

# Weekly POK News Digest

*(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)*

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## Political Developments

### **‘AJK’ premier blames ‘mafias’ for smear campaign, touts anti-corruption drive**

*Dawn, 21 April 2025*

‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’ (AJK) Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq accused powerful mafias of launching a smear campaign against his administration, in retaliation for his government’s sweeping crackdown on corruption, tax evasion, and smuggling.

Speaking to a select group of journalists on the completion of his coalition government’s second year in office, Mr Haq claimed that these mafias — including corrupt politicians, bureaucrats, and segments of the media — had lost billions due to the government’s anti-graft measures.

The ‘AJK’ premier alleged that mafias had looted Rs600 billion from the region, and when action was taken against them, their “sympathisers,” having lost ill-gotten sources of income, launched baseless criticism.

Among the steps taken, Mr Haq said his administration had dismantled the timber mafia, banned illegal timber transportation, and launched over 100 FIRs resulting in vehicle seizures and heavy fines. Nearly a dozen non-tax-paying cigarette factories — primarily in Mirpur and Bhimber — were also shut down, despite pressure and interim relief from courts.

“Ask the Pakistan Tobacco Company how much their revenue has increased after this action—it’s a matter of billions,” he said, adding that around 200 individuals in the cigarette industry had long evaded taxes.

He also claimed that many ‘ghost’ and illegal tea production units were identified and closed, saving the national exchequer billions. Subsidised wheat flour smuggling was curbed through the sealing of undeclared warehouses.

“Despite a Rs 71bn deficit, we are standing on our own feet,” the prime minister said. “Visit and see for yourself before passing criticism.”

Mr Haq maintained that he draws no salary or privileges and is ready to step down if his opponents musters 27 lawmakers. “I do not draw a salary, nor have I availed any privileges. I am ready to return in the same clothes I came in,” he said.

Addressing the fiscal challenges, he said his government cleared Rs12bn in development liabilities, allocated Rs4bn for the conversion of the Bank of ‘AJK’ into a scheduled bank, and launched special packages for the health and education sectors.

He added that Rs20bn was earmarked for road infrastructure and Rs3bn was saved through e-tendering. “I did not purchase a new vehicle and surrendered my own budget,” he said. “We overcame a major crisis by cutting unnecessary expenditures and

enhancing revenues. Allah gave us the strength to deal with it.”

On development, Mr Haq highlighted that the Muzaffarabad and Mirpur cardiac hospitals were operationalized under his government, with procedures such as stenting available at half the cost compared to Islamabad. The budget for medicines was also doubled.

Turning to the Kashmir issue, Mr Haq praised Chief of Army Staff Gen Syed Asim Munir for his “unambiguous position” on the matter.

“I have met him only once in the past two years, but his unambiguous position on the Kashmir issue... has set things on the path to improvement,” he said.

Mr Haq said the struggle for freedom in ‘Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir’ continues despite ongoing brutalities. “Indian brutalities continue unabated in ‘occupied Jammu and Kashmir’,” he said.

“Movements go through ups and downs, but the current army chief, while sitting in Muzaffarabad, categorically stated that we have fought three wars over Kashmir and are ready for seven more. With such resolve, there is no room for despair.”

Referring to the right of resistance under the UN Charter, Mr Haq said nations have the right to use military force in self-defence if war is imposed or human rights are violated by a member state.

“‘Azad Kashmir’ is the base camp of the freedom movement. It is our duty to continue political, moral, diplomatic and military support to the oppressed people of occupied Kashmir,” he said.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1905571/ajk-premier-blames-mafias-for-smear-campaign-touts-anti-corruption-drive>

### **PM Shehbaz meets ‘AJK’ leadership to discuss politics, development**

*The Nation, 22 April 2025*

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a high-level meeting with the leadership of ‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’ (AJK) to discuss the political situation and ongoing development initiatives in the region.

The delegation included Chaudhry Abdul Rehman, President of PML-N UK; Shah Ghulam Qadir, President of PML-N ‘AJK’; and Tariq Farooq, Secretary General of PML-N ‘AJK’. Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Engineer Amir Muqam, Minister for Public Affairs Rana Mubashir Iqbal, and Advisor to the Prime Minister Rana Sanaullah were also present.

