

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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CPEC

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Glacial lakes Court
Gilgit-Balistan
non-locals
Palestine Ahl-e-
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non-local Sunnis Shia
Disaster management
sectarian
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Political Developments

Silk Route to KKH and CPEC

Masud Ahmad Khan, The Nation, 10 May 2021

Historically, parts of Gilgit-Baltistan especially Gilgit and Hunza were extremely important transit points in the Silk Route that spread from Europe to China which at that point was the most important trade route in the world. In modern history of Pakistan, this silk route was replaced by the Karakoram Highway which was built with great labour and sacrifice by both Pakistan and China. The KKH construction has increased the status of GB which has gained all the more strategic importance as China's presence next door and an unobstructed connection between China and Pakistan which will soon extend to other parts of the world as well. The US interests of containing Chinese influence converge with those of India. And with this convergence, comes the threat of attempts to destabilise CPEC projects both from India and the US

Earlier, India was also involved in terrorist attacks on the Pearl Continental Hotel in Gwadar and the Chinese consulate in Karachi. India is beyond any doubt, directly involved in terrorism—especially in Balochistan. Pakistan has already exposed India's nefarious design against CPEC. DG ISPR last year exposed India's links, financing, training and sponsorship of terrorism to the world. Pakistan's security forces will continue to thwart all hostile attempts to sabotage the project and destabilise the country.

<https://nation.com.pk/10-May-2021/silk-route-to-kkh-and-cpec>

AJK President calls for Muslim Ummah unity to end plights of Palestinian and Kashmiris

Business Recorder, 17 May 2021

Expressing Shock and anguish over the indiscriminate bombardment and destruction of Palestinian life and property in Gaza, AJK President Sardar Masood Khan called on the Muslims of the world to overcome their petty differences and unite to protect the people of Palestine and Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK). He also said that the people of Palestine as well as those of Jammu and Kashmir were being targeted for the same reason i.e. their Muslim identity.

"Our brother and sisters in Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) have been facing agonies which have no precedence in the history," the AJK president added.

Highlighting the decades-long atrocities of India and Israel, he said: "The People of Kashmir and Palestine have been imprisoned in their own homes and deprived of their land, homes, businesses as well as essential commodities to survive.

He also pointed to the irony of the fact that while India officially recognizes and supports the Palestinian cause, still around 50 youth in Jammu and Kashmir were arrested for expressing solidarity with their Palestinian brethren.

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40092832/ajk-president-calls-for-muslim-ummah-unity-to-end-plights-of-palestinian-and-kashmiris>

Justice Saeed Akram takes oath as AJK Chief Justice

The News, 19 May 2021

Justice Raja Saeed Akram Khan took oath as Chief Justice (CJ) of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) here on 19th May, a day after a notification to this effect was issued by the AJK law, justice, and parliamentary affairs and human rights department. The oath was administered to him by AJK President Sardar Masood Khan at a well-attended ceremony at Aiwan-i-Sadr. Among others, Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider, some members of the cabinet and the legislative assembly, acting chief justice of AJK high court, Sadaqat Hussain Raja; deputy attorney general of Pakistan Raja Khalid Mahmood Khan attended the ceremony.

Prime Minister Imran Khan sent an advice to Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) President Sardar Masood Khan for confirmation of Justice Raja Saeed Akram Khan as permanent chief justice of the region's Supreme Court after more than a year. Under Article 42 (4) of the AJK's interim constitution, the AJK chief justice is appointed by the AJK president on the advice of the chairman AJK council – the prime minister of Pakistan.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/836900-justice-saeed-akram-takes-oath-as-ajk-chief-justice>

Shia, Sunni clerics to jump into fire in Gilgit-Baltistan; survivor to be considered winner

Daily Times, 18 May 2021

The Shia and Sunni clerics of Gilgit-Baltistan have challenged each other to a *Muhabila* (Debate) in an extension of the recent sectarian disputes in the region. The venue and timing of the *Muhabila* have also been fixed.

