

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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sub-standard 13th Diemer Basha
flour Amendment
autonomy Cultural tourism
Civil disobedience
Gilgit-Baltistan CPEC
boycott POK
Dasu Hydropower project



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Contents

Political Developments

- A Non Cooperation Movement Is Taking Hold of ‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’
- Srinagar declared Red Zone for drones
- Modi in Kashmir Nature’s Fury
- Wani urges UNHCR to release complete report on rights abuses in ‘IIOJK’
- Javed Iqbal condemns Indian PM Narendra Modi’s visit to Srinagar
- Int’l Day of Disarmament celebrations ring hollow as India continues to neglect Kashmiris’ aspirations
- CII to apprise SC of ambiguities in Mubarak Sani case ruling
- APHC calls for shutdown in ‘IIOJK’ during Modi visit
- Exiled Kashmiri leader Dr. Mubeen Shah calls for Imposition of world economic sanctions against India
- Complete shutdown observed in IIOJK on Modi’s visit
- Losing history
- US lawmaker Terry Meza seeks peaceful solution of Kashmir dispute
- One killed as snow, landslide bring life to standstill in GB
- Hydropower Controversy
- OIC voices concern over India’s Kashmir abuses

Economic Developments

- Diamer-Bhasu dam, Dasu hydropower projects: Wapda chief for accelerating construction work
- 70 tons of minerals recovered from a Chinese Citizen in Skardu
- Lost Treasures: The Threat to Gilgit-Baltistan’s Ancient Heritage
- IIOJK PHE daily wagers seek regularization

Vernacular Urdu Media

- In the wake of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to 'Indian Occupied' Kashmir, Protest Rallies in Kotli
- 'AJK' Food Minister Chaudhary Mohammad Akbar Ibrahim took notice of sub-standard flour
- Security forces in Indian Jammu and Kashmir are doing Worst Human Rights violations: Gul Zaman Awan
- With No Salary for Five months, MNCH Employees Struggle to Meet Ends
- Tight restrictions enforced in IIOJK ahead of Modi's visit

Political Developments

A Non Cooperation Movement Is Taking Hold of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir'

The Friday Times, 06 March 2024

It almost has the look of an 'anarchist' utopia that only a few could fathom right under Islamabad's nose, but understandably away from the media spotlight. 'Azad Kashmir' (AJK) is witnessing a momentous civil disobedience movement around the boycott of electricity bills. The idea that people do not have to pay for utilities as they have ownership of natural resources has taken root here, and it begs a thorough inquiry as to how this development took place.

In May 2023, in the picturesque town of Rawalakot, the headquarters of district Poonch and the seat of 1947's armed uprising against Maharaja Hari Singh, a few volunteers started a sit-in against rising flour and electricity prices that quickly gained momentum, followed by a boycott of electricity bills. According to the details released by the electricity department of AJK, around 70 to 80% of users in the successive months boycotted the bills, with some areas touching 93% boycott several times.

Initially, the movement remained confined to the Poonch division, but with the formation of the Joint Awami Action Committee, it spread to Mirpur and Muzaffarabad as well. A highly unpopular government in 'AJK' that came as a consequence of the region's

majority lawmakers abdicating their loyalties after PTI's downfall in Pakistan was unable to assuage tempers – and so it failed to counter the popularity of emerging young leaders, particularly Umer Nazir Kashmiri and Shaukat Nawaz Mir, along with scores of others who surpassed the popularity of AJK's traditional leadership. Initially, the government followed its default carrot-and-stick policy to no avail: it lodged FIRs, and arrested the movement's leaders, but later released them under public pressure. It has since tried hard to seek Islamabad's help in breaking the boycott, which has little time and attention for a peripheral problem.

It is both extraordinary and unfortunate that for the last nine months, people in AJK have remained steadfast in their disobedience, causing a great deal of revenue loss to the government, which relies heavily on income from the boycotted sources. It is pertinent to note that before the 13th amendment in the interim constitution of AJK, the government had no rights over hydroelectric power generation, and consequently, projects such as Mangla and Neelum-Jhelum didn't fall under the jurisdiction of AJK's government. After the much-awaited 13th Amendment, a feather in the cap of former Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider, some level of autonomy was restored in AJK, but the this development did not go well with the establishment, and it tried hard to dilute the region's autonomy every time, resulting in protests across AJK.

The Awami Action Committee now pushes along with the agenda of taking such projects under the control of the Azad government that make use of the region's land and water resources.

AJK produces a mammoth 3,000 megawatts of cheap electricity, whereas the maximum requirement of the region is 400 megawatts. And yet there are long hours of load shedding on top of burdensome bills. Consequently, one of the demands set forth by the leaders of the Awami Action Committee is to charge users a minimum of PKR 2.59 per unit that is in accordance with the production cost of Mangla. The government has been charging almost five times the production cost, citing reasons such as the use of furnace oil in production – a problem related to independent power producers (IPPs) that has very little to do with power generation and usage in AJK itself.