During the meeting, the participants reviewed the current political landscape in ‘AJK’ and held discussions on the federal government’s ongoing development programs in the region. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reiterated his commitment to the socio-economic uplift of ‘AJK’ and assured continued

support for sustainable development and political stability in the area.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/22-Apr-2025/pm-shehbaz-meets-ajk-leadership-to-discuss-politics-development>

### **GB bar rejects retired judges for top court, extends strike**

*Dawn, 22 April 2025*

The Gilgit-Baltistan Bar Council on Sunday demanded that vacant positions in the region's Supreme Appellate Court be filled with lawyers on merit, rather than appointing retired judges, warning that any such appointments would be rejected.

During a council meeting chaired by its vice chairman in Gilgit, the council passed a resolution announcing the extension of its ongoing strike until April 26, expressing dissatisfaction with the government's failure to meet lawyers' demands.

The GB Supreme Appellate Court Bar Association, GB High Court Bar Association, and various district bar associations also announced the continuation of their strike until April 26.

At a press conference, GB High Court Bar Association President Tanveer Akhtar Advocate, GB Supreme Appellate Court Bar Association General Secretary Javed Iqbal and others criticised the federal and GB governments for not taking the matter seriously.

They said GB lawyers had been boycotting court proceedings across the region — except for emergency cases — from November last year to April this year.

Senior lawyer Islam Advocate said the government, after accepting the lawyers' demands, had shown reluctance in resolving the matter. He said judges in the GB Supreme Appellate Court had previously been appointed from among retired judges — a practice rejected by the lawyers.

He added that the legal fraternity unanimously demanded that vacant positions be filled from among lawyers on merit.

He said the GB Supreme Appellate Court had not been functional for the past seven years due to the non-appointment of judges, as only one judge was available who could not hear cases alone. Thousands of cases have remained pending in the court for the past eight years.

Adnan Hussain Advocate said special courts, including labour, consumer, and family courts, had not yet been established in GB, and related cases were being referred to civil or session courts.

He said lawyers had also demanded the advertisement of vacant civil judge positions, and called for the separation of judicial magistrate posts from civil judge posts, as practiced in other parts of the country, with appointments made from the legal fraternity on merit.

Lawyers also demanded that the Lawyers Protection Act be extended to Gilgit-Baltistan by the federal government, calling it essential for ensuring their safety and professional rights.

They said the GB government had not incorporated their recommendations in the proposed land reforms. Lawyers' objections were also ignored in the GB reforms draft, while mineral and mining leases were awarded to outsiders.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1905815/gb-bar-rejects-retired-judges-for-top-court-extends-strike>

### **The Pahalgam Tragedy: Security Lapse or Sinister Calculation?**

*Friday Times, 24 April 2025*

The bloodshed in Pahalgam has shaken South Asia's conscience. The killing of more than two dozen civilians, most of them tourists, has rightly drawn widespread condemnation, but it has also triggered a series of unanswered questions. How can such a heinous attack take place in one of the most heavily militarised regions of the world? The Kashmir Valley, particularly areas like Anantnag and its surroundings, is blanketed with multiple layers of surveillance. Military pickets, bunkers, and checkpoints mark every road and hilltop, while the area is under near-constant watch by the Indian Army, paramilitary forces, and an extensive network of intelligence agencies. In such a fortress-like environment, the claim that seven

militants roamed freely with automatic weapons, attacked a group of civilians, and then managed to disappear without a trace stretches the bounds of credibility. This apparent failure of intelligence and security isn't just concerning—it's suspicious.

When one considers the timing of the incident, the questions become even more pointed. India is currently amidst national elections—a time when hyper-nationalism becomes political currency. An attack of this magnitude immediately provided the ruling establishment with an opportunity to shift public focus from pressing internal issues such as inflation, joblessness, and growing dissent to a familiar and politically expedient enemy: Pakistan.

Eyewitness reports suggest that the attackers selectively targeted non-Muslims, demanded Islamic recitations, and carried out a grotesque verification of identity based on religious markers. These details, conveniently fitting into an extremist stereotype, have been repeated in the media without independent verification.

Within hours, fingers were pointed across the border. Diplomatic ties were downgraded, borders sealed, and economic agreements such as the Indus Waters Treaty were unilaterally suspended. But such knee-jerk reactions do not amount to evidence. Rather, they appear as part of a script that has been played before. From the 2016 Uri attack to the Pulwama tragedy



of 2019, incidents that happened under similarly sensitive circumstances were quickly politicised and leveraged for electoral gains.

