

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

Volume 5 | Issue 45

03 November - 09 November 2025

**POK
SOST Dry Port
OPD Scheme
GB Chief Extension
Contractors woes
Exclusion of Middle class
High unemployment
Gilgit-Baltistan
Symbolic autonomy**



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
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मनोहर परिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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Political Developments

PPP, PML-N at odds over 'AJK' govt term

The Express Tribune, 4 November 2025

The PPP claimed last week that it was in a position to bring its prime minister in 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK), where the coalition government of Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq has been in trouble for the last couple of months. However, the PPP high command has yet to nominate an alternative leader of the house in the 'AJK' Assembly, causing repeated delays in submitting a no-confidence motion against Haq.

Despite claiming a numerical majority, the PPP has struggled to assert its position for over a week and a half. Sources indicate that the decision to move the no-confidence motion is expected only after PPP Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari returns to the country. The delay is also reportedly linked to the PML-N's demand for early elections, which would prevent the PPP from gaining political advantage through an in-house change.

The current assembly's term ends in July. Two months before elections, all development work is typically halted, and the authority over appointments and transfers is revoked. Sources said the PML-N is firm on holding elections in March, meaning a new government would lose powers by January, two months before the vote. In December and January, the PPP would be unable

to achieve its political goals. The party's insistence on completing the assembly's full term is reportedly a key reason behind the deadlock.

Around 80% of 'AJK's development budget remains unspent, and about 2,000 immediate recruitment positions, along with initiatives like health cards, could offer political leverage to a new government. The PPP earlier announced its intention to form the government in the 'AJK' during a meeting chaired by President Asif Ali Zardari. The party's 'Azad' Kashmir Parliamentary Group also met in Islamabad to discuss the political landscape.

On October 26, ten members of the PTI's forward bloc in the 'AJK' Assembly announced their decision to join the PPP, enabling the party to gain the required majority. The following day, the PPP and PML-N agreed to move a no-confidence motion against PM Haq. However, the PTI disassociated itself from the opposition alliance's no-confidence motion.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2575720/PPP-PML-N-at-odds-over-ajk-govt-term>

'Opponents' continue to serve under 'AJK' PM

Dawn, 5 November 2025

Even as efforts to unseat Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq remain stalled over the choice of his successor, the same ministers leading the revolt continue to serve under him — a paradox that has turned 'Azad Jammu

and Kashmir' (AJK) into a spectacle of irony and political confusion.

The PPP and PML-N, in separate meetings, had earlier decided to part ways with the coalition government and sought approval from their respective leaderships to withdraw ahead of the upcoming general elections. After several rounds of deliberations and shifting positions, the PML-N eventually announced it would support the PPP in forming its own government but would not accept any share in the new set-up. Meanwhile, a series of meetings of PPP legislators and senior leaders were held in Karachi and Islamabad to chalk out a strategy.

PPP law minister defends use of official perks, says they can be availed until vote of confidence. During one such meeting, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari categorically declared that his party would oust the incumbent 'AJK' premier and replace him with a loyalist from within the party.

Under Article 18 of the 'AJK' Constitution, a resolution for a vote of no-confidence against the prime minister must be moved by at least 14 members — constituting 25 per cent of the total strength of the assembly — and must include the name of the proposed successor. Subsequently, at least 10 members from the so-called 'forward bloc' of PTI dissidents also announced their support for the PPP's planned move, enabling the party to

meet the minimum requirement of 27 votes needed to topple the government.

Nevertheless, the PPP leadership remained insistent on securing PML-N's backing to ensure a comfortable and unchallenged majority. Following the understanding between the two parties, a draft of the no-confidence motion against Mr Haq was prepared and signed by over 14 legislators, including two from the PML-N. Yet, nearly three weeks later, the PPP has failed to finalise the name of its candidate for the premiership, leaving the move hanging in the balance.

'Forward bloc' irony

Ironically, despite publicly announcing their intent to unseat the prime minister, none of the PPP or PML-N ministers have resigned from their positions or relinquished official privileges. One cabinet member from the PML-N, who was seen accompanying his party's senior anti-Haq leadership at one meeting, also chaired a meeting himself and released pictures from it to the media.

Of the 10 'forward bloc' members, three — representing Pakistan-based refugee constituencies — had announced their resignations from the cabinet, but the same had not been accepted by the prime minister. Despite their declared dissociation, the trio also continued to enjoy official perks and privileges. Adding to the irony, most of the 'disgruntled' ministers have been camped in the federal capital for weeks, engaging in slow-paced negotiations

and power-sharing discussions over the formation of the next government.