Surprisingly, instead of understanding the matter in its true spirit, Islamabad Electric and Supply Corporation (IESCO) went to the Supreme Court of Pakistan on the issue of GST application in bills collected from 'AJK' and cited how New Delhi has done the same in Indian Occupied Kashmir. It did not comply with Articles 157 and 161 of Pakistan's constitution, which bars the government from making a profit out of AJK residents' pockets through raising the electricity tariff and ensures the priority supply of locally produced electricity to the region. Instead, IESCO maintained the strange position that the electricity produced in AJK is actually 'exported' to AJK from

Pakistan! The SC, sensing the absurdity of the argument and sensitivity related to the case, refrained from making any judgments and asked IESCO to raise the matter with the federal government – which is yet to wake up from its slumber. The recent boycott came on the heels of simmering discontent in the region since the 5th of August that shook the morale, trust, and confidence of the Kashmiri people in any policy that Islamabad had for either side of historical Kashmir. It is for this reason that several rounds of negotiations between Muzaffarabad and Islamabad, as well as between the Awami Action Committee and the AJK government, have failed to produce the desired results.

On the other hand, the ongoing movement in AJK has strengthened the region's resolve for more autonomy in accordance with the mandate given by the United Nations, and the calls to revisit the Karachi Agreement that governs the scheme of relations between Pakistan and the AJK government have become stronger. Unfortunately, Pakistan's Kashmir policy is in disarray, and contrary to the past, it now relies heavily on trolls and fake social media accounts, fostering artificial narratives that lack genuineness and depth.

It may seem threatening that people in AJK, to a great degree, have achieved an organisation, capacity, and manoeuvrability that can upset the Kashmir chessboard, but if understood honestly, the situation can help Pakistan in numerous ways. For a

while, the people of AJK remained sidelined in Kashmir's struggle for self-determination, and it increased Pakistan's role and responsibility that it could not fulfill. Now is an appropriate time for Pakistan to yield some space and autonomy to the people of AJK and work towards building the international recognition of the region.

From the 5th of March, the people led by the Awami Action Committee have hit the roads again, moving one step closer to a final march towards Islamabad. It is high time that the new government understands the gravity of the situation and starts a political process, including the leadership of AJK and Gilgit-Baltistan, focused on settling the issues related to ownership of natural resources, political autonomy and the international recognition of these areas in accordance with the aspirations of local people.

<https://thefridaytimes.com/06-Mar-2024/a-non-cooperation-movement-is-taking-hold-of-azad-jammu-and-kashmir>

Srinagar declared Red Zone for drones

Pakistan Observer, 07 March, 2024

Srinagar, the capital of Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, has been designated a Red Zone for drone and quadcopter operations on the eve of Narendra Modi's visit.

"All unauthorized drone operations within the Red Zone will face penalties in accordance with the relevant provisions of Drone Rules, 2021. We request the cooperation of all

responsible citizens in this matter," stated the police in a released statement.

The move appears contradictory to Modi's peace mantra, which he has been advocating since the revocation of Article 370 in the territory.

According to Kashmir Media Service, employees from 13 departments including education, sports, agriculture, social welfare, rural development and others have been ordered to ensure their participation in the event. Additionally, the Food Safety department has received specific instructions to ensure the presence of representatives from 62 bakery shops located throughout the city.

The employees are from different districts in the Valley. The New Delhi-installed 'Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (IOJK) administration has ordered private schools in Srinagar to ferry these employees in their buses to the Bakshi Stadium.

Indian daily, The Hindu quoting an official circular said, "All Departmental/Sectoral Nodal Officers shall strictly ensure that vehicles allotted to their respective sectors shall only be utilised at respective identified pickup locations, keeping in view of the security measures."

According to reports, Indian agencies have been ordered to run a background check and find out whether the employees, who have been directed to attend Modi's rally, have any links with the ongoing freedom movement.

<https://pakobserver.net/srinagar-declared-red-zone-for-drones/>

Modi in Kashmir

The Dawn, 09 March 2024

Nearly five years after his government scuppered India-held Kashmir's limited autonomy, Narendra Modi descended upon the disputed territory to tell Kashmiris how 'fortunate' they were to be living under New Delhi's rule. To thwart protests, Srinagar was put under a security blanket, while rent-a-crowds were bussed in to hear Modi hold forth at a stadium, with government employees reportedly ordered to attend. The Indian PM told the crowd that he had come "to win your hearts", though his government's brutal methods have managed to alienate even some of its staunchest loyalists in the occupied region, particularly after the scrapping of Article 370 in 2019. As a former chief minister of 'Indian Held Kashmir' (IHK) noted on social media, the visit was likely designed to remind BJP supporters ahead of India's general elections that the Hindu nationalist government had 'solved' the decades-old Kashmir question — in India's favour. The reality of the matter is, of course, quite different.

