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A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

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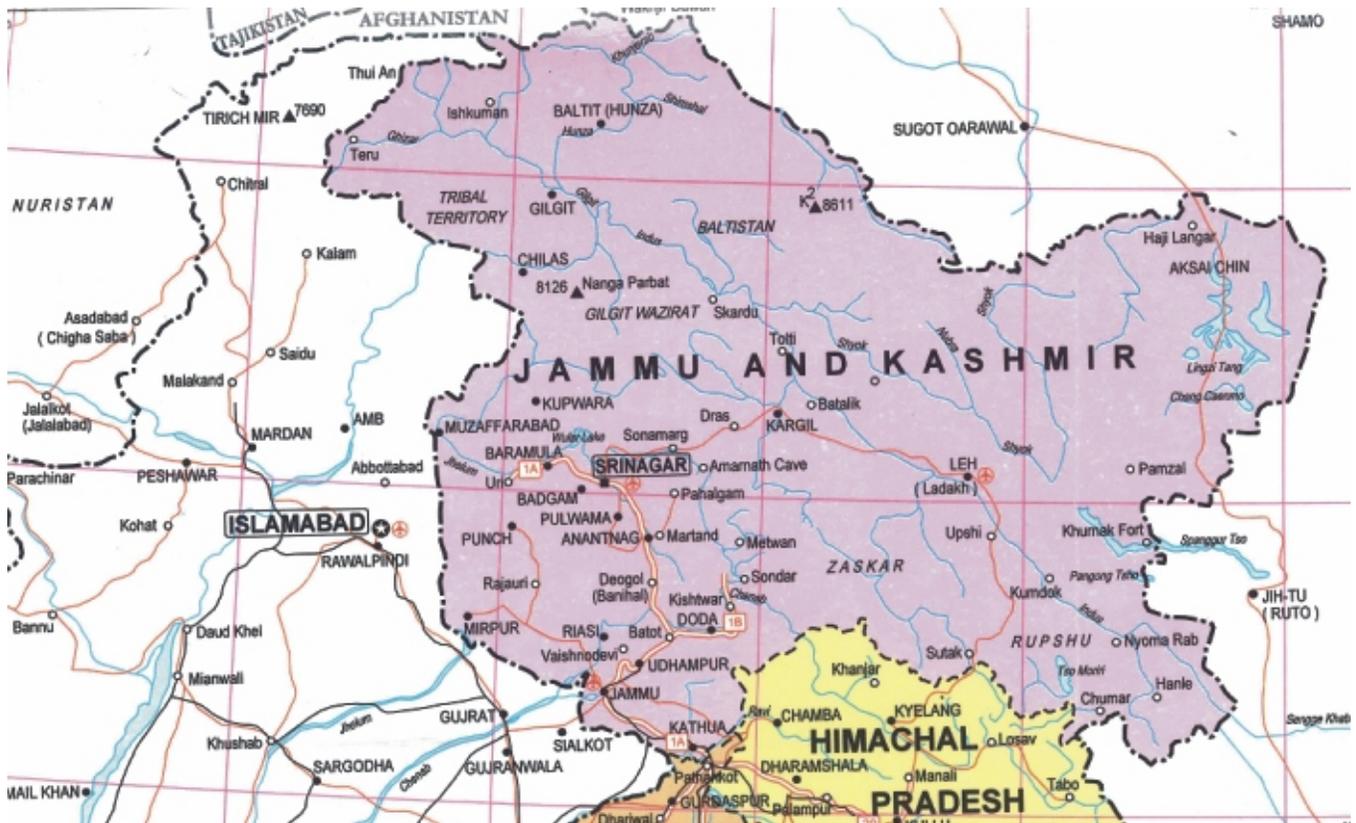
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Jammu & Kashmir

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

In this Edition

A prolonged phase of controversy followed the setting up of a care taker government in Gilgit Baltistan after the previously elected government under the PPP (Pakistan Peoples Party) completed its five year term in December 2014. Since there was no provision for a caretaker government under the Empowerment and Self Rule package of 2009, certain amendments were made to facilitate the same. Apart from this, the Federal Minister of Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan, Chaudhry Barjees Tahir, was appointed as the Governor of Gilgit Baltistan, an unprecedented move in the history of the region. Never before has a federal minister been appointed to the office of the Governor in Gilgit Baltistan. The issue raked up after the opposition parties such as the PPP and the PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) opposed the appointment calling it part of a deliberate pre rigging exercise undertaken by the PML-N to ensure it wins the upcoming polls in the region. The PTI which led the widespread protests in Pakistan against the PML-N on grounds of alleged rigging during the 2013 general elections has vociferously taken up the issue of appointment of alleged PML-N loyalists in the caretaker set up.

The cross LoC (Line of Control) travel and trade took a hit in February 2015, having being disrupted after a PoK driver was arrested by the Indian authorities for allegedly carrying contraband in his truck. The officials from both sides met in order to resolve the deadlock. The cross LoC exchange could be resumed only after several rounds of talks were held between the two sides.

Those people affected by the controversial and the much delayed Diamer Bhasha dam project would receive compensation at a revised and much higher rate. Since the original rates were decided long time ago, the displaced people demanded that the rate of compensation should be enhanced. In view of the popular demand, the government of Pakistan decided to increase the rate of compensation by almost 25 %.

Priyanka Singh

Political Developments

“Harassment issues: G-B lawyers undergo training”

The Express Tribune, February 1, 2015

A Center for Learning conducted a two-day training programme on “Protection against harassment of women at the workplace act 2010” that started on January 28, noted a press release issued on January 31. Participants mainly included lawyers from Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B). The programme was also attended by the presidents of the Gilgit and Skardu bar associations. Amna Ansari, opposition leader in the legislative assembly of G-B, also attended the programme. The participants found the training very informative and expressed their commitment to work for implementation of anti-sexual harassment laws in G-B. A day after the completion of the programme, a meeting was organised with the Anti-Harassment Committee of the National Database and Registration Authority to learn from their experience of handling sexual harassment cases. The committee provided valuable suggestions to the group of lawyers for conducting inquiries into such cases.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/830964/harassment-issues-g-b-lawyers-undergo-training/>

M Arshad, “Finance Ministry to release Rs 9.28b to Azad Kashmir in current fiscal year”

Customs Today, February 2, 2015

The Finance Ministry has proposed to release Rs 9.284 billion to the Azad Jammu and Kashmir during the current financial year. Total development outlay for AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) is of Rs 96.391 billion for the financial year 2014-2015. “Moreover out of remaining 20%, an amount of 2613.813 million has also been allocated for development activities in AJ&K territory during the current financial year through Minister's Development Schemes,” a source noted on January 31. Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJ&K) and Gilgit

Baltistan (GB) have peculiar status. The GB government is run by the Gilgit Baltistan (Empowerment and Self-Governance) Order 2009; and the AJ&K government is run under AJ&K Interim Constitution Act 1974.

