

POK

News Digest

A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

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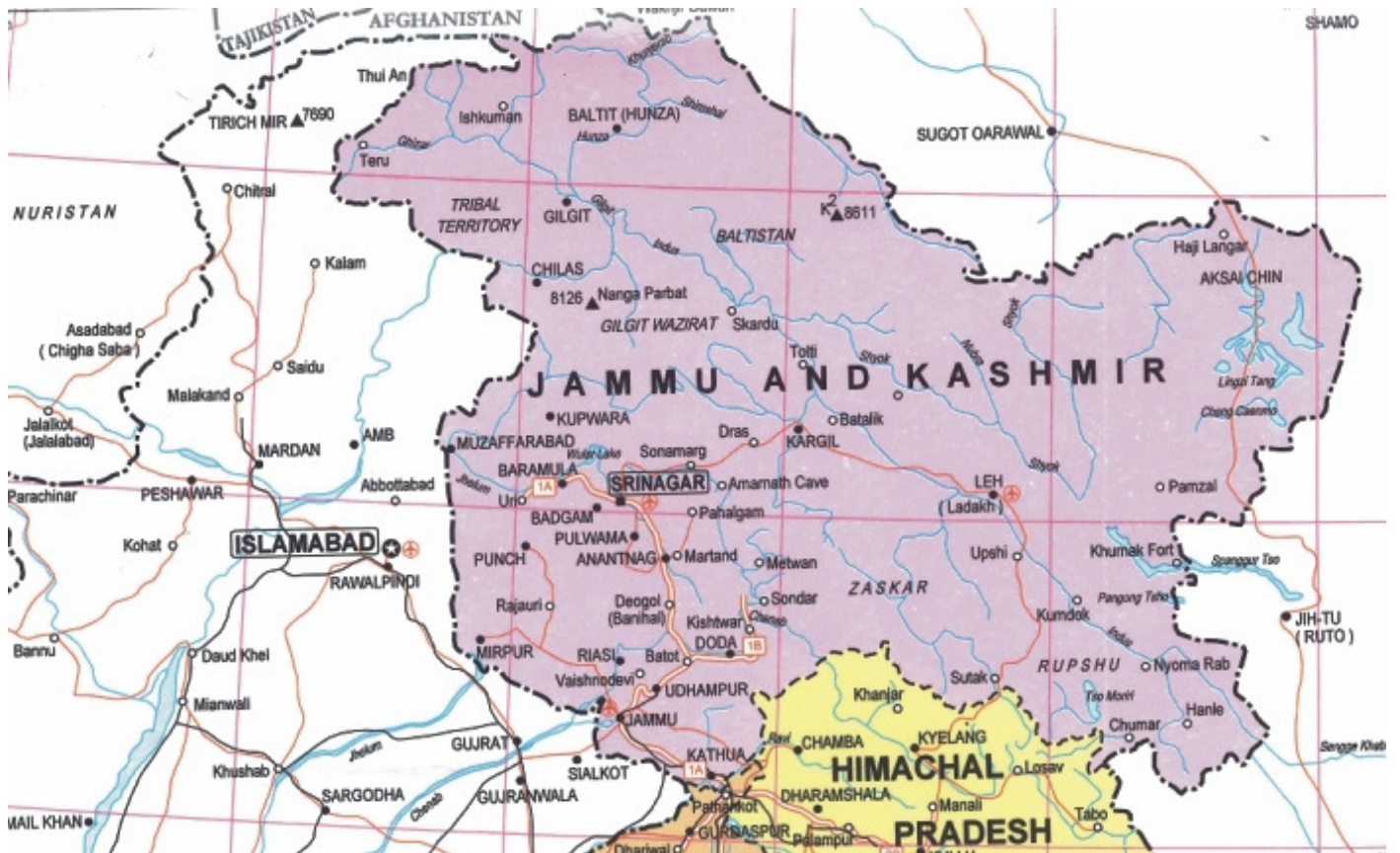
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Jammu & Kashmir

In this Edition

A close look at some of the reports included in the current issue reveals that Pakistan is making concerted efforts to revive its Kashmir propaganda, especially at the international level. Over the years, the Kashmir issue has been losing relevance and there is receding attention of the international community over it. As a result, Pakistan, which has for decades, been using Kashmir to bandwagon false propaganda against India seems to be rather uncomfortable with the diminishing focus on Kashmir. In what appears to be an act of desperation, Pakistan is all out to malign India in the wake of recent turmoil in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) that followed the killing of Hizbul Mujahideen Commander Burhan Wani in July 2016. What is being also witnessed is that the President and Prime Minister of the so called Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) have been issuing statements against India and how badly it is dealing with the present J&K situation.

While there is nothing materially new in Pakistan's Kashmir rhetoric against India, some thinking must be invested in India's policy making circles on how to thwart the false propaganda unleashed relentlessly by Pakistan and political representatives from PoK. India will never resort to something that is akin to Pakistan's drive of spreading falsehood on India and Kashmir. However, what India must consider doing is to conceive a strategy that could neutralize Pakistan's bid of peddling lies about J&K and India's approach towards the state. India must initiate measures that tend to put the record straight and thereby not allow the international opinion to sway once again in Pakistan's favour. Another positive step for India in this direction would be taking up its official claim on PoK with a certain frequency and concurrently spreading more and more information about the continuing political unrest in PoK, especially Gilgit Baltistan.

With Chinese stakes becoming further entrenched in PoK in the wake of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), questions have been raised on what this could portend for China's stance on the Kashmir issue. China's stated position on Kashmir claims to be a neutral one- advocating a bilateral resolution between India and Pakistan. However, in the garb of neutrality, it has been seen over several decades how starting from the provisional Sino-Pak Border Agreement, the Chinese have continued to make extensive forays in PoK at Pakistan's behest and despite India's reservations.

Priyanka Singh

Political Developments

“Killing Gilgit-Baltistan Tourism”

The Nation, May 1, 2017

In response to the Interior Ministry imposing a strict requirement that foreign tourists obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) before visiting Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), the Chief Minister of the region, Hafizur Rehman approached the ministry to protest a move that would “seriously damage” the province. Other individuals and organisations have shared his concern, and it is easy to see why; 70% of the people of GB depend on tourism as their source of income in the absence of any other major industry in the land. Putting fetters on growing international tourism puts those livelihoods in jeopardy. The Interior Ministry’s reasons for reaffirming this ban are ill-defined and disproportionate. “National security” has been cited once more as a catch all without really making clear what the threats to security are. Furthermore, the requirement that the tourists obtain a separate NOC is duplication of efforts.

<http://nation.com.pk/editorials/01-May-2017/killing-gilgit-baltistan-tourism>

R C Ganjoo, “China’s two prong strategy for Gilgit-Baltistan”

Northlines, May 2, 2017

China has entered in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), under the illegal occupation of Pakistan, with a well conceived two-prong plan to keep its military presence in Pakistan to counter US existence there, under the garb of strategic China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) worth \$ 46 billion project. In similar fashion, as US military presence is in Pakistan, China too wanted its military existence to counter effectively the Muslim separatists, operating from the tribal areas of Pakistan for almost a decade carrying out cross-

border activities in trouble-torn Xinjiang, an autonomous region in China. Beijing is setting up its Military Bases either in FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) or the Northern Areas (Gilgit-Baltistan). In exchange of this strategic plan Pakistan wanted China to Build a Naval Base at Gwadar in Baluchistan with a definite design. China is well aware of this fact that Gilgit-Baltistan is in political and diplomatic dispute and Pakistan’s sovereignty does not extend to this region. Though knowing the fact that Pakistan’s constitution and the Supreme Court of Pakistan or other federal government institutions do not have jurisdiction in Gilgit-Baltistan, yet China with firm strategy wanted to establish trading routes to Iran and the Middle Eastern countries. Both China and Pakistan have crushed the legitimate concerns raised by the people in GB while violating their human rights to achieve the CPEC objectives. The locals feel Pakistan and China are exploiting their resources. Several local NGO delegations and intellectuals who study the region are constantly voicing these concerns in the United Nation Human Right Sessions. India repeatedly has underlined its claim over Gilgit and Baltistan (GB) territories of Jammu and Kashmir, under illegal occupation of Pakistan.

