

POK News Digest

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A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

**Compiled & Edited by Dr Priyanka Singh &
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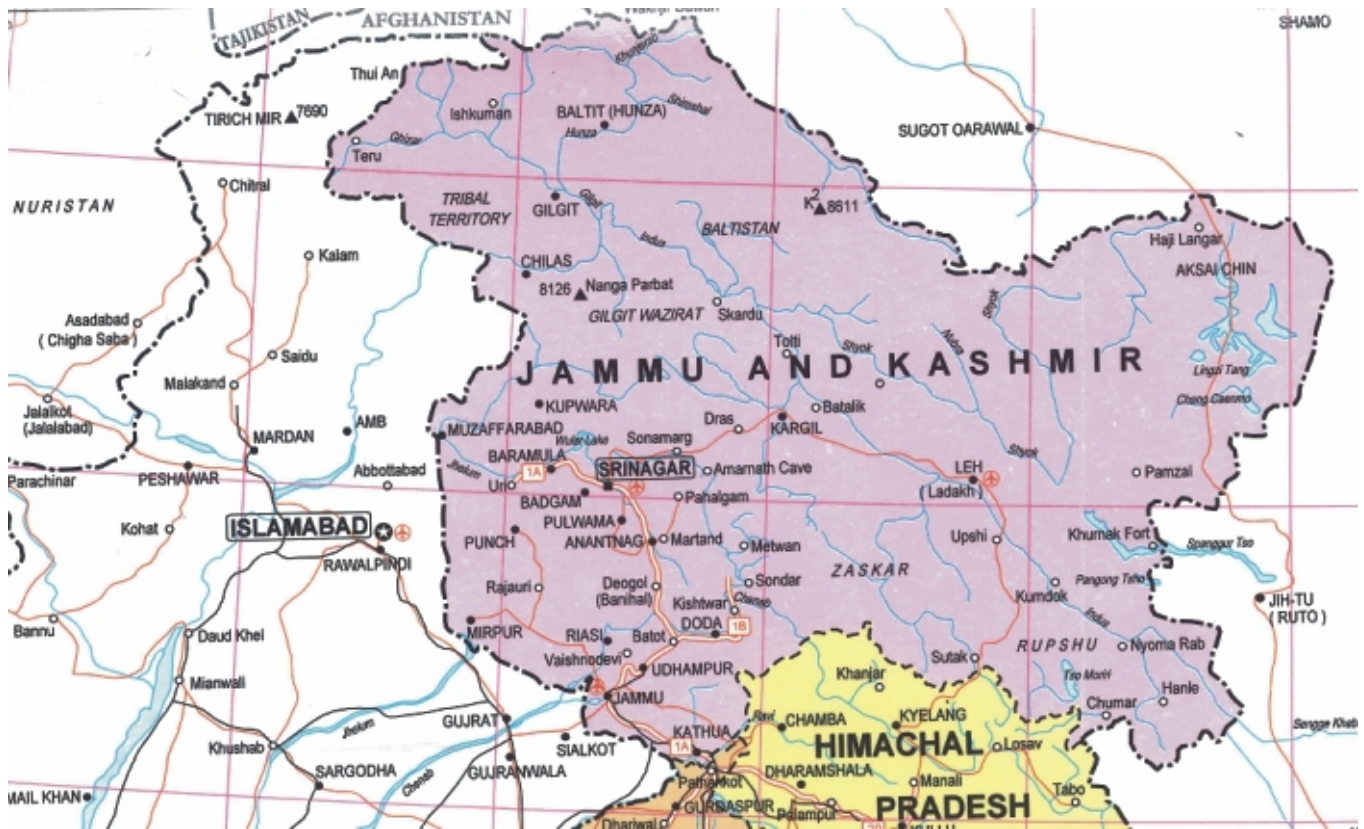
Diamond in the Rough: Project to Boost Gems Sector in G-B, Chitral

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Jammu & Kashmir

(Source: Based on the Survey of India Map, Govt of India 2000)

In this Edition

The controversy regarding the appointment of a care taker government in Gilgit Baltistan refused to die down. There was uproar when the federal minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan, Muhammad Barjees Tahir, was appointed as the Governor of the region. Subsequently, the appointment of a former banker, Sher Jahan Mir as the care taker chief minister, also, was widely resented. There were widespread allegations that the caretaker chief minister was politically inclined towards the PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz). Interestingly, the Empowerment and Self Governance Package 2009 did not have any provision for a caretaker government after the term of the incumbent government expires. Certain amendments were initiated by the government of Pakistan to accommodate setting up a caretaker government in the region as the elections could not be held on time after the previous PPP (Pakistan Peoples Party) led government completed its five year term in December 2014. After the caretaker government took oath, there were sections who objected to the set up as being not fully representative of all sub regions of Gilgit Baltistan. They alleged that regions like Hunza, Ghizer and Ghanche had no representation in the care taker government.

A meeting was scheduled between the Cross LoC (Line of Control) traders of Jammu and Kashmir and the so called Azad Jammu and Kashmir at the Kaman Bridge in the middle of January 2015. Such meetings between the traders from both sides have been held in past. This time around the traders made a request that a meeting be held so that they could discuss issues related to zero tariff and barter trade and the common problems which they face while trading across the LoC.

The fiscal deficit in the so called AJK government's budget is reportedly widening and has crossed over Rs 14 billion, as noted in one of the reports included in the current issue. Due to this deficit, the AJK government noted its difficulty in compensating the victims of the colossal floods that occurred in the year 2014.

Priyanka Singh

Political Developments

Shabbir Mir, “Collateral damage: Local communities call for renaming of Bunji power project”

The Express Tribune, January 3, 2015

People from various parts of Baltistan held a protest in Skardu on January 1 to urge the government to rename the proposed Bunji Dam hydropower project. Protesters demanded the project be renamed 'Bunji-Rundu Dam' as a large number of people from Rundu area of Baltistan will be displaced once construction work begins. More importantly, the dam includes a large part of Rundu area and its name should reflect this, they added. According to the protesters, the change of name will ensure the sacrifices of the Rundu communities are not forgotten and they are not deprived of their rights.

Speaking about the environmental impact of the project, they stated the dam will submerge nearly 50 kilometres of land in Rundu and displace over 28,000 people. The protesters threatened to obstruct the construction of the dam if their demands are not met. When it was first proposed, the Bunji power project was expected to be completed within six years at an estimated cost of Rs12 billion. A survey conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency in August 2013 claimed the lower part of Shangus area would be submerged because of the project. However, the survey confirmed displacement will be far less compared to that feared in the Diamer-Bhasha hydropower project. Nevertheless, residents voiced concerns that the construction of the dam will affect their livelihood. They also insisted that the existing survey did not reflect everything at stake and demanded it be conducted once again.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/816170/collateral-damage-local-communities-call-for-renaming-of-bunji-power-project/>

“For the record: 'G-B governor not target of

bomb’”