One must also consider the disturbing convenience of the narrative that has emerged. Eyewitness reports suggest that the attackers selectively targeted non-Muslims, demanded Islamic recitations, and carried out a grotesque verification of identity based on religious markers. These details, conveniently fitting into an extremist stereotype, have been repeated in the media without independent verification. It is worth asking whether these narratives are organically emerging from survivors or being subtly framed to reinforce a predetermined agenda. The Indian intelligence apparatus has, for decades, operated with sweeping authority in Kashmir, often accused of detentions, surveillance, and rights abuses. Is it then plausible that a group of well-armed attackers went undetected not only during their infiltration but also in the aftermath of a massacre of such scale?

The implications of the incident are alarming. The fallout has not only intensified diplomatic hostilities but also given Indian authorities a fresh excuse to tighten their already oppressive grip on Kashmir. In the days following the attack, the region has seen renewed crackdowns, arrests, internet shutdowns, and heightened militarisation. Far from bringing peace, such measures deepen alienation and unrest among the Kashmiri people. If

the goal was truly to ensure safety and stability, the first step would have been to initiate an independent, international investigation into the incident. Yet, the Indian government has resisted such calls, just as it has in past tragedies that raised too many uncomfortable questions.

Pakistan, meanwhile, has categorically denied involvement and demanded transparency, knowing well the cost of being scapegoated in regional politics. At a time when Islamabad is striving for economic recovery and global engagement, sponsoring such an attack serves no logical purpose. Instead, the incident has been used as a tool to isolate Pakistan diplomatically and justify India's continued repression in Kashmir under the veil of national security.

In a world driven by narratives and optics, the Pahalgam massacre is more than a tragic loss of innocent lives—it is a disturbing reflection of how human suffering can be manipulated for political gain. The silence of the international community in the face of such events only emboldens the forces that thrive on fear and division. As journalists, scholars, and advocates of peace, we must ask the difficult questions, challenge dominant narratives, and refuse to let this incident fade into the background. Because if we don't, the next Pahalgam might already be in the making.

<https://thefridaytimes.com/24-Apr-2025/the-pahalgam-tragedy-security-lapse-or-sinister-calculation>

## **Khunjerab Pass opens for year-round trade and travel**

*Dawn, 23 April 2025*

The Khunjerab Pass was virtually inaugurated on Tuesday for year-round trade and travel between Pakistan and China, in what officials called a historic step toward strengthening regional cooperation and advancing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

The pass, which serves as the entry point for the CPEC project, had previously remained open only from April 1 to Nov 30 due to heavy snowfall during the winter months. However, under this new agreement, the border will now remain open throughout the year.

A high-level virtual ceremony marked the inauguration, attended by officials from China's Xinjiang province and the Gilgit-Baltistan government. Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan Haji Gulbar Khan, GB ministers Engineer Muhammad Anwar and Rehmat Khaliq, GB Customs Collector Ghulam Mustafa, Additional Chief Secretary Mushtaq Ahmed, and the the governor of Xinjiang province participated via video link.

"This is a historic milestone not only for Gilgit-Baltistan but also for the whole of Pakistan," said chief minister. "The decision to open the Khunjerab Border year-round will prove to be a new spirit for the economy of Gilgit-Baltistan.

"Traders will continue their business activities between the two countries

without interruption throughout the year," he added. "This step is a practical example of turning the vision of CPEC into reality, and we are determined to further strengthen this important partnership."

Officials from both regions described the move as a "historic progress" in regional cooperation and a "new dimension" in CPEC.

According to a statement issued after the event, a new spirit has been instilled in trade relations between Gilgit-Baltistan and Xinjiang, marking a milestone in economic cooperation between Pakistan and China.

Speaking on the occasion, the governor of Xinjiang said the long-standing friendship between Pakistan and China has entered a new phase. "The opening of the Khunjerab Pass year-round will directly benefit the people of both regions," he said. "Khunjerab Pass is a symbol of progress, prosperity, and cooperation. We will continue to work with the leadership of Gilgit-Baltistan to promote peace, development, and mutual interests in the region."

During the ceremony, Chinese officials presented a documentary video on the customs clearance system in Xinjiang. The commissioner of Kashgar city and the GB customs collector also briefed participants on customs operations on both sides of the border.

Officials highlighted the growing cooperation between the GB and Xinjiang governments and expressed



hope for further positive developments.

The Khunjerab Pass, which connects Gilgit-Baltistan with China's Xinjiang region, is located at 15,500 feet above sea level, making it the highest paved international border in the world.