<https://thenorthlines.com/chinas-two-prong-strategy-gilgit-baltistan/>

“GB Development Projects to Be Completed Timely: Iqbal”

Pakistan Radio, May 2, 2017

Minister Information planning and Development Gilgit-Baltistan Iqbal Hassan noted ongoing development projects will be completed in stipulated time. In a statement on May 2, he stated the PML-N Government is determined to utilize development budget properly. The minister stated that the new

Government department have been set up which would not only provide job opportunities but also address public issues.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/02-May-2017/ongoing-development-projects-to-be-completed-in-stipulated-time-iqbal>

“Kashmiris protest Pak move to declare Gilgit-Baltistan fifth province”

DNA, May 4, 2017

Scores of Kashmiris took part in a protest outside the United Nations office in Srinagar against the Pakistan Government’s proposed move to declare Gilgit-Baltistan as the country’s fifth province. Members of the South Asian Friends (SAF) took to the streets in the city, carrying placards that stated that the area from Lakhanpur to Gilgit belonged to Kashmiris. They also shouted slogans against the Nawaz Sharif government. Our protest is against the Pakistan government’s order to declare Gilgit-Baltistan a fifth province. The area from Lakhanpur to Gilgit-Baltistan belongs to Kashmiris. It should be left to us, Salim Akhthar Malik, SAF chairman, noted. Malik also further stated that their organisation intends to organise many more such protests against Pakistan for illegally occupying areas in Gilgit-Baltistan. Malik stated they would present a memorandum to the UN office asking them to prevent Pakistan from declaring Gilgit-Baltistan its fifth province. The Gilgit-Baltistan area is Pakistan’s northernmost administrative territory that borders disputed Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

<http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-kashmiris-protest-pak-move-to-declare-gilgit-baltistan-fifth-province-2427709>

“Speakers at roundtable conference call for moving International Criminal Court on Kashmir situation”

The News, May 5, 2017

The speakers at a roundtable conference organised by Jammu and Kashmir Council for Human Rights (JKCHR) on May 4 urged the government of Pakistan to adopt a proactive approach on highlighting the

Kashmir issue. The conference was attended among others by Azad Jammu and Kashmir President Sardar Masood Khan, former AJK president General (r) Sardar Anwar Khan, former chief justices of AJK Manzoor Hussain Geelani and Majeed Malik, JKCHR President Dr. Syed Nazir Gilani, Jamaat-e-Islami AJK Naib Amir Noor Albari, Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front leader Rafiq Dar, Hurriyat Conference leader Ghulam Mohammad Safi, Syed Faiz Naqshbandi, Azeem Dutt and many other Kashmiri leaders.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/202553-Speakers-at-roundtable-conference-call-for-moving-International-Criminal-Court-on-Kashmir-situation>

“Nawaz assures support for development in AJK”

Daily Times, May 5, 2017

Azad Kashmir Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan called on Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on May 5 and apprised him about the ongoing development, welfare schemes and projects in the territory. Expressing his satisfaction, Nawaz noted that Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government must work even more vigorously for the welfare and prosperity of the people. Nawaz noted that it is the collective responsibility of the federal and AJK governments to serve the people. He also stated that improved communication and roads networks will improve the standard of lives of people and greatly boost up economic activities. He further stated that federal government would ensure all possible support to the government of Azad Kashmir.

<http://dailytimes.com.pk/pakistan/05-May-17/nawaz-assures-support-for-development-in-ajk>

“PM urged to include Shontar bypass in CPEC”

Pakistan Observer, May 5, 2017

Governor Gilgit Baltistan, Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan on May 5 noted that Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif would be requested to include Shontar bypass in the multi faceted, China Pakistan Economic Corridor Project (CPEC) to make Azad Kashmir and GB

further closer. "I would soon meet with the Prime Minister of Pakistan and would request him to include Shontar bypass in CPEC," the Governor made this assurance to a high-level delegation of Jumaat e Islami Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan led by Abdur Rashid Turabi who called on him at Governor House. Member GB Legislative Assembly, Rani Ateeqa Ghazanfar and Vice Ameer Jumaat e Islami Azad Kashmir and GB Mushtaq Ahmed were also present. Turabi had requested the Governor to play role for inclusion of Shontar bypass in CPEC. The Governor noted he would soon hold meeting with PM and would request him to include Shontar bypass in CPEC as it would benefit a large number of people besides bringing Azad Kashmir and GB people further closer.

<http://pakobserver.net/pm-urged-include-shontar-bypass-cpec/>

"AJK President Urges Students to Expose Indian Atrocities Through Social Media"

Radio Pakistan, May 6, 2017

Azad Jammu and Kashmir President Sardar Masood Khan urged students to expose Indian atrocities in Jammu and Kashmir through social media. Addressing a school function in Rawalakot on May 6, he noted civilized world should be informed. Sardar Masood Khan also stated that tangible steps are being taken for promotion of quality education in Azad Kashmir.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/06-May-2017/ajk-president-urges-students-to-expose-indian-atrocities-through-social-media>

"SJC, AJK meeting held"

Daily Times, May 6, 2017

A meeting of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) was held under the chairmanship of the Chairman Council Justice Chaudhry Muhammad Ibrahim Zia. During the course of the hearing, the SJC permitted a Justice of AJK high court Justice Saleem Babar to continue to perform his duties as justice after submitting apology note by him and adjourned further proceeding against

him. On this occasion, the honourable judges of AJK High Court have also expressed their apology. In the SJC meeting it was also decided to take action against judicial and administrative officials for not implementing the judgments of Supreme Court, High Court and Shariat Court. The meeting of the SJC would be held twice in a year, however, the chairman of the council could be summoned for the meeting any time if necessary. The meeting was attended by Senior Justice Supreme Court AJK Raja Saeed Akram Khan, Chief Justice AJK High Court Tabbasum Aftab Alvi as member of the council.

<http://dailytimes.com.pk/pakistan/06-May-17/sjc-ajk-meeting-held>

"AJK rejects Indian claim after arrest of a Kashmiri boy"

Pakistan Today, May 7, 2017

The Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) government on May 6 rejected Indian claims that a 12-year-old boy had crossed over into the Rajouri district of J&K for the purpose of 'spying.' A 12-year-old boy from Azad Jammu Kashmir has been arrested by the Indian Army after he crossed over into the J&K along the Line of Control in Rajouri district, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency quoted Indian Army sources as saying. "A patrol of the Indian Army along the Line of Control apprehended a 12-year-old 'intruder' from Pakistani side of Kashmir (AJK) who had crossed over to this side of LoC late last evening in Nowshera sector of Rajouri district," the news agency reported. Quoting the unidentified Indian Army officials, the PTI reported that the boy named Ashfaq Ali Chauhan, who is the son of a retired army soldier from AJK, was found moving 'suspiciously' near the LoC. On being challenged by the army's patrol party, the boy immediately surrendered, it noted. "It is suspected that the boy was sent by 'terrorists' in connivance with the Pakistan Army to probe routes for infiltration across the Line of Control," the Indian Army claimed, confirming that the boy would be handed over to the police by the army for further investigation.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/05/07/ajk-rejects-indian-claim-after-arrest-of-a-kashmiri-boy/>

Shabbir Mir, “Entry by permit only”

The News, May 7, 2017

In what can portend to be a potential blow to the country’s tourism, the interior ministry requires foreign tourists visiting scenic Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) to obtain a NOC (No Objection Certificate). The notification this time includes all foreigners, whereas before only diplomats, international NGO and donor agency workers were required to seek permit from the ministry of interior. The decision comes just as the tourism season begins in GB where the tourism industry is still struggling to make a comeback after the deadly Nanga Parbat attack that killed 10 foreign trekkers in 2013. The fresh decision has been communicated to GB through a letter sent by Chaudhry Nisar’s interior ministry to the provincial government of GB recently. According to the letter, it has been reported that foreigners are frequently visiting the region without obtaining an NOC or security clearance from the ministry, which is against the rules. The letter further asks the authorities to take concrete measures to discourage the practice. A senior official at the tourism department in GB noted the NOC is meant for diplomats, international NGOs and donor agencies workers.