The BJP may have managed to pull off an act of constitutional subterfuge — endorsed by India's Supreme Court last year — by tinkering with held Kashmir's special status. But to think that 'all is well' in the 'disputed region' is a delusion. As Pakistan's Foreign Office noted, "efforts to project normalcy are a facade". If Mr Modi was so convinced that Kashmiris

would fill the streets to welcome him, why was Srinagar put under virtual lockdown? Clearly, Kashmiris want justice, and to decide their future through the democratic process, not sops about development and tourism that India has to offer. Once the dust clears post elections, it remains to be seen how serious the new Indian government is about resolving the Kashmir question. While hawks in New Delhi would insist the Kashmir file is closed, Pakistan, the UN and the Kashmiris themselves beg to differ. If the BJP and other members of the Indian political class are serious about bringing peace to Kashmir, then only a tripartite solution — involving Pakistan, India and the Kashmiris — can pave the way for stability, and, indeed, lower the temperature in the rest of the subcontinent. Will the new dispensation in India take a bold decision and handle the Kashmir file with statesmanship? Or will the same stubborn attitude, and the associated repression and violence, continue to haunt this tortured land? The picture should be clearer in a few months.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1820209/modi-in-kashmir>

Nature's Fury

The Nation, 05 March 2024

The recent deluge of rain and snow in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), and Balochistan is a blatant reminder of our lack of disaster preparedness and resilient infrastructure. As we tally the rising death toll and witness the chaos

unfolding, it is abundantly clear that we can no longer afford to remain complacent in the face of Mother Nature's wrath.

Major roads in KP and GB have been wrecked, indicating that our infrastructure is as fragile as glass in a hailstorm. The Karakoram Highway and the Jaglot-Skardu road have become inaccessible, leading to a disruption of essential services. Thousands of people have been stranded due to the closure of roads. The National Highway Authority's struggles to clear these blockades expose the inadequacy of our current setup. This demands immediate attention from the government to improve our transportation arteries against such calamities.

Climate change exacerbates extreme weather patterns, making it necessary to invest in climate-resilient infrastructure, early warning systems, and community-based disaster preparedness programs. We cannot control nature, but we can control how prepared we are to face its fury. It is time for a paradigm shift in how we approach disaster management and infrastructure development. The people of GB deserve more than temporary relief. They deserve a government that takes their safety seriously and is ready to facilitate the people immediately.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/05-Mar-2024/nature-s-fury>

Wani urges UNHCR to release complete report on rights abuses in IIOJK

Pakistan Observer, 06 March 2024

Prominent rights activist and chairman Kashmir institute of International Relations Altaf Hussain Wani has made a passionate appeal to the UNHCR commissioner urging him to release full and comprehensive report on human rights situation in the 'Indian occupied Kashmir'.

Taking part in a general debate held under Item 2 at the ongoing 55th session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Wani, while speaking on behalf of the World Muslim Congress and International Muslim Women's Union, welcomed the statement of High Commissioner on raising the concerns on human rights situation and particularly for the people of Palestine, received a press release here from Geneva.

"The India's apartheid regime, which cherishes to violate UNSC resolution on Jammu and Kashmir is constantly violating the basic rights of Kashmiris by threatening and torturing journalists, putting leadership behind the bar, and virtually squeezing space for civil society to raise their concerns", Wani said.

Highlighting the plight of Kashmiris, he said that Kashmiris were paying the cost for asking their basic rights in the form of stolen Identity, broken families,

half widows, tortured and blinded youth, helpless and feared elders and incarcerated leadership from decades.

<https://pakobserver.net/wani-urges-unhcr-to-release-complete-report-on-rights-abuses-in-iiojkl/>

Javed Iqbal condemns Indian PM Narendra Modi's visit to Srinagar

Daily Parliament Times, 05 March 2024

Raja Javed Iqbal, Chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Overseas Council UK, vehemently condemned Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Srinagar, asserting that Modi's presence there exacerbates the pain of the Kashmiris. The Modi government will be held accountable for the countless lives lost in Kashmir. He expressed these sentiments in a statement, emphasizing that before Narendra Modi's visit, a military garrison had been established in the 'occupied valley', and the Modi government is committing severe atrocities in 'occupied Kashmir'. He highlighted that Narendra Modi's visit to Srinagar, where innocent civilians face bullets while asleep and their eyes are brutally harmed, reflects insensitivity to the plight of Kashmiris. How will the innocent Kashmiris, enduring gunfire, welcome Modi, the one who robs them of their vision? He underscored the ongoing arbitrary curfews, blockades, searches, and detentions of freedom leaders in occupied Kashmir. The international community should take note of the serious human rights violations

perpetrated by the Indian army in the occupied valley.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/03/05/raja-javed-iqbal-vehemently-condemned-indian-pm-narendra-modis-visit-to-srinagar/>

Int'l Day of Disarmament celebrations ring hollow as India continues to neglect Kashmiris' aspirations

Pakistan Observer, 06 March 2024

According to a report released by Kashmir Media Service, India's persistent neglect of the political aspirations of Kashmiris has not only heightened unrest among them but has also triggered two wars between India and Pakistan.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has, in the past, emphasized the imperative of eliminating nuclear weapons as a critical step towards ensuring global peace. He has highlighted Kashmir as the singular international conflict capable of plunging India and Pakistan into a nuclear catastrophe.

The report cited former US President Bill Clinton's characterization of Kashmir as the "most dangerous place on earth" and former Prime Minister of New Zealand Helen Clark's assertion that it is a "nuclear flashpoint," underscoring the gravity of the Kashmir issue on the global stage.

Questioning the necessity of maintaining a staggering presence of over 1,000,000 military and paramilitary personnel in the Kashmir

Valley, a region inhabited by no more than 10 million people, the report referenced Indian political figures who have admitted to the loss of Kashmir.

