

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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Ahmadiya **Climate** **Lake**
community **Change** **Outbursts**
tourism **D** **ower outages** **CPEC**
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Internet disruptions
Interim Constitution
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Political Developments

World wants to hear the voice of Kashmiri people: President of 'AJK'

Daily Parliament Times, 11 March 2024

The president of 'Azad Kashmir', Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry has said that the main purpose of the establishment of the 'Azad' Kashmir government was to highlight the Kashmir issue. He expressed these views while speaking at a briefing session, which was held under the aegis of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Cell (JKLC). The JKLC, he said, has played an important role in researching and educating the youth about different aspects of the Kashmir issue. He hailed the establishment of Kashmir Policy Research Institute (KPRI), the first ever 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) based think tank. He said that the world wants to hear the voice of the Kashmiri people. He congratulated the management of the KPRI for the publication of research journals, arranging workshops and internship programs, and producing research materials on Kashmir.

The president, referring to his efforts to highlight the 'Indian barbarism and brutality' at the international level, Chaudhry claimed that he has exposed India's fascist agenda and gross violations of human rights in 'Occupied Jammu and Kashmir', not only in 'Azad Kashmir' but also in Europe, America and other parts of the world. Commenting on the worsening

political and human rights situation in the 'IOK' he said that the human rights situation in the 'IOK' has further worsened since the Modi government stripped the region of its special status in 2019.

Under the given circumstances, the role and responsibilities of the government of 'Azad Kashmir' have increased manifold, the president said. He further said that it was quite heartening to see that the government and the KLC have played an effective role in turning the spotlight on Kashmir and sensitizing the world in a much better way.

He said that he had always tried not only to convey the voice of Kashmiris to the world but also to keep the people of 'Azad Kashmir' connected with this issue. He also hailed the Kashmiri expatriate community's role and their significant contribution in keeping the Kashmir issue alive at the international level. He said that Modi's visit to 'OJK' was an attempt to create a false impression of normalcy and peace in the 'held territory'. Earlier, Director KPRI Dr. Raja Muhammad Sajjad Khan gave a detailed briefing to the president. Advisor to the 'AJK' president Sardar Imtiaz Khan, Secretary Presidential Affairs Dr. Idris Abbasi, Secretary Liberation Cell Mirza Wajahat Rashid Baig, and others were also present on this occasion.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/03/11/world-wants-to-hear-the-voice-of-kashmiri-people-president-ajk/>

GB residents protest 22-hour power outages, internet disruptions

The Dawn, 12 March, 2024

Residents of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) have been protesting the prolonged unavailability of electricity, mobile services, and internet connectivity, enduring around 22 hours of disruptions each day for months. This situation has significantly affected the social and economic conditions in GB, prompting widespread concern and dissatisfaction among the local population. Those involved in online businesses, students, and professionals have become jobless due to the complete blackout. According to a statement issued by the GB Assembly Secretariat, Speaker Nazir Ahmed Advocate has taken notice of the situation and decided to convert complaints into public petitions for action under the assembly's rules of procedure.

The speaker highlighted the severe impact of internet service disruption on students and routine work for both government and non-government employees. Access to communication facilities is a basic right of the local people, he said. The speaker has formed a special committee to address the issue and seek a permanent and alternative solution. Meanwhile, the majority of areas in the region, including the capital cities Gilgit and Skardu, are experiencing over 22 hours of power load shedding and disrupted 4G internet services. Muhammad

Ismail, a resident, pointed out that mobile and internet availability depends on electricity supply, which is already limited. Mobile service providers activate towers only when electricity is available, leaving students, professionals, and individuals from all walks of life severely affected, he added.