The Express Tribune, January 3, 2015

Ghizer DC Rai Manzoor on January 3 cast aside speculation about Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Governor Pir Karam Ali Shah being the target of an improvised explosive device (IED) planted along a roadside in the district a day earlier. The bomb disposal unit (BDU) defused an eight-kilogramme bomb fitted inside a water cooler in Sipli. The cooler was placed along a road leading to the governor's residence. Manzoor, however, stated the bomb was not connected to a wireless remote and hence the governor's motorcade which frequents the route was an unlikely target of the terror bid. Police reached the spot at 8am on January 2. The road remained cordoned off until the BDU defused the explosive at around 12:30pm. A security official privy to the investigation stated miscreants were probably transporting the bomb elsewhere, but left it on the deserted road due to heightened security at checkpoints. A case has been registered with Ghizer police and further investigation is under way.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/816709/for-the-record-g-b-governor-not-target-of-bomb/>

“APML announces support to govt for curbing terrorism”

The Nation, January 4, 2015

Fully supporting the constitution of Special Trial Courts manned by Armed Forces personnel to deal with terrorism related cases, All Pakistan Muslim League (APML) Secretary General Dr Amjad stated that his party fully supports all endeavours of the government to curb the menace of terrorism from the motherland. Disclosing the decisions of the Central Working Committee of the party at party's secretariat on January 3, Dr Amjad stated that the party would continue efforts to bring all the factions of Muslim Leagues on one platform. He further stated that it was also decided in the apex

body of the party to fully participate in the upcoming elections in Gilgit-Baltistan for which the party was busy completing spade work. The meeting held under his chair had constituted 12 wings of the party across the country and assigned them the task to activate the party and enhance party activities, including enrolment of new voters. To a question, he stated that they were busy doing spade work for taking part in the upcoming elections in Gilgit-Baltistan, adding that they stand fair chance of forming future government in Gilgit-Baltistan keeping in view the popularity of their party in Northern Areas.'

<http://nation.com.pk/islamabad/04-Jan-2015/apml-announces-support-to-govt-for-curbing-terrorism>

“Mirwaiz pitches for joint leadership of J&K, Gilgit, Baltistan, Muzafarabad-Calls for joint new strategy by freedom camp to thwart 'BJP's invasion'”

Kashmir Images, January 6, 2015

Stressing the need for a united leadership for both the sides of Line of Control (LoC), Hurriyat-G chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on January 5 stated a joint and new strategy is needed to unite both sides of divided Kashmir. He also stated that finding ways for Kashmir resolution is the responsibility of Kashmir's leadership and the uncertainty needs to end at an earliest. Speaking at a seminar over the UN resolutions held at Hurriyat-M headquarters, Mirwaiz stated the delay in the resolution of Kashmir is not the failure of the people or their leadership.

<http://www.dailykashmirimages.com/news-mirwaiz-pitches-for-joint-leadership-of-jk-gilgit-baltistan-muzafarabad-70596.aspx>

Senge Sering, “Terror Outfits Build Presence in Gilgit-Baltistan”

The Diplomat, January 6, 2015

Khalid Balti, a resident of Gilgit-Baltistan, has been chosen as the new spokesperson of Pakistan's Taliban (TTP). He was selected to replace Shahidullah Shahid, who left to join the Pakistan based affiliates of the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIS). Naming a local is evidence of the Taliban's growing interest in the strategically

located Gilgit-Baltistan region. Khalid Balti, who identifies himself as Mohammad Al-Khorasani, was born in Thogmus Village in the Gangeche district in Gilgit-Baltistan. He left for Karachi in 1994 after studying at a local religious school. Balti is considered a religious scholar whose previous affiliations with several madrassas in Karachi include Jamiat-ul-Rasheed, Jamia Banoria, and Jamia Farooqia. His expertise in publishing and association with the Taliban's Umer media led to his prominence and his appointment is a diplomatic move by the Taliban to use cultural competency to fortify their stronghold in a disputed region that is claimed by both India and Pakistan.

Moving forward, it is expected that his understanding of local sectarian dynamics between Shia, Sunni, and Sufi Nurbakhshia will serve in recruitment efforts killing dozens, including local minorities, military officials, and tourists. The group has also attacked and bombed local girls' schools to show its opposition to female education. Like the Taliban, ISIS also stands to gain in Gilgit-Baltistan, a potential point of convergence between affiliated militant groups from Central Asia, Afghanistan, Xinjiang, Kashmir, and Pakistan. The rugged mountainous terrain and sparse population of Gilgit-Baltistan is conducive to the staging of militant forays into India, which the plains of Punjab lack. The Taliban and ISIS stand to benefit from an existing terror infrastructure and residual local sympathy for the Kashmiri and Afghan mujahideen. Despite opposition from local Shias, Pakistan employed religious extremism as a tactic to counter Indian control in Kashmir which led to militants from across the nation rushing in to establish training camps and seminaries in Gilgit-Baltistan.

<http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/terror-outfits-build-presence-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

Abbottabad Civil Judge Issues Arrest Warrant of Mir Shakeel ur Rehman

Pakistan Tribe, January 7, 2015

Civil judge Najeebul Haq of Abbottabad Civil Court issued warrants for arrest of GEO News owner Mir Shakilur Rehman, anchor Shaista Lodhi, actress Veena Malik and her husband Asad Malik.

over their repeated absence from hearings of a blasphemy case. Civil judge, Najeeb ul Haq, expressed his displeasure over repeated absence of Jang/Geo group owner Mir Shakil ur Rehman, Mir Ibrahim, Shaista Lodhi, Veena Malik and Asad Khattak. The court issued 'permanent' arrest warrants for the accused and ordered police to ensure their arrest and production in the court. The hearing was adjourned till January 15. Earlier, after receiving the jail term by Anti-Terrorist Court (ATC) of Gilgit-Baltistan, a petitioner moved the Supreme Court of Pakistan to drag owner of Geo/Jang Group via International Police aka Interpol. Pakistan Tribe's court correspondent reported that a petitioner filed a petition in the highest apex court to take action against Mir Shakeel ur Rehman.

One Mehmood Akhter Naqvi submitted a petition stating that ATC Gilgit-Balistan sentenced Mir Shakeel and others accused to 26 years imprisonment and a fine of Rs 1.3 million but he mustered help and absconded. It was, therefore, demanded to bring him and other absconders back to the country. He further suggested cancelling Mir Shakeel's license for the newspaper and channel. Federation, Secretary Information, Prime Minister, Mir Shakeel ur Rehman, Shaista Lodhi, Veena Malik and other were declared parties to the case.

<http://www.pakistantribe.com/story/27910/abbotabad-civil-judge-issues-arrest-warrant-of-mir-shakeel-ur-rehman/>

Peer Muhammad, "Preserving peace in Ghizer"

The Express Tribune, January 8, 2015

My native district Ghizer, one of the seven districts of Gilgit-Baltistan, has many peculiarities. First of all, it is known as the district of the 'martyrs' because its youth have made significant contribution to the Pakistan Army. Secondly, it is famous in Pakistan for being one of the most peaceful areas as no sectarian or militant-related activity has ever been reported even during the three-decade-long sectarian conflict in other parts of Gilgit-Baltistan.