The report cautioned that the volatile situation in the ‘occupied Jammu and Kashmir’ has the potential to engulf the entire South Asian region. It is therefore incumbent upon world powers, particularly the United States, to heed the urgency of resolving the Kashmir dispute.

The international legitimacy of Kashmir’s struggle, backed by numerous UN Security Council resolutions, affirms the right to self-determination for its people.

Failure to address the Kashmir dispute, the report warned, would have far-reaching consequences beyond the borders of India and Pakistan.

<https://pakobserver.net/intl-day-of-disarmament-celebrations-ring-hollow-as-india-continues-to-neglect-kashmiris-aspirations/>

CII to apprise SC of ambiguities in Mubarak Sani case ruling

The Express Tribune, 06 March 2024

The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) pointed out the ambiguities in the Supreme Court decision in Mubarak Ahmad Sani case, which would be sent to the apex court, its Chairman Dr Qibla Ayaz said.

Speaking at a press conference with Allama Tahir Ashrafi and other members of the CII, Ayaz said that a CII meeting had reviewed the apex court decision. He added that the clauses

about which the scholars had reservations would be formally communicated to the apex court through a letter.

“Comprehensive recommendations of the council will be submitted to the Supreme Court soon,” Dr Ayaz told reporters. “Recommendations about the clauses on which the council has reservations are being prepared in light of the legal opinion of two former judges.”

Responding to a question about those ambiguities, Dr Qibla Ayaz said that the Supreme Court judgment should be seen in conjunction with a previous court decision. He added that the references of the Quranic verses were unrelated to the case.

In response to a letter from the former caretaker prime minister about the law and order situation in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B), particularly against the backdrop of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the CII recommended the formation of an Ulema Board, Ayaz said.

He also told the reporters that the council also recommended to the government to prevent hoarding and illegal profiteering during the holy month of Ramazan. “Businessmen are also appealed to avoid illegal profits,” he added. On the occasion, CII member Tahir Ashrafi said that freedom should be given to everyone as much as it is given by the Constitution and the law.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2458474/cii-to-advise-sc-of-ambiguities-in-mubarak-sani-case-ruling>

APHC calls for shutdown in IIOJK during Modi visit

Pakistan Observer, 5 March 2024

The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) has called for a complete shutdown in 'Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir' on 07 March against the scheduled visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the territory.

According to Kashmir Media Service, call for the strike has been announced by Advocate Abdul Rashid Minhas, the APHC spokesperson in a statement in Srinagar, and it aims to express Kashmiris' rejection of all anti-Kashmir agendas of India's Hindutva regime and demanded the resolution of the Kashmir dispute to foster peace in the region.

Furthermore, the APHC condemned Modi's visit, asserting that it seeks to mislead the global community about the true situation in 'Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (IOJK), which has witnessed unprecedented brutality under BJP rule.

Meanwhile, posters have emerged in Srinagar and other parts of the territory, reinforcing the call for a shutdown during Modi's visit. The posters depict Modi as a perpetrator of violence against Muslims, orchestrating a genocidal campaign in IIOJK, with intentions to erase the Muslim identity of Jammu and Kashmir.

<https://pakobserver.net/aphc-calls-for-shutdown-in-iiojk-during-modi-visit/>

Exiled Kashmiri leader Dr. Mubeen Shah calls for Imposition of world economic sanctions against India

Daily Parliament Times, 05 March 2024

Demanding Immediate imposition of economic sanctions by the world against India for her continual suppression against the population of internationally acknowledged Jammu Kashmir state in her forced and 'unlawful occupation' for last 76 years, veteran Turkey-based Kashmiri leader and Senior Vice Chairman Kashmir Diaspora Coalition (KDC) Dr. Mubeen Shah has feared that if the economic sanctions, by all authoritative international forums, will not be done by the World, Kashmiris will be pushed to the wall and we know the consequences as seen in Gaza.

In a telephonic interview to this our Special Jammu and Kashmir state correspondent Altaf Hamid Rao, Dr. Mubeen Shah said " it is too much to ask from a country – India which has used all the deception in international relations to delay the Plebiscite which would give Kashmiris the Right Of Self Determination".

"Until and unless we go to the main action needed i.e. in the imposition of economic sanctions I fear till india does not have an economic cost they will not back out and an immediate action to this direction by the world is the need of hour ? he concluded.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/03/05/exiled-kashmiri-leader-dr-mubeen-shah-calls-for-imposition-of-world-economic-sanctions-against-india/>

Complete shutdown observed in IIOJK on Modi's visit

Pakistan Observer, 08 March 2024

A complete shutdown is being observed in 'Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (IIOJK), today, in protest against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the 'disputed territory'.

Over 700 youths have been arrested during the ongoing crackdowns and raids by the Indian army and police in Srinagar and other districts of the Kashmir valley. The youths are being detained without apparent cause after being summoned to police stations and Kashmir valley has been turned into a fortress on Modi's visit.

The Indian police have declared Srinagar city as 'temporary red zone' for the operation of drones and quadcopters. "Srinagar city has been declared as "Temporary Red Zone" for the operation of drones and quadcopters, as per provisions of Rule 24(2) of Drone Rules, 2021 with immediate effect," wrote District Police Srinagar in a post on microblogging site 'X'.