Political sources claim that the tabling of the motion may take another four to five days, effectively giving more time to an embattled prime minister who has virtually lost the confidence of the assembly's majority.

Hurried approval of schemes

Taking advantage of the situation, the incumbent premier — who had preferred to spend much of his time in Islamabad during the previous two and a half years of his rule — has unusually stationed himself in Muzaffarabad for the past 12 days, where he has been issuing directives and granting administrative approvals on files that had remained pending in his office for several months.

On October 27, he sanctioned six schemes in the energy sector worth over Rs2.68 billion — four of them worth Rs1.4bn for his home district alone. The same day, he approved releases of funds to different departments for the first half of the current fiscal year, amounting Rs3.72bn. However, the approval was withdrawn by the additional chief secretary for development the following day.

In a pointed reference to the situation, the PM's electoral rival and PML-N Secretary General Chaudhry Tariq Farooq took to social media, expressing his surprise that the ministers who had inked out their signatures on the no-

confidence resolution were still holding their portfolios and using official resources.

"Since September, 'AJK' has been in a state of political crisis. Although the motion has not yet been formally tabled, it is astonishing that those ministers who have openly declared their intention to support it continue to remain part of the cabinet. The use of official resources and privileges goes on unabated. Good governance remains "untarnished," and the cloak of austerity has not even been pierced. What a fixed match — and everyone knows it," he wrote on X. The usage of the term 'good governance' is actually a reference to the 'AJK' PM, with the phrase being used ironically.

"People across 'AJK' are both surprised and saddened by the political farce," Mr Farooq added. However, when PPP legislator Mian Abdul Waheed, who still holds the office of law minister in the Haq-led government, was asked by a reporter if it was unethical for cabinet members seeking to dislodge the prime minister to use official transport, he defended it.

"The day the no-confidence motion is tabled and fails, it would become morally, legally and constitutionally impermissible — absolutely haram — for us to retain these official vehicles. Until the motion is actually presented, however, there is nothing written anywhere that bars us from using them."

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1953224/opponents-continue-to-serve-under-ajk-pm>

PM extends GB chief judge's tenure for another three years

Dawn, 6 November 2025

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has extended the tenure of Chief Judge of Gilgit-Baltistan Supreme Appellate Court Sardar Muhammad Shamim Khan for three more years. A notification issued by GB Council in Islamabad on Tuesday said: "In exercise of powers conferred under Article 75(5) of the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan Order, 2018, the Prime Minister of Pakistan/Chairman of Gilgit-Baltistan Council, on the advice of Governor of Gilgit-Baltistan, has been pleased to appoint Justice Sardar Muhammad Shamim Khan as the Chief Judge of the Supreme Appellate Court, Gilgit-Baltistan, with effect from November 5 till attaining the age of 70 years in terms of Article 75(8) of the GB Order 2018."

The three-year tenure of Chief Judge Shamim Khan ended on November 4. Meanwhile, GB Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan has moved a summary of eight candidates for their appointments on two vacant positions in the GB Supreme Appellate Court.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1953384/pm-extends-gb-chief-judges-tenure-for-another-three-years>

Kashmir's unending siege

The Express Tribune, 3 November 2025

Seventy-eight years after the partition of British India, Kashmir remains an unresolved dispute that continues to strain regional relations. It is not simply

a territorial dispute between two nuclear-armed neighbours; it is a tragedy of human suffering and political failure. What began in 1947 as a dispute over accession has evolved into an unending ordeal of siege and ethnic cleansing, depriving generations of Kashmiris of normalcy, dignity and the hope of a peaceful life.

In August 2019, India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) revoked Articles 370 and 35A of its constitution, effectively dismantling the semi-autonomous status that Jammu and Kashmir had enjoyed since independence. The move was celebrated by India's Hindu nationalists as an act of "integration" and a triumph of unity. In reality, it was a constitutional sleight of hand that turned a political problem into a military one. Today, the region is among the most heavily militarised places on the planet, and its residents are living under an architecture of surveillance, suspicion and fear.

To be fair, New Delhi has long argued that its actions in Kashmir are meant to curb separatism and terrorism. But the means have been self-defeating. You cannot claim to win hearts and minds by placing an entire population under lockdown or by turning schools and hospitals into an 'occupation'. Pellet guns, arbitrary detentions and media blackouts have only caused alienation.

