

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

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Political Developments

Ministry curtails G-B government's powers to execute PSDP projects

Express Tribune, 24 April 2021

In what can be seen as a significant measure to curtail GB government's powers, the ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan (KA&GB) has directed 'all Projects' directors to approach the KA&GB directly through the P&M wing without involving any of the respective departments. The official handout notifying the same referred to Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) projects which are being implemented in the region. The development has raised serious questions over intention of the federal government that has repeatedly claimed in the recent past to grant provincial status to G-B via constitutional amendment.

The letter has over a dozen points that left the regional government ineffective in regard to PSDP projects being executed in G-B. The opposition leaders of the GB assembly accused the federal and the present regional government of corruption and a ploy to reduce the GB government to the status of a subordinate department. Federal Minister and KA&GB's man in charge, Ali Amin Gandpur was especially accused of trampling the regional government's authority for kickbacks.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2296473/ministry-curtails-g-b-govts-powers-to-execute-psdp-projects>

GB govt decides on Pakistan Army deployment in urban areas

The Nation, 26 April 2021

In view of the consistently aggravating Covid-19 situation, the government of Gilgit-Baltistan has decided to deploy army in the urban areas of the region. This decision was taken along with many other important decisions pertaining to the pandemic management. These decisions were broadcast through a notification by Gilgit-Baltistan Home Secretary Mohammad Ali Randhawa.

In addition to the deployment of the Pakistan army for strict implementation of Covid SOPs, the notification also announced closing of all government and semi-government educational institutes if 5% positive cases of the virus were reported. All markets are also to be closed from 6pm to dawn with the obvious exception of essential services. Also weekends will see a stiffening of the standard SOPs and less travel permits within the city and no inter-province travel at all. Office hours in all government and semi government offices have also been reduced.

<https://nation.com.pk/26-Apr-2021/gb-govt-decides-pakistan-army-deployment-in-urban-areas>

Maryam voices concern over ‘secret talks’ with India

Dawn, 28 April 2021

After almost a month of silence over the thaw in relations between India and Pakistan, PML-N vice-President Maryam Nawaz expressed concern over the secret nature of the ‘talks between governments of the two nations and keeping the people of Pakistan and the people of Kashmir in the dark.

“If some people are making a decision on Kashmir while keeping it secret with the people, especially Kashmiris, and the parliament, and if they believe that they would again do it like they previously threw Kashmir into India’s lap by allowing it to annex (the disputed territory) with the country, then listen, we will not let you do anything against the wishes of the people of Kashmir,” declared Ms. Maryam.

Maryam also promised of a fierce resistance in case a GB type poll rigging attempt is made in the upcoming AJK elections. On this occasion, AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider said that any effort to rig the elections would amount to support the narrative of India and its Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1620771>

Fears persist as guns fall silent along LoC

Daily Heights, 29 April 2021

After 2 months of a surprise truce between India and Pakistan, the people living on the both sides of the line of control are still unable to detach from the fear that comes from living near the border area. While the people welcomed the ceasefire and the relative calm that it has brought with it, the residents struggle hard to separate themselves from the trauma that years of continuous shelling brought with it.

The deal effectively reinstated an earlier ceasefire signed by the two sides in 2003 that had been undermined by thousands of ceasefire violations in recent years. As per Pakistan’s military, the original deal had largely held until 2016, when tensions exploded in occupied Kashmir, resulting in a surge in ceasefire violence between the two sides. As fighting across the LoC raged, ties between the rivals went into freefall with India repeatedly accusing Pakistan of sending infiltrators across the LoC. While Pakistan accused India of stroking Hindu nationalist sentiments against the Muslims. But even after stepping back from the brink, fighting along the LoC escalated, reaching an apex last year with thousands of clashes reported.

Even as the various think tanks and observers expect the truce to hold as both the countries need some breathing space to get their houses in order, the residents along the border are always wary of imminent fighting that can begin anytime.

<https://heights.com.pk/page-heights.php?id=1&edition=heights&dt=29-04-2021>

AJK observes International Labour Day

Business Recorder, 02 May 2021

Azad Jammu and Kashmir, along with the rest of the world celebrated the International Labour Day with simplicity due to the restrictions on holding of gatherings following the anti-corona SOPs. Brief and simple ceremonies were hosted under the officially devised SOPs at various places by various labour organisations.

Various representative organizations of workers and labourers of different private and public sector institutions individually observed the day by staying at their homes. In Mirpur, a simple ceremony with specific arrangements following the set SOPs maintaining the social distance was organized. Leaders of various labourer organisations, workers forums, were hosted by Jammu and Kashmir Peoples National Party PNP's Chairman Zulfiqar Ahmed Raja Advocate at his residence at native village of Seva to observe the day. Also, rich tributes were paid to the martyrs of Jammu and Kashmir. Speakers reiterated their firm resolve to continue the mission of the valiant sons of the soil who laid down their lives to bring the struggle for freedom of Jammu and Kashmir with full vigor till it reach to its logical end.