“The Finance Ministry is taking a number of steps to improve the economic conditions of both the areas and uplifting the socio-economic position of the people by providing funds through Annual Development Programmes (ADP) and Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP),” the source stated. He further noted that the Federal Government was giving subsidy in the shape of transportation and handling charges of wheat to people of Gilgit Baltistan. “Presently the sale price of subsidised wheat in GB is Rs 11 per kg as compared to Rs 33.25 in Pakistan,” the source stated, adding that government was also taking keen interest to improve the infrastructure of both the areas. “In this context, several mega projects like Diamer Basha Dam Project, Mangla Dam Raising Project, Neelum Jhelum Hydro Power Project,” he named the projects, adding that the projects were being implemented in collaboration with different ministries/divisions. Moreover, the source noted that proposals of Rawalakot Airport and feasibility study for construction of new rail link from Islamabad to Muzaffarabad were also a step forward to improve the infrastructure of the area.

<http://customstoday.com.pk/finance-ministry-proposes-release-of-rs-9-28b-to-azad-kashmir-in-current-fiscal-year/>

“Gilgit-Baltistan: PTI to challenge appointment of caretaker chief minister”

Business Recorder, February 5, 2015

Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan on February 4 stated his party is going to challenge the appointment of caretaker chief minister of Gilgit-Baltistan in Supreme Court. Addressing a press conference, he alleged the caretaker chief minister G-B is a worker of Pakistan Muslim

League-Nawaz (PM L-N) and his party has decided to challenge his appointment in Supreme Court. Khan stated that his allegations that Returning Officers (ROs) rigged the general elections in 2013 and 'stole' the mandate of people to help PML-N on the directives of the former Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhary proved true after the NA-118 commission report. PTI chief further stated the PML-N is now flexing muscles to rig Gilgit-Baltistan council elections. PTI chief accused Nawaz Sharif of appointing his own "umpires" to achieve his goal in the upcoming G-B elections. "PTI demands fair and transparent elections in Gilgit Baltistan," he stated. Imran stated that after the commission's report regarding NA-118 it has been proved that 2013 elections were 'fixed' and "electoral game" was played by Returning Officers (ROs). He stated that according to the report, out of 261 polling stations, no record was available of 42 polling stations; and 50,000 ballot paper were found missing.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-stories/0/1148626/>

Jamil Nagri, "Two GB leaders quit PML-Q, join PTI"

Dawn, February 5, 2015

The president of PML-Q's Gilgit-Baltistan chapter and former member of the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA), Mirza Hussain, and former GBLA member and regional chief of PML-Q's women's wing, Amina Ansari, announced on February 4 that they had joined the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI). Mr Hussain and Ms Ansari announced the decision at a press conference at the PTI's central secretariat which was also attended by PTI chief Imran Khan. Addressing the press conference, Mr Khan alleged that the PML-N planned to rig the upcoming elections to the GBLA and stated the PTI would not allow this to happen. He described appointment of Sher Jahan Mir as GB's caretaker chief minister and nomination of a 12-member cabinet by the federal government as "undemocratic and illegal moves". According to the prescribed rules and regulations, the caretaker cabinet should comprise only three members, the PTI chief stated. He accused the PML-N government of appointing its workers as the GB's

chief minister and ministers. Mr Khan stated his party would challenge the measures in the Supreme Court.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1161648/two-gb-leaders-quit-pml-q-join-pti>

Shabbir Mir, "Chipping away at history: Ancient rock carvings falling prey to disfigurement"

The Express Tribune, February 5, 2015

More than 30,000 ancient rock carvings dotting Chilas town of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) are expected to be lost forever, submerged in the reservoir water of the proposed 4,500 megawatt Diamer-Bhasha Dam. This is slated to happen at least a decade from now when the dam is ready to begin production. However, negligence on the part of locals and government departments is hastening the elimination of precious historic art and depictions, especially along the Karakoram Highway. Graffiti and advertisements have been painted over several ancient inscriptions, some dating back to the ninth millennium BCE (roughly the late Stone Age). "There have been a growing number of incidents of slogans painted on rocks carved with ancient inscriptions," stated Mujeeb Ahmed, a resident of Chilas. "This is perhaps because locals are not aware of the historic significance of these inscriptions." Mostly, the writings and art are engraved on big boulders or cliffs and cannot be relocated, while many have been damaged by excavation and painted messages, a problem which seems to have escaped the relevant officials' attention. "We do not have reports of new graffiti. But there are standing orders against drawing or painting over the rock inscriptions," stated Home Secretary Sibtain Ahmed, adding if they find any such violations they will take action.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/832964/chipping-away-at-history-ancient-rock-carvings-falling-prey-to-disfigurement/>

Muhammad Saleem, "Kashmir Day today"

Business Recorder, February 5, 2015

Pakistan once again expressed complete solidarity with the Kashmiris on "Kashmir Day" being observed on February 5, with a firm resolve to continue all-out moral and diplomatic support to the

Kashmiris. The Pakistani nation across the country including Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan would mark the day in a befitting manner to pay homage to Kashmiri martyrs and express unity with struggling people of Kashmir. In this connection, the federal and provincial governments, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan have chalked out various programmes. The day will begin with special prayers for the martyrs of Kashmir, victory of the freedom struggle and expression of solidarity with the Kashmiri people, followed by big rallies, symposia, peace walks, conventions, meetings and speech declamations.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-stories/0/1148566/>

“NACTA to be expanded to provinces, AJK and Gilgit Baltistan”

The Nation, February 6, 2015

The interior ministry has decided to expand the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) to provinces, AJK and G-B to effectively fight the menace of terrorism. Sources in the interior ministry stated that the interior minister is holding consultations with NACTA authorities to expand the scope of the counter-terrorism department to all the four provinces including Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B). The sources further stated that a final decision to this effect will be made after the approval of the prime minister. The sources noted that the provincial chief ministers and the prime minister of AJK will be heads of regional NACTAs. According to the sources, the aim of expanding the scope of NACTA to the provinces is to accelerate the fight against terrorism and to enable province to take practical measures against terrorism. The sources also stated that consultations between the interior minister and the NACTA authorities have almost finalized and final approval, in this regard, will be taken from Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/06-Feb-2015/nacta-to-be-expanded-to-provinces-ajk-and-gilgit-baltistan>

“No change in design of Pak-China economic corridor: minister”

Pakistan Today, February 6, 2015

Minister for Planning Development and Reforms

Ahsan Iqbal February 6 ruled out any plan to change the design of Pakistan-China Economic Corridor a project symbolising new vision of Pak-China economic partnership. “The Pak-China economic corridor is not a game changer but a fate changer for Pakistan and for the prosperity of three billion people of the region,” Ahsan Iqbal stated while addressing a press conference on February 6. Ahsan resolved that the mega project was aimed at uniting all federating units including the remote areas of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh, Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit Baltistan Region. He added that a transit trade between Pakistan and China would be started from Gwadar, adding that backward areas of Balochistan would especially benefit from the economic corridor project. The economic corridor and connected energy projects with a total investment of \$45 billion during the next five years was a glaring example of the close friendship between the Pakistan and China. The corridor, he stated, was a landmark project which would connect Pakistan's deep sea Gwadar port with China's Xinjiang region bordering Gilgit Baltistan, an area full of natural resources.

