

Weekly POK News Digest

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Climate change
Gilgit-Baltistan
Economic package
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CPEC



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Political Developments

Former ‘AJK’ PM Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi arrested

The Dawn, 4 August 2025

Former ‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’ (AJK) Prime Minister and Regional President of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Sardar Abdul Qayyum Niazi, was arrested by Mirpur police on Sunday for allegedly disturbing public order, sparking protests by party workers in several areas.

Mr Niazi was taken into custody near the shrine of Baba Shadi Shaheed in Bhimber district while returning from Samahni to Bhimber city—constituency of incumbent ‘AJK’ Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq—to lead another rally as part of PTI’s mobilisation campaign for the August 5 protests, called by the party’s incarcerated founder Imran Khan.

Mr Niazi had spent Saturday night in Mirpur but, anticipating his arrest, left his accommodation via a back exit and used someone else’s vehicle to reach Samahni. There, he led a rally from Pir Galli to Samahni from 2pm to 4pm, urging people to participate in large numbers in the upcoming protest against both the “unlawful arrest” of Mr Khan and India’s abrogation of ‘occupied’ Jammu and Kashmir’s special status six years ago.

According to Mr Niazi’s press secretary, Habib Ahmed, a large contingent of police led by SSP Mirpur Khurram Iqbal intercepted his

entourage and detained him. Mr Niazi was among several PTI leaders—including former President Dr Arif Alvi—who were booked on November 24 last year at Karachi Company police station in Islamabad under seven sections of the Pakistan Penal Code, two provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Act, and one clause of the Peaceful Assembly and Public Order Ordinance.

His nephew, Advocate Sardar Moteeb, told Dawn that Mr Niazi had secured protective bail from the Islamabad High Court on July 13, which was further extended on July 26 until August 17. “Despite this, Islamabad police had new arrest warrants issued based on additional charges,” he said.

Eyewitnesses said that apart from ‘AJK’ policemen, the arresting party included nearly 20 plainclothed officials, reportedly from Islamabad police. However, DIG Mirpur region Dr Liaqat Ali clarified to Dawn that Mr Niazi was taken into custody on the orders of the Mirpur deputy commissioner under Section 16 of the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO).

“Given his health condition, he has been kept at the Industrial Area rest house in Mirpur, which has been declared a sub-jail by the deputy commissioner,” he added. The DIG also rejected reports that two PTI activists accompanying Mr Niazi were also arrested.

Soon after news of Mr Niazi’s arrest spread across the region, PTI workers staged protest demonstrations in

various areas, blocking roads and burning tyres. Meanwhile, in a statement issued from the United States, where he is currently on a private visit, PTI regional information secretary and former minister Chaudhry Maqbool Gujjar condemned what he called the “uncalled-for arrest” of Mr Niazi on “frivolous charges,” accusing Prime Minister Haq of betrayal.

“Anwarul Haq owes his return to the ‘AJK’ Assembly after a decade to PTI’s platform and Imran Khan’s personal campaigning. It’s shameful that the same man is now ordering crackdowns on party workers who are peacefully demanding Khan Sahib’s release,” he said.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1928539/former-ajk-pm-sardar-abdul-qayyum-niazi-arrested>

GB Needs More

The Nation, 5 August 2025

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif’s announcement of Rs4 billion for damage assessment and reconstruction efforts in flood-hit Gilgit-Baltistan is a welcome gesture—but it falls short of what is truly needed. Given the scale of devastation and the economic reliance of the region on tourism, the amount seems inadequate, and the overall effort appears somewhat unfocused.

While the Prime Minister’s visit to distribute compensation cheques to the families of the deceased is a humane and necessary act, cash handouts alone cannot address the deep structural

issues that contributed to the disaster. Bereavement cannot be healed with money, and the long-term safety of residents and tourists alike depends on far more than financial relief.

In this light, the proposed damage mapping, reconstruction efforts, and the creation of an advanced weather warning system that sends alerts to tourists are steps in the right direction. But they must be part of a much broader strategy—one focused on systemic change and long-term resilience.

If Gilgit-Baltistan is to recover and thrive, significant investment must follow. The region urgently needs stronger infrastructure: more roads and bridges, robust flood defences, better access to emergency services including field hospitals, helipads, and helicopters, and the complete reconstruction of affected tourist spots. These are not just recovery measures—they are economic stimulus tools for a region whose future hinges on tourism.

Tourism remains one of Pakistan’s most promising avenues for sustainable growth. For areas like Gilgit-Baltistan and ‘Azad Kashmir’, it is nothing less than a lifeline. Protecting that lifeline through proactive planning, serious investment, and climate resilience is the only way to ensure these regions are not left vulnerable the next time disaster strikes.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/05-Aug-2025/gb-needs-more>

Sost Traders' Sit-In; Policy Actions and A Way forward

Pamir Times, 4 August 2025

Scrolling through the social media coverage and speeches during the last few days by protesting traders and opposition political leaders in favor of the Dharna, and also recently by a few government ministers and advisors against it, it looks like it is not a straightforward political demand for constitutional rights or representation in the constitution of Pakistan. The slogan of 'No Taxation without Representation' is vital, but it seems vested interests are also at play for own benefits.

In the distant past, I had been writing about border trade, starting as far back as the 1990s. Since my first visit through the border in 1994 and later deliberating the conception and proposals of the community-owned Silk Route Dry Port Trust Sost in the late 90s and early 2000s with the founding General Manager and other Trustees, and also conducting a background study on the Dry Port in 2003, and currently as one of the Trustees, I can recall the fears, opportunities and the kind of stakeholders and vested interests involved in cross-border trade and economy, and how it may benefit GB, in particular Gojal and Hunza.