The authorities have also announced a traffic advisory for motorists and commuters. "Traffic movement from Jehangir Chowk to Rambagh and Rajbagh to LD Hospital-Tulsi Bagh route will be restricted from 4:00am to 7:00pm," as per the advisory, issued by the Traffic Police, Srinagar.

<https://pakobserver.net/complete-shutdown-observed-in-iiojk-on-modis-visit/>

Losing History

The Dawn, 4 March 2024

While we have history strewn all over, the debate around pro-preservation development is not loud enough. Last week, Wapda entered into a Rs46.5m cultural preservation contract with a consultancy firm for the "digitisation and 3D modelling of significant rock carvings within the impact zone of the upcoming Diamer Basha dam". It is no secret that northern Pakistan is a well of antiquity comprising innumerable rock carvings. Although the authority intends to devise a cultural heritage management plan to preserve prehistoric etchings, establish a museum, and encourage cultural tourism, experts believe that the dam's construction may put thousands of ancient engravings in jeopardy. The volume of potential damage can be assessed by the vastness of heritage in the locality — over 50,000 rock carvings and 5,000 inscriptions from the Epipaleolithic era to Buddhist times lie along the banks of the Indus, with ibex and sheep imprinted on the earliest petroglyphs.

Past incidents of apathy provide sufficient reason for concern: for example, in 1999, GT Road's expansion project destroyed two historic waterpower facilities and the connecting walls of Shalimar Gardens, while in 2020, WWF-Pakistan's intense pressure forced the Gilgit-Baltistan government to abort jeep rallies and a polo fiesta at Rama in Astore. While Wapda's is a heartening plan on paper,

the fact remains that the culture and museum department in the territory is dormant. Clearly, authorities do not regret old lapses. Once again, short-sighted policies threaten priceless inheritance as perhaps only a few ancient boulders can be relocated to the Wapda office. Further, digitisation is not to be confused with investing in relics, and isolated samples impede tourism and research. The government has to change tack: it must become cognisant of the advantages of preservation, raise awareness about sites erased from state narratives and reimagine progress with a conservation method. The enforcement of the Antiquities Act, 1975, will ensure smugglers, vandals and imprudent planners face the law.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1818950/losing-history>

US lawmaker Terry Meza seeks peaceful solution of Kashmir dispute

Pakistan Observer, 07 March, 2024

US State Representative Terry Meza while condemning denial of justice in 'occupied Jammu and Kashmir' has urged for a peaceful solution to the long-pending Kashmir dispute.

Terry Meza was addressing the US-based Kashmiri Diaspora Community in Dallas, Texas. She condemned the human rights violations and the denial of justice in Kashmir.

She called upon the international community, particularly the United States, to play a constructive role in

facilitating dialogue between India and Pakistan to resolve the conflict over Kashmir. The meeting was aimed at raising awareness about the Kashmir dispute and advocating for a just and lasting resolution to it.

<https://pakobserver.net/us-lawmaker-terry-meza-seeks-peaceful-solution-of-kashmir-dispute/>

One killed as snow, landslide bring life to standstill in GB

The Dawn, 5 March 2024

One person was killed after being hit by falling debris during a landslide in Astore Valley, Gilgit-Baltistan as heavy rain and snowfall continue to disrupt life in the region. Meanwhile, main highways connecting GB with other parts of the country and several inter-district roads remain blocked for the fourth consecutive day.

In Astore, two men on a motorcycle were hit by falling rocks during a landslide in the Harcho area of Astore district. One of them died on the spot, while the second was reported missing. He is believed to have fallen into a river on the other side of the road, according to Rescue 1122 officials.

The deceased has been identified as Shahzad. Both individuals were residents of Dashkin Valley in Astore. Rescue efforts are ongoing to locate the missing person.

Access to the region has been cut off as the Karakoram Highway (KKH), Baltistan Road, Astore Road and other roads which were blocked at multiple locations due to heavy snowfall and

rain-triggered landslides were yet to be reopened for traffic.

Thousands of passengers are stranded on both sides, along with several vehicles and trucks loaded with goods, waiting for the reopening of KKH.

According to the GB Disaster Management Authority, heavy machinery has been mobilised to clear debris and restore traffic. GB government spokesman Faizullah Faraq told *The Dawn* that traffic on the Diamer-Gilgit section of KKH has resumed after the road was cleared on Monday. He said the highway is still blocked at multiple locations in the Kohistan area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

“Heavy machinery is working with administration and disaster management officials supervising the restoration work on the Baltistan and other roads,” added Mr Faraq. He added that GB residents stranded in Kohistan had been shifted to safer places.

Upper areas of Astore, Skardu, Shigar, Kharmang, Ghanche, Ghizer, Hunza and Nagar received a fresh bout of snowfall, with up to six inches of snow severing land access to the areas.

Temperatures dropped to below zero Celsius, confining the locals in their homes. Electricity and mobile communications have also been disrupted.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1819192/one-killed-as-snow-landslide-bring-life-to-standstill-in-gb>

Hydropower Controversy

The Nation, 5 March 2024

The recent uproar surrounding the extension of the 20MW hydropower project to 40MW in Gilgit-Baltistan epitomises the dire need for transparent and accountable decision-making processes, especially in matters as critical as energy development in the country. In a region grappling with acute power shortages, the stakes could not be higher, yet the manner in which this project has unfolded raises serious questions about governance and regulatory oversight.