<http://tns.thenews.com.pk/entry-permit/#.WWcJ1tR97Gg>

“Entire Nation United in Political, Diplomatic Support of Kashmiris: Barjees”

Radio Pakistan, May 7, 2017

The Minister stated entire nation is united in political, moral and diplomatic support of Kashmiri people. He also stated that Pakistan has emerged as a strong economy in the world due to prudent policies of the government. Chaudhry Barjees Tahir noted political opponents are worried about their future because Prime Minister has initiated record developmental projects in the country.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/07-May-2017/govt-to-continue-with-agenda-of-development-barjees>

“Get ready for LG polls, Haider tells activists”

The Express Tribune, May 8, 2017

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider asked Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) workers to step up preparations for the forthcoming local government (LG) elections and maintain close liaison with people. The LG system brings power to grassroots level and also the authority to spend funds, though meagre. “Huge funds will be allocated to the local government institutions to provide people with basic amenities,” Haider noted while addressing party workers in Hatiyan Bala on May 7. However, these development funds were not released without an oversight. The local government allocations will be spent in consultation with the local people, Haider told his party workers.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1403967/get-ready-lg-polls-haider-tells-activists/>

Munir Ahmad, “Economic murder of Gilgit-Baltistan”

Daily Times, May 9, 2017

Federal government is still reluctant to withdraw its order imposing ban on the foreign tourists visiting Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) without obtaining an (additional) no-objection certificate (NOC) from the ministry of interior in Islamabad despite a formal request from the GB chief minister. A letter recently sent by the ministry to the Gilgit-Baltistan government says that it has been reported that foreigners are frequently visiting Gilgit-Baltistan without obtaining an NOC or security clearance from the ministry, which is against the rules. The letter asks the authorities concerned to take concrete measures to curb the practice. The GB government and the tour operators have a valid stance that the foreign tourists wish to visit Gilgit-Baltistan do not get visa until they have compulsory NOC and clearance from the federal ministry of interior. Why another NOC after their arrival? There has been no precedent for foreigners to obtain an NOC for visiting

tourist points after getting visas — a process of two to three months. This seems to be intentionally discouraging Gilgit-Baltists tourism — the only seasonal source of livelihood for the natives after the small portion of dry-fruits sales. On the other hand, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government withdrew the NOC required for foreign tourists visiting Malakand division in March 2016 to promote tourism in the area. The only threat they are facing is an increase in the tourism. To me, this letter reflects the cowardly defeat of the federal government to prevent the country from security breaches.

<http://dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/09-May-17/economic-murder-of-gilgit-baltistan>

“Alarming number of suicide attempts in Ghizer district, Gilgit Baltistan”

Pakistan Today, May 9, 2017

The increasing number of suicide attempts in the Ghizer district of Gilgit Baltistan has become alarming as five more youngsters have reportedly committed suicide during last one week. This district, where literacy rate is comparatively better, has emerged as the worst district keeping in view the number of suicides during the past one decade. According to residents of the area, over 300 youth including both, boys and girls have committed suicide since 2000. Although, the number is alarming, the issue has largely gone unnoticed. However, police are yet to know the causes behind the emerging trend of suicides among youths in the district. The increasing incidents of suicides, particularly among students, have alarmed the people of the district. The emerging trend of suicides in Ghizer district has created fear and unrest among parents of the area. Residents of Ghizer district expressed dissatisfaction over police investigation in these sensitive cases. Parents stated that in many cases, police even did not bother to register suicide cases just to avoid further investigation. According to residents of the area, once it is proclaimed as suicide, police usually avoid investigating the matter.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/05/09/alarming-number-of-suicide-attempts-in-ghizer-district-gilgit-baltistan/>

MA Mir, “Opposition leader challenges AJK PM to declare assets”

The Express Tribune, May 9, 2017

Leader of the Opposition in Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly (AJKLA) Chaudhry Muhammad Yaseen challenged AJK Prime Minister Farooq Haider to declare his assets and source of income on May 8. The PPP leader, while addressing the oath taking ceremony of AJK’s Central Bar Association, noted, “My assets are open but will Prime Minister Haider show his source of income?” Yaseen also accused Prime Minister Haider of maintaining double standards. He stated when the PML-N celebrated its Panamagate victory in Burhan Wani chowk they were allowed to take out a rally, but when the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) staged a sit-in at the same spot they were baton charged. The PPP leader recalled that the AJK interim act of 1974 was the blessing of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto through which the valley got a separate assembly and courts. The act has been widely criticised by the ruling party in AJK and the opposition leader asked the PML-N why they were not changing the act when they are in control of the federal and AJK governments.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1404810/opposition-leader-challenges-ajk-pm-declare-assets/>

“1124MW Kohala Hydropower Project to be Completed in Time: Haider”

Radio Pakistan, May 9, 2017

Prime Minister Azad Kashmir Raja Farooq Haider Khan noted that 1124 megawatt Kohala Hydropower Project would be completed in the stipulated time period. Addressing management committee of Kohala Hydropower Project in Muzaffarabad on May 9, he noted the project is part of CPEC. Two other hydro power projects have also been included in CPEC. These projects on completion would not only add power to the national grid but also create job opportunities for the skilled manpower of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Raja Farooq Haider Khan stated all reservations of Kohala Hydropower Project

affectees would be addressed on priority basis. He directed Senior Member Board of Revenue to setup Special Cells at Commissioner and DCO offices for facilitation of the affectees.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/09-May-2017/1124mw-kohala-hydropower-project-to-be-completed-in-time-haider>

“Azad Kashmir Great Beneficiary of CPEC: Masood”

Radio Pakistan, May 10, 2017

AJK President Sardar Masood Khan noted that vast potential with conducive atmosphere exists for investors in mineral and tourism sectors in the state. Talking to a delegation of Chinese investors in Islamabad on May 10, he noted investors would be welcomed in these sectors. AJK President stated white granite and marble of Azad Kashmir is in high demand at international level. Sardar Masood Khan further stated Azad Kashmir is a great beneficiary of CPEC. Chinese investors expressed their willingness to invest in mineral, coal, tourism and other sectors in the state.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/10-May-2017/azad-kashmir-great-beneficiary-of-cpec-masood>

“Sword of Damocles hanging over the corrupt”

The Nation, May 11, 2017

AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan on May 10 stated that reorganisation of the AJK Accountability Bureau was in process, adding that those looted the resources of the state should start counting the time to face the music. Addressing a reception hosted by Ch Khalid Masood, he noted under a new system nobody would be able to question the credibility of the bureau. The prime minister stated that reorganisation of the Accountability Bureau was in process and a new system would be introduced. He also stated the organisation of Pakistan Muslim League- N in AJK was renewal of a pledge that was made with the Quaid-e-Azam in 1940 by Kashmiris. “It was really difficult to carry on political journey with the people who believed in the ideology of

Sheikh Abdullah,” he added. He further stated that it was the result of the hardworking and commitment of the workers of PML-N and association of people with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that they posed historical confidence in PML-N during the general elections in 2016.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/11-May-2017/sword-of-damocles-hanging-over-the-corrupt>

“HRCP lauds removal of 47 names from ATA’s 4th schedule in Gilgit-Baltistan”

Pakistan Today, May 11, 2017

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has welcomed the removal of 47 individuals’ names from a list under Fourth Schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act in Gilgit-Baltistan, and called for a fair hearing for those remaining on the list. In a statement issued on May 11, the commission noted: “HRCP welcomes as a positive development a recent notification by the Gilgit-Baltistan Home Department deleting the names of 47 individuals being monitored under Fourth Schedule.” “An HRCP fact-finding mission to Gilgit-Baltistan last year had received reports from several activists that government agencies in the region monitored their activities after placing their names on the Schedule Four list over alleged links with groups accused of sabotaging law and order in the Gilgit-Baltistan region.” The HRCP fact-finding mission had learned that individuals classified as posing threats to security by the agencies were forced to report their movements to local police stations and in some instances could not leave their districts of domicile without reporting their intended movements to the authorities. A failure to comply could lead to arrest. “HRCP wishes to emphasise the need to respect and facilitate the right to peaceful protest, and fundamental freedoms, particularly the freedoms of association and expression, by all citizens.”