Another resident, Abid Hussain, highlighted the shrinking business opportunities in the region. The tourism industry is already in crisis, and people affiliated with online business and marketing are economically suffering, he said. Housewives and students are particularly affected due to the unavailability of electricity, impacting essential activities like cooking, lighting, mobile charging, and clothing pressing. The situation worsens on the eve of Ramadan if electricity is not available during Sehri and Iftar.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1820893/gb-residents-protest-22-hour-power-outages-internet-disruptions>

Kashmiri delegation calls on Mr. Celement Nyaletsossio Voule at UNHRC Geneva

Daily Parliament Times, 12 March 2024

Kashmiri delegation comprising of Syed Faiz Naqashbandi, Hassn ul Banna, Advocate Parvez Ahmad Shah and Barrister Nida Salam called on Special Rapputor on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association Mr. Celement Nyaletsossio Voule at

United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) Geneva and apprised him about denial of freedom of peaceful Assembly and Association to the people of 'Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (IIOJK). The Kashmir delegation told Special Rapporteur that on the eve of Narendra Modi's recent visit to 'IIOJK', the people of 'occupied Kashmir' were hounded under the barrel of a gun to attend the gathering in Bakhshi stadium where Narendra Modi the Indian Prime Minister spoke against their will.

The visiting delegation told the Special Rapporteur that the students, and government employees were threatened to compel them to attend Modi's meeting. The delegation also draws the attention of the Special Rapporteur towards the banning of pro-freedom organisations who show dissent to the 'Indian illegal occupation', denial of religious congregation to the Kashmiri Muslims and continuous detention and denial of grand Mufti Mirwaiz Umar Farooq from addressing the Friday prayers thereby denying the people from performing their religious freedoms. The Special Rapporteur noted the submissions of the Kashmiri delegation and showed serious concern about the denial of freedom of peaceful Assembly and Association to the people of 'IIOJK.'

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/03/12/kashmiri-delegation-calls-on-mr-celement-nyaletsossio-voule-at-unhrc-geneva/>

Forgotten Community: The Resilient Women of Khaltaro Village Defying All Odds

Pamir Times, 12 March 2024

Khaltaro Valley is the name given to one of the wildest and untamed beauties in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB). This valley is a real treasure, hidden from the rest of the world. There are no tourist facilities in this valley, including hotels, restaurants, or local shops. This valley is in Gilgit district and its road is very scary. The jeep drive takes two hours on a tiny, narrow road along with Darchan River. The route is extraordinarily steep. Between Sassi and Khaltaro, the path climbs sharply from 1,401 meters above sea level to 2,577 meters above sea level. The hiking to Khayi Valley, the last settlement in Khaltaro, can take up to four hours due to the difficult terrain.

Although this place is a breathtaking hideaway, its majestic snowcapped mountains provide a much-needed escape from the chaos of everyday life. Unfortunately, everyone ignores the heart-wrenching challenges faced by the vulnerable communities living here. Their lives are a constant struggle to survive without essential resources and government support. The women in Khaltaro Valley are facing different kinds of challenges daily. They are cut off from the outer world due to the rough terrain, and sloppy and unpaved road tracks. Their homes are mostly covered in snow for a considerable period of the year. They also witness heavy snowfalls, landslides, and even

avalanches, which sometimes result in temporary displacement. They are facing hurdles in having access to food items, education, quality healthcare, and paved roads.

The first challenge, these resilient women face is unpaved roads and rough terrains. They have to walk for several kilometers carrying heavy amounts of goods or water to reach their homes. This heavyweight sometimes puts a lot of strain on their physical bodies, particularly in situations of extreme weather such as significant snowfall or landslides. Another pressing issue is the lack of proper toilets and sanitation systems in local homes. Women, especially young girls are unaware of hygiene management. Uncleanliness, poor hygiene and absence of washrooms can lead to diseases like diarrhea and cholera.

The difficulties that the women in Khaltaro face get even worse because of the lack of a dispensary, doctors, and clinic and restricted access to medical care and medicines. The women of Khaltaro Valley are the symbol of perseverance and resilience, working tirelessly to manage their families through managing livestock and agriculture. Their firm persistence in the face of endless challenges is inspiring. However, local authorities must recognize the urgent need for change. Basic rights and facilities, such as education, healthcare, and sanitation, should be accessible to every woman in Khaltaro.