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/02/06/business/no-change-in-design-of-pak-china-economic-corridor-minister/>

Shabbir Mir, “New appointments: PML-N announces office bearers in G-B”

The Express Tribune, February 8, 2015

The changes have been approved by Prime Minister and PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif and the office bearers have been notified, stated spokesperson Habib Rehman on February 7. Hafeezur Rehman has been appointed as the regional president while Muhammad Akbar Taban has been appointed as regional general secretary. The decision has been taken at a time when polls in G-B are around the corner and the party is rife with internal rifts. According to the notification, Ghulam Muhammad, Mir Ghazanfer Ali Khan, Hayat Baig, Ibrahim Sanai, Col (ret'd) Karim Shah, Atiqa Ghazanfar Ali Khan, Dr Muhammad Iqbal, Tahir Ayub, Haji Haider Khan and Shafiquddin have been appointed as senior vice presidents. Jafarullah Khan has been appointed as deputy general secretary, Shams Mir

as political adviser while Farooq Mir will be the new information secretary. G-B Supreme Appellate Court (SAC) Chief Judge Rana Arshad retired after completing his three-year term on February 7. He was appointed during the previous government, in the face of reservations voiced by the legal fraternity of the region. Meanwhile, Judge Raja Jalaluddin has taken charge as the acting chief judge. Judges at G-B's apex court are appointed on a three-year contract, although they are entitled to privileges similar to the ones received by judges of the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/834637/new-appointments-pml-n-announces-office-bearers-in-g-b/>

Shabbir Mir, “Keeping watch: G-B's seminaries to come under close scrutiny”

The Express Tribune, February 10, 2015

As part of the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP), the government of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) has decided to scrutinize both registered and unregistered madrassahs operating in the region. According to a government official, the decision was taken during a meeting chaired by interim chief minister Sher Jehan Mir. Home Secretary Sibtain Ahmed and intelligence officials attended the meeting. “Scrutinizing madrassahs was one of many decisions taken in the moot,” the official noted. He added clerics from outside G-B have been barred from entering the region for an indefinite period as intelligence reports have suggested their presence could incite hatred and lead to sectarian violence which has plagued the region in the recent past.

Moreover, according to a statement issued from the chief minister's office regarding the meeting, the regional government will take steps to set up military courts soon to formally implement the NAP. The statement added collection of donations by any groups or parties has been banned, officials have been directed to ensure tinted glasses are removed from private and official vehicles and police have been directed to launch a crackdown against proclaimed offenders. The statement further noted cellular network towers will be set up along all stretches of the Karakoram Highway which do not

have the facility to ensure safe travel along the strategic route.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/835705/keeping-watch-g-bs-seminaries-to-come-under-close-scrutiny/>

Shabbir Mir, “Controversial move: Federal minister to also serve as Gilgit-Baltistan governor”

The Express Tribune, February 13, 2015

An amendment has been made to the Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Empowerment and Self-governance Order 2009, allowing federal minister for G-B and Kashmir affairs to handle the additional responsibility of G-B governor. “The amendment was made by the Ministry of G-B and Kashmir Affairs on the advice of the prime minister and endorsed by the President of Pakistan,” an insider privy to the development noted on February 12. “The amendment has been inserted in Article 20 of the Governance Order 2009.” Sources stated after the amendment, Federal Minister for G-B and Kashmir Affairs Birjis Tahir will become the G-B governor through a notification, replacing Pir Karam Ali Shah, who was appointed to the post during Pakistan Peoples Party's tenure. The move has triggered a sharp reaction in the region, with the main opposition party terming it a ploy to influence elections which are likely to be held in May 2015. “This is meant to hijack elections in the region,” former G-B chief minister Mehdi Shah noted. “But we will resist this with full force,” vowed Shah, who is also PPP's president for G-B and served as the chief minister from 2009 to 2014.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/837298/controversial-move-federal-minister-to-also-serve-as-gilgit-baltistan-governor/>

Shabbir Mir, “IS wall-chalking: G-B police arrest five suspects”

The Express Tribune, February 15, 2015

Police have arrested several men allegedly involved in graffiti favouring the so-called Islamic State (IS) in different parts of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B). The first wall-chalking in the region, welcoming the self-proclaimed caliphate, was spotted in Gilgit back in November 2014. Almost three months later, similar graffiti was seen on walls in Skardu, stirring fear

among locals and signalling the possible presence of the notorious group in G-B. “Skardu city police have arrested Zakaria, a resident of Shigar Valley, for spraying slogans in favour of the terror group,” read a statement issued by G-B's central police office. According to the statement, Zakaria was caught red-handed in Skardu. Moreover, Shamsuddin, Awais, Zahid Mir and Muhammad Yasin were also arrested in connection to the incident and Tassar police registered cases against them. “A joint investigation team (JIT) has been formed and interrogation is under way,” stated department spokesperson Mubarak Jan while speaking on February 14. The arrests came days after G-B's new police chief Zafar Iqbal Awan took charge and announced to implement the National Action Plan in letter and spirit. “Awan has issued clear directives in this regard and police will not spare militants and their sympathisers,” added Jan.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/838486/is-wall-chalking-g-b-police-arrest-five-suspects/>

Asim Yasin, “PPP opposes changes in GB empowerment order”

The News, February 15, 2015

The PPP on February 14 expressed reservations about the recent changes made in the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment Order 2009 and arbitrary appointment of a 12-member caretaker cabinet, the latest move paving the way for appointing the federal minister for Kashmir Affairs as Governor GB in gross violation of the region's autonomy and placing a question mark over the fairness of the forthcoming polls. A PPP delegation of GB, led by former Chief Minister Syed Mehdi Shah, called on former President Asif Ali Zardari in Zardari House on February 14. PPP spokesperson Senator Farhatullah Babar stated that the delegation brought to the attention of the co-chairman and expressed serious reservations about the recent changes made in the G-B Empowerment Order 2009, the arbitrary appointment of a 12-member caretaker cabinet and the latest move paving the way for appointing the federal minister for Kashmir Affairs as Governor G-B in gross violation of the region's autonomy and placing a question mark on the fairness of the forthcoming polls. Issues relating to the setting up

of economic zones as part of the Economic Corridor in Gilgit-Baltistan were also discussed during the meeting.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-35911-PPP-opposes-changes-in-GB-empowerment-order>

“PML-N is going for pre-poll rigging in Gilgit Baltistan: Mazari”

The Nation, February 15, 2015

Dr Shireen Mazari, Central Information Secretary PTI, today criticized the PML-N government once again of planning to rig the forthcoming elections in GB, by planting their federal minister Birjees Tahir as Governor Gilgit Baltistan. This is a clear case of pre poll rigging by PML-N, Mazari stated. She pointed out that PML-N has never played without having their own umpires and without fixing matches - beginning from 1990 when they received funds from the ISI to the greatest electoral fraud in 2013. Unless the 2013 electoral fraud is investigated by an independent inquisitorial Judicial Commission, PML-N will continue to seek electoral success through rigging. She stated PTI and its Chairman Imran Khan will fight till they expose the 2013 electoral fraud before the nation.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/15-Feb-2015/pml-n-is-going-for-pre-poll-rigging-in-gilgit-baltistan-mazari>

“GB autonomy under threat”