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/05/11/hrcp-lauds-removal-of-47-names-from-atas-4th-schedule-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

“NOC for foreign tourists to Gilgit-Baltistan not mandatory, says Ch Nisar”

ARY, May 11, 2017

Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan on May 11 stated that condition – which was made mandatory for foreign tourists – to have No-Objection Certificate (NOC) for visiting Gilgit-Baltistan has been lifted after holding meetings and forming consensus including with Chief Minister of the region. “However, the security clearance will be mandatory for any foreigner to set up a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) or a key project in the country”, Nisar noted while addressing a press conference in Islamabad. Talking about fake National Identity Cards (NICs), the interior minister stated that 353,000 NICs have been blocked in last three months including 174,000 identity cards of foreign nationals. He also apprised the media persons that 33,000 passports were also cancelled, however, an appeal could be filed in this regards.

<https://arynews.tv/en/noc-foreign-tourists-gilgit-baltistan-not-mandatory-says-ch-nisar/>

“PPP protests against load shedding in Mirpur Khas”

Daily Times, May 12, 2017

Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) senior lawmaker Nisar Ahmed Khuhro who is the party’s Sindh president and Minister for Food, while addressing the attendees of the party’s protest against electricity load shedding outside the Mirpur Khas Press Club noted that the government must be answerable for HESCO’s operations. “We have taken to streets to convey unity with our people who are suffering important issues of water shortages and prolonged electricity blackouts and gas outages,” he stated. According to details, Sindh’s ruling party carried out protest against the load shedding of electricity and scarcity of water. In Mirpur Khas, PPP supporters protested at the Press Club Mirpur Khas. A Large number of women and men took part in the sit-in and chanted slogans against the federal government. The protesters raised slogans against the federal government, WAPDA, HESCO

and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and gave an ultimatum straight away to end unscheduled load shedding, curtailment in the approved load shedding administration, discharge of Sindh’s share in the irrigation water, etc. Protestors carried banners and placards inscribed with slogans against the federal government, WAPDA and HESCO.

<http://dailytimes.com.pk/pakistan/12-May-17/ppp-protests-against-load-shedding-in-mirpur-khas>

“AJK president visits LoC at Kiaran Sector”

Pakistan Today, May 13, 2017

Azad Jammu and Kashmir President Sardar Muhammad Masood Khan visited Kiaran Sector of Line of Control on May 13. The AJK president who is on a three-day tour to Neelum valley also engaged in public meetings. AJK Legislative Speaker Shah Ghulam Qadir—who also accompanied the president on the occasion— briefed Masood Khan on the geographical situation of LoC and ceasefire line area near Kairan Sector. He also informed him about the Indian forces’ violations on ceasefire line, and physical and infrastructural damages caused due to those violations. The AJK president also met with the tourists who had come from different parts of the country to visit the resorts of Neelum Valley. The president inquired them about the facilities and questioned about the beauty of Neelum Valley. The tourists expressed satisfaction over the facilities provided to them by the AJK Tourism Department. The AJK Assembly speaker arranged a feast in the honour of the president Masood Khan and different social and political figures of the local area also were also present on the occasion and exchanged their views with the president.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/05/13/ajk-president-visits-loc-at-kiaran-sector/>

“Protests in Gilgit-Baltistan as OBOR summit opens in Beijing”

DNA, May 14, 2017

As China opened one of its biggest foreign policy initiatives since 1949 - the One Belt One Road

(OBOR) summit in Beijing, attended by heads of state and government of over 23 nations, including Pakistan, protests broke out in Gilgit-Baltistan against the ongoing construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project under the Belt and Road initiative. Various students and political organisations including Karakoram Students Organisation, Balwaristan National Students Organisation, Gilgit Baltistan United Movement and Balwaristan National Front have been protesting against OBOR in Gilgit, Hunza, Skardu and Ghizer. They described the project as an illegal attempt to grab Gilgit and see it as a “Road of Gulami or Slavery for Gilgit-Baltistan “. Protestors across Gilgit see the CPEC and OBOR as a ploy by China to take over their territory. Carrying placards and banners stating “Stop Chinese Imperialism “protestors have been calling on the World Community to stop this Chinese transgression on Gilgit’s soil which remains disputed since 1948-49.

<http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-protests-in-gilgit-baltistan-as-obor-summit-opens-in-beijing-2437643>

“Azad Kashmir Vast Potential of Hydropower Generation: Haider”

Radio Pakistan, May 14, 2017

AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan noted Azad Kashmir has a vast potential of Hydropower generation and can produce 8800 megawatt electricity. He was addressing a function after laying a foundation stone of 48 megawatt Jagran Phase-two hydro-power Project at Kuttan in Neelum Valley on May 14. The project is being started with the support of France. The AJK Prime Minister stated effective planning, research and availability of resources would significantly help to overcome energy crises. He also stated that long-term planning is being made to utilize natural resources for the development of the territory. Speaking on this occasion Ambassador of France in Pakistan Ms. Maretine Dorance noted that her country is extending its cooperation to different development projects being run in Azad Kashmir. She also stated that France would continue to extend cooperation for

overcoming emergency crisis and environmental hazards in Pakistan.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/14-May-2017/azad-kashmir-vast-potential-of-hydropower-generation-haider>

Imtiaz Ali Taj, “Thousands’ protest govt’s negligence of Gilgit Baltistan under CPEC”

Dawn, May 15, 2017

A large number of protesters gathered in Skardu on May 15 to protest the exclusion of Gilgit-Baltistan from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project. People from ten districts of Gilgit-Baltistan gathered for the second phase of the protests, being organised by the PPP’s GB chapter. The PPP stated that while 439 kilometres of land in Skardu had been acquired by the government for CPEC, Gilgit-Baltistan had not received any share in the project. Rather, the total investment of \$42bn dollars has been directed towards Punjab and other areas, the PPP noted. The protesters further noted that while the chief ministers of all four provinces had accompanied Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on his visit to China for the One Belt, One Road forum (OBOR), the chief minister of Gilgit-Baltistan had not been invited. They also stated that the exclusion of the chief minister of Gilgit-Baltistan from the forum was a sign that the government has adopted exploitative and discriminatory policies in the area. The prime minister had travelled to China on May 12 to participate in the OBOR forum, aimed at regional development through win-win cooperation.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1333298/thousands-protest-govts-negligence-of-gilgit-baltistan-under-cpec>

Ghulam Abbas, “PM to inaugurate Diamar Dam with Chinese venture”

Pakistan Today, May 15, 2017

While construction work on the much-awaited project of the Diamar-Bhasha Dam is yet to be started since the first inauguration of the project in 2006, the federal government has planned another inauguration

of the project by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif next month. The prime minister would be laying the foundation stone of the \$15 billion project for the third time as the project was earlier inaugurated by then president Pervez Musharraf in 2006 and then Prime Minister Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani in 2001. Ministry of Water and Power, the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and other authorities concerned have been asked to make necessary arrangements for the foundation laying ceremony after China has given a green signal for investing into the multibillion dollar project. “Musharraf and Yusuf Raza Gilani had inaugurated the project without any development on ground like acquisition of land and arrangement of the funding. We are going to inaugurate the dam after due homework post which work on the much-delayed project will practically be started,” stated Barjees Tahir, federal minister of Gilgit Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs. “We have paid over Rs 50 billion to victims of the dam as compensation to their land so far and almost 90 percent required land for the project has been acquired.