At face value, the protests in Sost, a small border town near the Chinese border in sub-division Gojal in Hunza district, by a group of traders against

the imposition of sales and income tax and against the controversy created by the NLC-administered TIR is strangling cross-border trade, devastating local livelihoods, and brewing public unrest.

Taking notice of the situation, on July 18, 2025, the Governor of Gilgit Baltistan Syed Mehdi Shah appealed to the President for immediate action to halt illegal taxation and release over 250 stranded consignments. But there is no news from the Presidency as yet. However, on 3rd August 2025, the Prime Minister had constituted a 14-member committee at the federal level to report back within two weeks with terms of reference to review the "legal, operational, security and policy bottlenecks" affecting the Sost Dry Port and engage with stakeholders and recommend a sustainable mechanism including joint examination with the Chinese side. While the treasury bench and GB Government Ministers and some advisors have lined up against it, calling it a drama, opposition leaders have voiced their support and made token speeches and participated in the dharna sit-in.

The GB Tax Crisis at a Glance

Since 2021, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has been imposing sales and income taxes at Sost Port even though:

G-B is tax-exempt under Section 40 D(5) of the Sales Tax Act, 1990. The Supreme Court of Pakistan (1999) and the G-B Chief Court (2024) declared

such taxation illegal, as GB is not a constitutional part of Pakistan and does not have representation in the federal institutions.

The stated official position of Pakistan in the UN and other international forums and Pak-China border agreement of 1962 also acknowledges the provisional status and links to resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

Under the CPEC investment discourse, China always emphasizes Pakistan to provide sovereign guarantees and protection for Chinese investments in GB, as they are cautious and reluctant to invest due to its current disputed status.

However, despite these facts and stated position of the state of Pakistan, the FBR insists and continues to impose taxes on the businesses and people of Gilgit Baltistan. While explicit data is not available, 2023 Customs data reported Rs. 5.5 billion record revenue collection by the Dry Port which shows it is a significant point for trade, especially in the context of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Other estimates report up to Rs. 9 billion, if leakages are curtailed including:

Malpractices and release of containers and consignments through illegal means by different groups of businesspeople and their agents' hand-in-glove with customs officials, with heavy losses to the treasury. However, this malpractice created an anomaly as some businesses and traders' groups

were paying the taxes to clear their consignments, others were protesting but still trying to do under carpet handling to clear their containers. However, when failing to reach a deal, they also resorted to threats, blackmailing and public protests, using the banner of the Tax-exempt status and the slogan of "No taxation without representation."

The protests and stoppage caused heavy demurrage charges to traders and consignments stuck for months, and massive financial losses for traders.

Accusations of Transport Internationaux Routiers TIR system misuse by National Logistics Cell (NLC), reportedly diverting goods in sealed containers sold or disposed of within local market, a violation of customs rules, akin to smuggling and undercutting local trade.

Sost Border Trade -Where Cross-Border Trade Meets Local Survival

Sost Dry Port serves as the main artery for Pakistan's trade with China via the Khunjerab Pass. It's also the hub of a vibrant cross-border economy-from multi-million-rupee shipments to the everyday hustle of petty traders.

A unique and long-standing system operates here. Young locals, often unemployed, act as carriers for small-scale goods, leveraging border pass allowances that permit limited baggage for personal use. These items, often passed through Chinese customs legally, are handed over to middlemen

or actual owners in exchange for a small per-kilogram or per-item fixed amount or commission. The process is repeated multiple times, since border pass holders are allowed numerous entries per year under bilateral arrangements.

While this “backpack trade” may seem minor, it represents the only source of livelihood for many in these high-mountain towns, many of them use this apprenticeship to start their own business, and many of the current formal importers and exporters were once bag carriers on this route. But today, both petty traders and formal importers face strangulation-not from market forces, but from the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and customs authorities.

This type of petty border trade in marginalized areas have many benefits like it provides livelihood and employment to youth, it boosts local economy and consumption circulating money locally, low-cost import/export green channel and encourages people to people contact and informal trade, culture and tourism diplomacy between bordering regions and countries using legal movement utilizing border pass management.

Nevertheless, there are risks and challenges namely, evasion of taxes and duties by formal importers/exporters exploiting backpack carriers, weak documentation of formalization of economy, exploitation of carriers used

for risky and illegal cargo unknowingly or underpaid for the work and security and smuggling challenges like potential channel for narcotics, counterfeit goods or sensitive items etc.

However, these risks and challenges could be thoughtfully mitigated based on the current measures and lessons learned through engaging district and sub-division level business associations and chambers of commerce and traders for registration of carriers, digitizing volume allowance limits and items lists for personal baggage allowance online, security vigilance and proper sanitization at border crossing points using AI and reducing human to human contact in personal and baggage search to enhance the dignity and honor of travelers and in the interest of promoting mutual trust.

Formal Border Trade Regime at Sost

As far as the formal traders/agents from GB are concerned, although fewer compared to such businesses from other provinces of Pakistan doing imports through this border, they are actually leading these protests as their containers and consignments are stuck and they are facing losses, both with imposition of taxes and demurrage costs.

It needs to be noted that formal import and export operations through Sost Dry Port in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) follow a regulated process involving registration, licensing, documentation, customs clearance, payment of duties, and logistics coordination. Sost Dry

Port, strategically located near the Khunjerab Pass on the China-Pakistan border, is managed by the National Logistics Corporation (NLC) through a lease agreement with Silk Route Dry Port Trust, a community owned Trust of Hunza, and offers inland customs services. This reduces the need to use seaports and facilitates trade, especially Chinese exports to Pakistan.