Under a 1985 agreement between Islamabad and Beijing, the pass traditionally remained open from April to November. However, in December last year, the two governments agreed to open the Khunjerab border year-round under Article 2(3) of the 2013 agreement on border ports and their management system.

Year-round trade and travel activities through the pass already began in December.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1906063/khunjerab-pass-opens-for-year-round-trade-and-travel>

### **Musadik visits GB to assess GLOF impact**

*Dawn, 24 April 2025*

Federal Minister for Climate Change Musadik Malik on Wednesday accompanied a delegation from the United Nations Development Programme to the areas in Gilgit-Baltistan affected by the glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) this week.

According to a statement released by the ministry of climate change and environmental coordination, the minister reviewed schemes initiated under the GLOF-II Project in Shigar Valley, including the installation of

early warning systems and protective embankments.

Musadik Malik assessed the damage caused to local communities due to glacier melt and glacial lake outburst floods. Baltistan Commissioner Kamal Khan, Deputy Commissioner Shigar Waliullah Falahi, Director General of Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority Zakir Hussain, and Rasheeduddin, coordinator of the GLOF Project, briefed the delegation about the progress and impact of the project.

Aisha Humera Moriani, Secretary to the Ministry of Climate Change, briefed the federal minister about Gilgit-Baltistan's vulnerability to climate change and its adverse impact on the lives and livelihood of local communities. She also briefed him about the objectives of the GLOF-II project and its importance in mitigating problems arising out of disasters like the glacial lake outburst floods.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1906204/musadik-visits-gb-to-assess-glof-impact>

### **Indian False Flag**

*The Nation, 24 April 2025*

India's response to the tragic attack on tourists in 'Indian-occupied Kashmir' follows a tired and transparent playbook—one that is increasingly unconvincing to anyone observing with clear eyes. Before the dust had settled and the blood dried, New Delhi rushed to blame Pakistan, issuing accusations without even the pretence

of an official investigation. Within minutes, a torrent of vitriol was unleashed by social media trolls, amplified by the Bharatiya Janata Party-aligned and notoriously inflammatory Indian media, all trained to attack Pakistan.

This coordinated outcry only strengthens Pakistan's suspicion that the attack may have been pre-planned, a false flag operation designed with a purpose. And as events unfolded, India's true intent quickly came into focus. By unilaterally suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, India revealed its hand.

This treaty, a pillar of regional stability, cannot be altered or suspended by a single party under international law. Yet India's actions show that its longstanding goal has been to disrupt Pakistan's water supply—something it has already sought to do by constructing illegal dams on rivers allocated to Pakistan. This latest move represents not just a breach of an agreement, but a dangerous escalation aimed at undermining Pakistan's security and sovereignty.

India's decision to act unilaterally not only violates international norms but threatens to unravel the fragile peace of the entire subcontinent. The Indus Waters Treaty is not merely a technical agreement—it is a cornerstone of South Asia's delicate power balance. Undermining it risks setting off a chain reaction that could destabilise the region.

If Pakistan's access to the Indus waters is threatened, then the very basis of other bilateral agreements also comes into question. Pakistan, in turn, may justifiably consider suspending its own commitments, including the Shimla Agreement—which established the Line of Control—and other ceasefire arrangements. Such a scenario would dismantle the mechanisms that have kept hostilities at bay, however uneasily.

India is playing with fire, seemingly unaware—or perhaps wilfully ignorant—of the conflagration it risks igniting. The consequences of such reckless brinkmanship could be catastrophic, not just for the two nations involved, but for the entire region.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/24-Apr-2025/indian-false-flag>

### **Pahalgam attack**

*Dawn, 24 April 2025*

In the aftermath of Tuesday's militant attack on tourists in 'India-held' Kashmir's Pahalgam area, South Asia once again stands on a knife's edge. Displaying a knee-jerk reaction to the tragedy, in which over 25 people were killed, the Indian foreign secretary has highlighted the alleged "cross-border linkages of the terrorist attack", dragging Pakistan into this deplorable episode.

New Delhi has responded by suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, which has survived wars and periods

of tension, further downgrading diplomatic relations, and closing the Attari border crossing. Pakistan, which had initially expressed concern and condolences over the attack, will calibrate its response today, as the prime minister has convened a meeting of the National Security Committee to review the situation.