Dawn Editorial, February 17, 2015

The appointment of the federal minister for Kashmir affairs as governor of Gilgit-Baltistan has been criticised across the political spectrum. It is being described by political parties as evidence of the PML-N's 'pre-poll rigging' in the region in order to create a tailor-made government in the upcoming legislative assembly elections. The PPP, which ruled the region under the previous elected set-up, is not happy with the appointment of the caretaker cabinet or the governor, while the PTI has voiced its reservations about GB's chief election commissioner. While nationwide the trend is to grant the provinces and regions greater devolved powers, attempts are being made to go back to ruling GB through fiat from the federal capital. Change in GB's administrative set-up began during

Gen Musharraf's rule, but it was the previous PPP-led federal government that promulgated the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order, 2009, altering the region's name from the Northern Areas and giving the local elected leadership a greater degree of power.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1164062/gb-autonomy-under-threat>

“Diامر-Bhasha project: Heftier payouts offered to residents displaced by dam”

The Express Tribune, February 23, 2015

The federal government has agreed to hand over bigger payouts to people displaced by the construction of Diامر-Bhasha dam. Compensation has been increased by 25 per cent for those forced out of their homes and properties, and the government will soon disburse Rs25 billion among them. Earlier, a demonstration was staged over the delay in the payment of compensation money under the previous agreement and protesters demanded a revision in the rate after the government failed to pay the compensation within the deadline, i.e. December 31, 2013. The displaced residents claimed that the compensation amount for their lands taken over by the government for construction of the dam should be revised keeping in view the increase in the dollar rate as well as the steep rise in the market price of lands across the country. Following protests, the government constituted a ministerial committee comprising Minister Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Barjis Tahir, Minister for Water and Power Khawaja Asif, Minister of Information Pervaiz Rashid and Minister for Finance Ishaq Dar to look into the matter. A few days back, G-B Governor Barjees Tahir had stated the prime minister specially inducted him as governor to expedite the mega development projects.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/842669/diامر-bhasha-project-heftier-payouts-offered-to-residents-displaced-by-dam/>

“PML-N names candidate for LA-III by-poll”

The Nation, February 26, 2015

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) announced to field Arshad Mahmood Ghazi, a former AJK minister, as its candidate to contest the

LA-III by-election scheduled to be held on March 15. When contacted, Central Secretary General Shah Ghulam Qadir stated that his party had decided to field the former minister as its candidate in the by-election to LA-III of the AJK Legislative Assembly, lower house of the AJK parliament. Ghazi and Muhammad Saeed, the party's central secretary finance and former president of FPCCI and AJKCCI, were in the race for getting the party ticket. Political observers believe that he will have a close contest with PTI's Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry, former prime minister of AJK, and PPP's Muhammad Ashraf, an ex-mayor of Mirpur.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/26-Feb-2015/pml-n-names-candidate-for-la-iii-by-poll>

“Securing foreign climbers: High Altitude Police unit set up in Gilgit”

The Express Tribune, February 22, 2015

A High Altitude Police (HAP) Unit has been established for the first time by the Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) police, stated a press release issued on February 22. The body has been set up on the directives of the newly-appointed police chief of G-B, Captain (ret'd) Zafar Iqbal Awan. “Its prime duty will be to provide foolproof security to foreign mountaineers,” noted the press release. “In its initial phases, the unit will comprise 50 police officials while 50 more will be appointed later.” According to the press release, Awan also handed 12 special kits for policemen to Diامر SP Rauf Qaisarani at a ceremony in Gilgit. Speaking on the occasion, the police chief stated the special kits will help police officials withstand frostbite while on high altitude. “Officials affiliated with the HAP unit should be encouraged to wear these kits rather than their police uniform,” he stated. In June 2013, gunmen dressed as paramilitary forces had stormed into the Nanga Parbat base camp and killed 10 foreign trekkers and their local guide.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/842621/securing-foreign-climbers-high-altitude-police-unit-set-up-in-gilgit/>

Shabbir Mir, “Powered up: Alliance in G-B gives seven-day ultimatum to end outages”

The Express Tribune, February 3, 2015

Awami Action Committee (AAC), an alliance of 23

parties in Gilgit-Baltistan, has given the government a seven-day ultimatum to resolve G-B's power crisis. "If the government turns a blind eye to our demand, we will paralyse life in the entire region," warned AAC Chairman Advocate Ehsan Ali while speaking on February 2. "Our natural resources remain untapped while we suffer due to the government's inefficiency," he stated. G-B alone can produce 60,000 megawatts of electricity through its renewable energy resources, he further added. The AAC announced the ultimatum during a rally held on February 1. Protesters marched from Ghari Bagh to Airport Chowk. Formed last year to press the government to lower wheat prices, the alliance of 23 religious and nationalist parties has come back to life. In April 2014, the AAC forced the government into a Rs6 reduction in the price of one kilogramme of wheat. Around 20 to 22 hours of load-shedding is a norm in Gilgit, the headquarters of G-B. The crisis worsens from November to April every year. According to a Public Works department official, G-B's power requirement is 40 megawatts while only 10 megawatts are generated at Naltar and Kargah power stations.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/831689/powered-up-alliance-in-g-b-gives-seven-day-ultimatum-to-end-outages/>

Shabbir Mir, "For the record: Not affiliated with any political party, clarifies G-B CM"

The Express Tribune, February 6, 2015

Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Caretaker Chief Minister Sher Jehan Mir has clarified he is not affiliated with any political party in the region. Mir refuted Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan's claims and termed them "a pack of lies" in a press release issued on February 5. "Imran Khan wants to mislead the masses," he stated. Speaking to the media on February 4, Khan had accused Mir of having ties with Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), saying his appointment would be challenged in the Supreme Court. Two senior politicians from G-B, Mirza Hussain and Amina Ansari, announced to quit Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid and join PTI during the press conference. The caretaker CM, who was appointed after a consensus between the previous government and opposition, lashed out at Khan and called him

an "ill-informed man". Mir stated, "It is evident from his press talk that he knows little about the constitutional status of G-B." He added the region does not fall under the jurisdiction of SC. Mir stated Khan needs to learn more about G-B's legal and political dynamics before passing blanket judgements.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/833603/for-the-record-not-affiliated-with-any-political-party-clarifies-g-b-cm/>

"Gilgit-Baltistan: Gubernatorial choice of govt rankles PTI"

The Express Tribune, February 16, 2015

A federal minister's appointment as Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) governor ahead of elections in the territory has given Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) another reason to cry foul against the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and allege rigging. A day after Minister for Kashmir Affairs Barjees Tahir's appointment, the party stated the government was once again planning to rig the forthcoming elections in G-B. "It is a clear case of pre-poll rigging by the ruling PML-N," stated PTI Information Secretary Dr Shireen Mazari in a statement on February 15. Mazari stated the PML-N has never played without having its own umpires and fixing matches. The appointment of the new governor of G-B also provided the PTI to renew its demand, with a new vigour, for the constitution of a judicial commission to investigate rigging allegations in 2013 general elections. The party has held several rounds of talks with the PML-N, during and after its 126-day sit-in, it has even warned it could re-launch its protest campaign against the government any time. Yet the government has not responded to the PTI over judicial commission.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/839020/gilgit-baltistan-gubernatorial-choice-of-govt-rankles-pti/>

Peer Muhammad, "G-B gubernatorial row: Barjees Tahir takes oath but predecessor says he is still governor"