However, legal concerns arise when G-B-based firms act as agents for businesses in mainland Pakistan to exploit G-B's tax-exempt status. While G-B is constitutionally outside Pakistan's tax net under Section 40 D(5) of the Sales Tax Act 1990, exemptions are meant for goods consumed or used within G-B. If firms import goods duty-free through Sost for use or resale in mainland Pakistan, this constitutes tax evasion and can be seen as a form of smuggling. Customs and FBR authorities have flagged such misuse in the past cases, and unless the trade benefits remain in G-B and are transparently documented, such practices fall outside legal and ethical boundaries. A fair regulatory environment must distinguish between genuine local businesses with goods intended to GB consumers, and those disguised conduits for tax avoidance.

TIR- NLC-Related Risks:

There have been specific precedents where the National Logistics Corporation (NLC), which manages Sost Dry Port, has been implicated in alleged misuse of the TIR (Transports

Internationaux Routiers) system, facilitating questionable trade for mainland-linked firms. Such practices raise serious concerns around institutional oversight and customs compliance. Even if documentation appears to follow procedure, customs and FBR authorities can prosecute these arrangements as fraud or tax evasion, especially when the importer of record in G-B is merely a front for tax-exempt goods entering the wider Pakistani market.

Past incidents illustrate how institutional loopholes can facilitate unlawful trade practices, raising concerns about transparency and legal compliance.

To Sum Up

In this light the recent sit-in at Sost Dry Port, led by the groups of traders and supported by the opposition parties and figures, has sparked intense debate across political and social circles. What appears on the surface to be a demand for the constitutional rights of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) residents, particularly "no taxation without representation", has upon closer inspection, exposed a complex interplay of legal grievances, economic exploitation, and political posturing.

Tax Avoidance by formal GB traders and NLC

This concern is heightened by past incidents involving formal importers/exporters from GB acting as front for mainland firms in Pakistan,

more recently, the traders have blamed the National Logistics Corporation (NLC), which manages Sost Dry Port, on behalf of the Silk Route Dry Port Trust, of facilitating dubious trade practices under the TIR (Transports Internationaux Routiers) regime, allowing sealed containers to be diverted illegally to local markets. Such abuse undermines both customs compliance and the legitimacy of GB's tax-exempt status. That means both the disguised formal firms from GB and the NLC are doing the same illegal things to avoid tax and doing disservice to the people of Gilgit Baltistan.

Local Livelihoods under Pressure

Beyond trade volumes and court rulings and capture and tug of war between NLC and the local fronts for big mainland businesses and FBR, this crisis affects the day-to-day survival of the real genuine local people, mainly the local businesses in Sost and the young bag carriers, who make a living out of it.

For decades, youth and traders from Sost, Gojal, Nagar and Gilgit have engaged in "backpack trade", carrying small goods across the border under personal baggage allowances. This informal cross-border trade has offered employment to youth, boosted local consumption and small businesses, and facilitated people-to-people contacts and cultural diplomacy across the China-Pakistan border.

The FBR can also legalize and regulate small-scale trade corridors, issue cross-

border trader cards via district trade bodies, support cooperatives of backpack traders at district levels, and develop smart customs apps for green channel clearance at both the Sost and Tashkurgan ports.

The Way Forward: From Protest to Policy Action

To avoid economic collapse of CPEC and further alienation of people of Gilgit Baltistan, urgent steps are needed:

Legalize and regulate small-scale trade corridor: FBR need to allow cross-border trader cards via district level trade associations, limit baggage allowance for local people, support cooperatives of backpack traders at district levels, and develop smart customs apps for online green channel clearance (tax and duty free) at both the Sost and negotiate with Chinese officials to do the same at Tashkurgan Khunjerab port under CPEC cross-border people to people contact.

Immediate Amnesty for GB Traders: Assess formal GB importers/exporters, release all their blocked containers at Sost and waive demurrage fees and penalties, with exception of those fronting mainland Pakistan businesses, who must pay legal taxes, duties and charges.

Legal Clarity and Declare GB as SEZ and tax-free Zone: Suspend FBR tax enforcement in GB jurisdiction/territory, declare whole GB as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), and provide tax holiday for all investors

and sovereign guarantee, until the constitutional clarity is established through political resolution to Kashmir dispute.

Fair Revenue Sharing: Allocate 50% of Khunjerab trade revenue to GB (within 10% dedicated to district Hunza and 5% to Sost Border town development).

Under CPEC Develop an Integrated Cross-border Program: To bring sub-division Gojal and Hunza district at par with Tashkurgan Tajik Autonomous County across the border and promote skills, cultural, educational, sports, conservation and climate change efforts and trade and economic development working jointly with Chinese to institute joint cross-border program with Sub-division Gojal.

Third Party Audit: Third party audit of all formal firms from GB and the NLC TIR operations at Sost to ensure transparency and move towards eTIR in future.

Political Resolution: Grant full provincial status to GB or provide interim fiscal autonomy with local legislative authority.

Justice must precede profitability and delusional stability

The Sost sit-in may involve some opportunism by vested groups, but its core demands reflect deep-seated grievances. Gilgit-Baltistan is not a colony, it guards borders, fuels tourism, protects crucial ecosystems, and facilitates major overland trade with China.

GB contributes significantly to Pakistan's economy, through tourism, mining, trade, and environmental stewardship, yet receives less than 25% of the revenue generated. Ongoing tax enforcement, trade blockages, and neglect of legal rights have triggered protests, job losses, and growing disillusionment. To ensure sustainable development and political stability, the federal government must reform revenue-sharing mechanisms, and recognize GB's rights, either through full provincial status or interim autonomy with sovereign guarantees for international investors through the chosen representatives of the people of Gilgit Baltistan.