The assault has been claimed by 'The Resistance Front', a hitherto unknown entity; media reports have quoted the outfit as claiming the attack to protest against demographic changes in the disputed region. This is probably the biggest attack targeting civilians in IHK in 25 years. Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has termed the assault as a possible "false flag operation". No cause can justify the targeting of innocent non-combatants, and the incident must be roundly condemned.

However, India must also look inwards and review its brutal rule in 'held Kashmir', which has bred immense discontent. And when all peaceful avenues for a just resolution to the Kashmir dispute are blocked, it is not surprising that some inside the 'occupied territory' take up guns to express their anger. Ever since doing away with the disputed region's limited autonomy in August 2019, the BJP-led government has pretended that 'all is well' in IHK. That is not the case. Even voices within India are questioning the government's claims of having established calm. For example, India's opposition leader, Rahul Gandhi, has asked the rulers to move

beyond "hollow claims" of peace in 'occupied Kashmir'.

Genuine peace can only come to Kashmir — and the rest of South Asia — when this nearly eight-decade-old dispute is resolved as per the wishes of the Kashmiris, with buy-in from Pakistan and India. If the Hindu nationalist government in New Delhi thinks it can stamp out all peaceful calls for freedom and justice through brute force and intimidation, then there will be no end to blood-soaked episodes. The tragic events in Pahalgam should serve as a wake-up call for India's rulers: if they want peace in IHK, and peace between Pakistan and India, then sincere efforts must be made to resolve the Kashmir question at the negotiating table, involving the Kashmiris as well as Pakistan.

From here, Pakistan must proceed with caution and prepare a calm yet firm response to India's allegations, and threats. While de-escalation is the preferred course of action, India should also know that any misadventure will be met by Pakistan resolutely.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1906230/pahalgam-attack>

### **PM 'Azad Kashmir' warns India of strong response to any border aggression**

*Express Tribune, 24 April 2025*

'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq warned India against any attempt at cross-border aggression, asserting that

Pakistan is prepared to deliver a “decisive response” if provoked, Express News reported.

Speaking in the ‘Azad Kashmir’ Legislative Assembly on Thursday, Haq said, “India does not have the courage to violate Pakistan’s borders. But if it does, a strong response awaits.” He accused India of following the Chanakya doctrine—“a dagger in the cloak of diplomacy”—and claimed that India’s narrative on the recent Pahalgam incident had been “exposed as a fabrication.”

The prime minister also warned that India could use a third party to destabilise ‘Azad Kashmir’ from within. “If India attempts such an adventure, it will receive a fitting reply,” he said. Haq alleged that New Delhi’s water aggression has been ongoing for a year, and that its international footprint in terrorism is widely acknowledged. “From Canada to Kashmir, Modi’s India has adopted terrorism as a state policy and has been exposed on the world stage,” he added.

He defended the role of Pakistan’s armed forces and said the strength behind ‘Azad Kashmir’s’ flag is Pakistan’s support. “The freedoms we enjoy in ‘Azad Kashmir’ are absent in ‘Indian-occupied’ Kashmir. I stand with our brothers and sisters across the Line of Control.” Haq reaffirmed that any Indian violation along the LoC would entitle Pakistan to respond under the UN Charter. “India won’t dare,” he added.

Highlighting India’s alleged water encroachments, Haq claimed that actions have already begun to divert water from rivers Poonch and Neelum. “These are part of India’s broader designs against Pakistan,” he said. “Pakistan is a nuclear power,” Haq stated. “No country, including India, has the courage to violate our borders. We are always ready to respond.”

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2542021/pm-azad-kashmir-warns-india-of-strong-response-to-any-border-aggression>

### **Concern in ‘AJK’ as flows surge in River Jhelum**

*Dawn, 27 April 2025*

An unusual surge in the water level of River Jhelum — attributed by officials to snowmelt but feared by locals as flash floods released by India after suspending the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) — has triggered panic among the residents of Muzaffarabad and surrounding areas.

“A rise in the water level in River Jhelum at Muzaffarabad was recorded, leaving residents panicked. They thought it was a flash flood released by India upstream,” a local resident told Dawn. “People kept watching the river, trying to check if any debris had come, like it does during flood seasons, but they couldn’t find anything,” he added.

A daily water situation report issued by the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) also confirmed an increase in water flow levels in River

Jhelum. However, an officer from the Met Department's Flood Forecasting Division (FFD) dismissed the concerns, stating the rise was part of usual seasonal flows.