The Express Tribune, February 17, 2015

Even hours after federal minister Chaudhry Barjees Tahir took oath as Gilgit-Baltistan's new governor on February 16, his predecessor, Pir Karam Ali

Shah, insisted that he was still governor and had not been removed from his office. Acting Chief Justice of Supreme Appellate Court G-B Raja Jalaluddin administered the oath of office to Barjees Tahir at a modest ceremony at the Ministry of Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir Affairs as scores of people from G-B staged a protest in Islamabad. Protesters accused the prime minister of violating the 18th Constitutional Amendment by appointing a non-local governor. According to initial plan, the swearing-in ceremony was scheduled to be at the Gilgit-Baltistan House, but the venue was later changed to avoid a planned protest by people from G-B. Barjees' predecessor Pir Karam Ali Shah was not invited to the ceremony. Interestingly, Shah stated he has neither resigned from his office nor was he officially informed by the government about his removal. "I still consider myself the constitutional governor of Gilgit-Baltistan," Shah noted. "This is unconstitutional, unethical and illegal to appoint a new governor without taking resignation from or officially removing the incumbent governor... we seem to be living in the age of Sultans instead of a democratic era," he further stated.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/839592/g-b-gubernatorial-row-barjees-tahir-takes-oath-but-predecessor-says-he-is-still-governor/>

Asim Yasin, "PPP submits adjournment motion in Senate on appointment of GB governor"

The News, February 17, 2015

The Pakistan People's Party has submitted adjournment motion in the Senate to discuss what it says the "sudden, mysterious and inexplicable roll back of the GB Empowerment Order 2009" to appoint federal minister for Kashmir affairs as Governor of Gilgit Baltistan "on a public holiday on February 14". The adjournment motion submitted by Senator Farhatullah Babar noted, "The sudden, mysterious and inexplicable rollback of GB Empowerment Order 2009, the subsequent appointment within hours of a non GB resident as Governor on the eve of crucial polls there amounts to a grave assault on the autonomy of the region and a public declaration of no-confidence in over 2 million men and women of the region". The adjournment motion stated that this provocative assault on the autonomy of the region and affront to

its people has grim forebodings for the political and social stability of Gilgit-Baltistan and calls for an urgent debate by suspending the normal proceedings of the House.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-302131-PPP-submits-adjournment-motion-in-Senate-on-appointment-of-GB-governor>

Shoaib-ur-Rehman Siddiqui, "Free, fair elections to be ensured in Gilgit-Baltistan"

Business Recorder, February 18, 2015

GB Governor Chaudhry Barjees Tahir is committed to ensure free and fair elections in Gilgit Baltistan (GB). This was stated in a clarification issued by Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan in which it dispelled apprehensions of the press. The ministry clarified that the Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan has been appointed as ex-officio GB Governor and the impression that the move has been made to influence elections is merely based on speculations and has no relevance with the story published in the press. The clarification was issued with reference to the news items appeared in the print media on February 17 concerning the federal minister serving as GB Governor. It was further stated that a caretaker chief minister was appointed on the advice of outgoing Chief Minister and Leader of the Opposition. Similarly, the election commissioner was also appointed on the advice of former Governor and all the parties of Gilgit-Baltistan were taken on board.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/1-front-top-news/225930-free-fair-elections-to-be-ensured-in-gilgit-baltistan.html>

Qamar Zaman, "NA opposition leader alleges pre-poll rigging in G-B elections"

The Express Tribune, February 18, 2015

Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Khursheed Shah stated on February 18 that there has been pre-poll rigging in the Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) elections and has written to the premier in this regard but has still received no answer. "I have written a letter to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that there has been pre-poll rigging in the G-B elections but I got no reply from him," Shah stated while speaking in his parliamentary chamber. "This does not happen in developed country that an opposition

leader writes a letter to the head of the state to which he does not reply.” Shah stated that there were countrywide protests against Prime Minister Nawaz and his government claiming that they were involved in electoral fraud in the 2013 general elections but the government has learnt no lessons. The opposition leader stated many parties have raised concerns about the appointment of the G-B governor. “The prime minister is making more friends than enemies,” the leader of the opposition stated.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/840258/na-opposition-leader-alleges-pre-poll-rigging-in-g-b-elections/>

Shabbir Mir, “Without govt aid: Shimshalis build irrigation channel on self-help basis”

The Express Tribune, February 20, 2015

Bereft of government development schemes in the region, the people of Shimshal Valley, the last village near Pakistan's border with China, have begun digging a water channel on self-help basis to irrigate their fields. The canal was deemed necessary because as spring approaches, time is running out for ploughing. Government help is hard to come by in this remote valley located 300 kilometres from Gilgit, and if the channel is not built, locals might lose the season's yield. The building of the Korbant channel began earlier this month and is being undertaken by scouts and volunteers led by Sifat Khan and Abdul Hassan, respectively. A group of men flatten the land, smash rocks and cut through the mountains without any protective measures to pave way for the four-kilometre Korbant channel in the valley which is inhabited by nearly 2,000 people. However, this is not the first project that has been initiated and completed entirely by the locals, according to Abdul Joshi, a resident of Shimshal.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/841194/without-govt-aid-shimshalis-build-irrigation-channel-on-self-help-basis/>

Qamar Zaman, “Vote fraud row: PPP offers to mediate between PTI and PML-N”

The Express Tribune, February 19, 2015

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) stated it is ready to play the role of an 'umpire' between the government

and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) over the constitution of a judicial commission to probe allegations of rigging in the May 2013 general election. Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Syed Khurshid Ahmed Shah who belongs to the PPP stated on February 18 that he had met with Finance Minister Ishaq Dar over the issue and expressed willingness to play a role for the resolution of the long-drawn crisis. “It will be dangerous for the country, Constitution and government itself if it does not constitute a judicial commission,” Shah stated, adding: “The PPP wants the PTI to return to parliament.” The PTI has had several rounds of talks with the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) over judicial commission and claims that the government has backtracked from its commitment. The PTI has also warned it could re-launch its movement against rigging in general elections. Shah linked the issue with what was happening in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) ahead of elections and stated it seemed as if the government has not learnt any lessons.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/840632/vote-fraud-row-ppp-offers-to-mediate-between-pti-and-pml-n/>

Peer Muhammad, “G-B governor: Barjees Tahir to oversee mega projects”

The Express Tribune, February 20, 2015

Gilgit-Baltistan Governor Chaudhry Barjees Tahir on February 19 stated that he was appointed to oversee and monitor the projects under way in the area under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP). “It is the discretion of the federal government to appoint governor of G-B and I have been elevated to this office particularly to monitor the mega development projects in the area,” Barjees Tahir stated while talking to the media in Islamabad. Tahir is the federal minister for Kashmir Affairs and G-B and now the governor of the territory. Defending the move of the federal government to appoint a new governor without informing the sitting governor, Tahir stated that Pir Karam Ali Shah was appointed by the former president, so there was no need to send him a formal termination letter or extracting a resignation from him by the sitting president. Tahir also mentioned

that as per the rules of the Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self Rule Order 2009, he is eligible to be appointed as governor of G-B as he could be elected as member National Assembly and is over 35 years of age, which is the key qualification for this office. The new governor also levelled allegations of irregularities committed by his predecessor.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/841318/g-b-governor-barjees-tahir-to-oversee-mega-projects/>

“PTI chief hopeful to win upcoming Azad Kashmir elections”

The News Tribe, February 22, 2015

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Imran Khan on February 22 stated he will win upcoming Azad Kashmir election, but he would succeed in next general election too in spite of whatever tricks the prime minister plays. Speaking to media on February 22 along with PTI Azad Kashmir President Barrister Sultan Mehmood, the PTI chief lamented that a dictator conducted local bodies' election in the country but political parties opposed the polls, concentrating all the powers in their hands. “I am going to introduce a new local bodies system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,” he added. Imran alleged that the PM was hiring his own umpire for election in Gilgit Baltistan. He stated rigging had started in Gilgit Baltistan that he would not allow and would take to street. He stated acting Governor Barjis Tahir was a PML-N leader who had announced a development fund before election. The PTI head stated that sense of deprivation was increasing in the small provinces while people of Gilgit-Baltistan had been turned into second-rate citizens.