Pakistan's stance on Kashmir has always been tied to its moral and humanitarian concern for the Kashmiri

people. The region's decades-long turmoil, however, has inflicted immense pain and displacement on countless lives. In this context, Pakistan's continued diplomatic and moral support must remain anchored in the principles of justice and humanity. While Pakistan continues to champion the cause of self-determination, the complexity of the conflict also calls for introspection.

The greatest losers in this long saga are the ordinary Kashmiris - men, women and children who have lived their entire lives under curfew, checkpoints and 'occupation'. Their access to education, healthcare and employment remains abysmal. Their voices are drowned out by the nationalist narratives on both sides of the border. India falsely claims that Kashmir is an "integral part" of its union, while Pakistan insists it remains the "unfinished agenda" of the partition. Both are correct in their own limited sense - and both are tragically wrong in ignoring that Kashmir is, above all, about Kashmiris.

The international community, too, bears its share of responsibility. Having passed multiple UN resolutions affirming Kashmir's right to self-determination, it has largely retreated into indifference. The world's concern resurfaces briefly after each episode of violence, only to fade again into silence. The United Nations has been unable to enforce its own resolutions; major powers prefer profitable partnerships

with India over uncomfortable questions of human rights.

What measures should be taken to resolve the issue? The first step is to restore political agency to the people of Kashmir. The suspension of local democracy and the continued detention of political leaders are untenable in any society that claims to be democratic. Secondly, India must allow independent observers and journalists to operate freely in the region; the truth should not fear inspection. Thirdly, Pakistan should balance its stance on the Kashmir issue with equal attention to domestic reform and internal development. The future of Kashmir cannot be forged through unruly rhetoric, nor by the guns of either side.

Ultimately, peace in South Asia hinges on acknowledging uncomfortable truths. Kashmir is not a prize to be claimed; it is a problem to be solved. And it will not be solved through patriotic posturing or religious passion, but through recognition of basic human dignity and political fairness. The people of Kashmir deserve more than sympathy; they deserve sovereignty over their own lives.

Until that happens, both India and Pakistan will continue to pay the price in wariness, in military spending, and in the moral deterioration that comes from denying justice to millions. The world may look away, but history will not.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2575670/kashmirs-unending-siege>

The forgotten genocide that still haunts Kashmir

The Express Tribune, 6 November 2025

In the autumn of 1947, as the subcontinent was divided into India and Pakistan, a horrifying tragedy was unfolding in the scenic valley of Jammu as tens of thousands of Muslims were massacred over a matter of weeks. The killings, carried out by Hindu and Sikh militias with the complicity of the then-Kashmir's Dogra Maharaja's forces, were not spontaneous riots born of Partition's chaos. They were organised, deliberate, and aimed at cleansing the region of its Muslim population. Caravans of families attempting to cross into Pakistan for safety were ambushed and slaughtered. Villages were torched.

Archival estimates even suggest astonishing losses — one analysis of Maharaja-era records claims some 237,000 Muslim victims were "systematically exterminated" by Dogra forces and their Hindu and Sikh auxiliaries. By the time the violence subsided, nearly half a million Muslims had fled their homes. It was a demographic transformation that reshaped Jammu's identity forever. Muslims, who constituted 61% of the total population, were reduced to a minority.

Historians who chronicled the events — including the late Kashmiri editor Ved Bhasin — called it what it was: a state-sponsored genocide. Mahatma

Gandhi himself lamented that Muslims in Jammu had been killed by Hindus and Sikhs of Jammu, and those who had gone there from the outside. A Kashmiri scholar explains that the goal of such genocide was explicit: "if they (India) lose the state of Kashmir, at least they should get Jammu" by ensuring a Hindu majority.

The 1948 UN Convention defines genocide as acts "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group." Here, a religious community (Muslims) was targeted for elimination. Victims were shot en masse, villages were razed, and even women were subjected to systematic rape and abduction. Yet India's post-independence governments never investigated the killings. No truth commission, no memorials, not even an official acknowledgement. The massacre disappeared from textbooks and national consciousness, buried beneath the mythology of "tryst with destiny".

The UN did get involved at the time: in 1948, the Security Council passed Resolution 47, calling for the withdrawal of forces and a plebiscite to determine the fate of Jammu and Kashmir. But India ignored the promise of a vote, and instead solidified control over Jammu — in part by rewarding those who helped "communalise" the province.

