that the volume of trade between Pakistan and China was higher after PM inaugurated the Attabad tunnel than the past five years. This was low after the blockage of KKH at Attabad. During the winter season tens of feet of snow fall on the Khunjerab pass, located between Lon 76.515° & Lat 35.904°. The pass connects China and Pakistan at an altitude of around 15, 000 feet above the sea level.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/01-Dec-2015/khunjerab-pass-closed-for-4-months>

Shabbir Mir, “Warring families of Gilgit settle differences”

The Express Tribune, December 2, 2015

In a region plagued by sectarian strife, a rare show of harmony raised hopes for many as warring families who lost 13 relatives to acts of violence in 2012 pardoned each other in Gilgit. On April 3, 2012, clashes erupted between Shias and Sunnis after masked motorcyclists attacked a rally held by the G-B chapter of Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) in Garhi Bagh, Gilgit to protest the detention of one of its leaders. The man behind the reconciliation was G-B Assembly Speaker Jafarullah Khan who brought together the relatives of the men killed on that day. Over 55 others were injured in the violence that was sparked off by the grenade attack. When news of the incident reached Chilas Town, a vengeful mob ran amok, burning passenger buses and firing at people of rival sects. At least 10 passengers were killed. Following the violence, authorities imposed a curfew in Gilgit town and registered cases under the Anti-Terrorism Act against 15 men for attacking buses in Chilas. Three were also booked for throwing a hand grenade at the rally.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1002054/warring-families-of-gilgit-settle-differences/>

Shabbir Mir, “Insulating Diامر from trouble”

The Express Tribune, December 4, 2015

For quite some time now, Gilgit-Baltistan's scenic Diامر Valley has been in the spotlight, but for all the wrong reasons. It all began in 2011-12, when passenger buses travelling on the Karakoram Highway were attacked and their passengers

butchered on sectarian grounds. A year later, armed men wearing army uniforms, stormed a base camp in Nanga Parbat, killing 10 foreign mountaineers. It does not end there. The security officials investigating the high-profile murders of the mountaineers also fell prey to terrorists in the days that followed the attack. After a brief pause, the district made headlines again in 2015. First, for barring women from voting and then blaming a djinn for the abduction and subsequent murder of a four-year-old child. In addition to this, there was also an incident in November 2015 where two officials were kidnapped, although this failed to draw media attention. With a population of over 0.2 million, Diامر is one of the 10 districts in Gilgit-Baltistan, sharing boundaries with Kohistan in Khyber- Pakhtunkhwa. Just like its neighbour, Diامر's society is deeply patriarchal and heavily influenced by orthodox clergy. Class stratification runs deep, as Sheen and Yashkun tribes wield political, social and economic clout. While it comprises 77 per cent of the total forest-cover in Gilgit-Baltistan, the valley is lagging far behind on many other fronts. According to Alif Ailaan Pakistan District Education Rankings 2015, Diامر is ranked 95 out of 148 districts in terms of education and 127 in terms of infrastructure and facilities.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1003589/insulating-diامر-from-trouble/>

“Lawmaker Rehana Abbadi demands security from G-B govt”

The Express Tribune, December 4, 2015

The long-standing row between Gilgit-Baltistan and Kohistan over a strip of land on both sides of Basri check post (which separates the two regions) has resurfaced. The nearly 10-kilometre stretch of land is among the areas being demarcated for acquisition for the Diامر-Bhasha Dam project. An official privy to the development noted that the issue flared up once again when work on the realignment of Karakoram Highway (KKH) near Shatial, 60 kilometres west of Chilas, was temporarily screeched to a halt by residents. “On December 3 locals threatened to permanently stop work on the disputed territory if the matter is not

resolved as per their wishes,” the official stated. “More clashes and bloodshed will take place on both sides of the check post if the issue is not settled.” The disputed land, which separates Kohistan from the region, has been a bone of contention between Thor Valley, Diamer in Gilgit-Baltistan and Harban Nala, Kohistan in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The status of the land remains uncertain and has been the cause of considerable unrest in Diamer and Kohistan as it involves compensation and royalty in the long run. In January 2014, the federal government stepped in to resolve the issue. The matter was referred to a boundary commission, constituted by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, for a permanent settlement. Rangers were stationed on the disputed territory to defuse tension till a decision was reached. A jirga brokered a 40-day ceasefire between warring tribes in Kohistan and G-B. It convinced the warring tribespeople to bid farewell to arms and leave the boundary dispute for the government to resolve. However, in February 2014, locals on the G-B side took to the streets and blocked KKH after residents of Kohistan forcibly took away over 400 goats from a resident of Diamer. The goats had been grazing on a swath of land claimed by both regions.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1003470/uncertain-borders-territorial-row-between-g-b-kohistan-resurfaces/>

“AJK LA Formally Backs PM Nawaz Sharif's Four-Point Formula on Kashmir”

Business Recorder, December 4, 2015

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Legislative Assembly (LA) on December 4, while backing Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's four-point formula to resume talks with India on Kashmir, paid tributes for forcefully raising the issue in United Nations. The Legislative Assembly adopted unanimous resolution in this regard, tabled by opposition members Syed Shukat Shah and Muhammad Sadeeq Batli and termed the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif speech at the United Nations General Assembly as thought-provoking and expressions of the hearts of Kashmiri masses. The LA session, continuing on second consecutive day with Speaker Sardar Ghulam Sadiq in the chair, adopted some

other resolutions besides taking up a number of legislation bills, question hour and other business. Through another resolution adopted unanimously, the AJK Legislators expressed full satisfaction over the progress of operation "Zarb-e-Azb" for the elimination of terrorism and paid tribute to Armed Forces.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/1/265941-ajk-la-formally-backs-pm-nawaz-sharifs-four-point-formula-on-kashmir.html>

“APHC-AJK condoles death of JKPL leader's father”

Kashmir Media Service, December 1, 2015

The All Parties Hurriyet Conference Azad Jammu and Kashmir (APHC-AJK) chapter expressed profound grief and sorrow over the sad demise of the father of senior leader of Jammu and Kashmir Peoples League, Muhammad Ashraf Sofi. The APHC-AJK at a meeting held in Islamabad on December 1 expressed solidarity with the bereaved family and prayed Allah Almighty to rest the departed soul in eternal peace and give courage to the aggrieved family members to bear the irreparable loss with patience. The meeting was held under the chair of the Convener, Mir Tahir Masood, and was attended by Syed Yousuf Naseem, Syed Faiz Naqshbandi, Manzoorul Haq Butt, Hassan-al-Bana, Ijaz Rehmani and Muhammad Shafi Dar.