The district, with a 95 per cent population of Ismaili Muslims, has a track record of living in a peaceful way with the people of other sects. The advent of

2015 was somehow alarming for the locals in Ghizer due to the discovery of a 12-kilogramme homemade bomb which was defused by the police in the Silpy village, just one kilometre away from the district headquarters Ghakuch, after being informed by a local on January 3. Experts believe that it would have had a devastating effect had it exploded before being defused. Some reports suggest that it was planted to target the governor of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pir Karam Ali Shah, who is otherwise an uncontroversial figure of G-B in the eyes of all the sects.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/818442/preserving-peace-in-ghizer/>

Shabbir Mir, "Save the river: Municipal administration officials dump waste into Gilgit River"

The Express Tribune, January 9, 2015

Gilgit River became a breeding ground for pollution after a group of low-grade officials of the municipal administration started disposing waste by it. According to insiders, the officials began dumping waste near the Reinforced Concrete (RCC) Bridge in Konodas. This has negatively impacted the scenic beauty of the river and contaminated the water for people living downstream. A heap of waste was first noticed in the river by Abdul Rahman Bukhari and Essa Haleem, two Gilgit-based journalists.

They immediately lodged a complaint with the police and urged them to take action against the perpetrators. Following the complaint, SHO Murtaza Shah summoned Javed Iqbal, chief officer of the municipal administration, to the police station for further interrogation on January 7. However, Iqbal denied that the municipal administration was involved in this practice and vowed to investigate the matter. It was later revealed that some low-grade officials of the municipal administration had been dumping waste on the request of a resident of Haider Pura who needed help 'levelling his land'.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/818806/save-the-river-municipal-administration-officials-dump-waste-into-gilgit-river/>

Muzzafar Mukhtar, “Empowering generations: Striving for a better future in the mountains”

The Express Tribune, January 9, 2015

Gilgit-Baltistan, known for its scenic beauty, present an irony. A majority of the residents of the region live a life of poverty marred by illiteracy in an underdeveloped set-up. To help the people of the northern areas, Pakistan Air Force (PAF) in collaboration with Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has begun an initiative to educate and train underprivileged children of underdeveloped and far-flung areas, especially in Pakistan's north, in order to promote education and sports activities. PAF initiated two programmes in this respect three years back-Free Education and Training (FET) and Volunteer Programme in Gilgit-Baltistan. In the volunteer programme, educated individuals are selected from various walks of life from throughout Pakistan. Recently, PAF has begun running these programs in Naltar, a valley at an hour's drive from Gilgit. The children are being provided free books. Computer labs have been set up and salaries are being given to local teachers. PAF is also training skiers in the area with the help of the Ski Federation of Pakistan (SFP). SFP spokesperson Obaid Abbasi noted that different governments floated different ideas to deal with the situation but in vain.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/818960/empowering-generations-striving-for-a-better-future-in-the-mountains/>

“GB hospitals to get Rs1.5 billion for machinery”

The Dardistan Times, January 9, 2015

The Planning Commission of Pakistan has approved Rs1.5 billion for the purchase of modern machinery for government hospitals in Gilgit-Baltistan. The money to be provided by the Islamic Bank will be given to the region's health department, an official of the Gilgit chief sectary office noted on January 8. The official noted that the Planning Commission had approved the amount of money during a recent meeting of the Central Development Working Committee in Islamabad. He stated a request for the money was sent to the Planning Commission by the GB Development Working Party three months ago. The official stated the

money would be used to buy modern machinery for district headquarters hospitals of Skardu, Gilgit and Chilas. He further stated the installation of modern machinery would improve patient care at the region's hospitals. Visitors, mostly the poor people, complain facilities at government hospitals in the region are very poor to their misery.

<http://www.dardistantimes.com/gilgit-baltistan/News/708521573/gb-hospitals-get-rs1-5-billion-machinery>

Abdul Manan, “PM gives nod for establishment of military courts in Gilgit-Baltistan”

The Express Tribune, January 13, 2015

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on January 13 gave a nod for the establishment of military courts in Gilgit-Baltistan. The premier approved that Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK Councils also adopt the 21st Constitutional Amendment as well as amendment in the Army Act to facilitate formation of military courts in those areas. Presiding over a meeting to review progress on the National Action Plan (NAP), the prime minister stated, “there is no room for terrorism or terrorists in our society.” The Prime Minister was briefed on legislative and administrative measures as well as the progress on sub-committees regarding implementation of the National Action Plan. We have the determination not to be at ease till the elimination of every last terrorist from our country,” Nawaz added. The meeting further reviewed progress on legislative measures, administrative measures and progress on sub-committees, according to an official statement.

During the meeting, the premier was informed that since December 23, 2014 in Punjab and Islamabad Capital Territory, 164 cases have been registered for use of hate speech and material while 157 persons have been arrested. Further, 40 printing presses and shops have also been sealed. On the misuse of loudspeakers, 1,994 cases have been registered and 1,088 persons have been arrested. Information from other provinces is awaited. The prime minister is personally supervising progress on the speedy implementation of the NAP.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/821126/govt-taking-all-necessary-steps-to-eliminate-terrorism-pm/>

Fazal Sher, “NJHP hydel project: AJK government urges Centre to provide its share from profit”

Business Recorder, January 14, 2015

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government on January 13 urged the federal government to provide its share from the net hydel profit of Neelum Jhelum Hydroelectric Project (NJHP). Officials of AJK government while speaking at the Standing Committee on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan stated the federal government need to provide share of net hydel profit generated from Neelum-Jhelum Hydroelectric Projects like Khyber Pakhtunkhawa is getting in the case of Tarbela dam. They stated that we just want parity and what the government has provided to other province should also be provided to AJK. General Zubair (Retd), Project Director, Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower project, told the committee that the cheap power generation project will be completed by December 2016. He stated the total foreign currency component (FCC) requirement of the project as per approved PC-1 is \$1.585 billion. The donors of the project had agreed to provide \$1.110 billion against provision of PC-1 for FCC, which is \$1.585 billion, a gap of \$475 million still exists for which the government of Pakistan is exploring new avenues, he stated.

The project director further stated that one Chinese engineer along with three Pakistani workers died in an accident on December 24. The Chinese companies have admitted that it was fault of the company and the workers would be compensated and will be given Rs 0.5 million per workers. The members of the committee also expressed concern over the amount of compensation and urged the official to direct the Chinese company to pay compensation to the victim families according to international rules. Chief Secretary AJK informed the meeting regarding rehabilitation activities carried out after the severe floods in different areas of AJK. Due to the flood, 56 people have lost their lives and 46,979 people rendered homeless. The committee also recommended initiation of flood mitigation projects in AJK to avoid such huge losses in future.

<http://www.brecorder.com/fuel-a-energy/193/1142091/>

Parvez Jabri, “Rs29,551.80mn spent on Diamer-Basha dam construction in last five years: NA told”

Business Recorder, January 15, 2015

A total of Rs29,551.80 million have so far been spent on the construction of basic infrastructure of Diamer-Bhasha dam from 2009 to December 2014, State Minister for Water and Power Chaudhry Abid Sher Ali told National Assembly on January 15. Responding to the question by Khalida Mansoor, he stated the United States has agreed to fund the project. However the government will construct the project on its own if funding is not available. The construction of infrastructure/preliminary works of the project colony at Thor Valley and Composite Model Village II at Harpan Das at Karakoram Highway is in process. He stated the construction of main dam has not yet stated due to non-availability of financing arrangements from International Donor Agencies. A sum of Rs337.89 million had been spent on basic infrastructure of Diamer-Bhasha dam during 2009-10. Rs3,534.38 million were spent in 2010-11, Rs4,788.07 million in 2011-12, Rs2,143.41 million in 2012-13, Rs7,774.53 million during 2013-14, Rs8,451 million in 2014-15 and Rs973.49 million were spent on construction of dam's infrastructure in 2014-15.