For Kashmiris, the genocide in Jammu was not an isolated atrocity. It was the

opening chapter of a decades-long story of fear, erasure, and occupation. Today, the 'IIOJK' remains one of the most heavily militarised zones on earth, its people living under surveillance and siege. The events of August 2019 — when India revoked Jammu and Kashmir's special constitutional status under Article 370 — deepened that sense of historical repetition.

Since then, journalists have been detained without trial, political leaders silenced, and thousands of young men imprisoned under sweeping anti-terror laws. Land and domicile policies have been rewritten to allow non-Kashmiris to settle, rekindling fears of demographic engineering. What began in 1947 as a campaign to expel a people now continues in the language of law and bureaucracy — a quieter, more sophisticated form of domination.

This enduring repression does not exist in a vacuum. It is nurtured by the rise of Hindutva — the ideology that envisions India as an exclusively Hindu nation, which, historically, it never was. The movement's parent organisation, the RSS, was active in Jammu during the 1947 killings. Today, its political arm, the BJP, dominates Indian politics and public discourse.

Anti-Muslim bigotry has become normalised in India's mainstream. Hate speech thrives on television; mobs lynch Muslims with impunity; "bulldozer justice" targets Muslim

neighbourhoods. Top Indian officials have publicly likened Muslims to "termites" and even threatened to toss them into the sea. Research shows hate speech against Indian Muslims has surged, tripling around the 2023 Gaza conflict and concentrated in BJP-ruled states.

An agenda of Hindu majoritarianism — the Hindutva ideology — has seeped into the corridors of power and public life in India. Where once inciting hatred toward a religious minority would have provoked outrage, today it is often treated as normal politics. In such an atmosphere, the story of Jammu 1947 is not a forgotten footnote — it is a warning unheeded. The ideology that once justified the expulsion of Muslims from Jammu now fuels a nationalism that equates dissent with treason and erases entire communities from the moral map.

Unfortunately, the world has developed a hierarchy of grief. We remember some tragedies and conveniently forget others. Victims of 9/11 or 26/11 are remembered — as we should — but we rarely speak of the hundreds of thousands who were massacred in Jammu or the millions who continue to live under military rule in 'IIOJK'.

According to international law, genocide is defined as the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. By that standard, what happened in Jammu was genocide. The continuing

repression of Kashmiris — through mass surveillance, demographic manipulation and collective punishment — bears the same moral and legal stain.

This is not an argument against India's sovereignty. It is a plea for its humanity. For a nation that seeks global recognition as a modern power, India's refusal to confront the ghosts of Jammu — and the suffering of today's Kashmiris — is a moral failure of historic proportions.

Each year, on November 6, Kashmiris mark Youm-e-Shuhada-e-Jammu — Martyrs' Day — in quiet defiance of enforced silence. They do not seek revenge; they seek remembrance. They mourn for the dead, and for the living — those who still wait for justice.

Acknowledging their suffering does not mean picking sides in a century-old conflict; it means upholding universal human values. Kashmiris still mark 27 October each year in mourning, out of grief for their parents and grandparents, and hope that such horrors never recur. The memory of Jammu 1947 should not be erased. Nor should the quiet eviction of rights today be allowed to pass without notice. In an era of resurgent nationalisms, indifference to mass suffering only sows the seeds of the next tragedy.

If the world can grieve for the thousands lost in New York on 9/11, it must also find the moral courage to remember the hundreds of thousands

who perished in Jammu — and the generations still living under the weight of that unhealed wound. Only when we remember truthfully can the world finally begin to heal.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2576013/the-forgotten-genocide-that-still-haunts-kashmir>

Kashmiris observe Jammu Martyrs' Day

Dawn, 7 November 2025

The people of Jammu and Kashmir, living on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) and across the world, observed the Jammu Martyrs' Anniversary on Thursday to commemorate the supreme sacrifices of over 250,000 Muslim residents of Jammu city and its outskirts who lost their lives in 1947 while migrating to the newly-born Muslim homeland, Pakistan.

The day is observed every year by Kashmiris to remember the martyrdom of more than 250,000 men, women, children, and elderly Muslims of Jammu who were mercilessly slaughtered by armed Hindu gangs, Indian 'occupying' forces, and Dogra military troops — with the connivance of Dogra Hindu fanatics — under a nefarious, pre-planned conspiracy while they were proceeding to migrate to Pakistan near the Jammu-Sialkot working boundary.