<http://www.thenewstribes.com/2015/02/22/pti-chief-hopeful-to-win-upcoming-azad-kashmir-elections/>

Shoaib-ur-Rehman Siddiqui, “Standing Committee of KA&GB directs to complete on going schemes”

Business Recorder, February 25, 2015

Chairman of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan on February 25 directed concerned ministry to complete on-going schemes in Kashmir and Gilgit

Baltistan. The meeting of the committee was held at Parliament House under the chairmanship of MNA Major (Retd) Tahir Iqbal. Federal Secretary for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan (KA&GB) Shahid ullah Baig informed the committee that ongoing development schemes would be completed soon and after their completion, new development project would be started in the areas. He told the committee that there were nine projects of Federal PSDP under the KA&GB division which were at various stages of implementation. He stated that Prime Minister, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif visited Kashmir various times adding that the present government had allocated Rs 48 billions to the government of Kashmir for the various development projects. He stated that government also gave amount of Rs 47 billion to the Gilgit Baltistan for their development projects as well. The Secretary also informed the committee that work had been started on the 90pc stalled ongoing development schemes in Gilgit Baltistan.

<http://www.brecorder.com/top-news/1-front-top-news/227661-standing-committee-of-ka.html?gb-directs-to-complete-on-going-schemes=>

Mumtaz Alvi, “Imran to move SC against GB appointments”

The News, February 23, 2015

The Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Imran Khan, on February 22 stated the appointments of Barjees Tahir as the governor, an 'employee of Karakoram Bank' as the caretaker Chief Minister and the election commissioner of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) were tantamount to pre-poll rigging and announced to move the Supreme Court against these steps. Speaking at a news conference and reception at the residence of Azad Jammu and Kashmir's ex-premier Barrister Sultan Mahmood, the PTI chairman strongly advocated the election of senators through open voting to stem the chances of vote-buying and corruption. He asked all the political parties to bring an amendment for the purpose if they really wanted to ensure transparency in the Senate elections. He alleged Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif could not play with neutral umpires which was why he had already appointed his party men in the region to rig the upcoming polls there.

Under Article 101 of the Constitution, Imran Khan noted that a governor should be a resident of Gilgit-Baltistan while Barjees was from the Punjab and a PML-N loyalist.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-36033-Imran-to-move-SC-against-GB-appointments>

“NA body for completion of ongoing projects in AJK, GB on priority”

Daily Times, February 26, 2015

National Assembly (NA) Standing Committee on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) recommended only on-going projects should be prioritised for Public Sector Development Programmes (PSDP 2015-16) and after their completion new projects could be initiated. The committee with Malik Ibrar Ahmad as chair discussed and scrutinised budgetary proposals relating to PSDP 2015-16. Secretary Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and GB apprised Committee about development projects of Ministry and its attached departments.

He informed on going projects in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and GB included construction of Rothera Haryana Bridge across Reservoir Channel on Mirpur-Islamgarh Road, Athmaqam-Keran and Noseri-Leswa Bypass, construction of three medical colleges in AJK, establishment of regional grid-Baltistan and five hydro-power projects etc. The budgetary proposals regarding PSDP for 2015-16 put before Committee for consideration/approval were unanimously approved after having detail discussion.

The Committee recommended administrative cost should be curtailed so medical colleges in AJK could be completed in time and in this respect Committee recommended a Board of AJK based community abroad should be mobilised for fund raising to overcome financial deficit in this sector. The Committee recommended measures should be taken to develop the medicinal plant industry especially in GB.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/business/26-Feb-2015/na-body-for-completion-of-ongoing-projects-in-ajk-gb-on-priority>

“Back to square one: AJK to re-tender Jagran

power project”

The Express Tribune, February 2, 2015

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government will re-award contract for the establishment of the 48-megawatt Jagran phase-II hydel power project. The contract, which was previously awarded to a China Water and Electricity company in a joint venture with a Pakistani construction firm, was cancelled without any reasons by the government. Sources in the government, however, noted that the earlier contract was mired by allegations of financial irregularities from initial documentation to the tendering. AJK Power Development Organisation Minister Chaudhry Yaseen stated the new tendering process will be completed in six months. “The contract of 48-megawatt Jagran phase-II hydel power project will be awarded through transparent bidding to an international firm and the project will be completed in 40 months,” he stated. French Agency for Development will provide a soft loan of 68 million Euros for the power project. The power house would be constructed at Jagran stream, a tributary of Neelum River in Neelum district. The project is also expected to create employment opportunities for more than 600 people of AJK.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/831351/back-to-square-one-ajk-to-re-tender-jagran-power-project/>

“AJK govt to introduce computer literacy program from gross root level”

Aaj TV, February 2, 2015

Azad Jammu Kashmir government inked a phased integrated plan to launch computer literacy program from the primary education level in the educational institutions, official sources stated. “The government of AJK principally decided to introduce computer literacy from class 1st in all state run primary schools located in all remote and backward areas side by side the urban parts of the liberated state”, the sources noted. “The remote and far flung areas will be preferred under the mass computer literacy extension program”, they added.

<http://www.aaj.tv/2015/02/ajk-govt-to-introduce-computer-literacy-program-from-gross-root-level/>

“PM addresses joint session of AJK LA, Council”

Samaab TV, February 5, 2015

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on February 5 addressed joint session of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly and Kashmir Council on the Kashmir Solidarity Day. In his address the session, the PM reiterated the commitment that Pakistan firmly stands by the people of Kashmir. The PM, on the occasion, also announced uplift projects for Azad Kashmir. Earlier, he was received by AJK President Sardar Muhammad Yaqoob Khan and Prime Minister Chaudhry Abdul Majeed along with senior government officials. The Prime Minister was presented the guard of honour by a smartly turned out contingent of police. He held a meeting at AJK Speaker's chamber also attended by the AJK President and Prime Minister. The Prime Minister was also to hold a meeting with a delegation of All Parties Hurriyat Conference later in the day. Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs Chaudhry Barjees Tahir and Chairman Special Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir Maulana Fazlur Rahman also accompanied the Prime Minister.