We are also moving forward to establish a colony with education, health and others facilities for the relocated families,” he noted, adding that transparency in the fund disbursement has been ensured. Officials at the WAPDA office in Diamer confirmed that the authority has been asked to make necessary arrangements for the next ground-breaking ceremony of the project.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/05/15/pm-to-inaugurate-diamer-dam-with-chinese-venture/>

“AJK govt directs to ensure timely completion of projects”

Daily Times, May 18, 2017

Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) government directed all heads of state institutions to ensure timely completion of development projects maintaining required quality. According to a report quoting official sources, promotion of concerned authorities has been linked with their performance in respective

department. The Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan directed to cut down the budget of all those departments that would fail to present satisfactory progress on the development program.

<http://dailytimes.com.pk/pakistan/18-May-17/ajk-govt-directs-to-ensure-timely-completion-of-projects>

“Foreign Secretary Calls on AJK President”

Radio Pakistan, May 18, 2017

Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua called on President Azad Jammu and Kashmir Sardar Masood Khan in Islamabad on May 18. The Foreign Secretary assured the AJK President that Foreign Office and all Pakistan missions abroad will continue to support the cause of Kashmir and highlight the gross human rights violations by Indian occupation forces on all international forums, especially at United Nations and UNHRC.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/18-May-2017/foreign-secretary-calls-on-ajk-president>

“View from Kashmir Observer: Curiosity is rising in Kashmir over China-Pakistan Economic Corridor”

Scroll. In, May 19, 2017

Leaders of 29 countries attended the high-profile Belt and Road Forum in Beijing over May 14 and 15 even as India boycotted it over its objections to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor – a \$54-billion infrastructure project connecting Gwadar in Pakistan to Kashgar in Xinjiang – that passes through Gilgit-Baltistan, which India considers its territory. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has drawn a lot of attention in the Valley too, for its potential to help in the resolution of the Kashmir dispute. In March, a seminar titled “Impact of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in Kashmir” was organised in Srinagar by The Kashmir Institute, a think tank. Andrew Small, the author of *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia’s New Geopolitics*, addressed the gathering via Skype. Small predicted that the corridor would have a very consequential impact on the overall framework of

India-Pakistan relations, and China's role and equity in these disputes.

<https://scroll.in/article/838009/view-from-kashmir-observer-curiosity-is-rising-in-kashmir-over-china-pakistan-economic-corridor>

“AJK contributes 1100 MW electricity to Pakistan's national grid: Masood Khan”

Kashmir Watch, May 19, 2017

Sardar Masood Khan, President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, stated that it is our goal to make Azad Kashmir self-sufficient in energy. “Power generation in AJK directly helps Pakistan redress its energy deficit and contribute to its economic development. In the years to come, it will turn around Pakistan's energy sector, rejuvenate its industry and help attract private investment.” he noted. The President Azad Jammu and Kashmir was addressing the concluding session of 9th Power Generation Conference. He stated before the audience that Azad Kashmir's hydropower potential has been estimated at 8,000 MW in the medium term and 18,000 MW in the long term. Sardar Masood Khan further stated that, currently, Azad Kashmir produces roughly 1,500 MW electricity through hydropower. Mangla Dam's installed capacity is 1,150 MW. The remaining power is being generated by small and micro dams. AJK's total requirement for household, commercial and industrial usage is 400 MW. AJK thus makes a net contribution of 1,100 MW to Pakistan's national grid, as of today,” he added.

<http://kashmirwatch.com/39719-2/>

“CPEC to change fate of GB”

The News, May 20, 2017

A seminar titled ‘Social Impact of CPEC and Vision of One Belt One Road on Gilgit-Baltistan’ was organised by National Council of Social Welfare (NCSW), for public awareness, noted a press release. NCSW Chairman Dr. Nadeem Shafiq Malik chaired the seminar while Iqbal Hassan, Minister for Information, Planning and Development, Gilgit-

Baltistan was the chief guest. Representatives of civil society, NGOs, students, and intellectuals of Gilgit-Baltistan, and other stakeholders attended the seminar. NCSW chairman in his address deliberated that China's vision of One Belt One Road would change the fate of Pakistan especially Gilgit-Baltistan which is the gateway of CPEC. Pakistan has become the most geo-economic important country of the region due to the successful financial policies of the government. Pakistan is about to become the hub of financial activities because of CPEC.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/205557-CPEC-to-change-fate-of-GB>

“Masood Expresses Gratitude to Nawaz for Increasing Development Budget”

Radio Pakistan, May 20, 2017

AJK President Masood Khan expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for increasing the development budget of the state. Talking to different public delegations in Islamabad, he welcomed the decision of National Economic Coordination Council to significantly increase the development budget of Azad Kashmir. The President stated the government of Pakistan under the leadership of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is keen to develop Azad Kashmir on modern lines. It is to mention that National Economic Coordination Council in its meeting accorded approval to the increase of development budget of AJK from nine billion to twenty-two billion rupees.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/20-May-2017/masood-expresses-gratitude-to-nawaz-for-increasing-development-budget>

“AJK PM assures Chinese investors of security, facilities”

The Nation, May 21, 2017

A delegation of Chinese investors called on AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan and discussed matters related to investment in the state, it was officially declared. The delegation apprised the AJK PM of the Chinese entrepreneurs keen interest in investing in CPEC and other mega projects

including hydroelectric, construction of economic zones, infrastructure and other sectors in the AJK. On the occasion, Farooq Haider assured the Chinese investors of foolproof security and all other facilities in the state. He also stated that AJK possesses great potential in various sectors including hydroelectric, tourism, mining and others. Meanwhile, AJK Premier Raja Farooq Haider attended meeting of National Economic Council (NEC) in the federal capital on the special invitation of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and presented the financial case of AJK in the meeting, it was officially stated. “PM Nawaz Sharif had extended invitation to Farooq Haider last month during his visit to Muzaffarabad for participation in the NEC meeting”, noted an AJK government’s official statement that was issued.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/21-May-2017/ajk-pm-assures-chinese-investors-of-security-facilities>

“Art Industrial Zone to Be Established Under CPEC in Mirpur: Masood”

Radio Pakistan, May 22, 2017

AJK President Sardar Masood Khan has urged universities of the state to devise curricula in the light of the emerging economic landscape, especially with reference to the AJK’s integration with CPEC. Addressing a seminar on ‘Promoting Technology and Entrepreneurship’ in Mirpur, he noted a state of the art industrial zone will be established under CPEC in Mirpur. He also stated the zone would stimulate knowledge-based economic activities in the state. AJK President stated Azad Kashmir can be turned into Silicon Valley and IT hub, which could supplement Pakistan’s burgeoning IT market.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/22-May-2017/art-industrial-zone-to-be-established-under-cpec-in-mirpur-masood>

“AJK to be turned into Silicon Valley”

The Nation, May 23, 2017

President Sardar Masood Khan on May 22 declared that the AJK could be transformed into a Silicon Valley and IT hub, which could supplement and

augment Pakistan’s burgeoning IT market. “The AJK government will be encouraged to lend all of its due resources to achieve the task through the promotion of latest skills and products of information technology in all private and public sector institutions in line with the global needs for speedy progress and prosperity of the region,” AJK President Masood Khan stated while addressing a seminar on May 22. The seminar titled “Promoting Technology and Entrepreneurship in Azad Jammu and Kashmir,” was organised by the Mirpur University of Science and Technology (MUST) in collaboration with Sandbox Ltd, the private-sector promoter of IT field.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/23-May-2017/ajk-to-be-turned-into-silicon-valley>

Ghulam Abbas, “GB Council fails to approve budget even after 11 months”

Pakistan Today, May 23, 2017

The government has not passed budget of the Gilgit Baltistan Council even after 11 months of this financial year to be closed on June 30. The budget session could not be held in the absence of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif as chairman of the council despite scheduling the meeting repeatedly in Gilgit. After the first meeting, held on May 19, 2016, the council could not meet again under the prime minister. “Every time when we scheduled the meeting we had to cancel it for unavailability of the chairman (the prime minister),” stated an official at the council on anonymity. Interestingly, it was the budget session as well as the oath taking ceremony of new members when the premier had attended the last meeting in Gilgit in 2016. The budget of 2015-16 was also passed on May 19, 2016, the official noted. “The elected members cannot use the budget when it is passed almost one month before the closure of the financial year,” stated Ataullah Shihab, a former council member. “It seems the council which is empowered to legislate in almost 53 subjects is practically dysfunctional for the last two years,” he further noted.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/05/23/gb-council-fails-to-approve-budget-even-after-11-months/>