This year too, the day was observed, renewing their pledge to continue the ongoing struggle for the freedom of 'occupied' Jammu and Kashmir from

Indian control until the achievement of their globally recognised right to self-determination.

In 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK), special ceremonies, including seminars and symposiums, were held in various parts of the region, including the capital Muzaffarabad, to pay tribute to the Jammu martyrs who were gunned down by armed Hindu fanatics and Dogra military personnel 78 years ago, in 1947.

President, PM's messages

In his message, President Asif Ali Zardari reiterated Pakistan's unwavering support for the people of 'occupied Kashmir' in their struggle for self-determination. PM Shehbaz, in his message, said that India was committing a "prolonged violation of fundamental human rights, the right to self-determination, and international law".

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1953602/kashmiris-observe-jammu-martyrs-day>

PML-N leader urges 'AJK' premier to resign or dissolve assembly

Dawn, 8 November 2025

Former 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) prime minister and parliamentary leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Raja Farooq Haider, on Friday said the government and administration had lost control over affairs, plunging the state into a deep administrative crisis.

In an informal conversation with journalists at the Central Press Club, Muzaffarabad, he asserted that the police and civil administration were "demoralised and hesitant to perform their duties amid prevailing political uncertainty". "'Azad Kashmir' is facing the worst administrative paralysis. The police and administration are dispirited, and there is no one to listen to them," Mr Haider remarked.

Recalling Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq's oft-repeated claims of upholding democratic principles, the former premier said once 27 lawmakers had publicly shown their support for the no-confidence motion, Mr Haq should have demonstrated moral courage and resigned on his own. "There is no denying that Mr Haq has lost his majority in the Legislative Assembly and, therefore, no moral justification remains for him to cling to office," he said, urging the premier to either dissolve the assembly or step down to "prevent further damage to the system".

Mr Haider said the ongoing situation had inflicted "irreparable harm" on the region's politics, adding that the uncertainty reflected the indecisiveness of political leadership. "In the past, no-confidence motions were moved, but the situation never deteriorated to this extent. The current state of affairs is highly damaging for 'Azad Kashmir,'" he warned. The veteran leader said the matter had lingered due to weak political leadership, otherwise a no-

confidence motion would not have become such a big issue.

Answering a question, Mr Haider maintained that the ministers who signed the motion against the prime minister should have resigned first. Discreetly criticising the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), he regretted that despite publicly supporting the motion, its ministers continued to enjoy official perks and remained in the cabinet. "They should have resigned first," he reiterated.

Mr Haider said he had advised his party's regional president Shah Ghulam Qadir to secure resignations from the party's ministers, since the PML-N had already announced its support for the no-confidence motion. "Two of our ministers have already resigned, and I wonder what the remaining two are waiting for. They should do so without further delay," he said.

Calling for fresh elections as the only viable solution to the political turmoil, Mr Haider, however, cautioned that the prevailing environment could also affect the electoral process.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1953755/pml-n-leader-urges-ajk-premier-to-resign-or-dissolve-assembly>

Lack of impartiality

Dawn, 7 November 2025

The five-year tenure of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) parliament is due to end in July 2026. While the move for

an in-house change of 'AJK' prime minister is constitutional, the process being followed raises many questions.

The office of the President of Pakistan, as per the 1973 Constitution, is that of the 'head of the state', representing the unity of the federation and conducting all functions with due impartiality. The political meeting that took place in the President House recently, where a change in 'AJK' was discussed, created doubts about the impartiality of the presidency. Any person holding that office needs to be discreet in such matters.

The party chairperson should have held such a meeting at any location except the presidency. It is unfortunate that impartiality was compromised just like it was compromised during the tenure of the last person who held the office of the President of Pakistan.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1953669/lack-of-impartiality>

A New Progressive Vision for Pakistan-Administered Jammu & Kashmir

Friday Times, 8 November 2025

A major political reshuffle appears imminent in Pakistan-administered Jammu & Kashmir, also known as 'Azad Jammu & Kashmir' (AJK). But will it effectively revive the legitimacy of the prevailing political settlement among the people of 'AJK'? *Prima facie*, this seems unlikely, as the current crisis reflects deeper underlying structural and institutional issues that are often

overlooked. As a development economist studying 'AJK', I identify two major structural challenges that have shaped the region's socioeconomic development. First, the issue of 'symbolic autonomy' and second, the systemic exclusion of the working and middle classes, particularly young people, from meaningful participation in economic processes. These issues are deeply interconnected and reinforce each other through a persistent feedback loop in 'AJK'.