<http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/politics-a-policy/217375-rs2955180mn-spent-on-diamer-basha-dam-construction-in-last-five-years-na-told.html>

Anirban Bhaumik, “Kerry ignores India, brags of backing Pak's PoK dam”

Deccan Herald, January 16, 2015

Disregarding New Delhi's sensitivity, United States Secretary of State John Kerry has bragged about Washington's support to Islamabad in mobilising funds to construct a hydroelectric and irrigation project in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK). Kerry told journalists in Islamabad that Washington in October 2014 introduced the Diamer-Bhasha dam project to US investors to encourage them to invest in construction of the hydroelectric plant-cum-irrigation facility.

He made this remark while addressing a news-conference jointly with Sartaj Aziz, National

Security and Foreign Affairs adviser to Pakistan Prime Minister M Nawaz Sharif on January 13.

New Delhi is understood to be upset over Kerry's remarks. India has since long been objecting to the controversial Diamer-Bhasha dam project since it is proposed to come up at Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). The US support to Pakistan on the Diamer-Bhasha project has emerged as a new irritant in New Delhi's ties with Washington ahead of American President Barack Obama's visit to India. The joint statement issued after Kerry and Aziz chaired the US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue on January 13 also expressed "satisfaction" of both as the US Agency for International Development and the US Chamber of Commerce on October 8 last convened the Diamer-Bhasha Dam Project Business Opportunities conference. Kerry met Aziz in Islamabad and made the remark just two days after calling on Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Gandhinagar on the sideline of the "Vibrant Gujarat Global Investors' Summit".

<http://www.brecorder.com/fuel-a-energy/193/1142091/>

"Earthquake-hit areas: Erra approves final strategy for completion of 1000 schools"

Business Recorder, January 14, 2015

Earthquake, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) approved a final strategy for the completion of 1000 schools by the end of December 2015 in three phases with a cost of Rs 8 billion in the earthquake affected areas. The strategy was approved on January 13 in monthly review meeting of the authority which was chaired by Deputy Chairman ERRA, Major General Muhammad Azeem Asif. The meeting was attended by the outgoing and incoming Chief of Staffs ERRA, Director General Pakhtunkhwa Reconstruction, Rehabilitation Authority, State Earthquake Reconstruction, Rehabilitation Authority and other senior officials. While giving the details of schools construction plan, DG planning Tahir Pervaiz Dar stated that by March 2015, total 200 schools are planned to be completed and ready for inauguration by the Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. He added that 100 school each will be completed in

earthquake affected areas of KPK and Azad Jammu and Kashmir depending on availability of funds by the federal government.

<http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172/1142093/>

Muhammad Saleh Zaafir, "Military courts to be set up in AJK, GB"

The News, January 14, 2015

A high-level meeting to review the National Action Plan (NAP) to counter terrorism on January 13 decided to establish military courts in Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The meeting chaired by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was held at the PM House. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif while addressing the meeting made it clear that the government would not rest till the elimination of terrorism from the country since any let-up in this regard would be tantamount to criminal negligence. He stated there was no place for terrorists in the country. The meeting is significant in the backdrop of the revelation by Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan a day earlier about the lethargic attitude of the provinces in the implementation of NAP except Punjab and lack of their coordination for the purpose. The meeting was also attended by the interior minister who briefed it regarding progress on the implementation of the plan. The meeting decided that the Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK councils would also adopt the 21st constitutional amendment as well as the amendment in the Army Act 1952 to facilitate formation of military courts in these areas.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-35241-Military-courts-to-be-set-up-in-AJK-GB>

Shabbir Mir, "Now or never: Lawyers urge government to end G-B's constitutional limbo"

The Express Tribune, January 8, 2015

Lawyers in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) urged the federal government to either bring the region within the purview of Pakistan's constitution or provide it with a separate constitution. The firm stance comes at a time when the region is preparing for elections this year. A caretaker set-up has already been put in place with a mandate to hold elections within 90 days after the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)-led

government completed its five-year term in December 2014. "This is the right time to grant us a constitution and redress the sense of deprivation which the region has faced for decades," G-B Bar Council Vice President Shehbaz Khan noted on January 7. According to Khan, the G-B Self Governance and Empowerment Order 2009 introduced by the erstwhile PPP government is inadequate to suit their needs. "The 2009 order will not be accepted anymore," he added. "Instead of introducing ceremonial changes in the order, the federal government should make arrangements to conduct elections for a constituent assembly". G-B was made a de facto province through a presidential order in 2009. While the semi-autonomous region has its own chief minister and governor, its people don't have representation in the National Assembly.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/818361/now-or-never-lawyers-urge-government-to-end-g-bs-constitutional-limbo/>

Zaheer Abbasi, "Gilgit-Baltistan, AJK councils require to facilitate setting up of military courts"

Business Recorder, January 14, 2014

A high level meeting on implementation of National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism has decided that Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK Councils would also adopt the 21st Constitutional Amendment with amendment in the Army Act to facilitate formation of military courts in these areas. The Prime Minister, who chaired the meeting, reiterated his resolve against terrorism and extremism. An official stated that heads of different sub-committees have briefed the Prime Minister about progress on implementation of NAP. An official further stated that the Attorney General for Pakistan briefed the Prime Minister on legislative measures while other concerned updated the meeting on administrative measures. The Prime Minister has formed 15 sub-committees for implementation of the NAP and set a timeframe to submit their recommendations. He himself is heading the principal committee on implementation of a counter-terrorism plan. The meeting was informed that since December 23, about 164 cases have been registered in Punjab and Islamabad capital territory for use of hate speech and material while 157 persons have been arrested.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-stories/0/1142040/>

Irfan Ali, "Political suicide in Gilgit-Baltistan"

The Express Tribune, January 19, 2015

Some of the religio-political parties in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) are demanding the annulment of the provincial caretaker cabinet for being non-representative, biased and unbalanced. These assertions may be true, but if the demand to change the already notified caretaker provincial cabinet is acceded to, it will cause religio-political rifts in the region. The parties which have reservations about the mechanism used for the selection of the cabinet members must tolerate this for now and remain silent for the greater cause of peace in the region. Of course, it goes without saying that the incumbent government in Islamabad is completely disconnected from the indigenous dynamics of G-B. While the people objected to the previous provincial government of the PPP for being corrupt and incompetent, it is also a fact that the party has actually given a lot to G-B. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in 1972, visited the region and set the people free from the clutches of the Rajgi system. It should be clear that I am neither a PPP supporter nor do I have any kind of affiliation with that party and nor do I support everything that the PPP has done in the rest of the country. But it is a fact that Bhutto annulled the extension of the Frontier Crimes Regulation and empowered this region through the Northern Areas Legislative Assembly. Later on, in 2009, the PPP, once again, empowered the region through the Gilgit-Baltistan Self-governance Ordinance, 2009 and granted 'provincial status' to the region and also gave it an identity and name of 'Gilgit-Baltistan' instead of the previously used nomenclature of Northern Areas. In stark contrast, the PML-N, which ruled the country for three terms, did nothing for the betterment and progress of G-B. Admittedly, G-B is indeed a very difficult area to administer.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/824277/political-suicide-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

"Editorial: Logging and consequences"

The Express Tribune, January 28, 2015

Forest cover in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) has diminished by more than 50 per cent in the last 20 years, and the rate of deforestation is unlikely to

slacken. The felling of banned species such as pine, kail and deodar continues; and despite being aware of this, the present government has lifted a logging ban that it itself had imposed shortly after coming to power. The lifting of the ban is likely to have far-reaching environmental consequences, not the least of these being the erosion of critical slopes and the consequent landslips often with disastrous consequences for mountain communities sited below the slide areas. There is an almost insatiable demand for good quality wood in Pakistan, not just for fuel in remote and rural areas, but as building material. Technically, the land that is being logged belongs to local communities in Diamer district of G-B under a deal they signed with the then-government in the 1950s; but the reality is that logging is controlled by the G-B Council (chaired by the prime minister) and the timber traders. The tussle between the commercial imperatives of the loggers and the preservation concerns of the environmentalists is long and bitter.