<http://www.samaa.tv/pakistan/05-Feb-2015/pm-addresses-joint-session-of-ajk-la-council>

“Barrister Sultan joins PTI today”

The Nation, February 5, 2015

Barrister Sultan joins PTI today Former AJK Prime Minister Barrister Sultan Mehmud will join the Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf of Imran Khan on February 5. He is taking the new initiative after exercising many options during the past three decades. Many note that he is throwing his weight behind the cricketer-turned-politician because according to his assessment Imran stands a better political future compared to other parties in the field. Barrister Sultan once led the Azad Muslim Conference, which he subsequently merged with the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation League. Much later, he joined the PPP, a platform which helped him become the Prime Minister, an office he enjoyed for five years. He also remained Opposition leader in the AJK

Legislative Assembly. At the end of 2010, Barrister Sultan Mehmud again merged his party with the PPP. Sources close to him confirm that the former AJK Prime Minister has already completed talks with the PTI leadership and will join it at a Kashmir Day ceremony in Islamabad on February 5.

<http://nation.com.pk/la-hore/05-Feb-2015/barrister-sultan-joins-pti-today>

“India, Pakistan suspend trade on Kashmir border: officials”

The Express Tribune, February 8, 2015

India and Pakistan have suspended trade across their de facto border in the disputed territory of Kashmir after Indian authorities detained a truck driver accused of drug trafficking, Pakistani officials stated on February 8. Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since the two countries won independence from Britain in 1947. Both claim the scenic Himalayan territory in full. Barter trade across the de facto border began in 2008 as part of peace efforts but it is frequently disrupted over disputes. “We were informed by the Indian authorities on February 6 that they have stopped 22 Pakistani trucks which crossed the Line of Control (LOC) earlier that day,” Basharat Iqbal, trade facilitation officer on the Pakistani side of the border, told AFP. “They told us that they had discovered 12 kilogrammes of opium from a truck carrying oranges and were taking an action against the driver. After the incident, we also held 50 Indian trucks in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), because traffic crosses the border simultaneously,” stated Iqbal.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/835032/india-pakistan-suspend-trade-on-kashmir-border-officials/>

“AJK Council clarifies report”

The News, February 11, 2015

The AJK Council Secretariat Islamabad has clarified a news item published in “The News” on February 10, titled “Lowest bidder denied Rs610 million road project”. The AJK Council Secretariat clarified that the entire tendering process was completed after a due process of law and tender was widely circulated in two national dailies i.e. “The

Nation” and “Jang”. Total four bidders participated. One bidder did not qualify technically. The other three bidders duly participated and all terms and conditions set out in the tender notice were announced before the opening of financial bids. No one objected to it. Of these three bidders, one was financially disqualified for not having credit line of Rs500 million to assess financial strength. The other two qualified all the terms and conditions of the tender notice and resultantly work of the project was awarded to the lowest bidder. It is, therefore, not correct that lowest bidder was denied the road project. All the bidding documents were also examined in the light of the terms and conditions of the PEC contract documents.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-301060-AJK-Council-clarifies-report>

“No headway in negotiations to resume cross-border bus service”

Pakistan Today, February 10, 2015

Authorities on both side of the Line of Control (LoC) again failed to reach an agreement to resume the suspended bus service and trade between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar. Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Indian Kashmir authorities met at the Chakothe Crossing Point February 10, but the meeting bore no fruits with both sides only agreeing to take up the minutes of the meeting with their respective high-ups for further consideration before the cross-border bus service and trade could be resumed. The bus service and trade between the two sides was suspended on February 6 after the Indian authorities arrested a Pakistani truck driver, accusing him of smuggling heroin. During the negotiations, the AJK authorities demanded that they should be given access to the arrested truck drivers, Inyat Hussain and Muhammad Shafiq Awan, who was arrested earlier, and the calling data of an arrested trader in India Kashmir should also be provided to verify that who he was in contact with on this side of the border. They also demanded that copies of the FIRs against the drivers should be provided to them. The AJK delegation also demanded that in future trucks from both sides should offloaded on the respective sides of bridge

instead of offloading them after crossing the bridge. The Indian authorities stated they would take up their proposals with their high-ups for consideration.

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/02/10/business/no-headway-in-negotiations-to-resume-cross-border-bus-service/>

Ershad Mahmud, “From Bani Gala to AJK”

The News, February 15, 2015

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has finally extended its wing to Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) under the leadership of former prime minister and People's Party's top leader Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhary, who joined the PTI after a long intra-party feud over the premiership. It is the third largest mainstream political party, which has entered into AJK and eyeing the upcoming local assembly elections which are due in July 2016. Pakistan's national parties have made a footprint in AJK's politics over a long time. The history of PPP in AJK goes back to 1976 when the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto travelled to Muzaffarabad and formed the Pakistan People's Party. Stalwarts of the then local politics such as Sardar Ibrahim Khan and K.H. Khursheed joined the PPP. The Pakistan Muslim League-N too opened up its chapter in 2010 when Nawaz Sharif reluctantly dashed to Muzaffarabad to inaugurate its party with former prime minister Raja Farooq Haider as its regional head.

<http://tns.thenews.com.pk/from-bani-gala-to-ajk/#.VVSDjevLzI>

Altaf Hameed Rao, “AJK CEC turns down plea seeking vote postponement”

The Nation, February 22, 2015

By-election to LA-III Mirpur city seat of Azad Jammu Kashmir Legislative Assembly will be held in all circumstances as per the schedule on March 15, 2015, declared AJK Chief Election Commissioner Justice Munir Ahmed Chaudhry categorically while dismissing an application, seeking postponement of the election for some time. The petition was filed by a candidate Raja Khalil Yousaf belonging to the ruling PPP AJK. According to details, a total of 28 candidates had filed their nomination papers with

the District Returning Officer by last date of February 18 to contest the scheduled March 15 by-election to LA-III Mirpur city, which had fallen vacant following resignation by former AJK Prime Minister Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry from the seat because of his defection to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on February 5.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/22-Feb-2015/ajk-cec-turns-down-plea-seeking-vote-postponement>

“Turncoats' acceptance negates Khan's claim for change: Pervaiz”

Pakistan Today, February 23, 2015

Minister for Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage Pervaiz Rashid on February 22 stated that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan was inducting “recycled political turncoats” in his party, contrary to his claims for bringing a change. The minister, in a statement, stated the turncoats had already enjoyed many terms in government offices. He observed that PTI chief only thought of launching his party in Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) at the time of elections there. He would forget the people of these two areas like he had forgotten the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after getting their votes, he added. The minister pointed out that none of the PTI's ticket holders for Senate elections belonged to the middle class, or a representative of the masses. They were either billionaires or representatives of higher bureaucracy, he added. He stated even one of the Senate tickets was given to buy and bribe the AJK bureaucracy.