Afzal Ali Shigri, “Constitutional rights for GB”

Dawn, May 23, 2017

Led by a small group of Gilgit Scouts, with the complete support and participation of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, the armed revolt to liberate the region against the repressive Dogra lasted for more than a year. For a few days, an independent state of GB was formed in November 1947, which then made a formal request to the government of Pakistan for accession. The rajas of various small principalities and areas also voiced their assent to join Pakistan. The Pakistan government dispatched its representative and a few army officers under the able leadership of Muhammad Aslam Khan (alias Colonel Pasha). Under his command, parts of Gilgit and all of Baltistan was liberated. While this irregular formation of brave warriors was on the march to Leh and Kashmir valley, the United Nations passed a resolution calling for ceasefire. All of GB had unconditionally acceded to Pakistan. Unfortunately, the political government of Pakistan decided its fate unilaterally instead of consulting with the local leadership. They did so by signing the infamous Karachi Agreement, 1949, with the Kashmiri leadership — who surrendered the administrative control of this vast region, which was inhabited by a patriotic and trusting people, without any attempts to guarantee their citizenship rights in Pakistan. Since then, the arbitrary rule of the federal government has carried on — the trust reposed in Pakistan through unconditional accession rewarded, in turn, with harsh bureaucratic rule that introduced the draconian, colonial-era Frontier Crime Regulations (FCR).

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1334774/constitutional-rights-for-gb>

Altaf Hameed Rao, “AJK to find representation in federal entities: Farooq”

Pakistan Observer, May 24, 2017

AJK Raja Farooq Haider noted on May 22 that the matter of granting of due share to AJK, Gilgit Baltistan and FATA in National Finance Commissioner Award would be finalized in the forthcoming meeting with chief ministers of all four

provinces to be held in July 2017. Addressing news conference at Directorate General of Public Relations on May 22, the Prime Minister advised the media and civil society to adopt national stances on issues of national importance. He noted that, with the keen interest of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif the AJK development budget had been increased by Rs.10 billion.

<http://pakobserver.net/ajk-find-representation-federal-entities-farooq/>

“GBYA chief accuses police of harassment”

The Nation, May 25, 2017

Police have registered FIR against Gilgit-Baltistan Youth Alliance (GBYA) Chairman Sheikh Hassan Johari and Hafiz Bilal – a Skardu based social activist - by alleging them of provocative speeches and blockage of roads. They claimed that police have warned them to avoid the protest rallies and speeches otherwise they would be booked in charges of terrorism and their names would be placed in Schedule Four of ATA. The Police is also preparing the list of the supporters of the above mentioned activists so that they would be warned to give up the support of GBYA, they claimed. The detained activists claimed they were booked because they had staged a protest against the government for its negligence on civic issues of Gilgit-Baltistan. They further stated that their major demands were the construction of Gilgit-Skardu road, due share in CPEC and transparency in appointments at education department of Gilgit-Baltistan. The arrested activists claimed that the government is using anti-terror laws against opposition parties and social activists in the region.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/25-May-2017/gbya-chief-accuses-police-of-harassment>

“Mansehra-Muzaffarabad-Mangla Expressway to Usher New Era of Development In Region: Haider”

Radio Pakistan, May 25, 2017

Prime Minister Azad Kashmir Raja Farooq Haider

Khan noted Mansehra-Muzaffarabad-Mangla Expressway will usher a new era of development in the region. Addressing a public gathering at District Haveli on May 24, he noted completion of this Expressway would boost trade activities in the region. On the occasion, the AJK Prime Minister announced up-gradation of three Tehsil Headquarters Hospitals, construction of district offices and roads.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/24-May-2017/mansehra-muzaffarabad-mangla-expressway-to-usher-new-era-of-development-in-region-haider>

“AJK terms budget growth-oriented”

The Nation, May 28, 2017

The AJK government and the AJK Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AJKCCI) have praised the proposals made by the federal government of Pakistan in the current budget for fiscal year 2017-18, and termed it balanced and growth-oriented. “This is a peoples-friendly and broad-based development-oriented budget inked by the PML-N government”, observed Ch Muhammad Saeed, the AJK minister for sports, culture and youth. Ch Saeed, who is former president of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry, stated that it is balanced budget as it has tried to alleviate poverty, unemployment by raising salaries of the working class / labourers. He also praised the government for increasing salaries of the government employees and pensioners by 10 percent. The AJK minister also noted that by increasing the export surplus, the country would not only be able to successfully meet the trade gap but also help increase exports to a great extent.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/28-May-2017/ajk-terms-budget-growth-oriented>

“India’s objections on CPEC are fake: AJK president”

The Nation, May 29, 2017

President Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Masood Khan dismissed India’s objections to the China-

Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as fake and disingenuous. The AJK president debunked India’s objections to CPEC while addressing a one-day international seminar on ‘Belt and Road Initiative: CPEC and regional integration’ organised by The Institute of International and Cultural Affairs. Masood questioned, “Having occupied one part of Jammu and Kashmir territory, now it (India) stakes claim of ‘sovereignty’ to Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir, under what law?” He stated the territory does not belong to India. Masood stated there was no easy way to assuage India’s concerns over the territories. India was not a stakeholder in Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir; it never was, he told the audience of the seminar. “The Belt and Road Initiative is an undertaking with no precedent, its scale is massive, the BRI is the most ambitious global development plan in history,” he noted.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/29-May-2017/india-s-objections-on-cpec-are-fake-ajk-president>

“Work on 40 Mw Harpo Hydrel Power Project to Begin Shortly: Speaker GBLA”

Radio Pakistan, May 29, 2017

Speaker, Gilgit Baltistan Legislative Assembly Fida Muhammad Nashad noted that work on 40 MW Harpo Hydrel Power Project in Skardu will begin shortly. In an interview, he stated WAPDA has released funds and appointed a focal person in this regard. He also stated that 30 MW Shagarthang hydrel power project would be included in the Public Sector Development program this year. He further stated work on a number of energy projects is going on to generate more electricity. The Speaker noted load shedding from Baltistan region would be eliminated by end of next financial year.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/29-May-2017/work-on-40-mw-harpo-hydrel-power-project-to-begin-shortly-speaker-gbla>

Economic Developments

“Chinese investors keen to invest in AJK”

Pakistan Today, May 5, 2017

The Chinese investors have expressed willingness to invest in hydel, mineral, tourism, and other sectors in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. A delegation of Chinese investors met AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan on May 4. Talking to the delegation, the prime minister stated that the Chinese investors will be provided full security and other incentives. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) reflects long-lasting Pak-China friendship and would usher an era of progress and prosperity in the entire region, concluded the AJK prime minister.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/05/04/chinese-investors-keen-to-invest-in-ajk/>

“Steps Being Taken For Promotion of Hotel Industry in GB: Fida”

Radio Pakistan, May 17, 2017

Minister Tourism Fida Khan stated steps are being taken for promotion of Hotel industry in Gilgit-Baltistan. In an interview on May 17, he stated due to prudent policies of the Government, the flow of national and international tourists in being increased day by day. He also stated that PML-N Government is committed to provide adequate stay and dining facilities to the tourists in collaboration with private sector.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/17-May-2017/steps-being-taken-for-promotion-of-hotel-industry-in-gb-fida>

“GB Council fails to approve budget even after 11 months”