Ignoring GB's legal rights, economic contributions, and institutional injustices will not only weaken national unity but also jeopardize CPEC itself. Real progress requires transparent reforms, inclusive policies, and respect for the people whose land underpins the entire corridor. Justice and constitutional rights for GB is not charity- it's a prerequisite for a just and prosperous Pakistan and the long-term relationship between Pakistan and China.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2025/08/04/sost-traders-sit-in-policy-actions-and-a-way-forward/>

NA resolution reiterates country's commitment to Kashmir cause

Business Recorder, 6 July 2025

The National Assembly on Tuesday passed a resolution marking the sixth anniversary of India's revocation of

Article 370, reiterating Pakistan's longstanding position that 'Indian-Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (IIOJK) remains an "international dispute" and that the right of Kashmiris to self-determination is non-negotiable.

The resolution, jointly presented by Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Amir Muqam in Urdu and Shazia Marri in English, asserted that 'IIOJK' is not an internal matter of India, but a pending issue on the global stage that warrants urgent attention in line with United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.

The House minced no words in condemning India's 'illegal, unilateral and morally indefensible' actions of August 5, 2019, which it insisted were designed to alter the internationally-recognised status of 'IIOJK' – a move it said violated both international law and the will of the Kashmiri people.

"This House reiterates that Jammu and Kashmir is an international dispute and Pakistan will never compromise on the right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination as guaranteed under international law and UN resolutions," said the resolution.

The House declared August 5 as a 'Black Day', describing it as the onset of a siege that has led to gross human rights violations and the denial of fundamental freedoms in 'IIOJK'.

The resolution strongly condemned New Delhi for demographic engineering, political persecution,

media blackouts, and the use of collective punishment in Kashmir – all in breach, it said, of the Geneva Conventions.

It warned that no unilateral action by India could alter the disputed nature of the region, which remains on the UN's active agenda. "The voices of Kashmiris cannot be silenced by force, censorship, or occupation," the resolution stated. "Such acts are not peace – they are tyranny." In an emotional crescendo, the House proclaimed that from Srinagar to Islamabad, the heart beats as one for Kashmir, vowing continued political, moral, and diplomatic support. The resolution also characterised the Kashmir issue as the "unfinished agenda of the partition" of the subcontinent.

Adding to the chorus, Information Minister Attaullah Tarar paid homage to the late Hurriyat leader late Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Shaheed Kashmiri resistance leader Burhan Wani, describing them as symbols of the "indigenous freedom movement." He accused India of deploying oppressive tactics to crush what he maintained was a home grown struggle.

Minister for Health Services and Regulations Mustafa Kamal echoed this sentiment, condemning brutalities in Kashmir and asserting that Pakistan's political spectrum remains united on the issue.

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40376487/na-resolution-reiterates-countrys-commitment-to-kashmir-cause>

From Glaciers to Classrooms: Preparing Gilgit-Baltistan's Young Mind for a Changing Climate

Pamir Times, 4 August 2025

Climate change is no longer just a worry for the future; it is already affecting daily life in Gilgit-Baltistan. This beautiful region, known for its glaciers, rivers, forests, and clean mountain air, is now facing serious environmental problems. Glaciers are melting rapidly, floods are becoming more frequent, and the weather is changing in unpredictable ways. These shifts are not only harming the environment, but also putting pressure on communities and threatening the future of our children.

Helping children understand climate change is one of the most powerful ways to prepare them for the future. When young people learn about the causes and effects of climate change, they can make better decisions and take meaningful actions in their homes, schools, and communities. Schools play a very important role in this effort, not only by teaching facts but by encouraging daily habits that protect the environment.

One of the most visible impacts in Gilgit-Baltistan is the melting of glaciers, which are the main source of water for the region. As they melt quickly due to rising temperatures, they create glacial lakes that can burst and cause floods, destroying homes, farmland, and roads. At the same time,

people continue to cut down trees for firewood or farming, leading to landslides, erosion, and the loss of natural wildlife habitats. The effects are made worse by growing tourism, which although beneficial for the economy, adds more waste, pollution, and unplanned construction in towns like Hunza, Ghizer, and Skardu. Overgrazing by livestock and the burning of plastic and garbage are additional human activities that damage the land and contribute to the problem.

Many families still do not fully understand how these small actions add up and lead to climate change. This lack of awareness is often passed on to the next generation. Children who grow up without learning about the environment may repeat the same harmful practices, not knowing how they can do better.

That's why climate education needs to begin early and be part of everyday life. Schools can include climate topics in subjects like science, geography, and social studies, helping students understand how local actions affect global systems. But learning should not stay in the classroom. Simple, hands-on activities can make a big difference. Students can plant trees and take responsibility for watering and caring for them. They can create eco-clubs to lead small environmental actions. Schools can set up recycling corners; organize weekly no-plastic days, and display students' drawings and stories

about nature on a climate wall. Even starting a small school garden or rainwater collection demo can teach valuable lessons.

At home, families can get involved in small changes that matter. Children can help save water by turning off taps while brushing or washing. They can switch off unnecessary lights and fans to save electricity. Parents and children can sort waste together, use cloth bags and refillable bottles, and even start a small vegetable or herb garden in pots or open space. These habits help children see that they can make a difference in their everyday choices.

Communities can also support children by involving them in local clean-up drives, riverside cleanings, and tree planting events. Schools can organize sessions where elders share how the climate and farming seasons have changed over the years. Such real-life stories can help children connect science with their own lives. Poster exhibitions, awareness walks, and group discussions led by students can also be powerful ways to spread climate messages.

Of course, for all of this to happen effectively, teachers need support too. They should receive training to understand environmental topics and learn how to teach them in simple and local ways. Programs that promote education for sustainable development and global citizenship can give teachers the skills they need to inspire their students.

Schools can also work closely with local authorities and organizations to get support for climate education, and ensure materials are available in local languages so that every child can understand. Progress should be monitored by tracking participation in school projects, counting trees planted or waste reduced, and sharing success stories with the wider community.