The pendulum has swung to and fro with a ban imposed in 1993 only to be lifted by the Musharraf regime in 2000. Logging continued recklessly until 2008 when restrictions were again imposed but the forest department did little to implement it and we now arrive at a situation that borders on the environmentally catastrophic. Forests thus stripped in a mountain landscape are slow to regenerate, likewise undergrowth that has been ravaged by unrestricted grazing of goats (to a degree reversed in recent years), and unless there is a brake put on illegal logging, irreversible damage may soon be caused. A meeting in Chilas on January 27 aimed at reviving the 'Zaito' committees, which are designed to enable communities to protect forests under their purview, may stem the tide; but there is big money to be made in the timber trade. Trees are set for an uncertain future.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/828538/logging-and-consequences/>

AbRAR Hussain, “Unfair politics in G-B”

The Express Tribune, January 28, 2014

This is with reference to the controversial appointments of inducting seven more members

into the caretaker cabinet of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B). In Pakistan, the centre is often seen to manipulate affairs in smaller entities in order to cement its political stature. Legislative assembly elections in G-B are expected in May 2015. Meanwhile, the centre is compromising the region's autonomy by gnawing upon G-B's Empowerment and Self-governance Order of 2009, by urging reforms through the caretaker government, even though the role of caretaker bodies is to carry out free and fair elections. Getting oppressive 'reforms' sanctioned through these bodies is very unfair for the people of G-B, who are known to have liberal and autonomous preferences.

The people of the administrative region have been constantly protesting the malpractices of the government but little attention is paid to their plight. Moreover, in demanding fair democratic practices, the people of G-B are hoping that the election commission of G-B will ensure that no electoral rigging takes place, which has been the case in the past. They are hoping that the new regime will eradicate the gigantic evils of corruption, lack of law and order and sectarianism, which have plagued the progress and peace of the administrative region for decades.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/829195/unfair-politics-in-g-b/>

“Let the polls begin: 'G-B elections scheduled for May”

The Express Tribune, January 30, 2015

Around 50 days after the Pakistan Peoples Party-led Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) government completed its five-year term, elections for the legislative assembly have been announced for May 2015. “It has been decided and a notification to this effect was also issued,” G-B and Kashmir Affairs Federal Secretary Shahidullah Baig told Outpost, a local publication. A competent local has been appointed as the chief election commissioner, Baig added. Last week, a 12-member caretaker cabinet took oath in Islamabad and promised free and fair polls. “Better late than never; it will help remove misconceptions over the government's intentions,” stated a political figure while commenting on the delay in the announcement for polls. According to

reports, portfolios were assigned to caretaker cabinet members, but the appointments are still awaiting notification. Following several postponements, members of the G-B Council representing the region have decided to boycott council meetings chaired by the prime minister. They demanded either constitutional powers through the 18th Amendment or to be made part of the NFC Award. The demands were forwarded by members of the G-B Council on January 28 just a day after the meeting was postponed for the fifth time since November 2014. Six of the council's 12 members are from G-B council, while the rest represent the federal government.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/829871/let-the-polls-begin-g-b-elections-scheduled-for-may/>

Shabbir Mir, “Controversy up north: G-B interim cabinet nominations spark anger”

The Express Tribune, January 17, 2015

The five-member interim cabinet of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) has been announced with representatives belonging to various areas of the region. However, it has met criticism from several quarters.

The announcement was made on January 15 night after Caretaker Chief Minister Sher Jehan Mir met Federal Minister for G-B and Kashmir Affairs Birjis Tahir in Islamabad. “A notification about the appointment has also been issued,” a G-B government official noted on January 16. Members of the caretaker cabinet are Inayatullah Shumali, who hails from Diamer district and is the chairman of the G-B National Alliance; Sheikh Nasir Zamani, who is a religious scholar and social activist from Nagar Valley; Advocate Mushtaq Ahmed, who is a senior Jamaat-e-Islami leader from Astore district; Niamatullah who belongs to Bunji; and Sanaullah, a former bureaucrat from Skardu town. Portfolios are expected to be allocated later this week after an oath-taking ceremony. However, some areas of G-B have not been given representation in the cabinet. These include Ghizer and Hunza Valley.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/822873/controversy-up-north-g-b-interim-cabinet-nominations-spark-anger/>

“PML-Q, MWM reject care taker govt, election commission in GB”

Daily Times, January 17, 2015

A high-level delegation of Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen (MWM) called on Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) President Ch Shujat Hussain and former deputy prime minister Ch Parvez Elahi at their residence in Islamabad on January 17. During the meeting, detailed discussion was held regarding next general elections in Gilgit-Baltistan and to form new electoral alliance in a very pleasant atmosphere. Leaders of both the parties rejected the present Election Commission and caretaker Cabinet of Gilgit-Baltistan and termed them as beginning of pre-poll rigging. They stated that this would not be accepted at all. They also deliberated over launching of mass movement against it. During the meeting, PML-Q Senior Vice-President Muhammad Basharat Raja, Provincial Chief Mirza Hussain and Vice-President Women Wing Amna Ansari were also present.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/national/17-Jan-2015/pml-q-mwm-reject-care-taker-govt-election-commission-in-gb>

Shabbir Mir, “Mounting pressure: Five new members for G-B interim cabinet”

The Express Tribune, January 20, 2015

As pressure over cabinet appointments mounts, the federal government has decided to include five more members in the caretaker set-up of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B). The appointments, if confirmed, will double the strength of the interim cabinet to 10 members and help settle differences between Gilgit and the Centre. Last week, the Centre appointed five members Inayatullah Shumali, Sheikh Nasir Zamani, Advocate Mushtaq Ahmed, Niamatullah and Sanaullah in the caretaker set-up that took charge in December 2014 after G-B's elected government completed its five-year term. The initial decision to appoint just five cabinet members triggered region-wide protests as three districts, including Hunza-Nagar, Ghizer and Ghanche, lacked representation.