"Typically, these days we see up to 50,000 cusecs in River Jhelum. As of now (April 26), we have 47,000 cusecs, which doesn't even qualify as a low flood in the river," Akhtar Mahmood, the FFD deputy director, explained to Dawn on Saturday. "A low flood in River Jhelum ranges between 75,000 and 110,000 cusecs," he added.

He further clarified that water levels in all rivers typically rise during this period due to snowmelt and rainfall in the catchment areas. "The water level in River Jhelum at Manga always rises this time of year (until June 15) due to snowmelt, followed by monsoon rains. Similarly, water rising in the Indus at Tarbela is 80 per cent due to snowmelt," he said.

"At times, the rise in Jhelum's water level could also be due to the cleaning of a mini-reservoir at the Kishanganga run-of-the-river hydroelectric project. But I believe this rise is due to increased temperatures melting snow," he concluded.

### **Unusual surge**

The Muzaffarabad division commissioner said on Saturday that an unusual surge in the flow of River Jhelum was recorded after India released water into the river.

Speaking to Dawn, Chaudhry Guftar Hussain said that while the normal

flow of the river in Muzaffarabad remained around 18 cumecs (cubic metres per second), it swelled to 26.4 cumecs at around 12:15pm. However, the flow reduced to 22 cumecs within an hour, he added.

Despite the sudden increase, the flood wave passed through the territorial limits of Muzaffarabad without causing any loss or damage, he said.

Mr Hussain said that so far, no adverse impact had been reported from the low-lying areas adjacent to the river, which are generally vulnerable to such surges. Nevertheless, he advised residents to continue exercising caution, particularly while moving near the riverbanks, as a preventive measure.

### **Water release**

The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Saturday released 118,500 cusecs of water from various rim stations with inflow of 129,400 cusecs, APP reported. According to data, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1431.43 feet, which was 29.43 feet higher than its dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 39,100 cusecs and 43,300 cusecs, respectively.

The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1129.60 feet, which was 79.60 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 47,100 cusecs and 32,000 cusecs, respectively.

The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was



recorded as 62,700, 44,300, 34,800 and 7,400 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, 22,400 cusecs of water were released at Nowshera and 12,500 cusecs from River Chenab at Marala.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1906856/concern-in-ajk-as-flows-surge-in-river-jhelum>

### **Anti-India rallies across GB slam Indus treaty suspension**

*Dawn, 27 April 2025*

Protest rallies and demonstrations against India continued on a second consecutive day across Gilgit-Baltistan, denouncing the announcement by the Modi government to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty.

The rallies organised by religious parties, civil society organisations, and political parties took place in various cities, including Gilgit, Skardu, Hunza, Diamer, Ghizer, Astore, Ghanche, Shigar, Kharmang and Nagar, on Friday and Saturday.

Elected members of the GB Assembly, religious leaders, civil society members, and students participated in the rallies. The marchers announced their unflinching support to Pakistan's armed forces to defend the country from any misadventure from India. They also carried placards inscribed with slogans such as "GB will never allow illegal occupation of water".

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1906859/anti-india-rallies-across-gb-slam-indus-treaty-suspension>

## **Economic Developments**

### **Gilgit-Baltistan's future: separating myths from facts**

*Express Tribune, 27 April 2025*

There is a curious habit in our national discourse, the tendency to simplify complex realities into convenient complaints. Few regions suffer more from this reductionist lens than Gilgit-Baltistan. Celebrated for its mountains but misunderstood in its politics, GB is often cast as a perpetual victim sidelined, suppressed, and stagnant. This caricature has been repeated so often that it has begun to obscure the truth.

While constructive criticism is necessary for any democracy, the narrative surrounding GB has drifted into territory that ignores progress, underplays agency, and dismisses the real strides being made on the ground. Worse, it promotes a dangerous illusion that constitutional status alone will solve everything from governance failures to economic disparity. But to believe that is to ignore the more pressing question: what has prevented meaningful change within the structures that already exist? It is easier to chant for "rights" than to ask how the ones already given have been used or misused. More dangerously, a section of the youth is now being swayed by emotional rhetoric that exploits their aspirations, weaponising historical grievances into slogans, while conveniently ignoring the ground realities that require



governance, not glorified constitutional semantics.