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40089528>

Economic Developments

Pak PM Imran Khan announces Rs 370 billion development package for Gilgit-Baltistan

Express Tribune, 30 April 2021

Prime Minister Imran Khan, during his visit to Gilgit-Baltistan, announced a package of Rs 370 billion for the region over the next five years. The package is to be used to generate Hydel power, improve the existing Wi-Fi system in the territory, provide sanitation and sewerage to parts of the urban towns and cities in the region which are over-pressed for these facilities and to offer the people as much as is possible in terms of development and facilities that they require. The prime minister also spoke make an effort to develop tourism and traditional industries in the area.

The prime minister said that developing tourism would be one of the prime factors of the GB development package. That however does not come without making considerations about the possible damage to the ecology. The PM on this occasion also tried to send across a strong political message after he apologized for making some 'wrong electoral decisions' in the past. He also spoke of the importance of maintenance of supremacy of law and prevention of corruption.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2297593/pm-imran-announces-rs370b-development-package-for-gilgit-baltistan>

CPEC new route to boost trade, development, tourism in KPK and GB*Daily Times*, 30 April 2021

Prime Minister Imran Khan has formally inaugurated a multi-billion project to widen and reconstruct the Chitral-Shandur-Gilgit road. This new road which is also an alternate route of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is expected to minimize the burden of Karakoram highway. The PM said that the project would not only help in the development of Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan but would also open up scenic areas to national and international tourists. Chitral-Shandur Road, known as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Highway S-2, is a provincial highway which extends from Chitral in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province to Shandur in Gilgit-Baltistan province.

As per a report published in *Gwadar pro*, the 153-km-long Chitral-Shandur road will help boost trade activities, development and tourism in Chitral and Gilgit-Baltistan. The report added, the construction would be completed in four phases. The maximum width of the road presently is around 6 to 7 meters which will be extended to 30 meters. The project would cost about Rs17 billion. The new route of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will also give access to the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan & Kyrgyzstan bypassing Afghanistan, hence giving Pakistan a direct link to Central Asia.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/750920/cpec-new-route-to-boost-trade-development-tourism-report/>

Prime Minister Imran Khan lays the foundation for Hunza's first IT Park*Pamir Times*, 30 April 2021

Prime Minister Imran Khan today unveiled the plaque at a ceremony in Chinarbagh, Gilgit to lay the foundation of Hunza's first Information Technology (IT) Park located in Nasirabad, Hunza. The event was attended by many important political, administrative and military personalities. Established jointly by Special Communications Organization (SCO) of the Government of Pakistan and the Aga Khan Foundation Pakistan (AKFP), the IT Park in Hunza will provide state-of-the-art infrastructure with un-interrupted power supply, high-speed internet facility and a co-working space for small and growing businesses, start-ups, freelancers, and chamber of commerce.

Speaking on the occasion and highlighting the opportunities in Gilgit-Baltistan, PM Imran Khan said, "I am pleased to witness the recent remarkable developments in the communication & information technology sector, which is reflected in the development of mobile services such as the launch of 4G and broadband services, as well as digital solutions related to cloud-based data centres, and these are all indicators of very positive progress in the region." Strengthening the IT infrastructure will open access to increased knowledge for developing digital competencies and lead to global networking and collaboration for remote work, online marketplaces and other national and global business opportunities.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2021/04/30/prime-minister-imran-khan-lays-the-foundation-for-hunzas-first-it-park/>

Ghizer people protest ‘discrimination’ in uplift schemes*Dawn*, 01 May 2021

People of Ghizer protested against allegedly being left out of the GB multi-billion rupees upliftment package announced by the PM on his visit to the region. The protesters blocked the main road in Gahkuch town, the district headquarters of Ghizer, and chanted slogans against Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid Khan for what they said discriminating against Ghizer in the financial package.

The protest call was given by Balawaristan National Front (Naji group) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz’s local chapter. The protesters claimed that no single project had been announced in the package for the district, which was injustice with the people, and demanded equal share in the package.