In this article, I explain that unless these underlying issues are addressed, the crisis in 'AJK' is likely to deepen further. In recent years, soaring prices of essential goods and utilities have fuelled widespread frustration, sparking protests across every district of 'AJK'. Although inflation has been a nationwide issue across Pakistan, why has mass mobilisation occurred only in 'AJK'? This can be partly explained by the convergence of these two underlying factors: symbolic autonomy and economic exclusion.

The issue of 'symbolic autonomy' arises from 'AJK's unique legal status, shaped by the ongoing Jammu and Kashmir dispute. Technically speaking, 'AJK' is not a province of Pakistan, nor is it recognised as a constitutionally defined region under Pakistan's 1973 Constitution. Instead, it is a self-governing administrative territory with its own president, prime minister, and legislative assembly. This is generally

seen in a positive light by the people of 'AJK', as they hold their local autonomy and distinct identity in high regard. But there is a flip side: 'AJK's autonomy is highly constrained and regulated by the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs in Islamabad. It is important to note that, unlike Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, the people of 'AJK' have no direct say in who gets elected in Islamabad (the federal government of Pakistan, including the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs) or in the National Assembly or the Senate of Pakistan.

In other terms, the lived experience of being a resident of 'AJK' is mediated by a dialectic of being neither fully autonomous nor fully integrated. This dialectic has produced a unique sociopolitical consciousness among the people of 'AJK', centred on pride in its symbolic autonomy but frustration over its structural and institutional limitations. Therefore, a large number of people in 'AJK', including young people, are deeply invested in both abstract and concrete questions of autonomy and recognition.

While the people of 'AJK' express aspirations for greater autonomy and improved governance, the ruling elites of 'AJK' appear primarily concerned with preserving their political dominance by embedding themselves within established patronage networks. As a result, the perception that the existing political elites of 'AJK' are simply compliant clients of

Islamabad has become pervasive in 'AJK's polity. The recent wave of mass protests is, in effect, a public vote of no confidence in all mainstream political parties of 'AJK', whose politics of convenience and inability to imagine alternatives to neoliberal policies and patronage politics have eroded their legitimacy.

Second, 'AJK' has been largely excluded from processes of economic development. While some socioeconomic and educational indicators in 'AJK' are better than those in mainland Pakistan, it is rarely mentioned why they are better. They are better because of the unique sacrifice people of 'AJK' are making, i.e., a mass exodus of men from 'AJK' in search of employment opportunities. To illustrate this point, consider a simple statistic: the male-to-female ratio reported in the population census. According to the recent census data, this ratio is 95.22 in 'AJK'. This means that there are 95 males for every 100 females in 'AJK'. In comparison, the average male-to-female ratio in Pakistan is 105. Further, in some districts of 'AJK', such as Kotli, Bagh, and Poonch, these ratios are 90, 91, and 92, respectively. What does this mean?

Men in 'AJK', mostly from working-class backgrounds, have no option but to leave 'AJK' for economic survival. In other words, these are the 'missing' men of 'AJK'—men not abducted or disappeared, but rather victims of economic exclusion,

underdevelopment, and patriarchal norms and values. Consequently, women are overburdened with subsistence farming work, alongside unpaid household and care work. 'AJK' is experiencing an exceptionally high unemployment rate of 11%, significantly above the national average of 5% across Pakistan. More strikingly, youth unemployment (ages 15–29) in 'AJK' stands as high as 27%. Thus, I argue that the lack of employment opportunities within 'AJK' is one of the defining aspects of its economic exclusion.

Now, the pressing question is: what can be done? This leads us to the notion of a 'New Progressive Vision' (NPV) for socioeconomic development in 'AJK' that addresses the underlying structural issues related to autonomy and economic exclusion. On the issue of autonomy, an NPV must promote democratisation of the bureaucratic structures of the state, alongside performance optimisation, to facilitate improved public service delivery for the residents of 'AJK'. People in AJK are frustrated by the perks and privileges enjoyed by political and state elites. To address this issue, transparent, participatory, and performance-based budgeting processes should be implemented to align public spending with the priorities of local communities.