Among soaring project costs and the absence of proper approvals, it is evident that something has gone seriously wrong in this endeavour. It remains unanswered how we could justify a project’s capacity doubling without the necessary green light from relevant authorities. The lack of transparent bidding processes only adds fuel to the fire, signalling a blatant disregard for regulatory norms and procedural integrity. We cannot turn a blind eye to such blatant transgressions, especially when they concern vital infrastructure projects essential for the region’s development.

Gilgit-Baltistan’s potential for hydropower is undeniable, but potential alone is not enough. We need concrete action coupled with robust governance mechanisms to harness this potential effectively. The region’s energy sector, currently reliant on isolated micro and small hydropower stations, is crying out for

comprehensive reform. This reform cannot happen on its own, as it requires adherence to transparent and accountable governance practices every step of the way.

The establishment of a dedicated energy regulatory authority and development organisation is a step in the right direction. However, lip service will not suffice. We need tangible measures to ensure regulatory autonomy and transparency, starting with stringent oversight of project implementation. The draft acts submitted for legislation must not gather dust on bureaucratic desks; they must be swiftly enacted to provide the regulatory framework necessary for sustainable energy development.

Lastly, we must not forget the voices of the local community, whose concerns have been drowned out within bureaucratic bungling. Their grievances regarding guideline violations and lack of consultation must be addressed urgently. After all, it is their lives and livelihoods that hang in the balance. We owe it to them to prioritise their interests above all else and ensure that these energy projects serve their needs while fostering broader regional development.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/05-March-2024/hydropower-controversy>

OIC voices concern over India's Kashmir abuses

The Express Tribune, 07 March 2024

Pakistan, speaking for the Islamic countries, has underscored the need for

investigating Israeli war crimes against the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank to pave the way for accountability.

“It is high time that violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law including war crimes committed against the Palestinian people are investigated and accountability follows,” Ambassador Bilal Ahmad, permanent representative of Pakistan to the UN offices in Geneva, told the Human Rights Council during its general debate.

“We urge India to comply with the applicable UN Security Council resolutions and implement recommendations addressed to it in the two Kashmir reports by OHCHR, the UN human rights office, which need to be updated,” the OIC statement said.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2458628/oic-voices-concern-over-indias-kashmir-abuses>

Economic Developments

Diamer-Bhasu dam, Dasu hydropower projects: Wapda chief for accelerating construction work

Business Recorder, 05 March 2024

Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) Chairman Lt-Gen Sajjad Ghani (R) has directed the project teams of the Diamer Bhasa Dam and Dasu Hydropower projects to accelerate the construction works so that both projects can be completed by their timelines. He issued these directions during his visit to Diamer-

Bhasha Dam and Dasu Hydropower Projects, disclosed a Wapda spokesperson here on Monday. Electricity generation from Dasu Hydropower Project is scheduled in 2026 whereas Diamer Basha Dam Project is scheduled for completion in 2028. Wapda successfully diverted the River Indus at the Dasu Hydropower Project in February 2023 and at the Diamer-Bhasha Dam in December 2023.

In the first leg, the Chairman reached Diamer- Bhasha Dam and reviewed construction work on the left and right abutments of the dam, diversion canal, guide wall, upstream and downstream coffer (temporary) dams and permanent bridge.

The CEO of Diamer Basha Dam Company, GM/PD Diamer Basha Dam Project, the consultants and the contractors were present on the occasion. Construction activities are being carried out on 13 key sites of the project. The permanent bridge and the approach road downstream of the main dam will be completed in June this year.

In the second leg, the Chairman visited the Dasu Hydropower Project and witnessed construction activities at the underground powerhouse and transformer cavern, left abutment and upstream coffer (temporary) dam.

The GM/PD Dasu Hydropower Project, flanked by the consultants and the contractors, briefed the Chairman that construction work is simultaneously

continuing on 13 sites, including excavation and support work at the powerhouse, transformer cavern as well as left and right abutments of the dam. Excavation is also underway on open areas, five tunnels and two bridges under the relocated Karakoram Highway.

It may be noted that Diamer-Bhasha Dam, on its completion, will store 8.1 MAF water to irrigate 1.23 million acres of land and generate 4500 megawatts, providing 18 billion units of green, clean and low-cost electricity to the national grid every year.

The 4320-megawatts Dasu Hydropower Project is to be completed in two stages: Stage 1, with an installed generation capacity of 2160 megawatts, will contribute 12 billion units of economically affordable electricity to the national grid per annum.