Both parties involved in the spar i.e. Ahl-e-Sunnat and the Imamia Council of Gilgit-Baltistan have issued statements accusing the other group of inciting religious strife between the two sects and accepting the other's challenge to a debate that will settle the dispute between the two parties once and for all.

“In this context, the district administration of Gilgit will arrange firewood on Friday, May 21, 2021, at 3pm at the Royal Polo Ground. In the presence of the provincial government, force commander, chief secretary, and esteemed judges of the courts, it is proposed that Agha Rahat Hussain Al-Husseini from the Shia sect and Maulana Qazi Nisar Ahmad from Ahl-e-Sunnat and Jamaat will jump into the fire to prove their legitimacy. The survivors will be the winner, and the one who gets burnt will be considered false”, said the letter written by Central Imamia council, copies of which were sent to the Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan, home secretary Gilgit-Baltistan, deputy commissioner, and the Gilgit SSP.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/757616/shia-sunni-clerics-to-jump-into-fire-in-gilgit-baltistan-survivor-to-be-considered-winner/>

GB Parliamentarians Organize Rallies against Israeli Aggression

Urdu Point, 22 May 2021

Political parties and religious groups across Gilgit-Baltistan organised rallies and protests in solidarity with the people of Palestine. PTI members of Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly along with the party members arranged a major rally in Gilgit. It started at Chinarbagh and ended at the Central Press Club, Gilgit.

Important political leaders like Deputy Speaker Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly Nazir Ahmed Advocate, Gilgit-Baltistan Finance Minister, Javed Manawa and Law Minister, Syed Sohail Abbas addressed the rally.

In their addresses, these leaders enlightened the public about the situation in Gaza and West Bank and criticized the Muslim states for being unable to stop the violence against innocent people. They also demanded that the Muslim nations which have recognized Israel should immediately withdraw their recognition. Rich tributes were also paid to Imran Khan for his principled stand in the United Nations General Assembly.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/en/pakistan/gb-parliamentarians-organize-rallies-against-1256481.html>

Trial by Fire: Sectarian tensions in Gilgit-Baltistan

Zaighum Abbas, Friday Times, 21 May 2021

The piece argues that the sectarian violence and the associated rhetoric reached a new height when the recent *Muhabila* (Debate) controversy asked for trial by fire. However, this is nothing new and has happened time and again in the history of GB. Agha Ziauddin Rizvi, predecessor of the present leader of the Shia majority of the region was assassinated while attempting to bring the two sects closer.

However, Islamabad's policy of being a mute spectator in cases of sectarian violence in GB is not always adequately analysed. By pitting the local Shias against Sunnis, by changing the demographics to "Sunnify" the region and by giving unbridled authority and power to the subversive sectarian clergy on both sides, Islamabad was able to keep Gilgit-Baltistan in a state of exception. In 1974, Pakistan allowed people from outside of Gilgit-Baltistan to buy lands and properties by scrapping state-subject rule in the region— a legislation enacted by Maharaja Hari Singh in 1927 to prevent non-locals from owning land and property in erstwhile Gilgit agency. When the issue of Kashmir was taken to the United Nations by Pakistan and India in April 1948, the resolutions entailed that no change in status quo shall be made until the plebiscite is held. Yet, Pakistan changed the status quo in Gilgit-Baltistan. This exacerbated sectarian tensions as it added to the perception of the predominant Shia majority that the state wanted to turn their numerical strength into a minority. With the arrival of non-local Sunnis, sectarian tensions flared, erupting in various episodes of gruesome violence.

Now, it has reached a point where even everyday governmental decisions are largely dictated by sectarianism. Educational institutes, bureaucracy and even cultural festivals are not safe from the monster of sectarianism. It has seeped into the very core of social life in Gilgit-Baltistan.