Similarly, this new progressive vision must address the underlying causes of economic exclusion. For example, more

than 80% of the population of 'AJK' lives in rural areas. Mountainous geography isolates rural communities and restricts access to basic public goods. Overcoming geographic exclusion is a prerequisite for economic participation. Under the NPV, Islamabad must prioritise universal access to basic public goods in 'AJK'. This can be achieved through public works programmes that develop sustainable infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and digital connectivity, to better integrate rural communities into the region's economic development. This will directly contribute to strengthening the productive capacity of 'AJK's local economy.

Rather than relying on state-directed, top-down approaches, which have historically failed to revive 'AJK's economy, community-led, bottom-up strategies should be promoted. For example, community-driven cooperative farming initiatives where local communities pool their land and labour can enhance agricultural productivity and improve economic outcomes for everyone in the community. Access to credit is often cited as one of the biggest challenges faced by residents of 'AJK' when starting new business ventures. This issue can be addressed if the State Bank of Pakistan mandates banks in 'AJK' to expand access to affordable credit for small-scale processing units and eco-friendly industries, including those in

the tourism sector. Together, these initiatives have the potential to stimulate economic growth and generate localised employment opportunities for both men and women in 'AJK'.

One thing is clear: a business-as-usual approach, such as the ongoing political carousel, which merely papers over the cracks, will not appease the people of 'AJK'. The pressing question for Islamabad, therefore, is whether it will continue to side with 'AJK's entrenched elites or respond to the genuine needs and aspirations of the people of 'AJK'.

<https://www.thefridaytimes.com/08-Nov-2025/new-progressive-vision-pakistan-administered-jammu-kashmir>

Economic Developments

SLIC to launch pilot OPD scheme in GB

Business Recorder, 7 November 2025

In a major step towards enhancing access to healthcare, the State Life Insurance Corporation of Pakistan (SLIC), in collaboration with the Government of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), held a formal signing ceremony for the Pilot Outpatient Department (OPD) Insurance Scheme in Gilgit.

The agreement was formally signed by Muhammad Ashar, SLIC Divisional Head Health, alongside Syed Ishtiaq Hussain, SHM Project Director Gilgit Baltistan. The signing ceremony was witnessed by Parliamentary Secretary

for Commerce, Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti, Shoaib Javed Hussain, CEO of SLIC, as well as Asif Ullah Khan, Secretary Health, Government of Gilgit-Baltistan.

The initiative introduces free OPD services for patients in selected districts of Gilgit-Baltistan, marking a significant milestone in improving primary healthcare access in the region. The project is financially supported by the German development bank KfW, which has allocated Rs 407 million for the pilot phase.

“Over the past few years, Pakistan’s healthcare landscape has transformed, and State Life has been privileged to stand at the centre of this evolution,” said Shoaib Javed Hussain, CEO of SLIC. “Through innovation, and a deep sense of national responsibility, we’ve built a foundation where over 180 million Pakistanis have access to quality care and financial protection. The Gilgit-Baltistan OPD initiative continues that journey; extending the reach of healthcare to every corner of our country.”

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40391344/climate-finance-key-to-protecting-pakistans-economy-and-environment-aurangzeb>

Record revenue collected from Sost Dry Port

Dawn, 6 November 2025

Pakistan Customs collected a record Rs1.88 billion in revenue from Sost Dry

Port during October — the highest monthly collection in the port’s history — following the resumption of trade between Pakistan and China through the Khunjerab Pass. According to Customs officials, trade activity at the border post has returned to full swing after being suspended for several months due to a protest by Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) traders. The strike ended in the last week of September following an agreement between a committee formed by the prime minister and representatives of the GB traders’ association.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1953421/record-revenue-collected-from-sost-dry-port>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

PPP and PML-N’s Political Fight for Power Continues: In-House Change in ‘Azad Kashmir’ Delayed

Urdu Point, 03 November 2025

The race between the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to secure political gains has left the in-house change in ‘Azad Kashmir’ under continuous delay. According to sources, the PPP high command has not yet nominated an alternative Leader of the House, and without this nomination, the submission of the no-confidence motion is facing repeated postponements.

Despite claiming numerical superiority, the PPP has been procrastinating for over a week and a

half in proving its majority. Sources say that the decision to submit the no-confidence motion is expected only after PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari returns to the country. Another reported reason for the delay is PML-N's alleged demand for early elections. If early elections are held, the in-house change would not politically benefit the PPP.

On the other hand, 80% of the current 'Azad Kashmir' government's development budget remains unspent. Around 2,000 job appointments for urgent recruitments, the health card scheme, and several other key initiatives could politically benefit the new government.