Climate change is already reshaping life in Gilgit-Baltistan. But by educating our children now and helping them take small, meaningful actions every day, we can prepare them to protect their environment and lead their communities wisely. Together—parents, teachers, elders, and students, we can build a future that is more sustainable, more aware, and more hopeful. What we teach and do today will shape the future of Gilgit-Baltistan tomorrow.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2025/08/04/from-glaciers-to-classrooms-preparing-gilgit-baltistans-young-mind-for-a-changing-climate/>

Kashmir Exploitation Day observed across GB with zeal

The Nation, 6 August 2025

Like the rest of the country Kashmir Exploitation Day was observed across Gilgit-Baltistan with great national spirit and fervour. Events including protest rallies, gatherings and condemnation ceremonies were held in all districts to raise voices against Indian atrocities in 'Occupied Kashmir' and express solidarity with the oppressed Kashmiri people.

A significant event was held at the renowned Sir Syed Boys High School in Gilgit where participants from various walks of life including students, teachers, and civil society members gathered in large numbers. Speakers at the event strongly condemned India's illegal move to revoke the special constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir and highlighted the continuing human rights violations in the region.

The speakers appealed to the international community, the United Nations, human rights organizations, and influential global powers to take serious notice of the Indian state terrorism in 'Occupied Kashmir' and play an active role in ensuring the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination.

Following the event a peaceful rally was held from Sir Syed Boys High School to Ittehad Chowk which was specially attended by Governor Gilgit-Baltistan Syed Mehdi Shah. People from various sectors including government officials, political workers, students and citizens, participated in large numbers. Participants were holding flags of Kashmir, placards and banners inscribed with slogans against 'Indian oppression'.

Upon reaching Ittehad Chowk, the rally transformed into a protest gathering, where speakers once again shed light on India's aggressive and oppressive actions in Kashmir. Addressing the gathering Governor

Mehdi Shah stated "August 5 is a dark day when India blatantly violated United Nations resolutions and illegally revoked the special status of 'Occupied Kashmir'. Today, we reaffirm our complete solidarity with the Kashmiri people and send a strong message to the world that our struggle will continue until Kashmir is free."

<https://www.nation.com.pk/06-Aug-2025/kashmir-exploitation-day-observed-across-gb-with-zeal>

When Mountains Cry: Gilgit-Baltistan's Vanishing Forests and Looming Ecological Collapse

Pamir Times, 7 August 2025

Amid the soaring peaks of the Karakoram and the silent tread of ancient glaciers, Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) stands as one of South Asia's most fragile ecological frontiers, rich in natural beauty, yet increasingly burdened by environmental neglect. In the heart of this landscape lies Gilgit City, once a cradle of traditional wisdom, pristine water streams, and aromatic forest canopies, now transformed into a pressure chamber of concrete sprawl, ecological instability, and alarming climate-induced disasters. The unchecked influx of non-local settlers, aggressive urbanization, illegal logging, and the systemic dismantling of forest and watershed ecosystems have placed this region on a trajectory of irreversible damage.

The forests of GB though already among the sparsest in Pakistan, have suffered staggering depletion. In the

last two decades alone, forest cover has plummeted from approximately 640,000 hectares to just 295,000 hectares, a decline of more than 50%. Once covering about 5% of the region, forests now occupy only 3.6% of the land, far below the ecological threshold needed to sustain hydrological and soil stability. The causes of this decline are manifold, ranging from the desperation of fuel-deprived winters and illegal logging to a near-total failure in sustainable planning and enforcement. According to recent environmental assessments, over 170,000 trees are felled annually in GB, often for fuel, construction, and a growing trend among elites who use rare, high-altitude wood species like deodar, walnut, and cedar, as decorative panelling in their homes and offices, effectively reducing living forests to interior design statements.

The consequences of this deforestation are stark and swiftly unfolding. GB hosts over 7,000 glaciers and 3,044 glacial lakes, of which at least 33 are designated as “high-risk.” These glacial reservoirs feed approximately 70% of Pakistan’s Indus River system, making their stability vital for national water security. However, accelerated glacier retreat fuelled by rising local temperatures of up to 4–5°C above historical averages has rendered the region catastrophically vulnerable. In the summer of 2025 alone, the region experienced record-breaking temperatures nearing 48.5°C, triggering massive floods that claimed

72 lives, swept away critical infrastructure, and destroyed swathes of farmland. Across GB, monsoon floods and landslides have become near-annual calamities, a direct result of barren mountain slopes, stripped of their natural arboreal armour.

Nowhere is the devastation more visible than in Gilgit City, the provincial capital and administrative epicentre. Originally designed to support a population of around 200,000, the city now buckles under the weight of above 500,000 residents, largely due to unchecked migration from other regions of Pakistan. This influx has driven an unprecedented wave of land conversion, whereby lush riverine belts, grazing pastures, and medicinal shrub-lands have been paved over to make room for housing colonies, shopping centres, roads, and industrial yards. Streams such as Jutial Nala and Khomar Nala, once lined with mulberry, chinar, and the locally cherished aromatic “Gunair” tree, are now narrowed, polluted, and frequently choked by plastic, sewage, and construction debris. These trees, once medicinal guardians of public health and providers of clean air and filtered water, have been removed without regard for their ecological function, replaced instead with steel bars and tar.

Such developments have not only accelerated the pace of climate-induced disasters but have also corroded public health. A recent analysis of Gilgit’s municipal water revealed dangerously

high turbidity levels (up to 10 NTU) and 100% microbial contamination including fecal coliforms and *E. coli*, making it unsafe for human consumption. With over 11 tons of plastic waste generated monthly in Gilgit City alone, less than 5% of which is recycled, open dumping and burning have become routine. The air, once pristine, is now laced with carcinogenic dioxins and furans, leading to increased respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses. Yet, amid this crisis, local and provincial authorities have failed to implement even the most basic waste segregation, water treatment, or pollution control protocols.