<http://www.kmsnews.org/news/2015/12/01/aphc-ajk-condoles-death-of-jkpl-leaders-father.html>

Shabbir Mir, “Separate constitutional status: G-B lawyers to garner support from counterparts in AJK”

The Express Tribune, December 6, 2015

Lawyers in Gilgit-Baltistan plan to seek the support of their counterparts in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) for a separate constitutional status for the region. Lawyers and politicians in AJK have vehemently opposed a separate constitutional status for G-B. They believe the move can weaken support for the Kashmir issue. On November 16, AJK former prime minister Sardar Attiq Ahmad Khan stated making G-B the fifth province of Pakistan

will dent the Kashmir cause. G-B Bar Council Vice Chairman Shehbaz Khan stated a delegation will be sent to AJK to rally support for G-B's cause. "We will request AJK lawyers not to raise objection if G-B is accorded a separate constitutional status," stated Shehbaz. The decision comes a day after the bar council's annual general meeting in Gilgit. In addition, lawyers also plan to organise a convention in December 2015 in Islamabad. A large number of lawyers from AJK and G-B will participate in the convention.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1004650/separate-constitutional-status-g-b-lawyers-to-garner-support-from-counterparts-in-ajk/>

"Pakistan under stress to initiate political reforms in Gilgit Baltistan"

New Delhi Times, December 5, 2015

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif declared on 24th November political reforms in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) to redress the grievances of the people of the region. While speaking at the swearing-in ceremony of Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan-the new Governor of Gilgit Baltistanat Gilgit, Nawaz informed that a committee has been set up for the purpose with Chief Minister Hafeezur Rehman, as a member to work out a plan for empowering people to resolve their issues. He promised to set up more economic zones worth multi-billion dollar projects as a back up to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and hoped that all these would increase trade activities in the region making it a business hub. While expressing the hope that development of tourism industry would usher in an era of progress in the region Nawaz informed about the progress of work on various power projects, including Bhasha Dam, Bunji and Dasu dams. Chief Minister Hafizur Rehman reiterated government's determination to develop the region. Governor Mir Ghazanfar Ali promised to accord priority to development-oriented projects and appealed to the federal government for financial help for completing the Gilgit-Skardu road project. Nawaz obliged declaring 50 crores for the Road. The development comes in the backdrop of agitation in the region clamouring for development, especially Modi's

model of development in Jammu Kashmir region and appears to be Pakistan government's knee-jerk reaction not to appear inferior as compared to India in developmental resolve. More such posers are expected in coming months.

<http://www.newdelhitimes.com/pakistan-under-stress-to-initiate-political-reforms-in-gilgit-baltistan123/>

"Rescue 1122 service to be introduced in all AJK districts"

Dispatch News Desk, December 5, 2015

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government decided to ensure the availability of Rescue 1122 service in all districts of the state, an official source stated on December 4. However, the Rescue 1122 service is presently available in Mirpur and Muzaffarabad. The AJK Civil Defense Department sources told media that the government would provide all possible financial assistance to facilitate the introduction of Rescue 1122 service in all AJK districts. Concerned nation-building departments have been directed to materialize the plan of launching of the popular rescue service within stipulated time frame simultaneously in all rest of the AJK districts. The sources further underlined that rapid increase of the civil defense volunteers in all AJK districts was the ample proof of the increased national wisdom and attachment among the young generation for serving the sick.

<http://www.dnd.com.pk/rescue-1122-service-to-be-introduced-in-all-ajk-districts/102049>

"Peace-loving GB people reject terrorism: Pervaiz"

Samma TV, December 6, 2015

Federal Information Minister Pervaiz Rashid stated on December 6 that the peace-loving people of Gilgit-Baltistan had rejected terrorism in its all forms and manifestations and made the region a cradle of peace. Speaking as the chief guest at a seminar on "Realizing the potential of Gilgit-Baltistan to commemorate the independence day of GB-Nov 1, 1947?", the minister noted killing innocent people was the creed of Satan. Sometime ago some followers of evil forces had slit the throats of innocent people after disembarking them from

busses and identifying them by their identity cards, he regretted. Pervaiz Rashid further stated Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif had constituted a committee under the chairmanship of his Adviser Sartaj Aziz on the constitutional rights for GB. The people would not only get constitutional rights but also the right of economic progress during the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) rule, he added. He stated like constitutional rights, road links were also vital. Roads not only linked regions but also brought people closer, besides ushering in economic prosperity, job opportunities and increase in trade, along with promoting culture and heritage.

<http://www.samaa.tv/pakistan/2015/12/peace-loving-gb-people-reject-terrorism-pervaiz/>

“No terror incident in GB after 2013 elections: chief minister”

Business Recorder, December 7, 2015

Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Hafiz Hafeezur Rehman on December 6 stated the PML-N government through its effective and prudent policies has been able to ensure the overall peace and unity in Gilgit-Baltistan region. He noted not a single incident of terrorism has occurred in the region since its coming to power after 2013 general elections. Addressing a seminar he stated, "that GB had cultural, linguistic, religious diversity and we can change it into an opportunity through unity." He noted after the implementation of National Action Plan, Gilgit-Baltistan has become far more peaceful though in the past sectarian divides were created by certain elements.

He further stated that with the construction of Karakoram Highway, people of GB came out this far-off and cut-off region and now after completion of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the region would progress by leaps and bounds in the years ahead. He stated that the present government of GB was striving day and night to change the destiny of the people of the GB region. Citing the example of surge in tourist activity, he noted that this year over 600,000 tourists have visited GB while during past 12 years only 70,000 tourists came to GB. He stated that present government was working to provide four road links with the people of country. He stated that 1400 teachers have been

appointed in GB on merit and about 1400 more vacancies of the teachers would be filled through FPSC.

<http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172/1253527/>

“Uncertain Status of FATA and GB”

The Nation, December 8, 2015

Not all Pakistani citizens are completely Pakistani citizens. While this was true for several minorities, such as the Ahmedis, whose rights contrast with the majority Sunni population, it is also true for large swathes of territory too. Places like Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) still do not enjoy the same constitutional protections that other Pakistani citizens do. They are administrative anomalies; a ramshackle and makeshift jumble of old colonial law, customary law, and incomplete legislative acts which leaves their residents uncertain and unprotected. Although the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has recently shifted its focus towards restructuring these faults, its promise of reform like so many governments before may yet be just another cosmetic change. Addressing a rally in connection to Independence Day in GB, Information Minister Senator Pervaiz Rashid stated the people of the province would get their “constitutional rights”, and will prosper due to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). At the same time, the debate over the fate of FATA is also underway; the government is pushing for a merger with the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a section of tribal leaders and political representatives want FATA to be declared an autonomous province, while some moot a hybrid system a provincially administered tribal area (PATA). Both regions, though different in history and administrative setup, are essentially arguing for the same thing equal rights and powers as other provinces and success of one campaign is bound to increase the pressure of the other.

<http://nation.com.pk/editorials/08-Dec-2015/uncertain-status-of-fata-and-gb>

“Vacant seat: G-B gears up for GBLA-6 polls”

The Express Tribune, December 10, 2015

The Election Commission in Gilgit-Baltistan

announced the by-polls schedule for a constituency vacated by Mir Ghazanfar Ali GBLA-6, Hunza-Nagar 3. The seat fell vacant after Ghazanfar took charge as the region's governor. He replaced Barjees Tahir. The notification says the polls will be held on January 28, 2016. The public notice for by-polls will be issued by December 10, while the dates for filing nomination papers are December 14 and 15. The date to announce the rejection or acceptance of appeals by returning officers has been set for January 2, 2016.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1007069/vacant-seat-g-b-gears-up-for-gbla-6-polls/>

“Kashmiri leaders hail Pak-India talks”

The Express Tribune, December 11, 2015

Leaders in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) hailed the resumption of dialogue between Pakistan and India. AJK Minister for Rehabilitation Abdul Majid Khan noted at a seminar on human rights in Muzaffarabad on December 10 that the decision to hold dialogue, announced after bilateral talks in Islamabad on December 9, had been hailed in the city and in Srinagar. “Kashmiris are the main party to the dispute, and without including Kashmiri leadership the talks will not succeed.”