<https://www.thefridaytimes.com/>

Pak-China Relations Getting Stronger Day By Day: CM GB

Urdu Point, 21 May 2021

Chief Minister Gilgit Baltistan Khalid Khurshid said the relations between Pakistan and China is getting stronger with passage of time. He said this while he was addressing a ceremony to mark the glorious 70th anniversary of Pak-China diplomatic relations here.

On the occasion the chief minister said that diplomatic and trade relations between the two countries has opened up new avenues for development, adding that the construction of Karakoram Highway is an

everlasting example of friendship between the two countries. He said that the CPEC under One Built One Road is an important project for the promotion of trade between the two countries and the world.

The chief minister added that Pak-China relations would be further strengthened and trust between the two countries would be further enhanced. He said CPEC would bring economic stability and prosperity for the people of whole region.

The chief minister said that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan viewed Pak-China friendship with respect and dignity because the region is very important in terms of CPEC.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/en/pakistan/pak-china-relations-getting-stronger-day-by-d-1256425.html>

Economic Developments

K2 base camp area gets internet access, phone coverage

Dawn, 18 May 2021

The 4G Base Transceiver Station (BTS) recently installed in Gilgit-Baltistan has been made operational to improve telecommunication services at the K2 base camp area. The 4G BTS had been installed at K2 base camp area of Concordia. The site which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister in his recent Gilgit-Baltistan visit has been named after late legendary Pakistani mountaineer Mohammad Ali Sadpara who passed away while on a K2 expedition earlier this year.

The operationalization of this station will provide phone and internet network to mountaineers and trekking groups for maintaining contact and sending for help in case of emergencies. It will also be helpful in monitoring weather so that any untoward incident can be prevented. Tourism promotion will also get a boost with greater internet connectivity.

The work to make the station operational was carried out by the Special Communication Organisation (SCO) to ensure communication facilities at the base camp of the world's second tallest peak.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=18_05_2021_003_006

Govt strives hard to promote tourism in liberated area: AJK President

Daily Parliament Times, 23 May 2021

While talking to a delegation led by Raja Shamshad Khan from the Dheerkot area of Azad Kashmir, AJK President Sardar Masood Khan said that the state government was working on a comprehensive plan to improve roads and allied infrastructure to promote tourism in the liberated area. AJK President also claimed that tourism is the economic future of Azad Kashmir

The delegation also comprised of Saba Shamshad Advocate, Raja Zeeshan, Raja Azlan and others. The President was updated with the issues confronting their respective areas. With the improvement of roads and implementation of connectivity projects, the areas of Dheerkot, Neela Butt, Rangla and Chamiyati can be turned into tourist destinations, which will not only increase the revenue but will also create new employment opportunities for the local population. Earlier, the delegation brought to the President's

notice the dilapidated conditions of the road infrastructure and educational institutions in the area, particularly the condition of Government High School Dheerkot.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2021/05/23/govt-strives-hard-to-promote-tourism-in-liberated-area-ajk-president/#.YKtGpqFX7IU>

250 engineering structures being built to mitigate impacts of GLOFs

The News, 20 May 2021

The federal government is presently overseeing construction of around 250 engineering structures to mitigate the ill effects of glacial lakes that have been created due to rising temperatures in the Hindu Kush, Karakoram and Himalayas. The climate change ministry is also coordinating with the Gilgit-Baltistan government and they are using Digital Terrain Model (DTM) to calculate the glacial lake volume to develop GLOF simulation to anticipate downstream risk.

Concerted efforts are being made to develop disaster management policies and install weather monitoring stations, flood gauges, hydrological modeling, and early warning systems to enhance the ability to respond rapidly to flood scenarios. The official data revealed that “The melting of the Hindu Kush, Karakoram, and Himalayan glaciers due to rising temperatures have created 3,044 glacial lakes in Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.”