The toll on wildlife is equally alarming. GB is home to some of the world's most elusive and endangered species, snow leopards, Astor markhor, Himalayan ibex, and brown bears. These animals are not merely icons of biodiversity; they are critical to ecosystem regulation and local heritage. Yet, as forested corridors vanish and alpine habitats fragment, these species face increasing threats of starvation, poaching, and climate displacement. The snow leopard, with an estimated 300–400 individuals in Pakistan (80% of which are believed to reside in GB), may lose up to 30% of its viable habitat in the coming decades due to warming alone. Meanwhile, community-managed conservation areas (CMCAs) remain poorly funded, inadequately staffed, and insufficiently expansive to ensure meaningful protection. The tragic irony

is that while these species dwindle in the wild, stuffed specimens and ivory-panelled walls featuring their likenesses adorn the homes of powerful elites often the very same people responsible for environmental policy lapses.

Even education and infrastructure have not been spared. The catastrophic floods of 2022 and 2025 damaged over 25 health facilities and more than 40 schools, disrupting services for nearly 10,000 children. Despite the presence of Karakoram International University (KIU) in Gilgit and the University of Baltistan in Skardu (UoBS), there remains a glaring lack of environmental education, research capacity, and institutional response. GB's literacy rate hovers around 65.6%, yet access to climate-smart technologies and environmental stewardship programs is still minimal, especially in rural and peri-urban zones.

Meanwhile, agriculture on barely 2% of GB's terrain has become increasingly unsustainable. With up to 70% of irrigation water lost before reaching fields, and soil erosion accelerating due to overgrazing and deforestation, food security in the region is under existential threat. Traditional farming systems that once maintained ecological equilibrium are now failing, not just from environmental pressures but also from the aggressive push toward urbanization and land speculation.

Efforts to mitigate these issues remain fragmentary and underfunded. Initiatives such as AKRSP-led reforestation campaigns and GB-EPA's Green Business Program, which promote plastic alternatives and native planting, offer glimpses of hope but lack scale. Proposals to desilt Gilgit's clogged waterways, restore mulberry and chinar belts, and develop climate-resilient infrastructure have been met with bureaucratic inertia and piecemeal execution. The urgency to act is clear, yet the political will and societal coordination required remain elusive.

GB today stands at a pivotal crossroads. Its natural wealth, glaciers, forests, wildlife, and water once its greatest strength, is now its most vulnerable liability. The unchecked sprawl of Gilgit City, driven by non-local migration, short-sighted infrastructure development, and ruthless forest removal, has eroded not only the region's ecological integrity but also its cultural and environmental soul. Without immediate and coordinated intervention through legislation, enforcement, education, and restoration, this mountain paradise risks becoming a blueprint for environmental collapse. It is not merely a regional concern but a national emergency. The mountains are crying; it is time we listen before their silence becomes permanent.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2025/08/07/when-mountains-cry-gilgit-baltistans-vanishing-forests-and-looming-ecological-collapse/>

Kashmir cause: JI says efforts will continue

Business Recorder, 7 August 2025

Secretary General Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan Ameerul Azim has said that Jamaat-e-Islami will continue its efforts for the Kashmir cause. He said that right to self-determination of Kashmiris is inevitable for durable peace in the region.

Ameerul Azim was talking to the delegation of Kashmir welfare organization Relief Organization for Kashmiri Muslims at Mansoorah. The delegation included former emir JI 'Azad Kashmir' Abdul Rashid Turabi, Relief Organization for Kashmiri Muslims Chairman Nazir Ahmed Qureshi, Vice Chairman Sanaullah Dar, Secretary General Raja Khalid Mahmood Khan and project manager Ahmed Hussain.

The delegation during meeting with Ameerul Azim informed him about different aspects of Kashmir and Kashmiri refugees. Relief Organization for Kashmiri Muslims delegation also held meeting with Emir JI Pakistan Engineer Hafiz Naeemur Rehman and Deputy Secretary General JI Syed Waqas Anjum Jafri at Mansoorah.

According to the press release issued by the Relief Organization for Kashmiri Muslims, the delegation of the organization has started the fundraising campaign for freedom movement of Kashmir and Kashmiri refugees present in Pakistan. Initially

this delegation visited Sialkot and met with the Jamaat-e-Islami district leaders, office-bearers of Alkhidmat Foundation and business community. This delegation will also visit Karachi for further moving this process.

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40376710/kashmir-cause-ji-says-efforts-will-continue>

The Wrath of Climate Change in Gilgit-Baltistan

Pamir Times, 7 August 2025

The wrath of climate change in Gilgit-Baltistan is getting worse with each passing year causing erratic weather patterns such as extreme heatwaves; GLOF events, cloudburst, floods followed by persistent drought conditions in winter. GB experienced unprecedented heat waves by breaking all previous records of the region since mercury rose to 48.5 C in Chilas and 46.1 degree Celsius in Bonji on 5th July 2025. It was feeling like the region was in flame and fans were producing hot air inside buildings. In such a boiling weather, the dwellers were facing six to eight hour load shedding in Gilgit city. Nights were getting even harder without electricity as bed sheets and night dress need to be soaked in water before going to bed otherwise it was unbearable especially for children and elders.

Furthermore, the persistent heatwaves started from mid-June this year triggered GLOF events and localized cloudburst that generated flash floods damaging homes, tillable land;

standing crops; sanitation system; road infrastructure and irrigation and communication channels in a large number of villages across GB. Diamer District was hit hard by climate change induced disasters where most fatalities 8 out of 9 were reported and dozens more went missing.

GB's larger ecosystem is getting susceptible to climate change induced calamity by destroying habitats and affecting biodiversity. The valleys across GB were once pristine and scenic are now getting polluted since the region is thronged with hundred thousand tourists from inland and abroad every year. Though tourism benefits the people of the region by providing job opportunities and becoming source of revenue generation but is at the cost of environmental degradation. Land excavation for development purposes such as roads, energy, mining and other infrastructures have led to rampant deforestation and depleting vegetation cover areas unabated.