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/02/23/national/turncoats-acceptance-negates-khans-claim-for-change-pervaiz/>

“Last-Minute Defection: MC leader joins PPP ahead of by-polls”

The Express Tribune, February 25, 2015

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) will field Chaudhry Ashraf against Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry in the LA-3 Mirpur by-elections. Ashraf was the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference (AJKMC) candidate for the by-elections, but joined the PPP on February 23 in a surprise move. “I have joined the PPP to

serve the people of Mirpur, who have been exploited by Barrister Sultan for a long time,” he stated at a press conference alongside AJK Prime Minister Chaudhry Abdul Majeed. Sultan recently left the PPP to join Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), along with a few other AJK politicians. Muslim Conference President Sardar Attiq Ahmad Khan, while reacting to Ashraf joining the PPP, stated Prime Minister Majeed had stolen his candidate. “It shows that the PPP could not find a suitable candidate from their own ranks,” he stated.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/843677/last-minute-defection-mc-leader-joins-ppp-ahead-of-by-polls/>

“Azad Kashmir: More than 50 political leaders join PTI”

Dunya News, February 25, 2015

More than 50 political leaders belonging to different political parties including Pakistan Muslim League Quaid (PML-Q), Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) joined Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on February 22. Chairman PTI Imran Khan stated that PTI will win the election in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). He stated that powers will be devolved down to the people through local body elections. The political leaders that have joined PTI include former AJK Prime Minister Barrister Sultan Mahmood and several other ex-ministers. Imran Khan stated on this occasion that a new movement will be started for 'New Azad Kashmir'. Imran Khan stated that the local bodies will be introduced in AJK. He stated that the local bodies would help in curbing corruption. He also announced to hold free and fair local body elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and devolution of power to the lower levels. “Both the major parties did not hold local body elections. Punjab and Sindh have become police.

<http://dunyanews.tv/index.php/en/Pakistan/263027-Azad-Kashmir-More-than-50-political-leaders-join->

Economic Developments

Usmaan Manzoor, “Lowest bidder denied Rs610m road project”

The News, February 10, 2015

A road construction project from Muzaffarabad to Pir Chanasi (Azad Kashmir) worth Rs610 million has been dubiously awarded to a favorite contractor while the lowest bidder has been made to pay the price for quoting low rates for a government project. AJK Council advertised the project of constructing 23 km road from Muzaffarabad to Pir Chanasi (a hilly resort) but the lowest bidder has not been awarded the contract, which has raised many eyebrows. The lowest bidder has already challenged the award of contract in the respective high court. As per the quoted rates, Sardar Ilyas Alam Construction Company quoted Rs532.157 million while the second lowest bidder, Progressive Construction Company, quoted Rs539.148 million but has been awarded the contract. Transparency International has already condemned the trick

played to award the contract to the favourite contractor, as Public Procurement Rules do not contain any such clause.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-35811-Lowest-bidder-denied-Rs610m-road-project>

“Intra-Kashmir trade resumes after six days”

The News, February 11, 2015

The Intra-Kashmir trade service resumed after six days of its suspension at the Chakothei crossing point, Geo News reported on February 11. The trade service was suspended after authorities in Jammu & Kashmir levelled allegations of smuggling. It was suspended when a truck from Azad Kashmir was stopped by Indian authorities allegedly stated to be carrying contraband.

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/article-174806-Intra-Kashmir-trade-resumes-after-six-days->

International Developments

“Kashmiri delegation holds meeting with US Congressman”

Kashmir Watch, February 5, 2015

“We understand that Kashmir is an issue and unresolved as per the United Nations resolutions.”, this was stated by US Congressman Tim Walberg in a meeting with 3-member delegation from Azad Jammu and Kashmir at Capitol Hill on February 4. The 3-member delegation, led by AJK Cabinet Minister Faisal Rathore, was accompanied by Murtaza Durrani Adviser to the Govt of AJK and Executive Director of Kashmiri Scandinavian Council Norway, Sardar Ali Shahnawaz Khan. Faisal Rathore briefed the US Congressman about the developmental challenges faced by Govt of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. He urged the Congressman that United States should help to improve the standard of living of the people neglected by the world community due to the unresolved conflict. He urged that US should introduce some investment schemes for the development of AJK. The minister in this regard invited the US congressman to visit Muzaffarabad by taking the stock of the situation. US Congressman accepted the invitation and agreed to visit AJK in near future.

<http://kashmirwatch.com/news.php/2015/02/05/kashmiri-delegation-holds-meeting-with-us-congressman.html>

“UK-AJK co-op to focus on health and education sectors”

The Nation, February 26, 2015

A strategy is being evolved to enhance bilateral cooperation in the fields of education and health sectors between British city of Birmingham and Mirpur and other cities of AJK, Lord Mayor of Birmingham Councillor Syed Shafique Hussain Shah. He was speaking at a luncheon hosted in

his honour by Ghulam Rasool Awami, the administrator of Mirpur Municipal Corporation, on February 25. He stated that the exchange of bilateral cooperation in the fields of education, health and civic sectors between Mirpur and Birmingham could bring both the cities closer. The delegation of British Councillors and eminent icons comprised, besides Syed Shafique Hussain, Lord Mayor of Aylesbury city Councillor Muhammad Tufail, British Kashmiri journalist Sajid Yousaf and Kashmiri Diaspora Syed Nazir Hussain Shah. The ceremony was largely attended by the citizens representing all walks of life including high ranking officials of Mirpur Divisional Administration. Mr Shafique Hussain stated that the exchange of bilateral cooperation will help exchange technical know-how in the related fields. He stated that it will usher in the new era of the extension of quality studies in the educational institutions of Birmingham and Mirpur.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/26-Feb-2015/uk-ajk-co-op-to-focus-on-health-and-education-sectors>

Other Developments

“Baltistan people oppose shifting of school project to Gilgit”

Dawn, February 22, 2015

Baltistan people opposed shifting of school project to Gilgit. The people of Baltistan region have resented reported plans to shift the site of a USTATED-funded school of education from Skardu to Gilgit. Approved in 2012, the school was to be constructed by the Karakorum International University in its Skardu campus, as the USTATED had given a donation of \$25 million for the purpose to accommodate students under the HEC approved new teacher education degree programmes. The project is part of USTATED financed \$300 million project to improve quality of teaching and learning in classrooms at 10 public sector universities throughout the country. The people of Baltistan were happy that the school would ensure a bright future for their children, but their hopes were dashed when they learnt that some elements in the KIU were opposing it. Some elements tried to shift the school project to Gilgit and also selected a piece of land. These elements also made the USTATED officials visit the selected site in Gilgit city, but the latter rejected the location.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1165171/baltistan-people-oppose-shifting-of-school-project-to-gilgit>

“Divided Societies: Intra-Kashmir women conference begins”

The Express Tribune, February 1, 2015

A two-day intra-Kashmir conference of Kashmiri women began to discuss women's issues on both sides of the Line of Control in Jammu & Kashmir to ensure a vibrant role of Kashmiri women for an early settlement of the longstanding Kashmir dispute. The Intra-Kashmir Women Dialogue is being under the auspices of the AJK Women for Peace Organisation (AJKWFPO). Former chief justice of AJK High Court, Justice (Retd) Abdul Majeed Mallick was the chief guest at the inaugural session of the conference whereas Dr. Attiya Innayat Ullah, former federal minister, and Patron in Chief of AJK WFPO was also in the chair. “The focus of the summit is 'addressing women's issues in divided societies,” Secretary Information AJK WFPO Dr Zahida Qasim stated in her welcome address while highlighting the salient features of the summit.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/830979/divided-societies-intra-kashmir-women-conference-begins/>

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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