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1007947/ray-of-hope-kashmiri-leaders-hail-pak-india-talks/>

“Legislative assembly elections: JKPP to push for direct elections for president”

The Express Tribune, December 13, 2015

The Azad Kashmir president should be elected through a direct public vote, newly-elected Jammu Kashmir Peoples' Party (JKPP) President Sardar Khalid Ibrahim Khan suggested on December 12. While addressing a press conference at National Press Club, the party president stated, “We do not support the idea of completely scrapping of 1974 Interim Act, but there is a dire need to revisit it in order to restore the sanctity of the act and dignity of the presidency”. All the major political parties will be contesting elections for the legislative assembly in AJK, likely to be held in May or June 2016. Khan stated major constitutional changes came in General Yahya Khan's era, when adult franchise

was adopted and a democratic setup was introduced in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. In 1974, parliamentary system was introduced in AJK under the Interim Constitution Act, which has undergone a number of amendments. Since 1975, the prime minister has been elected by members of the legislative assembly and is the chief executive of the state, whereas the president is the constitutional head.

He noted the system in his party was comparatively better than many others because it holds biannual intraparty elections. “The 1974 act damaged the sanctity of the presidency. The post is literally auctioned in AJK,” he stated.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1008958/legislative-assembly-elections-jkpp-to-push-for-direct-elections-for-president/>

Shabbir Mir, “Ousting terrorism: 37th batch of G-B police completes training course”

The Express Tribune, December 14, 2015

The 37th batch of Gilgit-Baltistan police completed a training course on December 14, vowing to root out terrorism from society. The rigorous training was held at Police Recruitment Training College (PRTC) in Gilgit where trainees undertook various courses including commando training taught by senior instructors for months. G-B Chief Minister Hafeezur Rahman who was the chief guest at the passing-out ceremony congratulated participants who also put on display various skills they had learnt during the course.

He praised the role of G-B police in maintaining law and order and stated the police force made G-B one of the most peaceful regions in the whole South Asia. Rahman exhorted the force to keep up their efforts and remain professionally committed. Addressing the ceremony, he also stated Rs400 million was being spent on improving the police force. “In addition to skilled training, police will be equipped with all necessary equipment including bullet-proof vehicles and jackets so they are better equipped to perform their duties,” he added. Rahman further stated the previous government had paid little attention to the betterment of police and he was bent on avoiding that mistake.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1010072/ousting-terrorism-37th->

“Pakistan to continue supporting Kashmiris, says NA speaker”

Pakistan Today, December 15, 2015

Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq stated that Kashmir dispute is close to the heart of every Pakistani and the future of both Pakistan and Kashmir is linked. He asserted that durable peace in South Asia cannot be achieved without resolution of Kashmir issue in accordance with the aspirations of Kashmiri people. He noted this while talking to President Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) Sardar Muhammad Yaqoob Khan who called on speaker NA in Parliament house on December 14. Reiterating support for the Kashmiri people, the speaker noted that Pakistan will stand by Kashmiris till the realization of their demands for a peaceful resolution of the issue and will continue to provide diplomatic, political and moral support to them. He stated that current government was availing every opportunity to raise Kashmir dispute on international forums. He stated that brave people of Kashmir have rendered countless sacrifices in course of claiming the right to self-determination and have remained resolute and steadfast against the oppression, for more than six decades. President AJ&K Sardar Muhammad Yaqoob Khan expressed his gratitude on Pakistan's staunch and firm support to the people of Kashmir. He stated that the present government has taken up this issue irrespective of political differences amongst parties and represented Pakistan's unwavering commitment to Kashmiris' plight on regional and international forums.

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/12/15/national/pakistan-to-continue-supporting-kashmiris-says-na-speaker/>

Shahzad Anwar, “Eight months on: AJK without poll body chief”

The Express Tribune, December 15, 2015

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) have been without a chief election commissioner (CEC) ever since the last one retired on April 14, 2015, because the federal and the state governments cannot agree on a new name. The PPP-led AJK government sent three names of serving AJK Supreme Court judges

-Justice Mustafa Mughal, Justice Rasheed Sularia and Justice Sardar Abdul Hameed- to the Kashmir Council on September 11. The council, a federally-controlled body headed by the prime minister, ignored all three and sent back an advice to appoint Justice (ret'd) Munir Ahmed Chaudhry, the CEC. It may be recalled that Justice Chaudhry, then AJK High Court judge, was given the additional charge of CEC on April 27, 2013. He held the post till his retirement on April 14, 2015. AJK President Sardar Yaqoob Khan filed a reference with the AJK apex court over the CEC appointment controversy on September 17. A full bench- headed by Chief Justice Mustafa Mughal and comprising Justice Muhammad Azam Khan, Justice Chaudhry Mohammad Ibrahim Zia, Justice Raja Saeed Akram Khan and Justice Masood Ahmed Sheikh- ruled that the council could only pick one of the three names the legislative assembly would forward to it. And that the council can ask the assembly to send another three names if it does not pick anyone from the first list. The court had also maintained that a serving judge of the high court could be appointed as CEC, but if a high court judge ceases to function as CEC for any reason, he could not be reappointed for the remaining period.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1010086/eight-months-on-ajk-without-poll-body-chief/>

“969 arms licences cancelled”

The Nation, December 15, 2015

The District Administration Mirpur on December 14 cancelled 969 arms licences of different categories on expiry of its renewal deadline, it was officially declared. Mirpur Deputy Commissioner Ch Amjad Iqbal noted on December 14 that the cancelled arms licences included 9mm and 7mm pistols and revolvers and 12-bore guns. He further stated that licences holders had failed to renew their licences by the stipulated period.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/15-Dec-2015/969-arms-licences-cancelled>

“LG polls in GB to be held next year”

Dawn, December, 16, 2015

The local government elections in Gilgit-Baltistan would be held in 2016, stated Minister for Local

Government and Rural Development Farman Ali. Talking to journalists on December 16, he stated that the elections would be held after preparation of computerised electoral roll by the GB Election Commission. "The government is determined to further strengthen local bodies in the region to facilitate people," he stated, adding local bodies' elections were inevitable to resolve issues of people at their doorsteps. The local bodies' elections have not been held in Gilgit-Baltistan since 2009.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1226666/lg-polls-in-gb-to-be-held-next-year>

"AJK President meets Ishaq Dar"

Business Recorder, December 16, 2015

President of Azad Jammu Kashmir Sardar Muhammad Yaqoob Khan called on the Federal Minister of Finance Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on December 16 at the Finance Division. The Finance Minister acknowledged the sacrifices of people of Kashmir for the sake of the unity of the country, stated a press release. The AJK President discussed different development projects of the AJK Government with Finance Minister and also the financial needs of region. The Finance Minister assured the President AJK that the Federal Government will provide all possible assistance to the AJK Government for the completion of ongoing projects. President AJK praised the economic turnaround of the country which had greatly helped improving the image of the country internationally.

<http://www.brecorder.com/world/1/268398.html?section=1>

"1800 Afghan nationals expelled from AJK"

The Nation, December 16, 2015

At least 1800 Afghan nationals have been deported from Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) under the National Action Plan. AJK Law Minister Azhar Gillani noted that around 3,100 Afghan nationals have been living illegally across the region, of them around 1,800 have been deported. He stated that final notices have been served on the rest of those staying illegally and they will be deported by 31 December. He noted that on request of the Afghan embassy in Islamabad, the date has been extended to December 31.