GB Assembly member, Nawaz Khan Naji criticized the chief minister for neglecting Ghizer district in the mega development package. He also said the people of the district had been facing discrimination for decades. He even threatened to resign from his seat if the ‘unfair’ distribution was not corrected.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1621396/ghizer-people-protest-discrimination-in-uplift-schemes>

From Vernacular Urdu Media**Transfer of power shows incompetence of the GB government: Shahzad Agha***Daily K2*, 27 April 2021

President of Pakistan People’s Party, Baltistan Division and member Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly, Ghulam Shahzad Agha has said that the transfer of power from Gilgit-Baltistan to the federal government shows a lack of trust between the federal government and the provincial government and a clear evidence of the GB government’s incompetence. In his statement, he said that instead of giving more powers to Gilgit-Baltistan, there is an attempt to take back power that GB enjoyed. It is a ploy to get rid of the federal Annual Development Program (ADP). The Federal Minister has no interest in the construction and development of Gilgit-Baltistan and the people’s problems here but his eyes are fixed on the resources here. He said that giving power to a secretary of Kashmir affairs from the initiation stage of the PSDP projects till its completion is a slap in the face of the provincial government. Transferring contracts to favoured individuals is a major blow to Gilgit-Baltistan’s economy and we condemn strongly and we will continue to resist this onslaught on the political powers of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan

<https://www.dailyk2.com/Post/1766>

Is Kashmir a hurdle in India-Pak trade?*Assadullah Ghalib, Nawa-i-Waqt, 28 April 2021*

India “occupied” Kashmir in 1947. Travel between the two countries continued till 1951 and the trade continued till 1965. Though there were brief breaks in trade, opportunists and profit-oriented businessmen resumed trade secretly whenever they could get a chance. During the Kargil war in 1999, the trade between India and Pakistan continued. Sugar-loaded trucks of Pakistani sugar-mafia were waiting in long queues at the Wagah border to enter India. Nawaz Sharif felt so bad about the war that as soon as he was exiled, he opened a steel mill for which he hired all Indian engineers. After being invited for an oath-taking ceremony by Narendra Modi, Nawaz Sharif refused to meet Kashmiri separatist leaders and spent his time with Indian business tycoons. Bilawal Bhutto, while talking about 5 August 2019, tends to overlook the fact that his mother Benazir Bhutto had removed the weather report on India-occupied Kashmir from PTV’s broadcasting, a foundation stone on the Muree Highway and a board of the Kashmiri House when Rajiv Gandhi was on a visit to Pakistan. The issue between India and Pakistan is lack of trust. In India Pakistan-phobia is being fuelled while in Pakistan, India is considered as enemy number one. But they share borders and geography. They can do trade with each other at much less cost than with other countries of the world. If we want to do trade with India, we can go ahead. Anyways, we are not free to decide. Most of our decisions are taken in the White House. If President Biden decides that Pakistan needs to resume trade with India, we would not be able to do much and would have to follow the order.

<https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/gujranwala/2021-04-28/page-8/detail-7>

AJK Elections to be held in July, Election Commission reveals poll Action plan*Daily Ausaaf, 28 April 2021*

The Election commission of Azad Jammu and Kashmir issued an action plan for the upcoming general assembly elections due to be held in July 2021. As per the notification issued by the EC, parties will have to complete their registration process by the 15th of May. Polling lists would be printed by the end of May and during this time, returning officers and assistant returning officers will be appointed. Poll schedule will be made public in June. Appeal against the polling scheme prepared by the Returning officer can be made first to the district returning officer and then to the election commission itself. 15 days prior to the election, polling staff has to be appointed. The returning officer and election commission will be responsible for the security during the polls. EC has to make sure that free and fair elections are held.

According to this notification, the delimitation process has been completed. However, a writ petition regarding the same is pending before the courts. Adjustments will be made if the court orders for such adjustments. Once the elections are over, all appeals against the process, if any, will be heard by the Election Tribunal which will be appointed jointly by the Chief Election Commissioner and the Chief justice of the High Court.

https://www.dailyausaaf.com/epaper/popup.php?newsrc=issues/2021-04-28/134383/p1_03.gif

The distribution of the development package will be uniform across districts: Kazim Maisam

Editorial, Daily K2, 02 May 2021

Provincial Minister for Agriculture Muhammad Kazim Maisam has said that there is no doubt that Baltistan region was completely deprived in the past and this important region was secluded from development which the present government is aware of. In a statement, he said that in the distribution of projects special attention is being paid to those projects which will help benefit the whole of Gilgit-Baltistan. The projects included in the recent historic package will have an impact on the entire region. There will be no misuse in any district including Baltistan region.

Kazim Maisam said that the government will work on the Shatong Nala project. Power projects are being put in place now, which obviously will take a lot of time to complete. If we don't have power projects, we will be the culprits of the people, but it will take time to complete. Political opponents will try to frustrate the government by using a broken clout to steal the public's attention from these plans.

He further said that the politics has become so polluted that the people have lost confidence in the political system itself. One of our main tasks is to restore public confidence in the system, which we will do through service and the development of the region. Under the leadership of Khalid Khurshid, the whole province is moving forward under one roof. We are committed to the supremacy of justice and merit, the rule of law, and the development of the region.

<https://www.dailyk2.com/Post/1819>

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Disclaimer

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