The term of the current 'Azad Kashmir' Assembly ends in July. Two months before the elections, all development work is halted, and the authority to make appointments and transfers is revoked. Sources say PML-N is firm on its demand for elections in March, meaning the new government would lose its powers as early as January – two months prior to the polls. Thus, in December and January, the PPP would not be able to achieve its desired political objectives. According to sources, the PPP's insistence on completing the full assembly term is the alleged cause of the deadlock.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/important-news/live-news-4605513.html>

Over 800 Retired Municipal Employees Forced to Live in Hunger and Poverty: Raja Sajjad Ahmed Khan Advocate

Urdu Point, 05 November 2025

Advocate Raja Sajjad Ahmed Khan has drawn the attention of the Prime Minister of 'Azad Kashmir' to the plight

of over 800 retired municipal employees, stating that they are forced to live in hunger and destitution. The hearths in the homes of these retired municipal workers are hard to get going. He urged the Prime Minister of 'Azad Kashmir' to issue strict orders to the Local Government and Rural Development Department for the immediate payment of all pending pension dues to the retired municipal employees.

He expressed these views while speaking to the media. He said that when the Prime Minister of 'Azad Kashmir' announced last year that pensions would be disbursed through the Accounts Department, the elite of the Local Government Board could not digest this decision. They began creating obstacles at every step in the official process. The meaningless and unnecessary correspondence between the Secretary Local Government & Rural Development and the Secretary Local Government Board has today resulted in starvation taking root in the homes of over 800 retired municipal employees.

He demanded that the bureaucracy correct its course and resolve all issues faced by the retired municipal employees at the earliest. Pension is a fundamental right of retired municipal employees, and they cannot be deprived of it under any circumstances. He further stated that a detailed judgment from the High Court also exists on this matter, and by violating it, the concerned officials are committing contempt of court.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffar-abad/kashmir/live-news-4608001.html>

Contracting System in Gilgit-Baltistan collapses, lakhs associated with the profession become unemployed

Urdu Point, 9 November 2025

The contracting system in Gilgit-Baltistan has completely collapsed, rendering lakhs of people associated with this industry jobless. The government has withheld 18 billion rupees owed to hundreds of contractors in Gilgit-Baltistan for several years. Funds for payments are not available with the government. Contractors had invested their own capital to complete construction work, but due to non-payment, hundreds of contractors have gone bankrupt and are now suffering from psychological disorders.

In the current year's PSDP (Public Sector Development Program), not a single new public welfare project has

been allocated for the entire Gilgit-Baltistan region, despite the area facing acute power shortages, roads turning into ruins, and unavailability of water. According to sources, even for ongoing old construction projects, funds are unavailable, due to which contractors have halted 90% of work on current projects. With construction work coming to a standstill, the livelihoods of masons, labourers, carpenters, cement and steel dealers, electrical and sanitary goods sellers, and many others have either stopped completely or been severely reduced, triggering a new wave of unemployment in the region. Due to the absence of new contracts and the freezing of payments for old work, the offices of GB PWD (Public Works Department) have become silent and deserted. Thousands of employees in these offices—from peons to secretaries—are merely marking attendance and drawing salaries.

Moreover, on the one or two projects where work is somehow continuing, the lack of funds has resulted in extremely poor quality of work. Contractors in Gilgit-Baltistan have appealed to the government to immediately release their pending payments and allocate substantial funds for new public welfare projects so that the livelihoods of lakhs of people dependent on this industry can be restored.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/gilgit-national-news/live-news-4612170.html>

From Social Media

MANZAR SHIGRI @ManzarShigri

4 November 2025

Justice Sardar Muhammad Shemim Khan will be the Chief Justice of the Supreme Appellate Court Gilgit-Baltistan up to the age limit of 70 years. Notification issued.

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/ManzarShigri/status/1985742588146827586>

WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti

6 November 2025

Former Spokesperson of the Governor of Gilgit-Baltistan, Mehdi, has been released on bail #gilgitbaltistan #ppp

Link to the video:

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/1986414125980000395>

JAMIL NAGRI @jamilnagri

6 November 2025

Pakistan Customs collected a record Rs1.88 billion in revenue from Sost Dry Port during October — the highest monthly collection in the port's history — following the resumption of trade between #Pakistan and #China through the Khunjerab Pass.

Link to the tweet

<https://x.com/jamilnagri/status/1986280672177299854>

Weekly POK News Digest

Volume 5 | Issue 45

03 November - 09 November 2025

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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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