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40291952/diamer-bhasha-dam-dasu-hydropower-projects-wapda-chief-for-accelerating-construction-work>

70 tons of minerals recovered from a Chinese Citizen in Skardu

Urdu Point, 06 March 2024

In Skardu, the department of minerals along with police raided a Chinese citizen's home, where they seized 70 tons of minerals. According to department of minerals Gilgit-Baltistan, a Chinese citizen had illegally stored minerals at his home. The Department along with the police upon a raid seized 70 tons of minerals. The Chinese citizen was using his rented

house for storage of illegally acquired minerals. According to the department of minerals, the person involved will face legal action towards this end.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/skardu/important-news/live-news-3940537.html>

Lost Treasures: The Threat to Gilgit-Baltistan's Ancient Heritage

Pamir Times, 07 March 2024

According to a news report published in a prestigious newspaper, WAPDA (Water and Power Development Authority) has entered into a contract worth 46 million rupees with a private company to preserve the ancient artifacts, rock carvings, and petroglyphs found at and around the site of the Diamer-Bhasha dam using digital technology.

The artifacts and carvings, petroglyphs, numbering more than ten thousand according to several studies date back from the Stone Age to the Buddhist era. The petroglyphs under discussions are part of an invaluable historical treasure and symbols of a bygone cultural heritage.

However, the specific conditions of the contract regarding the ownership of copyrights of the digitized heritage have not been made public yet. It remains unclear whether the copyrights of these historical artifacts will be held by WAPDA, the federal government, the Department of Archaeology in Gilgit-Baltistan, or the government of Gilgit-Baltistan, or the private company contracted.

This contract concerning the preservation of this historical heritage must be made public so that it is clear who will hold the copyrights to this invaluable historical treasure. The future utilization of this heritage could potentially bring significant revenue, thus transparency regarding the ownership rights is crucial.

Gilgit-Baltistan's mountains, valleys, and challenging terrains are rich in ancient artifacts, carvings, and rock inscriptions, which hold historical significance. Most of the carvings contain samples of script written in Sanskrit and other ancient languages. Experts believe that much of the prehistoric inscriptions contain valuable information about religions, lifestyles, Buddhist practices, and events.

Unfortunately, there hasn't been any serious effort on the governmental level to preserve this cultural and historical heritage. In the past, many important artifacts, inscriptions, carvings, and manuscripts have been stolen or sold, and now they adorn the homes of influential individuals, or they have been lost. Sculptures of Buddha were once visible at several locations in Gilgit-Baltistan, but now they are nowhere to be seen. Only the Buddhist monastery remains intact, as it was built on a high and difficult-to-reach cliff, making it inaccessible to the general public.

Moreover, governmental efforts have been made to preserve Yeshini (Buddhist) by creating pathways for

tourists. Last year, a group of Buddhist monks from Korea came and performed their rituals.

Due to the government's neglect, a significant portion of this cultural and historical treasure has been lost or fallen into the hands of unknown development schemes. While development projects are essential, they should not overlook the preservation of rare artifacts, ancient sites, and the environment. Therefore, it's essential to protect and preserve this historical and cultural heritage through a well-planned project and establish a museum and research academy in Gilgit-Baltistan to conduct further research. This would not only promote tourism but also contribute to significant economic gains.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of vision from our rulers, they prioritize the construction of cement roads, buildings, and malls over the advancement in fields such as science, literature, and technology. The world recognizes the importance of preserving history and advancing human knowledge, but our rulers seem unaware of its significance.

The International Convention on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights is an important convention that places the responsibility of preserving cultural heritage on the state. Therefore, the government must pay attention to these important matters, which involve preserving cultural heritage and promoting research and scientific development in Gilgit-Baltistan. The

preservation of this historical and cultural heritage should be the foremost responsibility of the Gilgit-Baltistan government. Losing this heritage would mean burying our illustrious history and scientific treasure. The world preserves its history and learns from it. Unfortunately, our rulers seem ignorant of its importance even in this modern era.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2024/03/07/lost-treasures-the-threat-to-gilgit-baltistans-ancient-heritage/>

IIOJK PHE daily wagers seek regularization

Pakistan Observer, 08 March 2024

Scores of daily wagers of Public Health Engineering (PHE) department have sought regularization. According to Kashmir Media Service, Chairman of Kashmir PHE Joint Employees Association Sajad Parray addressing a press conference in Srinagar said the issue of 61000 daily wagers in various departments, including PHE, is a long-pending one.

“This issue has been lingering for a long time now. In this regard, successive governments have formed several commissions and committees. The committees have furnished their recommendations and declared this issue as a human and social issue”.

“We have worked in floods, turmoil and COVID and given our best despite meagre salaries. We are still awaiting decent salaries and regularization”, he said, adding a peaceful protest will be held under the banner of Kashmir PHE

Joint Employees Association on March 9 at Chief Office Rajbagh to press for their demands.

<https://pakobserver.net/iiojk-phe-daily-wagers-seek-regularization/>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

In the wake of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to 'Indian Occupied' Kashmir, Protest Rallies in Kotli

Urdu Point, 07 March 2024

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to 'Indian Occupied' Kashmir led to protest rallies in Kotli. Among the participants to the protest rally were District President Bar Chaudhary Abdul Razaq, Hurriyat leader Mehmood Akhtar Qureshi Advocate, Naseer Rathod Advocate. Besides these government employees, trade unions, lawyers and civil society members in larger numbers took part in the protests.