Pakistan Today, May 23, 2017

The government has not passed budget of the Gilgit

Baltistan Council even after 11 months of this financial year to be closed on June 30. The budget session could not be held in the absence of Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif as chairman of the council despite scheduling the meeting repeatedly in Gilgit. After the first meeting, held on May 19, 2016, the council could not meet again under the prime minister. “Every time when we scheduled the meeting we had to cancel it for unavailability of the chairman (the prime minister),” stated an official at the council on anonymity. Interestingly, it was the budget session as well as the oath taking ceremony of new members when the premier had attended the last meeting in Gilgit in 2016. The budget of 2015-16 was also passed on May 19, 2016, the official noted. “The elected members cannot use the budget when it is passed almost one month before the closure of the financial year,” stated Ataullah Shihab, a former council member.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/05/23/gb-council-fails-to-approve-budget-even-after-11-months/>

Amin Ahmed, “UNIDO developing project on agro-industry for Gilgit-Baltistan”

Dawn, May 24, 2017

The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) developed a project proposal for Gilgit-Baltistan on agro-industry development programme, targeting fresh and dry fruits, trout fish as well as dairy sector. The project was developed following the conclusion of a need assessment mission to Gilgit-Baltistan for which UNIDO contributed \$50,000 as seed money for developing the project. The anticipated budget will be around \$3 million for the first phase to be mobilised by the federal government, international donors and UN funds. According to UNIDO, the concept for value addition was conceived in close collaboration with the ministry of national food security and research

as well as active participation of the provincial agriculture department. The project team was led by UNIDO representative in Pakistan Esam Alqararah, which undertook field visits to Peshawar and Gilgit-Baltistan for details. The team includes an international food expert from Lebanon and a UNIDO project manager based in Vienna.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1334951/unido-developing-project-on-agro-industry-for-gilgit-baltistan>

“Increase in Tax Collection Pivotal For Development, Prosperity of Country: Barjees”

Radio Pakistan, May 26, 2017

Minister for Kashmir Affairs Chaudhry Barjees Tahir noted that increase in tax collection is pivotal for

development and prosperity of the country. He was presiding over a meeting of Azad Kashmir Inland Revenue department in Islamabad on May 24. He directed the concerned authorities to utilize their utmost efforts for completion of tax targets in Azad Kashmir.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/24-May-2017/increase-in-tax-collection-pivotal-for-development-prosperity-of-country-barjees>

International Developments

“Delegates from across UK come together against annexation of Gilgit-Baltistan by Pakistan”

Bihar Prabha, May 1, 2017

A group of delegates from different European countries and across the United Kingdom gathered in Leeds to debate at a seminar titled ‘Preventing annexation of Gilgit-Baltistan and Further Division of Jammu and Kashmir. The way Forward.’ The seminar focused upon opposing Pakistan’s designs proposed to annex strategic Gilgit-Baltistan region as its fifth province. The seminar was organised by the United Kashmir Peoples National Party (UKPNP). Members Parliament of the U.K. and Councillors were the key guests in the seminar. Speaking at the event, party’s Chief Shaukat Ali Kashmiri talked about the withdrawal of Pakistani forces from the regions of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit Baltistan. It was the third such convention organised by UKPNP.

<http://news.biharprabha.com/2017/05/delegates-from-across-uk-come-together-against-annexation-of-gilgit-baltistan-by-pakistan/>

MA Mir, “For Kashmiris in UK, amiable candidates main focus”

The Express Tribune, May 1, 2017

With a strong, consolidated community – and thus a significant vote bank – Kashmiris living in England will go to polls next month with the aim of affecting the elections based on candidates who support the Kashmir cause. “We will focus on candidates rather than parties, whether they are from Labour or Conservative,” stated Tehreek-e-Kashmir United Kingdom (UK) President Raja Fahim while addressing a reception in Muzaffarabad organised by the Jamaat-e-Islami Azad Jammu and Kashmir chapter on April 29. “Our mission is to vote for the candidate who will support the Kashmiris’ right of

self-determination.” An engineering graduate from the University of Engineering and Technology (UET) Lahore, 36-year-old Fahim went to the UK in 2006. He worked for the promotion of Kashmir cause and soon rose in the ranks to be appointed as the president of TKUK – an organisation formed in 1985 which now has over a dozen branches spread across Europe to promote Kashmir cause. Fahim stated that in the UK, where there are over 1.2 million Kashmiris, they could play a decisive role in June 2017 election.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1397853/kashmiris-uk-amiable-candidates-main-focus/>

“China has vested interest in helping resolve Kashmir issue”

Times of India, May 2, 2017

China now has a “vested interest” in mediating between India and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir issue because of its nearly \$50 billion investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), an article in a state-run daily stated. The article in the Global Times, a ruling Communist Party of China publication, indicated Beijing’s latent interest in playing a bigger role in the region. Claiming that China had mediated between Myanmar and Bangladesh over Rohingya refugees issue, the article stated, “China has always adhered to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, but that doesn’t mean Beijing can turn a deaf ear to the demands of Chinese enterprises in protecting their overseas investments.” “Given the massive investment that China has made in countries along the “One Belt, One Road”, China now has a vested interest in helping resolve regional conflicts including the dispute over Kashmir between India and Pakistan,” it stated. China’s recent mediation between Myanmar and Bangladesh over Rohingya issue shows the increased ability of Beijing in

resolving conflicts beyond its borders to maintain regional stability, the article noted. “China has been at the centre of a regional power shift, thus the country now needs to learn how to act as a stabilising force and conflict mediator in the region,” it noted.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/china-has-vested-interest-in-helping-resolve-kashmir-issue/articleshow/58474654.cms>

“China-Pak Economic Corridor hasn’t affected our stand on Kashmir: China”

Deccan Herald, May 3, 2017

China today denied that it has plans of mediating between India and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir issue due to its investments in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, saying the USD 50 billion project has not affected its stand that the vexed issue should be settled bilaterally. China’s clarification came a day after an article in the Global Times noted that Beijing now has a “vested interest” in mediating between India and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir issue because of its hefty investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that passes through PoK. “China’s position on the issue of Kashmir is clear and consistent. It is an issue left over from history between India and Pakistan, and shall be properly addressed by India and Pakistan through consultation and negotiation,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang noted before PTI. He also noted that China will play a “constructive role” for the improvement of relations between India and Pakistan. “The building of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) does not affect China’s position on this issue,” he stated in a written response to a question about the article in the state-run Global Times, a ruling Communist Party of China publication. “We sincerely hope that India and Pakistan will properly handle differences by increasing communication and dialogue, and jointly uphold regional peace and stability. China is willing to make constructive efforts for the improvement of India-Pakistan relations,” Geng noted.

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/609636/china-denies-shift-stand-kashmir.html>

Irfan Aftab, “Former AJK PM pleads case for oppressed Kashmiris during Europe visit”

Geo TV, May 6, 2017

Former Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Barrister Sultan Mahmood attended important meetings at German foreign ministry while on a two-day visit to Berlin. Mahmood held a meeting with Stefan Röken, Head of Division Pakistan and Afghanistan at German Foreign Office in Berlin and also briefed the representatives of Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Speaking to Geo TV, Barrister Mahmood noted: “We have lots of expectation from German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Under her leadership, Germany helped millions of Syrian refugees. She is internationalist and we expect that chancellor will raise the voice for the oppressed Kashmiris.” He warned that the international community should not underestimate the cost of the confrontation at the LoC between two nuclear powers.

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/140742-Former-AJK-PM-pleads-case-for-oppressed-Kashmiris-during-Europe-visit>

“Destroy terror camps in PoK and Gilgit: Exiled Kashmiris tell Pakistan”

DNA, May 16, 2017

Exiled Kashmiri leaders have asked Pakistan to destroy all terror camps existing in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit-Baltistan at an event held in Torino, Italy. Organised under the aegis of United Kashmir Peoples National Party (UKPNP), the event was held in memory of Arif Shahid, a leader of All Parties National Alliance, who was brutally murdered in Rawalpindi in May 2013. The participants held deliberations on Pakistan’s nefarious plans to deny basic rights and human rights to people in PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan. Kamran Ayub, General Secretary of the United Kashmir People’s National Party, put forth a set of demands which includes: granting the people of PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan their full rights, all illegally detained activists and leaders should be released, revenue earned from PoK and Gilgit-Baltistan be spent upon the development of the region, the environmental challenge that aroused due

to changing the flow of Neelum Jhelum and Diamer-Bhasha Dam should be rectified, withdrawal of the National Action Plan, all terror camps in the region should be destroyed, speedy justice in cases related to human rights violations and putting an end to religious extremism among others.