The exclusion forced the interim chief minister to admit he was not consulted in the formation of the

cabinet. In a bid to settle the issue, the G-B-chapter of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) held a parliamentary board meeting in Islamabad. The regional chief of the party flew in to Islamabad to take part in the meeting. "It was decided that five more members would be appointed in the cabinet from the areas ignored earlier," a politician who attended the meeting noted on January 20 while referring to Hunza-Nagar, Ghizer and Ghanche districts. He stated others being considered as cabinet members were Kalbe Ali from Hunza-Nagar district, Fozia Kulsoom from Skardu, Abdul Hanan from Ghizer, Fida Zaidi from Ghanche and Basharatullah from Diamer. However, they have not yet been made members as the summary for their appointment sent to the prime minister has not been signed yet. The meeting also decided to hold elections in May/June when weather conditions improved, he added.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/824778/mounting-pressure-five-new-members-for-g-b-interim-cabinet/>

"Induction' of 'N' activists in GB caretaker cabinet protested"

The Dardistan Times, January 21, 2015

Workers of various political parties blocked the Karakoram Highway for seven hours on January 20 to protest the "induction" of PML-N workers in the GB caretaker cabinet. Activists of PPP, PTI, JUI-F, JI and MQM blocked the highway near Chilas, chanting slogans against the PML-N-led federal government for inducting 'blue-eyed' people in the caretaker cabinet. The protesters alleged that the federal minister for Kashmir affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan had handpicked the cabinet members without considering the views of the leadership of other parties. They warned of boycotting the upcoming GB elections if the decision was not reversed. Addressing the protesters, PTI deputy convener for GB, Shah Nasir, accused the federal government of interfering into the GB affairs. He alleged that the PML-N government had started pre-poll rigging in the region by appointing their cronies to the GB cabinet.

<http://www.dardistantimes.com/gilgit-baltistan/News/1973018627/induction-n-activists-gb-caretaker-cabinet-protested>

"GB council meets tomorrow"

The Nation, January, 26, 2015

The Gilgit-Baltistan Council will hold its meeting tomorrow under the chair of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to mainly discuss the extension of National Action Plan against terrorism to the areas. Being the chairman of the council, Nawaz would take the members into confidence on the measures so far taken on counter-terrorism. The matter of extension of National Action Plan to Gilgit-Baltistan would figure in the meeting and the council would give formal approval for that. The meeting will also discuss various development projects for the region.

<http://nation.com.pk/islamabad/26-Jan-2015/gb-council-meets-tomorrow>

Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Govt not to set up military courts in AJK, GB"

Dawn, January 31, 2015

The government has quietly reversed its decision of setting up military courts in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB). "We were today informed that the government has no intention of extending 21st Amendment in the Constitution to AJK and GB," stated Chairman of National Assembly's Special Committee on Kashmir Maulana Fazlur Rehman on January 30 after chairing an in-camera session of the committee.

The Kashmir committee was briefed by Adviser to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz and Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Birjees Tahir. The meeting had been convened to discuss escalation in tensions with India along the Line of Control and Working Boundary and preparations for Kashmir Day observance on February 5. "Media reports about the planned move to establish military courts in AJK and GB had created concerns," stated Mr Rehman who initially agreed to support military courts in the country at the All Parties Conference, but later reneged on his decision.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1160612/govt-not-to-set-up-military-courts-in-ajk-gb>

“MoU on resilience building signed”

Dawn, January 7, 2015

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the Azad Kashmir government and Islamic Relief (IR), an international aid and development charity, here on January 6. Under the MoU, the Islamic Relief will provide technical assistance to the State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA) in building resilience and synergising the preparedness among different stakeholders.

The MoU was signed by SDMA Secretary Mohammad Akram Sohail and IR's Country Director Ateeq Rehman at a ceremony. AJK's Senior Minister Chaudhry Mohammad Yasin was chief guest on the occasion. The SDMA secretary pointed out that disasters had badly affected AJK for many years, killing people and damaging the infrastructure. “

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1155390/mou-on-resilience-building-signed>

“Against minister: Over 50,000 AJK workers go on strike”

The Express Tribune, January 9, 2015

More than 50,000 employees across Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) began an indefinite strike on January 8, demanding exemplary action against senior minister Chaudhry Yaseen over his alleged involvement in a brawl and in nepotism. The legislative assembly session of January 8 was also postponed because of the strike.

Hundreds of workers, officers and bureaucrats gathered in front of the Civil Secretariat and chanted slogans against the senior minister who had scuffled with the principal secretary of AJK premier on January 7, allegedly to get a close friend of his allotted an undeserved grade in the government ranks. AJK Gazetted Officers Association and other members of the employees unions were also present on the occasion.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/818965/against-minister-over-50000-ajk-workers-go-on-strike/>

“Possessing Arms: Seven suspects rounded up in AJK”

The Express Tribune, January 13, 2015

Police on January 12 rounded up seven suspects in the capital of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). According to police officials, a tip-off was received on the movement of suspicious persons in Chela Bandi area in suburbs of Muzaffarabad. The City police launched an operation and arrested seven men with possession of arms and ammunition near Pirchanasi Road. Two rifles, a pistol, 40 bullets and a pair of commando uniforms were recovered from their possession. Police have registered an FIR against all seven suspects and put them behind bars for carrying arms illegally.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/820914/possessing-arms-seven-suspects-rounded-up-in-ajk/>

“No legislation to muzzle AJK press”

Dawn, January 20, 2015

Prime Minister Chaudhry Abdul Majeed and Leader of the Opposition Raja Farooq Haider on January 19 assured that no legislation was being done to muzzle the press. Both leaders held out this assurance at the oath-taking ceremony of the newly-elected office-bearers of Capital Journalists Forum (CJF). He stated a draft law on defamation would not be enacted without taking input from the journalist community. Mr Majeed stated his government was not bringing any legislation to contain or curtail the freedom of press. However, he stated, everyone was equal in the eyes of the law for the purpose of maintaining check and balance. He stated the government would talk with the opposition and the media representatives on the proposed piece of law on defamation. He also declared to activate a cell in the PM Secretariat to facilitate access to information. Mr Haider stated that media must point out the wrongdoings of the people at the helm and the ills of society but their reporting should not be based on assumptions and speculations. Mr Haider also supported the demand of the journalists that the ISPR should upgrade its office in Muzaffarabad for instant provision of information to the newsmen. He asked the prime

minister to do away with the practice of holding official meetings in Islamabad and instead should hold the same in the territory of AJK.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1158208/no-legislation-to-muzzle-ajk-press>

“828 Afghan families deported from Azad Kashmir”

Pajhwok Afghan News, January 22, 2015

More than 825 Afghan families have been deported from different cities of the Pakistan-controlled zone of Kashmir, an Islamabad-based news agency reported on January 22 "An operation for the deportation of unlawful foreigners across Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is in full swing and thousands of families have voluntarily moved from there," the report stated. A hundred families of illegal foreigners had moved from Mirpur subdivision, as noted by the Associated Press of Pakistan, adding another 197 houses left Thothal, 140 Mangla, 155 Afzalpur, 97 New City and 128 other areas. Led by magistrates with police, authorities conducted raids at residential sites of in Mirpur district and other parts of AJK. The illegal settlers are mostly Afghan refugees. In all, 828 Afghan families have been expelled.