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Climate Change Malik Amin Aslam meanwhile assured the people living in areas nearby the glaciers that the government is doing everything in its power to maintain their safety and to protect them from any impending disaster.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/837313-250-engineering-structures-being-built-to-mitigate-impacts-of-glofs>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

CJP Lays Foundation Stone of Gilgit-Baltistan Court Complex

Daily K2, 22 May 2021

Chief Justice of Pakistan laid the foundation stone of the Chief Court Gilgit-Baltistan Complex during his visit. According to the details, Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Gulzar Ahmed was given a briefing regarding the Chief Court Complex which will cost Rs 1.19 billion 82 lakh 76 thousand 902 and will be completed in two years.

The Chief Justice was accompanied by Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid, Chief Justice Gilgit-Baltistan Justice Malik Haq Nawaz, Justice Ali Baig, other judges and lawyers. The CJP also gave some suggestions regarding the entrance and parking space in the complex.

Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister also discussed cricket and development of sports infrastructure in the province at length with the Chief Justice. Both agreed that there should be a greater participation of youth from GB in both legal academics and sports and it was the duty of the institutions and governments to provide them with infrastructure.

<https://www.dailyk2.com/Post/1975>

Kashmiri refugees living under precarious conditions in Muzaffarabad*Jammu Kashmir Times*, 19 May 2021

Kashmiri refugees living in the Chella Bandi refugee camp in Muzaffarabad are facing immense problems as they face pressure from the locals and the landowners to vacate the area. The landlords have resorted to threats and intimidations in order to force the refugees to leave. Locals have built a road right through the Ishtiyaq Shaheed refugee camp the construction of which is causing immense problems to the refugees living there. With the construction of the new road, some hooligans in the nearby regions have started to visit the camp area regularly and stay in the vicinity and engage in drug abuse and other nefarious activities. The sand and gravel for the construction of this new road is being illegally mined from the Neelum River. There are greater instances of altercations between the locals and the refugees. The local administration has blamed the lack of rehabilitation measures for the worsening of the situation and they fear that the relationship between the locals and refugees can turn ugly at any moment. The refugees living in the camp have already written to the AJK PM, Chief Justice and all other authorities requesting a permanent relocation to a town as has been promised to them many times in the past.

<http://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/1-6.jpg>

PPP demands increment in salaries of AJK Police*Daily Ausaaf*, 18 May 2021

Pakistan People's Party Azad Kashmir has demanded an increase in police salaries along with the salaries of other employees. They argued that the government should use the last few days of its tenure and try to get some good work done. In the five years term of this government, the poorest of the poor have been deprived even more. Central Secretary Information, former Minister for Forests Sardar Javed Ayub said, "No good work has been done by this government in five years. If the salaries of the employees were to be increased, then the salaries of all the employees should have been increased. Those who are employed in the police force can neither protest nor raise any demand in this regard. Even after performing the most difficult of duties, they don't get their due."

He also said that the government should use these last few days of its tenure to implement the suggestions that the opposition has been feeding them for so many years. Some relief should be announced for the traders for the losses they have incurred due to the restrictions. The PPP also warned the government officials that the corruption that the government is being accused of will be looked into once the current regime have been thrown out of the office in the upcoming elections.

<https://dailyausaf.com/kashmir/news-202105-104456.html>

No constitutional provision to postpone elections: Choudhary Yaseen*Jammu Kashmir Times*, 18 May 2021

Leader of opposition in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative assembly, Choudhary Yaseen has said that the rumours about postponement of the Assembly elections are highly disturbing and should be looked at with all seriousness. The elections is scheduled to be held in coming months but lately, there have been growing apprehensions about the elections being pushed back. The opposition leader

said that there are no provisions in the constitution for postponing the elections and if any such efforts are made, they would by default be unconstitutional.

Yaseen made a reference to the deadly 2005 earthquake where hundreds of people were killed and thousands were rendered homeless. Even in those conditions, the elections were held on time. So, the same thing should happen this year as well. Just because PTI seems to be in no condition to win any seats, they should not sabotage the whole democratic process. The elections must be held in July.

<http://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/4-5.jpg>

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Disclaimer

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