In recent years, GB has witnessed a remarkable transformation that rarely finds its way into mainstream narratives. From new road networks to upgraded healthcare, from sprouting tourism to higher education opportunities, the landscape is shifting not always fast enough, not always perfectly, but undeniably. The myth that local governance is helpless due to federal interference collapses under a deeper scrutiny. How many times has the Prime Minister truly intervened in GB's governance? The number is negligible. Administrative decisions, appointments, budgetary allocations, and development priorities are overwhelmingly shaped within the GB framework. Yet, critics continue to use this alleged interference as a rhetorical crutch to justify underperformance. The creation of small tehsils and districts criticised by some as political maneuvering may have its flaws, but does anyone genuinely believe this will stop if GB's status changes? Governance is a function of competence and accountability, not a constitutional consequence. If administrative inefficiencies plague existing structures, they will persist in any new status unless leadership improves and changing a label does not change leadership.

At the heart of this debate is a more sobering reality: the challenges of GB are not unique to its geography or legal status. Unemployment,

underdevelopment, bureaucratic delays, and lack of job creation are common to other regions of Pakistan as well. To suggest that these problems would vanish with a constitutional stamp is a disservice to the people of GB and to common sense itself. What is more troubling is that some activists and self-styled pseudo intellectuals are misleading the common man, generating a sense of deprivation by selectively framing facts. The question must be asked what additional rights will the common citizen gain if the region is declared a province? Beyond symbolic inclusion in forums like the National Finance Commission or Council of Common Interests, which are often misrepresented, the everyday lives of people will not transform unless local institutions start functioning efficiently. What good is a new title if schools lack teachers, hospitals lack doctors, and departments lack performance? The consultative process on constitutional status must continue, certainly, but portraying it as the singular solution is intellectually dishonest. The real change will come not from Islamabad's pronouncements but from local leadership that delivers and holds itself accountable.

Indeed, evidence of ongoing development contradicts much of the gloom promoted by critics. Consider connectivity: the Karakoram Highway (KKH), once the lone artery, is being expanded, realigned, and supplemented. The Shandur Road, connecting GB to Chitral, is nearly

complete. The Juglot–Skardu Road has revolutionised intra-regional mobility, particularly for Baltistan. The planned Chilas–Mansehra Expressway, the Shounter Pass road to ‘AJK’, and the long-term goal of all-weather access through Babusar Pass all point to sustained infrastructural focus. The Skardu International Airport is already welcoming flights, boosting both tourism and trade. These are not mere promises; they are realities that tourists, traders, and transporters experience daily. Education, too, tells a similar story. With two functioning universities Karakoram International University (KIU) and the University of Baltistan (UoB) alongside engineering colleges, public schools, and vocational centers, GB’s youth have more academic options than ever. KIU alone receives a federal grant of Rs. 1.4 billion annually, while UoB receives Rs. 400 million. Cadet colleges, Army Public Schools, Danish schools, and IT parks run by SCO are changing the professional landscape. Thousands of young people are now freelancing, contributing to the digital economy a quiet revolution ignored by loud politics.

The healthcare sector, long a neglected domain, has seen measurable improvements. From the recently inaugurated cardiac hospital in Gilgit to the cancer treatment centre GINOR, from civil hospitals and dispensaries to the hepatitis eradication initiative and mobile health units, the outreach is growing. Skardu is now earmarked

for a new medical college, reflecting responsiveness to public demands after the earlier Gilgit project was shelved. In the energy sector, which arguably remains GB’s most stubborn challenge, momentum is finally gaining. Seasonal shortages are real and painful, with a winter shortfall of over 360MW. But projects like the 16MW Naltar-III (80% complete), the upgraded 40MW Hanzel project, and the 54MW Attabad plant promise to reduce outages in Gilgit and Hunza. The 34.5MW Harpo and 34MW Ghowari projects, alongside the planned 100MW solar initiative and a proposed regional grid by 2027, mark the first serious attempt to solve a decades-old crisis. If even half these projects materialise on time, GB may move from shortage to surplus within five years. What holds them back is not GB’s status, but land acquisition delays, legal complications, and bureaucratic inefficiencies issues that require governance, not merely legislation.