<http://nation.com.pk/international/16-Dec-2015/1800-afghan-nationals-expelled-from-ajk>

Prateek Joshi, "India's Karakoram Conundrum: The Great Game Lives On"

Geopolitical Monitor, December 15, 2015

The Karakoram Range lies on the northernmost borders of Pakistan and India, further extending into the western border of China. The range houses a huge concentration of peaks over 8,000 meters in height, including K2, the world's second-highest peak. It consists of the Ladakh region of India, the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, and it touches the Aksai Chin region occupied by China. The Great Game ended long ago, but the era of suspicion, border disputes, and geopolitical calculations it propagated got carried into the post-colonial states of India, China, and Pakistan. These machinations of the Great Game got reproduced on the smaller canvas of the Karakoram mountain ranges. The obsession with borders and strategic mountain passes still characterizes the Karakoram region. India as a mutual enemy strengthened Chinese and Pakistani relations through the Karakoram highway and an unconditional border agreement. On the other hand, the Indian side Karakoram's borders of Ladakh with Baltistan and Aksai Chin are heavily militarized. The Karakorams have a glorious past as a Silk Route road connecting India to the markets of Central Asia. The region is also characterized by the rich cultural intermingling of Kashmiri, Turkic, and Buddhist culture through the trading caravans. Once India's historical gateway to Central Asia and China, in the modern era it has become a lingering geopolitical flashpoint between India, China and Pakistan.

<http://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/indias-karakoram-conundrum-the-great-game-lives-on/>

"Gilgit Baltistan: Government Apathy for Earthquake Victims is Worrisome"

UNPO, December 16, 2015

People of Gilgit Baltistan have been badly hit by the harsh winters. With no government help, especially after the October 26 earthquake, the residents brace up for the extreme weather conditions. A children's

group, sitting in the open over the snow, is enjoying eating snacks. It is for the first time an NGO-Alamgir Welfare Trust International has reached the far-flung district of Ghizer in Gilgit Baltistan after the October 26 earthquake, distributing food packs and blankets. However, the woes of the locals will not end with this little relief measure the food packets will not last long and blankets will not help them to face the chill in the harsh climatic conditions that have engulfed the region. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had, after the earthquake, announced a relief package for Gilgit-Baltistan- Rs 0.2 million for completely damaged houses, while Rs 0.1 million for the partially damaged. Till now, the locals have received 2 Kgs of rice, 2 Kgs of pulses and 1 Kg wheat a slap on their face. While the people living in the mountainous regions do not have any option to get their voice heard, the students studying in urban localities have been on protest, demanding compensation for the losses people suffered.

<http://unpo.org/article/18803>

Shabbir Mir, “Technical support: Punjab bureaucrats arrive to streamline governance in G-B”

The Express Tribune, December 17, 2015

Senior bureaucrats from Punjab government are visiting Gilgit-Baltistan in a bid to improve the operation of government offices in the region. An official privy to the development noted on December 16 that the visit aims to provide technical support to the administrative structure of the regional government. “The G-B government had extended the invitation earlier this year,” he further stated. “The visit was finalised after Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Hafeezur Rahman's recent visit to Punjab.” According to the official, Rahman sought technical and administrative assistance from Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif to run government affairs smoothly and account for the wishes of the people. “The team comprises secretaries who are serving in planning, health, education, finance, development and other departments in Punjab government,” the official stated. “They have been sent by Punjab CM

Shahbaz Sharif on Rahman's request.”

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1011378/technical-support-punjab-bureaucrats-arrive-to-streamline-governance-in-g-b/>

“Reorganization of J&K is the only way: Bhim”

Scoop News, December 18, 2015

Prof. Bhim Singh, Chief Patron of J&K National Panthers Party & Member of National Integration Council advocated with strong note and compassion that the resolution of J&K lies in the reorganization of the state and reconstituting all the three regions namely, Ladakh-Gilgit, Kashmir Valley and Jammu Pradesh on geographical, cultural and ethnic basis. Addressing a rally of political activists from different parts of the country at Jantar Mantar, New Delhi on December 18, Prof. Bhim stated that the citizens of India in J&K enjoy social, cultural and political freedom and also strengthen their cultural bonds as nature has entrusted in the people of each region since the establishment of each region. NPP Supremo has been advocating for the reorganization of J&K ever since the establishment of the Panthers Party in the state. He further stated that the leaders in J&K irrespective of their political affiliations have been acting as agents of political hawks since 1947. He stated that Ladakh-Gilgit has its own cultural identity and entity and nature has confined them in a different situation in the Himalayas. The Kashmir Valley has its own identity and geographical recognition with its language and cultural unique entity. Kashmir's merger was a unique contribution of the Dogra Maharaja Gulab Singh assisted by General Zorawar Singh with Jammu State (Muzaffrabad to Kishtwar) in 1942.

<http://www.scoopnews.in/det.aspx?q=52907>

Shabbir Mir, “Sanction: G-B govt seeks permission from PM to expand cabinet”

The Express Tribune, December 20, 2015

The Gilgit-Baltistan government decided to seek permission from Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to expand regional cabinet. An official of the G-B government noted on December 19 that the decision was taken to ensure proper attention is given to all ministries, especially those which need more work.

“G-B Chief Minister Hafeezur Rahman, who is in Islamabad on an official visit, will formally submit the request to Nawaz for approval,” the official stated. Existing cabinet has seven members. Initially, six members were included in July 2015. Ibrahim Sanai was appointed the minister for information and education while Janbaz Khan was allotted the ministries for food and agriculture. The excise and taxation ministry went to Farman Ali. Sobia Moqaddam, who is the only woman to be appointed in the regional cabinet, was given the ministry of women development. In addition, Dr Muhammad Iqbal was made minister for works and Muhammad Wakeel was made minister for forests. However, the Cabinet's strength was increased to seven when Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz leader Akbar Taban was allotted the ministry of power.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1013046/sanction-g-b-govt-seeks-permission-from-pm-to-expand-cabinet/>

I.A. Rehman, “A new round on Kashmir”

The News, December 20, 2015

The way to India-Pakistan negotiations has been cleared once again as if by a sudden wave of the magic wand. Any speculation about the hands that have secured satisfaction of the egos of the subcontinental neighbours is unnecessary for they can easily be recognised. For the moment, India is happy that it has succeeded in putting terrorism high on the agenda of “comprehensive” negotiations although the subject was always included in the “composite” dialogue. And when Sushma Swaraj pitches for 'uninterrupted' parleys nobody should be happier than Mani Shankar Ayer because something of his terminology has survived. Pakistan is, of course, happy that Kashmir is back on the agenda for bilateral talks. Unfortunately, the government of Pakistan has not taken its people fully into confidence about the change in its Kashmir policy. While the parasitical militants are still ranting about taking Kashmir by force, that option was finally given up years ago by none else than General Pervez Musharraf, the then president of Pakistan and chief of the army staff and the man behind the ill-planned and ill-fated Kargil adventure. And if Nawaz Sharif agreed with Asif Zardari on any point it was their shared rejection of the idea of going to

war with India over Kashmir. Equally clear is the fact Pakistan itself dealt a fatal blow to the UN efforts to intervene meaningfully in Kashmir by its illogical reliance on the military option. The world still wants an end to the Kashmir stalemate as a condition necessary for peace and stability in South Asia but the terms of settlement devised in the 1950s are no longer relevant. Further, it is time that all notions of pressurizing India through pin pricks by non-state actors were given up because the international community, in its present mood, would not have anything of that kind.

http://tns.thenews.com.pk/new-round-kashmir/#.Vt_v_n197Gh

“Govt releases grant for AJK varsity”

The Express Tribune, December 21, 2015

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif released Rs111 million to the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (UJK). The amount will serve as scholarship of students from different programmes and classes in the university. The grant will pay for more than 2,000 masters, 600 MPhil and one hundred PhD students of UJK, while dues of 2014-15 students will also be reimbursed.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1013505/student-aid-govt-releases-grant-for-ajk-varsity/>