In the rally, slogans were raised against Narendra Modi and also slogans of Kashmir will become Pakistan were raised. Towards the end of the protest rally, prayers were held for safety and independence of Kashmir and Palestine, and special prayers were also held for the martyrs.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/kotli/kashmir/live-news-3940802.html>

'AJK' Food Minister Chaudhary Mohammad Akbar Ibrahim took notice of sub-standard flour

Urdu Point, 05 March 2024

The food minister of the 'AJK' Government, Chaudhary Mohaammad

Akbar Ibrahim took notice of sub-standard quality of flour in Muzaffarabad. Upon the orders of the food minister, deputy commissioner Abdul Hamid Kiyani along with committee members took on spot inspection of Neelum Flour Mills Muzaffarabad and Geelani Flour Mills. During the inspection some bags of flour mills were found of sub-standard quality. Given to this, it was urged upon the concerned that they should separate the sub-standard flour instead of grinding it. Kiyani told that good standard flour would be made available, especially during the holy month of Ramzan and if anyone faces problems with regard to the quality of the product, they should reach out to the administration and strict action will be taken in regard to this.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-3938701.html>

Security forces in Indian Jammu and Kashmir are doing Worst Human Rights violations: Gul Zaman Awan

Urdu Point, 06 March 2024

Major (R) Gul Zaman Awan has said that the deployment of security forces in Indian Jammu and Kashmir are doing worst human rights violations for the last seven decades which has turned the life of Kashmiri brethren into hell. We are assuring the brave sisters, brothers, daughters, and elders of Kashmir that we won't let the flag of their struggle go down. Until the freedom of Kashmir, our struggle will continue no matter what cruel tactics India will employ and we will continue

to raise voice for their rights. International community should shun its dual stand and compel India so that it comes forward to resolve Kashmir issue and end the times of oppression and tyranny in Kashmir.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-3939734.html>

With No Salary for Five months, MNCH Employees Struggle to Meet Ends

Daily K2, 06 March 2024

The employees of Maternal New-Born and Child Health (MNCH) of Gilgit-Baltistan are without salary for last five months. The employees have urged for quick release of their salaries otherwise they will resort for protests outside the Prime Minister's house. While speaking with the media persons, the employees shared that they haven't received salary from last five months, as a result of which they have to face difficult times. For fulfilling the daily expenses at home, the employees are facing hard times. Given to this, the MNCH employees request Prime Minister, Secretary Health and other officers to ensure the release of salary of affected employees.

https://www.epaper.dailyk2.com/Home?Issue=NP_GB&p=23862

Tight restrictions enforced in IIOJK ahead of Modi's visit

Pakistan Observer, 5 March 2024

Strict restrictions in the name of security measures have been enforced across occupied Jammu and Kashmir

ahead of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to the valley on March 7th.

According to Kashmir Media Service, authorities have implemented a series of restrictions and heightened surveillance protocols to ensure the smooth conduct of the upcoming event.

Restricted access zones, particularly around the rally venue at Bakshi Stadium in Srinagar, have been established. Only authorized personnel are allowed entry into these areas, causing in convenience to the residents.

Major highways leading to Srinagar are fortified with multiple roadblocks and checkpoints. Indian forces' personnel, equipped with advanced scanning equipment, are conducting thorough inspections of vehicles and individuals entering the city.

Sensitive locations remain under constant surveillance through manned patrols, electronic monitoring, and aerial surveillance using drones. An extensive network of CCTV cameras has been strategically installed to closely monitor activities around the rally venue.

Public gatherings and demonstrations have been strictly prohibited. Elite units, including the National Security Guard (NSG) and the Special Service Group (SSG), have been strategically deployed at the rally venue, underscoring the gravity of the security concerns as against the 'all is well' mantra paddled by the Modi regime.

<https://pakobserver.net/tight-restrictions-enforced-in-iiojk-ahead-of-modis-visit/>

From Social Media

PAMIR TIMES ® @pamirtimes

6 March 2024

KKH: Limited Daytime Closures for Road Clearance

The Frontier Works Organization (FWO) is undertaking a five-day effort, starting March 7th, to fully clear the Karakoram Highway (KKH) between Gonar Farm and Raikot. To facilitate the work and ensure safety, traffic flow will be controlled as follows:

Gunar Farm and Raikot Checkpoints: Closed from 7:00 AM to 11:00 AM daily between March 7th and 11th

Traffic to and from Gilgit-Baltistan will be stopped at Thalichi and Raikot Bridges between 6:45 AM AND 11:00AM during the five day #KKH #Gilgit #Baltistsn

<https://twitter.com/pamirtimes/status/1765421812442083378>

Roshan Din Diameri @Rohshan_Din

6 March 2024

Former Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid met Central Information Secretary of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Rauf Hassan at PTI Central Secretariat Islamabad.

#GilgitBaltistan

https://twitter.com/Rohshan_Din/status/1765318477613601190

Jamil Nagri @jamilnagri

5 March 2024

The snow avalanche occurrence in a village of district Nagar of #GilgitBaltistan.

Video link:

<https://twitter.com/jamilnagri/status/1764811217640550735>

Jamil Nagri @jamilnagri

5 March 2024

Dawn Editorial. Diamer Basha Dam's construction may put thousands of ancient engravings in jeopardy. Once again, short-sighted policies threaten priceless inheritance as perhaps only a few ancient boulders can be relocated to the Wapda office.

link:

<https://twitter.com/jamilnagri/status/1764061942254026990>

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Disclaimer

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