Furthermore, deforestation in GB increases ten times higher in winter season, where fire wood and timber get smuggled/transported in different valleys for heating, cooking, construction and commercial purposes. This is what we are hurting our mother land and the reactions of deforestation get multiplier. For instance, excessive emissions trap more solar radiations that heat up the earth's atmosphere which resulted in climate induced

catastrophe causing widespread devastation. Whereas trees act as natural carbon sink, they absorb carbon dioxide; methane, ozone from the atmosphere and release oxygen and water vapour that keep its surrounding air neat, humid, cool and protect land from erosion.

Moreover, the mushroom growth of population and the unplanned rural and urban settlement are devouring limited natural resources by vanishing vegetation and forest cover and replacing with jungle of concrete structure and infrastructures. The unplanned settlement is further shrinking the perennial rivers/stream passages and seasonal flood courses where life and livelihoods were affected from flood debris and land erosion.

In addition to that climate change is also manifesting from shrinking winters with below normal precipitation that has been causing worrisome for the mountain communities across GB. A large number of rural settlements of the region solely depend upon snow melt water in summer. I happened to visit my relatives in Gishgish Village located in Ishkoman valley of District Ghizer in July 7, 2025; where the villagers expressed their worries in this way, “As usual below normal precipitation (snowfall) was experienced towards the end of winter at higher elevation but that melt soon in the spring season. They further elaborated that the

persistent dry spell with extreme heatwaves dried the water sources in upstream alarmingly.” It was also highlighted that trees and plants were shedding off its leaves early and seasonal crops and grasses were getting dried in the village that would affect life and livelihood.

In another village, some local elders also narrated their past observations’ “Once the mountains in upstream of our village were covered with glaciers back in the 1980s, 90s and even in 2000 but now those glaciated areas are shrinking in mass and retreating in length by replacing huge moraines, sediments and lakes behind.” In addition to that this year’s prolonged extreme heatwaves triggered terrible GLOF events since large pieces of ice were floating with flood water in Hassanabad nullah in Hunza. Certainly this rings an alarm bell that how fast our fresh frozen water reservoirs are getting depleted due to global warming. Studies also revealed that glaciers in Pakistan are melting up to 60 meter per year and 23% ice loss was noticed since 1960. Empirical data further cautioned that up to 60% glaciers could vanish by 2100, causing sever water shortage for the entire region.

However, the only way forward is to comply the commitments made under International Agreements such as The Kyoto Protocol adopted in 1997 and Paris Agreement accorded in 2015 to reduce emissions and limit global

average temperature well below 2 C preferably 1.5 C. It was legally binding on each member state to coordinate persistent efforts to mitigate emissions and adapt to climate change impacts effectively.

Under mitigation, Pakistan has made commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 50% till 2030. Efforts are being made to replace fossil fuel energy sources with renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and hydel power generations. Hybrid and eclectic vehicles are also being manufactured to reduce reliance on fossil fuel driven engines. Nevertheless, according to Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) Pakistan was placed on 31st among 63 countries in 2025 in emission reduction efforts. Data shows 64% power generation of the country is still heavily relying upon imported fossil fuels (oil, gas and coal).

To further mitigate carbon footprint in the atmosphere, the rampant deforestation need to be checked at any cost through stringent regulations and litigation across the country in general and GB in particular. Communities especially in rural settlement should be provided substitute fuel sources like gas on subsidized rate that would reduce to have reliance on firewood for cooking and heating purposes.

Furthermore, reforestation and plantation drives need to be part and parcel of our curriculum in which a week long awareness campaign and plantation drive need to be celebrated

in autumn and spring seasons according to their context-specific climate. It should also be made mandatory for all government institutions with the support and cooperation of Forest and Agriculture departments to be part of the plantation and conservation movements. National and International NGOs along with civil society can also play critical role in conserving the existing forest cover; afforestation of arid land with smart irrigation methods and practicing controlled grazing method. Plantation with conservation at roadsides, parks, public places and residential areas are also critical to reduce urban heatwaves.

Furthermore, to better respond to any emergency situation, rescue 1122 need to be strengthen through capacity building programme so that precious lives can be saved. Flood warning system need to be installed in vulnerable valleys along with having a critical eye on its effectiveness. A contingent of volunteers at each union council need to be trained enough to tackle any emergency situation and to reduce risks.

Relief operation is quite critical in post disaster scenario by timely providing necessities of life such as food, shelter, medicine and clean drinking water. Disruptions of children's education in the calamity hit areas of the region should be restored immediately.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2025/08/07/the-wrath-of-climate-change-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

Heavy glacial flood rages through Hunza

Dawn, 8 August 2025

A glacial lake outburst flood (Glof) from Shisper Glacier swelled the Hassanabad Nullah in Hunza, damaging infrastructure, and putting dozens of mountainside homes at risk in the mountainous region of Gilgit-Baltistan. Officials said the heavy flood eroded the protective walls of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) and damaged farmland. Due to land erosion caused by the nullah, dozens of houses are at risk in case of such events in the future.

According to the Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority (GBDMA), the flood damaged the newly constructed retaining wall and a portion of the Karakoram Highway. Though the highway is open to all types of traffic, the damaged section has been sealed off for safety measures.

The authority said a significant area of cultivable land, along with standing crops and trees, had been wiped out in the flood, while the electricity supply to Hassanabad was also disrupted. Similarly, a property owned by the Forest Department had suffered damage while a portion of Frontier Works Organisation's land adjacent to a bridge also sustained damage.