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2015/03/10/828-afghan-families-deported-azad-kashmir>

Mushtaq Ghumman, “AJK decides to rebid power project”

Business Recorder, January 31, 2015

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) government decided to offer 48 MW Jagran-II hydropower project for rebidding after a

controversy emerged in the award of the project. Chaudhry Yasin, Minister for Irrigation, AJ&K, who is also head of the AJK hydroelectric board noted that he took this decision at a meeting of the board to ensure transparency in the award of this important project. The French agency, Agence Française de Development (AFD), has earmarked Euro 68 million for the project and one million Euros for engineering services. The world's biggest Chinese company in hydropower generation, Sinohydro, which was the lowest bidder through its local representative, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister's Office for intervention accusing the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Electric Board (AJK-HEB) of accepting the second lowest bid by another Chinese company, CWE. He stated, Sinohydro offered to do the job for Rs 6.9 billion while CWE demanded Rs 7.4 billion. The letter written to the Prime Minister's Office by Sino hydro's representative stated that at the tender opening on September 23, 2013, the read out price of Sinohydro and its local partner was the lowest. During the bid evaluation period, not a single clarification was sought from them with respect to any deficiency in the bid. The letter stated that the LHC set aside blacklisting of Sino hydro's partner by the Punjab government on February 13, 2014. It added that the judicial order removed the ground on which the evaluation committee decided to exclude the lowest price bid.

<http://www.brecorder.com/fuel-a-energy/193/1146950/>

Economic Developments

“AJK govt budget deficit crosses Rs 14b”

Pakistan Today, January 19, 2015

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir government is in severe financial crunch as its budgetary deficit has crossed Rs 14 billion and it has expressed its inability to pay compensation to the affectees of 2014 devastating rains and floods. According to reports, the AJK government had requested the federal government to provide a grant of over Rs 1.15 billion but so far has not received any response. The finance ministry advised the AJK government to check its non-development expenditure. Reports stated that the AJK secretary finance in a letter to the federal ministry informed it about financial crisis and sought supplementary grant for payment of compensation. It stated that during the first quarter of the financial year the difference between income and expenditure was around Rs 6 billion which has now crossed to Rs 14 billion. It stated the government needs urgent financial assistance to meet its obligations.

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/01/19/business/ajk-govt-budget-deficit-crosses-rs-14b/>

“Intra-Kashmir traders to meet at Kaman bridge on January 15”

Business Recorder, January 12, 2015

A joint meeting of intra-Kashmir traders from both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) is scheduled for January 15 at the Chakothi-Uri crossing point. The traders would discuss various issues relating to the barter trade with zero tariff regime, including the hurdles being faced by them on either sides of the divide. The officials concerned from both parts of the disputed Himalayan region would also attend the meeting, which will be the fourth of its kind over the last six years, ever since the trans-LoC trade was launched in October 2008. According to sources, some two weeks ago, traders in J&K had made a

request to their authorities that they wanted to have a meeting with their fellow businesspersons from Azad Kashmir. The request was conveyed by the J&K authorities to their AJK counterparts at a flag meeting and after a positive nod from AJK, January 15 was fixed for the joint meeting. An official stated 10 traders from JK and five from AJK would participate in the joint meeting, to be held in the middle of Kaman Bridge over a water channel that marks the divide in Chakothi-Uri sector. Jammu Kashmir Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industries (JKJCCI) has appreciated the decision to allow the traders from both sides to discuss their mutual problems and come up with suggestions for their possible solutions.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-stories/0/1141541/>

Parvez Jabri, “DDWP approves over Rs709mn for development projects”

Business Recorder, December 12, 2014

The Departmental Development Working Party (DDWP) has approved rupees over 709 million for development projects in Gilgit-Baltistan. The meeting was held in Gilgit, Chief Secretary Skindar Sultan Raja who is also Chairman of the DDWP presided over, reported Radio Pakistan. The approved schemes include police officers residential quarters in Hunza, costing rupees over 118 million, purchase of vehicles for home department more than 177 million, repairing of bridges in Baltistan 102 million. The road widening project from Hamayon to Sarmo Baltistan rupees costing 150 million was also sanctioned.

<http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/general-news/210387-ddwp-approves-over-rs709mn-for-development-projects.html>

International Developments

“Saudi Arabi providing Riyal 206mln for Muzaffarabad road project”

Daily Times, January 7, 2015

Saudi Arabia is providing Pakistan loan of Riyal 206 million for constructing Chehlla Bandi road in Muzaffarabad Azad Jammu and Kashmir. “The loan is repayable in 20 years at two per cent charge with five years grace period,” Jassim M Al-Khaldi, Charge d'affaires, Embassy of Saudi Arabia informed Finance Minister, Ishaq Dar on January 7. “Jassim Al-Khaldi handed over a letter from the Saudi Finance Minister to Ishaq Dar, conveying information about Saudi loan of 206 million Riyal for Chehlla Bandi road project near Muzaffarabad,” noted a statement issued by the ministry of finance. Commenting on 'Zarb-e-Azb' operation, Jassim shared his county's strong feelings for Pakistan on countering terrorism.

Acknowledging the Saudi support, the Dar thanked the Saudi government for its support to Pakistan. The minister also briefed the Saudi Envoy about the ongoing operation 'Zarb-e-Azb'. He stated the Pakistani nation, in unison with the armed forces, has a resolve to carry this operation to a conclusion. He stated that the war on terror had taken a heavy toll on Pakistan's economy and the overall losses had already surpassed 100 billion dollars. A large number of people were displaced due to the ongoing operation and hefty resources were needed for rehabilitation of the displaced persons. The minister also inquired after the health of King Abdullah and conveyed warm sentiments of the government and people of Pakistan for Khadim Al-Haramain Al-Sharifain.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/business/07-Jan-2015/saudi-arabi-providing-riyal-206mln-for-muzaffarabad-road-project>

“IFC/WB okay financing 108MW Gulpur Hydropower Project”

Daily Times, January 25, 2014

International Finance Corporation (IFC)/World Bank (WB) Board has accorded approval for financing 108 megawatts (MW) Gulpur Hydropower Project located at Poonch River district Kotli Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). A high level delegation of IFC/WB meeting with Finance Minister Ishaq Dar discussed in depth various WB sponsored development projects. Dar lauded WB Board's decision regarding Gulpur Power project as government was making efforts to generate affordable energy to meet the future requirements. He appreciated WB's continued support for different projects specially 4,200 mw Dasu Hydropower Project that would greatly help alleviate the energy problem. Dar stated Pakistan had become eligible for IBRD economic package after achieving \$15 billion forex reserves mark and there would be further expansion in WB's project funding in Pakistan, Finance Ministry noted in a statement. The statement stated another WB team had a meeting with senior officials of the Finance Ministry. During the meeting the performance of National Income Support Programme (NISP) was discussed. The delegation expressed satisfaction on improved NISP performance. The delegation hoped with increased funding NISP would better reach out to poor segment of the population.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/business/25-Jan-2015/ifc-wb-okay-financing-108mw-gulpur-hydropower-project>

“Raising a voice: Diaspora demands right to vote in upcoming elections”

The Express Tribune, January 25, 2015

As elections draw nearer, people of Gilgit-

Baltistan residing outside the region have demanded voting rights. “A large proportion of G-B's population is living outside of G-B because of lack of educational and employment opportunities. Not including them in the election process will be tantamount to denying them their basic rights,” reads an online petition initiated by Ali Taj, who lives outside G-B. “The general elections for Gilgit-Baltistan's Legislative Assembly are around the corner,” the petition states, adding nomination of chief election commissioner and interim set-up has been finalised and both bodies will start initiating the poll process soon. According to the petition, because of the long distance, many people will not be able to reach G-B to vote in the upcoming elections. It demanded the election commission and interim government take necessary steps to allow the diaspora of G-B to vote in the polls. “Voters should be given the facility of postal service or polling stations should be set up at the office of district coordination officers in major cities,” states the petition. While the schedule is yet to be announced, it is generally believed elections for G-B's legislative assembly will take place in June 2015. Although there are no exact figures available of the number of people residing outside of G-B, it is stated to be in the thousands.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/827123/raising-a-voice-diaspora-demands-right-to-vote-in-upcoming-elections/>