“Thaw in Pak-India ties delights Kashmiri businessmen”

The Nation, December 23, 2015

Welcoming thaw in India-Pakistan relations, top representatives of the business community of Azad Kashmir and Jammu and Kashmir called upon the leadership of both the countries to widen the scope of confidence building measures. Jammu & Kashmir Joint Chamber of Commerce & Industry Joint President Zulfiqar Abbasi noted that during a three-day meeting, which concluded in Dubai on 20 December, the representatives of the business community welcomed the steps taken by both the governments to resume the dialogue process. The leaders from the Jammu and Kashmir Joint Chamber and other regional chambers and federations hoped that Islamabad and New Delhi should take tangible steps to further strengthen

trade, travel, and civil society exchanges across the Line of Control (LoC). “With support and facilitation, the members of the Kashmiri business community from either LoC side had gathered in Dubai to deliberate upon the future prospects of cross-LoC trade. The meeting was also an opportunity to convene an annual meeting of key members of the Jammu and Kashmir Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industries (JK-JCCI), the first-ever platform of cross-Line-of-Control collaboration,” Abbasi stated. Besides, YV Sharma, the other members from Jammu and Kashmir who attended the Dubai meeting included Rakesh Gupta, president of Jammu Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Mushtaq Wani, president of Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Anil Suri, Lalit Mahajan, Satya Bhushan Abrol, Pawan Anand, Hilal Ahmed Turk, Ashiq Sheikh, Arun Gupta, Ashraf Mir and Yasin Khan.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/23-Dec-2015/thaw-in-pak-india-ties-delights-kashmiri-businessmen>

Muhammad Saleh Zaafir, “Government determined to improve GB, Dr Kirmani assures CM”

The News, December 24, 2015

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Political Affairs State Minister Dr. Syed Asif Saeed Kirmani has assured the people of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) that new vistas of progress and prosperity would be open for them during the incumbent Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) administration. According to a release issued by the PM House while talking to Chief Minister GB Hafiz Hafeezur Rehman on December 22, he noted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is determined to develop the region in a manner that it should become role model for other areas. The PML-N government in GB would complete all the commitment made by Prime Minister Nawaz during his visits to the area early in 2015. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) would become a source of ushering in new era of prosperity and development in GB, he added. The GB chief minister who called on Dr. Asif Kirmani briefed him about the ongoing various projects in the area and stated the people of GB have full faith in the leadership of Nawaz Sharif who

throughout had been most popular leader of Gilgit-Baltistan like other parts of the country. He discussed with Dr. Asif Saeed Kirmani the overall political situation prevailing in the GB and rehabilitation activities for the victims of massive earthquake that struck earlier. The affected are being provided maximum assistance and they are satisfied with the prompt action for the purpose by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the federal government, he added. The two also discussed matters pertaining to the reorganisation of the PML-N in GB.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/83899-Government-determined-to-improve-GB-Dr-Kirmani-assures-CM>

“Kashmiri leadership welcomes Modi's surprise visit”

Pakistan Ki Awaaz, December 26, 2015

The political leadership of AJK on December 25 hailed the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Pakistan and expressed hope for the positive outcome towards resolving all the issues including Jammu and Kashmir for durable peace in the region. The President Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Sardar Yaqoob Khan stated that the pleasant gesture shown by both Prime Ministers would create an atmosphere where, the journey towards peace and harmony shall be smooth and doubts were removed. The AJK Prime Minister Chaudhary Abdul Majeed stated the visit was a positive step towards right direction and could prove beneficial for resumption of comprehensive dialogue process between the two countries to resolve all the outstanding issues.

The speaker Azad Jammu and Kashmir Assembly Sardar Ghulam Sadique Khan noted that the surprise visit was pleasant news for the people of South Asia and was also a happy event for people of Jammu and Kashmir who were hoping some good outcome of the composite dialogue process since it was started. The opposition leader in the Legislative Assembly Raja Farooq Haider stated that any event that brings both the countries closer, was optimistic for people of Jammu and Kashmir who wish to get their issue be resolved peacefully. Ex-Prime Minister and head of All Jammu Kashmir Muslim Conference, Sardar Attique Ahmad Khan stated the

Kashmiri people had great expectations with composite dialogue process and anything that could resume the process was a good news for the AJK people.

<http://aaj.tv/2015/12/kashmiri-leadership-welcomes-modis-surprise-visit/>

“Experts stress steps to ensure fair AJK elections”

The Nation, December 28, 2015

Experts demanded electoral reforms, especially the preparation of computerised voter lists bearing snaps of voters to hold the upcoming general elections in a free, fair and transparent manner in Azad Kashmir. Addressing a workshop, they suggested the refreshing of registered voters lists, re-demarcation of the electoral constituencies in view of the raise in population and establishment of new districts and tehsil headquarters in AJK as well as the registered voters lists of the Jammu & Kashmir refugees settled in Pakistan. Experts including politicians, retired and serving officers, doctors, academicians, journalists, social worker and human rights activists called for initiation of the requisite measures before the announcement of the schedule of the forthcoming elections in Azad Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly, due for mid of 2016. A capacity building workshop of the seasoned civil society actors was hosted by the Kashmir Institute of the International Relations (KIIR). KIIR is holding a dialogue on Free, Fair and Independent Elections 2016 in AJK. KIIR Executive Director Sardar Amja Yousaf and Program Coordinator Altaf Hamid Rao in their inaugural remarks highlighted the salient features of the workshop to raise awareness among the civil society especially the elders, for their due role in ensuring the holding of the forthcoming AJK elections in free and fair environment. The participants included Ch Saeed, Dr Amin Chaudhry and Raja Naveed Akhter Goga of PML-N AJK, Ch Munir Hussain Advocate of PPP (Shaheed Bhutto) AJK, retired bureaucrat Shoukat Majeed Chaudhry, Research scholar and broadcaster Muhammad Shakeel, academicians Prof Qazi Zubair and Prof Sagheer Aasi, Altaf Hamid, Sohrab Ahmed Khan and Khawaja Shahid Mehmood and economist Rao

Hassan Ejaz.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/28-Dec-2015/experts-stress-steps-to-ensure-fair-ajk-elections>

“Youth in Gilgit Baltistan facing government apathy”

Bihar Prabha, December 29, 2015

Rising unemployment has become a major concern for educated youth in Gilgit Baltistan. The lack of job opportunities and low standards of education have made it difficult for them to secure jobs. Despite being rich in natural resources, Gilgit Baltistan has not done very well in realising its economic potential. In the absence of industries, there are not enough jobs on offer. The people of Gilgit Baltistan blame the administration for failing to come out with effective policies for the welfare of locals. Not much has been done to promote tourism and farming sectors in the region. Pakistan has built many dams in Gilgit Baltistan to exploit abundant water resources and generate electricity for its provinces. However, the people in Gilgit Baltistan are forced to live in darkness. With no government help reaching the public, the people have no option but to accept their fate.