Meanwhile, tourism and trade the two economic frontiers of GB are scaling new heights. Sost Dry Port remains operational year-round, with over 1,200 vehicles and \$95 million worth of goods moved just in the past few months. With nearly a million local tourists and over 200,000 foreign visitors last year, the region has become the crown jewel of Pakistan’s tourism economy. Under Vision 2025, the aim is to generate \$1 billion in annual tourism revenue and create 10,000 jobs. The

federal government's Economic Transformation Initiative (ETI), a Rs. 27.36 billion package, is reviving agriculture, infrastructure, and rural economies. Furthermore, the recently held seminar on mines and minerals marks a significant turning point, with stakeholders exploring ways to responsibly harness GB's untapped natural wealth. A Special Economic Zone is being developed at Maqpoon Das under CPEC, targeting investment and industrial growth. Gilgit-Baltistan's estimated hydropower potential of 60,000MW remains largely untapped, but serious groundwork has begun. What these examples reveal is that development is not stagnant it is alive, adaptive, and quietly redefining the region's future.

And yet, those whose politics thrives on perpetual outrage conveniently ignore all this. Their rhetoric is appealing but hollow. It creates division where unity is needed, and discontent where opportunity exists. The youth deserve better than being baited into protests without perspective. Resorting to coercive tactics in response to development projects like Diamer-Bhasha Dam despite Rs. 78 billion allocated for local uplift risks alienating the very state that has sustained GB for decades, including through subsidised wheat since 1971. The way forward lies not in politicising grievances but in constructive engagement. Autonomy must be paired with responsibility. Rights must be matched by results. And leadership not merely louder

slogans must earn its legitimacy. As Aldous Huxley wisely said, "Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored." GB is not a region in waiting; it is a region in motion. It does not need sympathy; it needs sincerity. Its people do not seek handouts; they seek honest governance. And its future will not be defined by status alone, but by the substance of its institutions and the vision of its leaders.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2542531/gilgit-baltistans-future-separating-myths-from-facts>

### **From Vernacular Urdu Media**

**Barrister Sultan Mohammad Chaudhary condemns terrorist attack of Pahalgam**

*Urdu Point, 23 April 2025*

President 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' Barrister Sultan Mohammad Chaudhary condemned the attack on a tourist spot of Pahalgam in Anantnag district of 'occupied Kashmir', which saw killing of several innocent tourists. In his statement he mentioned that terrorists have no religion, and no religion in the world approves killing of innocent lives. However, the Modi government runs high on waging a war. Earlier, the Modi government also ran similar tactics, as for instance in the aftermath of Pulwama attack in 2019, without doing any investigation, India straight away blamed Pakistan. Now similar to such tactics, in the aftermath of the Pahalgam incident without doing any investigation, within five minutes of the incident, it blamed Pakistan for the terror

incident. He said that India is unnecessarily blaming Pakistan and purposefully does that to actually hide its mistakes. India has emerged on the world scene as a terrorist supporting country and its propaganda is also exposed now.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/national-news/live-news-4402575.html>

**India is no more democratic state but has come under the grip of extremists: Sardar Amir Altaf Khan**

*Urdu Point, 22 April 2025*

Muslim League (N)'s central leader Sardar Amir Altaf Khan criticized India's actions in 'occupied Kashmir', including human rights violations and curtailing of religious freedoms. While interacting with the media, Khan said that Kashmir belongs to Kashmiris and India has 'forcibly occupied' it. The reading down of article-370 by India, seizing lands of Kashmiris, and settling of non-Kashmiris in the region go against the United Nations resolutions and international laws.

Sardar Amir Altaf Khan said that India is no longer a democratic state but has come under the grip of extremist forces such as RSS, VHP, who happen to shape India under Narendra Modi. He further highlighted that the minority community, especially the Muslims of India are denied of their religious rights and increasingly their religious places are locked.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-4400436.html>

## **From Social Media**

**WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti**

*21 April 2025*

Occupation upon occupation is unacceptable. The people of Skardu Rondu are up in protest

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/1914341557311852956>

**JAMIL NAGRI @jamilnagri**

*27 April 2025*

Protest rallies and demonstrations aga-inst India continued on a second consecutive day across #GilgitBaltistan, de--nouncing the announcement by the Modi government to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty.

<https://x.com/jamilnagri/status/1916345967860732351>

**WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti**

*21 April 2025*

In Diamer, students took to the streets, KKH closed

Link to the video:

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/1914327204978139339>

**PAMIR TIMES @pamirtimes**

*23 April 2025*

FIA Launches Investigation After Doctored Explicit Video Featuring Top Political Leaders Surfaces Online

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/pamirtimes/status/1915063326708555816>

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**Disclaimer**

*PoK weekly 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 edited and abridged to provide clarity. MP-IDSA is not responsible for the accuracy and authenticity of the news items.*



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