Locals said that four houses downstream were dismantled in time to save them from the flood. Last

month, a similar Glof event damaged four houses, agricultural land, trees, and public and private properties.

The authority requested the National Highway Authority (NHA) to urgently visit the site to assess the damaged section and inspect other vulnerable parts of the road. Community Based Disaster Risk Management Committee members, GBDMA staff, and other volunteers were actively monitoring the situation on the site and supporting community preparedness and response efforts. On the other hand, the Gilgit-Shandur Road remained closed off for the seventh day in Khotom village of the Phander valley, stranding thousands of people in the area.

Met Office alert

On the other hand, the Pakistan Meteorological Department on Thursday afternoon issued a warning for heavy rain across Azad Kashmir and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and advised citizens to stay alert, Dawn.com reported.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1929443/heavy-glacial-flood-rages-through-hunza>

Economic Developments

PM Announces Rs4 Billion for Flood Recovery, Orders Swift Setup of Weather Alert System in GB

Pamir Times, 4 August 2025

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has directed the immediate completion of an advanced weather warning system in Gilgit-Baltistan. During his visit to

Gilgit today, the Prime Minister announced a Rs4 billion package aimed at rehabilitating flood-affected communities and rebuilding damaged infrastructure. The funds will be utilised for detailed damage mapping, restoration of critical road links, and the resettlement of displaced populations.

Addressing the cheques distribution ceremony among the affected families of recent floods, the premier expressed frustration over delays in the operationalisation of the weather alert system, a project initially conceived seven years ago but yet to be made functional. He made it clear that no further extensions would be tolerated, directing federal and regional authorities to ensure its timely activation.

The Prime Minister distributed compensation cheques of Rs 1 million each to the families of those who lost their lives in the recent floods, while injured individuals received Rs 200,000 each. Highlighting the region's vulnerability to extreme weather events, the Prime Minister stressed the urgent need to modernise early warning mechanisms. He said timely alerts could save lives and prevent large-scale destruction, especially in high-risk zones frequented by tourists and remote mountain communities.

In addition to the disaster preparedness measures, the Prime Minister revealed plans for long-term development in the region. These include the establishment

of two Daanish Schools—one each in Gilgit and Skardu—and a 100-megawatt solar power project to reduce winter energy shortages. Foundation stones for these projects are expected to be laid during his next visit.

The Prime Minister also met with local officials to assess the damage caused by recent flash floods and instructed the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to submit a comprehensive report outlining the extent of losses and required recovery measures.

Gilgit-Baltistan, home to some of the world's highest mountains and largest glaciers, has become increasingly susceptible to climate change impacts. The Prime Minister's directives signal a renewed federal commitment to enhancing the region's disaster resilience through technology, infrastructure, and targeted investment.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2025/08/04/pm-announces-rs4-billion-for-flood-recovery-orders-swift-setup-of-weather-alert-system-in-gbl/>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

"We will continue our political, moral, and diplomatic support for the right of self-determination of our Kashmiri brothers": Sadia Danish.

Deputy Speaker Gilgit Baltistan Assembly, Sadia Danish, in her statement on Kashmir Exploitation Day, reiterated the commitment to continue political, moral, and diplomatic support for the Kashmiri

people's right to self-determination. She strongly condemned the unilateral and illegal actions of the Indian government on August 5, 2019, particularly the revocation of Articles 370 and 35A, which she described as a violation of United Nations resolutions and international laws. She paid tribute to the courageous struggle and sacrifices of the Kashmiri people, stating that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan share historical, cultural, and emotional ties with Kashmir. Sadia Danish urged the international community to take notice of human rights violations in Kashmir and ensure the Kashmiri people receive their legitimate rights, emphasizing that Kashmir's freedom is a demand of justice, peace, and global conscience.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/gilgit/national-news/live-news-4513758.html>

A meeting was held by Minister for Energy, Chaudhry Arshad Hussain, at the Ministry of Energy office in Muzaffarabad

Urdu Point, 7 August 2025

An important meeting was held under the chairmanship of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' Minister for Energy, Chaudhry Arshad Hussain, at the Ministry of Energy office in Muzaffarabad. The meeting was attended by Secretary Energy and Water Resources, Irshad Ahmad Qureshi, Chief Engineer Electricity (South) Muhammad Nazir Mughal, Chief Engineer Electricity (North) Chaudhry Ziad Ahmad, Section Officer

Malik Ishfaq Ahmad Awan, and Technical Assistant Chaudhry Khalil Ahmad.

On this occasion, 'Azad Kashmir' Energy Minister Chaudhry Arshad Hussain issued directives to ensure the upgradation of voltage and electrical systems, installation of new transformers, and the provision of conductors and poles.

He stated that due to the increase in population, the electricity load has also increased, leading to low voltage issues and frequent tripping of the power system. He further noted that the reorganization of the Electricity Department is bringing improvements to the system. During the meeting, Secretary Energy and Water Resources, Irshad Ahmad Qureshi, briefed Minister Chaudhry Arshad Hussain on departmental matters.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-4515807.html>

From Social Media

JAMIL NAGRI @jamilnagri

4 August 2025

Glaciers visibly receding; peaks more prone to avalanches; high temperature, lack of snow making rockfalls more common, Season comes to a close with climbers returning from K2, Broad Peak 'empty handed, the German Olympian perished after rockfall stuck

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/jamilnagri/status/1952212713792225443>

WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti

7 August 2025

We don't want this port, take it out of Gilgit-Baltistan's boundaries, Sheikh Nayar Abbasi Mustafavi's address to the Sost traders' protest

Link to the video:

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/1953499588931072017>

PAMIR TIMES @pamirtimes

4 August 2025

PM Announces Rs4 Billion for Flood Recovery, Orders Swift Setup of Weather Alert System in GB

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/pamirtimes/status/1952393240943943769>

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Disclaimer

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