<http://news.biharprabha.com/2015/12/youth-in-gilgit-baltistan-facing-government-apaty/>

Shabbir Mir, “Starting devolution: G-B govt set to implement amended LG act”

The Express Tribune, December 29, 2015

Minister for Local Government Wazir Farman Ali stated the Gilgit-Baltistan government has achieved an important milestone by introducing amendments in the G-B LG Act, 2014 which will be implemented soon. LG elections in the region will now be held under the amended act which will help address public issues on a more local level. These views were expressed by the minister on December 30. He stated, “The amendments in the act were made keeping public concerns in mind.” Ali added, “The act now has the capacity to address all public issues with few hurdles.” The minister further stated that the assembly members and other stakeholders will be taken into confidence if deemed necessary so that changes in the act could be made. Regarding the

elections, Ali pointed out, “LG polls in G-B will allow people to vote for their favourite party and candidate.” He also stated, “Preparations are in full swing and we will be able to hold elections soon. NADRA is preparing computerised electoral lists which are in the final stages.” The LG minister added, “The schedule for the polls will be announced after NADRA provides the data to the government.” Ali hoped the devolution of power to the grass-roots level through the act will help people get their issues and problems resolved with ease. “This is the best way to address the problems of the people,” he stated.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1017831/starting-a-devolution-g-b-govt-set-to-implement-amended-lg-act/>

“Justice Mughal made AJK acting CEC”

The Express Tribune, December 30, 2015.

The government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) on December 29 appointed Chief Justice High Court (HC) Justice Ghulam Mustafa Mughal as Acting Chief Election Commissioner (ACEC). The post had been vacant for the last six months. AJK President Sardar Muhammad Yaqoob Khan, with the consultation of AJK Supreme Court chief justice has appointed Justice Mughal as ACEC through the amended Ordinance 2015, in addition to his duties as High Court chief justice till the appointment of a permanent CEC. In October 2015, the AJK president approached the AJK SC to seek guidance for the appointment of ACEC. On October 21, the apex court guided the government to appoint the ACEC till the appointment of a permanent commissioner. AJK Rehabilitation Minister Abdul Majid Khan stated that three candidates have been sent to PM Nawaz Sharif, who is also the chairman of the Kashmir Council, for finalisation.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1018494/additional-charge-justice-mughal-made-ajk-acting-cec/>

“Mallick hopes further warmth in Pak-India ties”

The Nation, December 31, 2015

Expressing optimism over the recent visit of Indian Prime Minister Modi to Lahore, a Kashmiri politician stated that it was the result of the foreign

policy of the government and would pave the way for further warmth in the bilateral ties. “Despite reported hard and harsh criticism of certain political opponents and a section of the electronic media, Nawaz Sharif steadfastly continued his reconciliatory efforts through international political forces to convince India that bright and prosperous future of the Subcontinent lies in the trusted and good neighbourly relations between both the countries,” Justice (r) Majeed Mallick, the president of Jammu & Kashmir Liberation League noted. Abdul Majeed Mallick, also the retired chief Justice of Azad Jammu & Kashmir High Court, continued that the recent visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Lahore was of course a great achievement of the foreign policy of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Elaborating his views, the Kashmiri leader stated that the visit to Lahore had received appreciation in two countries and abroad. He observed that the changed move in the policy was obviously a positive step towards reconciliation between India and Pakistan and a step forward towards comprehensive move for settlement of the outstanding issues including the core issue of Jammu & Kashmir. “Irrespective of biased political criticism of opposition, the top leadership of both the countries must cease the opportunity and take bold steps to finally settle the outstanding issues including the Kashmir conflict, the prime bone of contention between the two countries,” he stated. Justice (r) Majeed Mallick strongly insisted that fortunately, the political atmosphere, at present, was very conducive and helpful in settlement of the old Kashmir issue in line with the aspirations of the people of Jammu & Kashmir. He reminded both the leaders of India and Pakistan of the aspirations of freedom of the people as both the countries attained the same after supreme sacrifices made during the last century from the British occupation.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/31-Dec-2015/mallick-hopes-further-warmth-in-pak-india-ties>

Shabbir Mir, “Power first: Gilgit-Baltistan governor says electricity is his top priority”

The Express Tribune, December 3, 2015

Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Governor Mir Ghazanfar Ali

Khan stated on December 2 that resolving the region's power crisis would be his top priority. "I will go for power generation first. It will help the poor earn a living," stated the governor at his first media interaction after assuming office. Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan replaced Federal Minister for G-B and Kashmir Affairs Barjees Tahir, thus becoming the sixth governor of G-B. "Attabad Lake could be the most feasible project to produce cost effective electricity in a short period of time," stated the Governor who served for five years as the region's chief executive during General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf's government. The position was later elevated to that of chief minister in 2009. Mir Ghazanfar, also called Mir of Hunza for being the progeny of the former ruler of the state, stated if G-B gets sufficient power, it would help people run their businesses and feed their families. The Governor stated the region should pay attention to exporting its products including fruits and vegetables. He suggested the region could export potatoes to China. "So far we have been importing goods from China and now it is time we should pay attention to exporting our products."

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1002738/power-first-gilgit-baltistan-governor-says-electricity-is-his-top-priority/>

"Khurrum for Constructing New Trade Route from GB to Tajikistan"

Business Recorder, December 3, 2015

Commerce Minister Khurrum Dastgir Khan on December 2 stated development of new trade route from Gilgit Baltistan (GB) to Tajikistan is need of the hour which will help Pakistan to establish direct road connection with the Central Asia. "The new trade route will open up new opportunities of enhancing trade with the Central Asian states", he noted talking to Chief Minister GB Hajiz Hafeez ur Rehman who called on him. He noted between Pakistan and Tajikistan there is only a gap of 24 km Afghan bordering area and a new route could be developed from Gilgit through Afghanistan bordering area Wakhan where a jeep track already existed. He stated this route would also be included in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The minister also assured the provision of all possible technical cooperation of the commerce

ministry for construction of Gilgit Industrial Zone. He stated the people of GB would benefit from these industrial zones and trade routes. The minister further stated the government was committed for the development of road, rail and air links with other countries. He also informed the CM that according to a research of Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), GB has a potential to produce 60,000 MW hydel electricity and work of numerous such projects was ongoing. He stated for Diamer Bhasha Dam, the land acquisition process has been completed and speedy work on the project continued.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/1/265635-khurrum-for-constructing-new-trade-route-from-gb-to-tajikistan.html>

"Construction of Diamer Bhasha Dam to start next year: Governor GB"

The Online News International, December 5, 2015

Governor Gilgit-Baltistan Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan says work on the construction of Diamer Bhasha Dam project will start in 2016. In an interview to state media, the Governor stated acquisition of land for the dam is in progress and payment of land compensation to affected people would be completed shortly. Referring to energy shortage in Gilgit-Baltistan, he stated Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif has approved 27 megawatt hydel power at Attabad Hunza which will help to reduce energy shortage in the area. The Governor stated the region has great potential in tourism sector and government is focusing on its promotion.

http://www.onlinenews.com.pk/index.php?page=newsdetail&news_id=1970

"CPEC to bring prosperity in Gilgit Baltistan: Pervaiz"

Daily Times, December 6, 2015

Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Senator Pervaiz Rashid on December 6 stated the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) would connect Gilgit Baltistan to Gwadar, Karachi and Central Asian Republics. Addressing a ceremony in connection with the Independence Day of Gilgit-Baltistan in the federal capital, he stated the federal

government was paying attention towards the development of Gilgit Baltistan. The economic corridor project he stated - would help promote trade, tourism and economy, adding that the CPEC would create numerous employment opportunities and bring prosperity. Addressing the ceremony, Gilgit Baltistan Chief Minister Hafiz Hafeezur Rehman stated law and order situation had improved in Gilgit Baltistan as a result of steps taken by the incumbent government. Tourism the minister stated was being promoted in the area, adding that at least 600,000 tourists have visited Gilgit Baltistan during the tenure of the present government.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/national/06-Dec-2015/cpec-to-bring-prosperity-in-gilgit-baltistan-pervaiz>

Peer Muhammad, “Ghizer connection: G-B chief minister wants road to Tajikistan”