<http://www.dnaindia.com/world/report-destroy-terror-camps-in-pok-and-gilgit-exiled-kashmiris-tell-pakistan-2440274>

“Norwegian Parliament to hold debate on Kashmir”

The Nation, May 18, 2017

The persistent struggle of Kashmiri Scandinavian Council (KSC), Norway achieved another milestone as an interpolation on Kashmir conflict was tabled by Mr Knut Ariled Hareide in the Norwegian parliament. Mr Knut Ariled Hareide is a member of the parliament and the current head of the Christian

Democratic Party, sources noted. The sources further noted on May 17 that Norwegian Foreign Minister Børge Brende is confirmed to make a policy statement in the parliament during interpolation on Kashmir conflict proposed on 23 May 2017. An earlier debate was held in 2010 and again in September 2012 when the Norwegian parliament raised the issue of existence of unidentified mass graves in occupied Kashmir. In May 2013, interpolation entitled “Kashmir on the backdrop of withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan in 2014” was submitted for a debate by the Chairman of the Norwegian parliamentary Kashmir Committee and Christian Democrat (KrF) Party leader Knut Arild Hareide, the sources added.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/18-May-2017/norwegian-parliament-to-hold-debate-on-kashmir>

Other Developments

“NHA Going To Hold Survey to Connect Astore to AJK”

Radio Pakistan, May 10, 2017

National Highway Authority (NHA) is going to hold a survey to connect Astore to Azad Kashmir. This was stated by NHA authorities during a briefing given to Standing Committee of National Assembly on Communications in Islamabad on May 10. The meeting was presided over by the Chairman Muhammad Muzamil Qureshi. It was briefed to the Committee that the Skardu-Gilgit road will be

constructed in a shortest period of seven months. The Committee showed its displeasure on the fact that there are several encroachments on the right of way of NHA especially on N-50 but NHA is not going to remove any encroachment because of one reason or the other. The Committee directed that all of the encroachments should be removed without any further delay. The Committee also directed that recommendations of the Committee should be implemented in letter and spirit.

<http://www.radio.gov.pk/10-May-2017/nha-going-to-hold-survey-to-connect-astore-to-ajk>

Extracts From The Urdu Media

Rais Samdani, “US Mediation”

Daily Baad-e-Shimal, May 1, 2017

India did not recognize Pakistan from day one. The ceasefire violations on the Line of Control border is common. Both countries have fought three wars in past. In a planned way, India got divided Pakistan in two parts. All powerful nations like US, Russia, Britain and China know that the main reason behind tensions between India and Pakistan is Kashmir. And till the Kashmiris do not get their legal rights, tensions will continue between both countries. Since both are nuclear powers, any escalation will not limit itself to traditional war. The Trump administration has shown interest in mediating between India and Pakistan and de-escalate the tensions. Ambassador Nikki Haley noted in a press conference that the Trump administration has reservations about the deteriorating relations between India and Pakistan. We want to see which type of role the US can play, she noted. It is being seen as an effective step to put an end to India-Pak tensions from a high ranking official in the history of American administration. Ambassador Nikki Haley was hopeful that Trump Administration can do something in this regard. If it is part of Trump’s policies then one may think about, otherwise America’s past record does not encourage us to expect anything. The second point raised by Ambassador Nikki Haley was that we should not wait for too long for something to happen. We are witnessing tensions, which can escalate anytime.

<http://www.dailybaadeshimal.com/?page=cGFnZS00&dt=MDUtMDEtMjAxNw>

“Council of Common Interest and interest of Azad Kashmir”

Daily Mahasib, May 5, 2017

A meeting of Council of Common Interest was held with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at chair. In the

meeting, the Chief Minister of Sindh raised the issue of gas and water and asked for flood relief fund. The Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa asked for profit of electricity and royalty of gas. Punjab and Balochistan’s CM must have pointed out their respective stands. The Council of Common Interests is an institution for sharing of resources in a justifiable manner between states and the federal government, where states are asking for their shares according to their contribution of resources in national income. There is no one to raise the voice of Azad Kashmir in this highest forum of resource sharing and distribution, since Azad Kashmir is not a constitutional unit of Pakistan. Though Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan are not part or a constitutional unit of Pakistan, their resources constitute the part of national economy. Running rivers, dense forest, expensive minerals and foreign remittance, contribute to the country’s economy. In return what these areas get is not more than peanuts. The reason is that no one is there to represent these areas. Leave aside constitutional debates, but Azad Kashmir must be represented at this forum.

<http://mahasib.com.pk/e-paper/page.php?id=4&edition=muzzaffarabad&dt=05-05-2017>

“CPEC! A corridor for China to reach Kashmir”

Daily Mahasib, May 6, 2017

An article in Global Times of China has send fear signals in India. Now several Indians are saying that CPEC is an excuse to reach Kashmir. China is trying to play a major diplomatic stroke in the name of investment in CPEC. It can jump for mediation in the name of saving their investment. Fears came into open when Global Times wrote that solution of regional issues are in the interest of China. The newspaper further writes saying that China has mediated between Bangladesh and Myanmar on the issue of Rohingya Muslims. This could be taken as an example for Kashmir. China can use experience

of Bangladesh and Myanmar mediation for Kashmir. This has instigated the Indian media. One of the newspapers in India termed it as “First investment Tactics Interfere”. Hindustan Times has discussed the China policy in Kashmir and asked India to be cautious since CPEC is a geopolitical agenda. This is open now that CPEC will be gateway of China to Kashmir. All fears are turning true. China may jump in on the basis of their investment. In 2009, Kashmiris were given visa on plain paper. A ban was imposed on northern command of Indian army. The resolution about Masood Azar was vetoed several times. According to the newspaper, one of the scholars from China also indicated that China can interfere in Kashmir conflict. These are all sufficient to reject that CPEC is an economic activity and it does not have geopolitical motives.

<http://mahasib.com.pk/e-paper/page.php?id=4&edition=muzaffarabad&dt=06-05-2017>

“Gilgit-Baltistan’s Financial Woes’

Daily Salaam, May 30, 2017

Gilgit Baltistan’s 70 years of history is associated with grant. This is the key reason that Gilgit-Baltistan is lagging behind despite being a region enriched with resources. Though we hear about annual budgets every year, it is the grant we get from the federal government and distribute it accordingly for different departments. Last year’s budget, if analysed A to Z from its preparation to presentation, one would conclude that we are a misfortunate community that does not like to move towards self-dependency.

<https://www.dailysalam.com/index.php>

Fact sheet on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir

Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK)

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

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

(Source: Jammu & Kashmir Government website at <http://www.jammukashmir.nic.in/>, accessed on November 14, 2010)

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)

Area: 13,297 square km

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

Capital: Muzaffarabad

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

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

President: Sardar Muhammad Masood Khan

Prime Minister: Raja Muhammad Farooq Haider Khan

AJK Council: Total 17 members

AJK Legislative Assembly: Total seats are 49

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

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

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

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

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

Gilgit-Baltistan

Area: 72,496 sq. kilometers

Population: 870,347 (1998 population census)

Capital: Gilgit

Districts: Nine

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

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

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

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

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

Gilgit-Baltistan Council: Total 15 members

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

Governor of G-B: Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan

Chief Minister G-B: Hafiz Hafiz-ur-Rehman

Political Parties and Groups: Balwaristan National Front (BNF), Gilgit-Baltistan Thinkers Forum, Gilgit-Baltistan, United Movement (GBUM), Baltistan

National Movement, Karakoram National Movement, Gilgit Baltistan Democratic Alliance (GBDA), Gilgit Baltistan

National Alliance (GBNA), All Parties National Alliance (APNA)

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

Disclaimer

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

POK NEWS DIGEST



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