“60 AJK women to be settled in UK”

The Nation, January 1, 2015

A UKbased educational institution has launched marriage training courses titled A-1 and B-1 for the women hailing from AJK to be the prospective settlers in Britain after being married to British nationals. A ceremony for the distribution of certificates to the second batch of successful participants of A-1 Training Course was held at the 'Access IL English Language Training Institute in Mirpur on December 31. On the occasion, Kashmiri academician Hassan Ahmed Bukhari distributed the certificates to over 60 women from various parts of Mirpur division, who successfully completed the training course. Administrator Access UK Training Centre Ms Zahra Jabeen and Coordinator Syed Qamar Hayat highlighted the salient features of the training programmes to make the women familiar with the life style in United Kingdom so that they could pass through a successful life there.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/01-Jan-2015/60-ajk-women-to-be-settled-in-uk>

Other Developments

“Power cuts: Traders, residents take to the streets”

The Express Tribune, January 4, 2015

Traders and civil society members in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) staged a protest in the capital city over the weekend against what they termed unannounced power cuts in the area. Traders' Joint Action Committee President Razaq Khan stated around 1,200 megawatts (MW) of electricity was being produced from AJK but the Water and Power Development Authority (Wapda) had failed to provide the minimum 300MW to local residents who sacrificed their graveyards to construct the Mangla Dam. He stated that 10 to 12 hours' of load-shedding had adversely affected businesses and daily activities. The protesters gave January 9 as a deadline to Wapda to solve the issue otherwise they stated they will be compelled to take extreme steps to get their rights. Later, the traders also set up a protest camp outside the Central Press Club, which was visited by leaders of various political parties. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz is the opposition party in the AJK Legislative Assembly.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/816725/power-cuts-traders-residents-take-to-the-streets/>

“Reducing emissions: Training workshop begins”

The Express Tribune, January 6, 2015

A six-day training workshop to “Reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation” (REDD+) commenced on January 5, noted a press release. Twenty senior forest officers belonging to the Forest Department, Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) are participating in the workshop. The programme is being conducted with the cooperation of Climate Change Division and Forest Department of G-B. In his keynote address, Inspector General of Forests Mehmood Nasir Syed asked forest officers to equip themselves with the latest technology and

knowledge about REDD+ so they could help local farmers. Climate change expert Alamgir Gandapur spoke about the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and Kyoto Protocol as well as climate change mitigation.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/817357/reducing-emissions-training-workshop-begins/>

Rizwan Shehzad, “Water and Sanitation Extension Programme: Thousands benefit in Chitral, G-B”

The Express Tribune, January 29, 2015

The completion of work on a mega water and sanitation project raised the standard of living of thousands of household in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) and Chitral. The Water and Sanitation Extension Programme (WASEP) has benefited over 210,000 people in 12,000 households in the region. The collaboration of the German government and Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) has not only helped improved lives by providing safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, but also benefited people through the installation of over 10,000 latrines, around 12,000 household tap stands and over 500 communal taps. These details were shared at a seminar on 'Water and sanitation extension programme in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral,' organised under the Aga Khan Foundation and Aga Khan Planning and Building Services on January 28.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/829355/water-and-sanitation-extension-programme-thousands-benefit-in-chitral-g-b/>

“Pakistani ski team reaches South Korea”

The Nation, January 27, 2015

Pakistan's two-member ski team comprising Jumma Mir and M Mumtaz both from Naltar Valley, Gilgit-Baltistan January 26 left for 15-day tour to participate in the world dream programme in South Korea. Teens from around 45 countries will participate in this programme to be held in Korea,

host of next Winter Olympics. The team was sent off from Islamabad airport by Ski Federation of Pakistan (SFP) vice president M Javed and media head Obaid-ur-Rehman Abbasi. CAA made special arrangements for the players at the airport. Both players along with coach Sqd Leader Qammar reached Korea on late January 26 night and also participated in the opening ceremony. Obaid stated: "The SFP has been taking steps to promote skiing in country on special directives of SFP president Air Marshal Sohail Gul Khan.

<http://nation.com.pk/sports/27-Jan-2015/pakistan-ski-team-reaches-south-korea>

“Diamond in the rough: Project to boost gems sector in G-B, Chitral”

The Express Tribune, January 27, 2015

The recently-concluded Technology Transfer and Skills Development in Gems Sector project will significantly change the lives of people in Gilgit and Chitral, stated Rupani Foundation (RF) Chief Executive Jalaluddin on January 26. The project formally ended at a ceremony in Gilgit on January 24. The ceremony was attended by representatives of PGMA, PGJDC and others. Implemented by RF, the project managed to set up a state-of-the-art gem testing and certification laboratory at Danyore in Gilgit. A four-member team is testing gems along with appraising and certifying the stones. Over the years, RF established two gem cutting and polishing production centres: one in Hunza and the other in Chitral. "The trainees can work anywhere in Pakistan now. It will strengthen the sector as these people can now add value to rough gemstones," Jalaluddin noted. He stated gemstones are plentiful in G-B and Chitral, thus offering an opportunity for Rupani Foundation trainers and trainees to market their products regionally and nationally.

<http://www.dardistantimes.com/gilgit-baltistan/News/432496059/gender-based-police-reforms-need-hour>

“2-day Intra-Kashmir Women Conference in Mirpur”

AAJTV, January 30, 2015

All is set to hold a two-day Intra-Kashmir Women Conference from January 31 to discuss the women issues under the auspices of "AJK NGO Women for Peace Organization" (AJKWFPO). "The main focus of the conference will be "addressing women issues in divided societies", secretary information AJK WFPO Dr. Mrs. Zahida Qasim informed the reporters on January 30 while highlighting the salient features of the conference. Ex-Chief Justice of AJK High Court Justice (Retd) Abdul Majeed Mallick will be the chief guest on this occasion. Whereas Dr. Attiya Innayat Ullah, Former Federal Minister, and patron in chief of AJK WFPO will chair the conference. "The basic themes will be 'historic perspective of women in the divided state of Jammu & Kashmir', 'women dimension and legal status in AJK, and 'women and peace building', stated Dr. Seema Jogazai, president and chief executive officer of the host organization the AJK WFPO.

<http://www.aaj.tv/2015/01/2-day-intra-kashmir-women-conference-in-mirpur/>

Fact sheet on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir

Total area of Jammu and Kashmir	222,236 sq kms
Area of under illegal Pakistani occupation (PoK = AJK + Gilgit Baltistan)	78114 sq kilometres
Area of J&K under Chinese occupation <i>Area ceded to China by Pakistan</i>	42,685 sq kms 5,180 sq kms
Together Pak-China	120,799 sq kms
Area with India	101437 sq kms

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 Yaqoob Khan

Prime Minister: Chaudhry Abdul Majeed

AJK Council: Total 12 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. 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: Pir Karam Ali Shah

Chief Minister G-B: Syed Mehdi Shah

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 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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