The Express Tribune, December 12, 2015

Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Hafiz Hafeezur Rehman proposed the federal government to include the Ghizer-Tajikistan route into the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects to directly connect the G-B with Central Asian countries. During his recent meeting with Commerce Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan, the GB chief minister stated the Ghizer-Tajikistan route would be the most feasible and accessible project to connect Pakistan with Central Asian countries through land route. He urged that the route be built and connected to the CPEC so that an alternative access is available to Pakistan from the G-B. Rehman stated the project would not only be beneficial for people of the G-B but would also offer both Pakistan and China the nearest route to the Central Asian states, adding that the CPEC is envisaged to develop connectivity with the entire region. A commerce ministry official, who was part of the meeting, stated the G-B CM stated an initial survey and feasibility study of the Ghizer-Tajikistan road project was conducted by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government back in 1993. However, despite the practicability of the project, subsequent governments have ignored it, he stated.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1008544/ghizer-connection-g-b->

[chief-minister-wants-road-to-tajikistan/](#)

Shabbir Mir, “Road to progress: G-B CM vows to develop Diamer Valley”

The Express Tribune, December 13, 2015

Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Hafeezur Rahman stated that Diamer Valley will be developed to bring it at par with the rest of the region. He was addressing a delegation from the valley at his office in Gilgit on December 12. “We will pay attention to infrastructural development,” Rahman noted. “The projects, which were left incomplete by the previous government, will also be completed on a priority-basis.” According to the CM, the promises made before elections in June 2015 will be fulfilled. “Thore, Tangir and Darel valleys will be provided with power and road infrastructure,” he stated. “The army's engineering corps services will also be hired for the construction of roads in the valleys.” About the construction of the Diamer-Bhasha dam project, Rahman stated the project will reap benefits for the entire valley and create job opportunities. The chief minister asked residents of Diamer to help the government eliminate troublemakers from the valley. “We have zero tolerance policy against terrorism and we expect residents to identify the persons involved in such activities,” he added.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1009015/road-to-progress-g-b-cm-vows-to-develop-diamer-valley/>

“Overcoming energy shortfall by 2018 top priority: Barjees”

Radio Pakistan, December 14, 2015

Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan noted the federal government is cooperating with all provinces to ensure law and order. Minister for Kashmir affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Barjees Tahir also noted that end of power shortfall by 2018 is the top priority of the government. Addressing District Bar Association in Nankana Sahib, he stated the federal government is cooperating with all provinces to ensure law and order. The Minister further stated lawyers had played an important role in supremacy of the Constitution and restoration of democracy.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/newsdetail/81434/1>

Economic Developments

Shabbir Mir, “Infrastructural growth: G-B requests \$1b package from federal government”

The Express Tribune, December 14, 2015

The Gilgit-Baltistan government urged the federal government to release an additional \$1 billion for the region for infrastructural development. On December 13, an official at the chief minister's office stated the G-B government will spend the amount on education, health and power sectors as the region holds a key position in the \$46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project. G-B Chief Minister Hafeezur Rahman also confirmed the demand for the funds. Speaking to journalists, he noted the regional government has requested the federal government for funds in view of “G-B's pivotal position in CPEC project”. “G-B will obtain maximum benefits from the project as it serves as a gateway for the country,” Rahman stated. “During my tenure, we have included 14 megawatts of power in the grid system. This has helped reduce the power crisis in the region.” Meanwhile, the multi-billion CPEC project will stretch across over 600 kilometres in G-B. The project will prove to be a milestone in the region's development and ensure the welfare of the people. Speaking to journalists in Gilgit, Minister for Works Dr Muhammad Iqbal stated the government has set targets for the next six months to provide relief to the public. “We are paying attention to the power sector,” he noted. “By the end of the next year, we hope to put an end to load-shedding in Gilgit as we plan to invest 400 million to produce 17 megawatts of power.”

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1009479/infrastructural-growth-g-b-requests-1b-package-from-federal-government/>

“AJK assured of assistance for uplift projects”

The Nation, December 16, 2015

Azad Jammu and Kashmir President Sardar Muhammad Yaqoob Khan called on Finance

Minister Ishaq Dar on December 15. The AJK President discussed different development projects of the AJK government with the minister and the financial needs of the region. Dar assured the President AJK that the government will provide all possible assistance to the AJK for the completion of ongoing projects. President AJK praised the economic turnaround of the country which had greatly helped improving the image of the country internationally.

<http://nation.com.pk/business/16-Dec-2015/ajk-assured-of-assistance-for-uplift-projects>

Shahbaz Rana, “ECNEC says yes to Neelum-Jhelum, CPEC road projects”

The Express Tribune, December 20, 2015

The government gave its final go-ahead to four mega projects, including two road construction schemes under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) at a revised cost of Rs862 billion Rs214 billion or one-third higher than original estimates.

The Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecneec) approved the 969-megawatt Neelum Jhelum Hydropower project as well as CPEC's 118-kilometre long Havelian-Thakot and 392-km Sukkur-Multan section roads. It also approved the National Highway N-70 East-West Road Improvement Project. The main reason behind the increase in cost of these projects except Neelum Jhelum was the government's compulsion to take foreign loans, which were tied with giving engineering, procurement and construction contracts, to parties belonging to these countries. The contractors placed bids higher than the original ones, leaving no option for the government but to revise the cost.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1013023/the-final-approval-ecneec-says-yes-to-neelum-jhelum-cpec-road-projects/>

“Govt Launches BISP, Prime Minister Interest Free Loan Scheme in Gilgit-Baltistan”

The News Teller, December 20, 2015

The federal government extended the scope of Benazir Income Support Program in Gilgit-Baltistan. Chairperson BISP Marvi Memon has formerly launched the scheme on December 20. Moreover, the federal government has also extended the scope of Prime Minister Interest Free Loan in Gilgit-Baltistan as well. Chairperson, BISP stated that the government is taking steps to empower and address problems confronting the women in the country. She also stated that the Federal Government has also been extending the scope of Prime Minister Interest Free Loan Scheme and stated the women to apply for the loan to enhance their role towards positive change in their life and in the region. BISP is the flagship program of the government for women empowerment and poverty alleviation.

<http://www.thenewsteller.com/local/gilgit-baltistan/govt-launches-bisp-prime-minister-interest-free-loan-scheme-in-gilgit-baltistan/30168/>

“Diamer-Bhasha Dam: Construction to begin next year”

The Express Tribune, December 29, 2015

Construction work on the Diamer-Bhasha Dam would start in 2016, stated officials in the Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform. Land acquisition process for the project has been finalised with a cost of Rs104 billion. The project, likely to be part of the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), would not only generate 4,500 megawatts of electricity but would also serve as a huge water reservoir for the country. “After a decade, the country is expected to face acute shortage of water, in order to prevent food starvation, this project will be developed at any cost,” Planning, Development and Reform Minister Ahsan Iqbal noted. He stated the government accorded highest priority to the Dam because a serious water crisis was feared in the next five to ten years, much bigger than the electricity crisis. Diamer-Bhasha Dam would produce

environmentally clean hydroelectric power, store an extra 8.5 million acre feet of water that would be used for irrigation and drinking, extend the life of Tarbela Dam located downstream by 35 years and control flood damage downstream Indus River during high floods.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1017818/diamer-bhasha-dam-construction-to-begin-next-year/>

Shabbir Mir, “No more discount: G-B contractors call strike over withdrawal of tax rebate”

The Express Tribune, December 21, 2015

Contractors in Gilgit-Baltistan announced a strike after the federal government withdrew rebate on income and other tax in the region. The increase in tax, which is now 7.5%, will be applicable to food items, transport companies and print and electronic media. “This is illegal and, in protest, we have decided to stop work on development projects,” stated G-B Contractors Association President Firdos Ahmed at a news conference in Gilgit on December 20. “Levy taxes if you have to, but after giving the region its due constitutional status.” A day prior to this announcement, the federal government withdrew the significant tax discount enjoyed by residents of G-B, increasing tax from 3% to 7.5%. “The contractors, who have already been denied escalation charges over the years, have received a blow with this move,” stated Ahmed, who was surrounded by dozens of contractors at the press club. “This decision [of the federal government] will hurt them the most as it will directly hit contractors; we will start a movement against the decision.” Other speakers present at the conference stated the government should first clear “our outstanding dues before imposing new taxes.”

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1013469/no-more-discount-g-b-contractors-call-strike-over-withdrawal-of-tax-rebate/>

“PTA to hold spectrum auction for AJK, G-B today”

Business Recorder, December 29, 2015

Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) is all set to go for spectrum auction of Wireless Local Loop (WLL) licenses for Azad Jammu Kashmir

(AJ&K) and Gilgit-Baltistan on December 29. Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) and LinkDotNet Telecom Limited have qualified for the spectrum auction of WLL licenses for AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan. According to sources, spectrum is likely to be allotted at base price. PTA Chairman Syed Ismail Shah noted that there is no delay in the auction and it would be held on December 29, 2015. PTA has notified qualified applicants and the successful applicants have been informed accordingly. Information package containing requisite information and instructions to

participate in the auction is also being provided to qualified applicants. PTA has planned to auction spectrum in 1900MHz and 3.5GHz bands for WLL licenses for all three telecom regions of AJK and GB. If all offered spectrum gets sold then, PTA is likely to generate Rs 90 million in total for 2×5 MHz in 1900MHz band and two 30 MHz unpaired lots in 3.5GHz bands. The spectrum winners will have to pay the fee with-in 30 days of the action.

<http://www.brecorder.com/market-data/stocks-a-bonds/0/1259803/>

International Developments

“Pakistan to Welcome Italian Investment for Diamer Bhasha Dam: Dar”

Business Recorder, December 18, 2015

Pakistan would welcome Italian cooperation and assistance for the Diamer Bhasha Dam, Finance Minister, Muhammad Ishaq Dar stated on December 17. He was talking to the visiting Trade Commissioner of Italy, Riccardo Monti who called on the minister. He was accompanied by the Italian Ambassador, Stefano Pontecorvo. Dar who informed Mr. Monti about the Dasu and Diamer Basha projects, however, stated that since Dasu had already achieved financial close, Pakistan would welcome Italian cooperation and assistance for the Diamer Bhasha Dam. The Minister stated that all possible facilitation would be extended to the Italian companies for having business ventures in Pakistan and added that Board of Investment and the Ministry of Commerce would play the lead role in this regard. The Minister emphasized greater economic and trade cooperation between Italy and Pakistan. He stated that collaboration in the fields of energy sector, agriculture, and livestock based food industry, textiles and automobile industry can be productive as both countries enjoy potential in these areas. The Finance Minister welcomed Italian government initiatives to have close cooperation with Pakistan in different sectors. On the occasion, Mr. Monti on this occasion apprised the Minister of his country strong resolve to foster cooperation with Pakistan in different fields

including agriculture, leather goods and textile sectors. He stated Italy could contribute both in terms of providing technical knowhow as well as funding different projects. He particularly mentioned about Italy's expertise in the marble industry and stated his country could consider undertaking training programme for Pakistani experts in this field. He also stated that Italy would invite Pakistani delegations from different spheres for interaction with Italian professionals.

<http://www.brecorder.com/sports/1/268778.html?section=1>

Other Developments

“Punjab to help improve health services in GB”

The Express Tribune, December 21, 2015

The Punjab government would provide financial and technical assistance for the development of health sector in Gilgit-Baltistan, Adviser to Chief Minister on Health Khwaja Salman Rafique stated on December 20. He was speaking to a delegation led by Gilgit-Baltistan Senior Minister Haji Akbar Tabani. Rafique stated that on the direction of Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif, officers from the Health Department had already visited Gilgit-Baltistan to review its requirements related to healthcare. He stated that a conference on health reforms in Gilgit-Baltistan should be arranged in Islamabad in January 2016. He assured the delegation that officers from the Punjab Health Department would participate in the conference and chalk out a roadmap for Gilgit-Baltistan. Health Secretary Jawad Rafique Malik stressed the need for evolving a master plan for the health sector of Gilgit-Baltistan. He also stated the Health Department would cooperate with the Gilgit-Baltistan government in the construction and rehabilitation of hospital buildings.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1013467/cooperation-punjab-to-help-improve-health-services-in-gb/>

Shabbir Mir, “Cleaner G-B: PC-1s ready for sewerage systems in Gilgit, Danyor”

The Express Tribune, December 30, 2015

The Gilgit-Baltistan development authority prepared plan worth over a billion rupees to establish a sewerage system in Gilgit city and the adjacent Danyor town. The sewerage network will help resolve long-standing hygiene, water contamination and environmental issues, which become more prominent during monsoon rains. A G-B government official requesting anonymity noted on December 29, “At the moment two sewerage plans are on the cards. One for Gilgit and

one for Danyor.” The official further stated, “The sewerage project for Gilgit will cost more than Rs1 billion; the project for Danyor will cost Rs750 million.” He added, “PC-1s have been prepared for both and will be submitted to planning department for vetting and approval.” A clean drinking water supply plan will also be executed in Gilgit, Jutial and Skwar to meet the growing water needs of the residents, the official stated. “The budget for the projects has already been earmarked in the annual development plan.” Information Deputy Director Farooq Ahmed noted, “The projects reflected the government's resolve to settle issues being faced by the people.” Ahmed added, “The government is committed to working towards welfare of the public and these projects are a few to name in this connection.”

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/1018443/cleaner-g-b-pc-1s-ready-for-sewerage-systems-in-gilgit-danyor/>

“Marvi vows to expand BISP”

The Nation, December 31, 2015

The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) chairperson stated that a survey had been conducted five years ago and now another country-wide survey would be conducted to assess the exact number of deserving families. Addressing a gathering of BISP cardholders in Kotli Azad Jammu Kashmir, BISP Chairperson Marvi Memon stated that the federal government wanted to stabilise the national economy to make the country prosperous. She invited the women who were left out in the last survey to get their names registered in the fresh survey which would be completed in two years. She stated that a total of one million children have been registered under the BISP and their educational expenses were being paid to the cardholders to enable their children to get education. She noted that that BISP had been recognised by international institutions as an effective programme. She added that the incumbent government had raised the

amount paid to beneficiaries from Rs1,000 to Rs1,500. She also stated that BISP would not only eradicate poverty but help deserving females to become financially made independent. She urged the card-holder women to focus on the education of their children for which the government had been providing them with funds. She also urged the women to get benefit from the interest-free loans and set up cottage industries. She further stated that almost half a million deserving women were benefiting from the BISP. The government would try its best to increase the amount paid to them in the next financial year, she added. Saima Farooq Sikandar, regional director of BISP Azad Kashmir, Raja Ikhlas, Parsa Rathor and others also addressed the Beneficiaries Outreach and Communication

Strategy ceremony. It was attended by the lawmakers, officer-bearers of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, and workers in huge number.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/31-Dec-2015/marvi-vows-to-expand-bisp>

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: 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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