Empowering women through these means will not only bring about social justice but also uplift the entire community.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2024/03/12/forgotten-community-the-resilient-women-of-khaltaro-village-defying-all-odds/>

Crossroads of Conflict: Kashmir slowly turning into another Palestine

Daily Parliament Times, 13 March 2024

Kashmir, often referred to as Paradise on Earth, has a tumultuous history marked by a prolonged dispute between India and Pakistan, stemming from the partition of 1947. In today's global landscape, where ideals of equality and justice are championed, it's disheartening to witness regions like Kashmir and Palestine suffer from systemic deprivation of fundamental rights. Despite the rhetoric of fairness and equality, the people of Kashmir and Palestine find themselves deprived of access to a just legal system, with their voices silenced and their grievances unheard. Families in Kashmir and Palestine live under constant threat, with their loved ones facing danger from targeted military operations.

Despite decades of struggle, the rights of Kashmiris remain unfulfilled, echoing the unresolved conflicts seen in places like Palestine. While the United Nations Security Council has passed numerous resolutions addressing the Kashmir conflict, a peaceful resolution remains elusive. The plight of Kashmir serves as a poignant reminder of the

ongoing struggle for justice and peace in our world. The problems in both Kashmir and Palestine date back to 1947. Israel maintains its illegal occupation of Palestinian territories, while on the other side, Kashmir is still an unresolved and disputed issue between India and Pakistan. The whole world is aware that the situation in Palestine is worsening day by day. The 7 October attack by Hamas exposed vulnerabilities in Israel's defense, prompting efforts to restore its military dominance. The Israeli Defense Forces have been responsible for the deaths of approximately 30,000 Palestinians, a significant portion of whom are children, and have caused extensive destruction in Gaza.

Both Palestine and Kashmir have suffered under occupation, global political maneuvering, humanitarian crises, and the neglect of human rights by supposed advocates. While the origins of the ongoing conflicts in Palestine and Indian-administered Kashmir differ, how people in both regions are fighting for indigenous freedom highlights a shared similarity between these globally recognized disputed areas. The Kashmir region has witnessed a cycle of spontaneous pro-Palestine protests and shutdowns during the past couple of years.

Talking about the current situation, India claims that four years after the Centre abrogated the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 on 5 August 2019, the restoration of peace and developmental activities

taking place, compared to the past, stands out as its most significant achievements. It is after more than three decades that public and social life in the erstwhile state, in general, and the valley in particular, are back to normal routine without disruption. While 124 civilians were killed at the hands of police and security forces during protests and stone-pelting incidents from 5 August 2016 to 5 August 2019, not a single such incident was reported in the last four years, official figures reveal. But let's see what is happening in Kashmir. Is this claim right that Kashmir is going towards development, or could it be said that the situation in Kashmir is drifting towards the situation in Palestine?

Article 370, which granted special autonomous status to Jammu and Kashmir, was seen by many Kashmiris as a symbol of their distinct identity and political rights. The abrogation of this article effectively centralized power in the Indian government, leading to a sense of disenfranchisement and marginalisation among Kashmiris, who felt their political voice and autonomy were being undermined. The revocation of Article 370 also had economic repercussions. It led to uncertainty and disruption in various sectors, including tourism, trade, and real estate, which are crucial for the economy of Kashmir. The region experienced restrictions on movement, communication blackouts, and a decline in business activities, affecting livelihoods and economic stability.

The question of whether Article 370 signifies India's colonisation of Kashmir depends on how one interprets and views the situation. While Kashmir has been viewed through a colonial lens in the past, the revocation of Article 370 suggests that a settler-colonial perspective might be more appropriate. Settler colonialism involves the recruitment of a settler class whose aim is not only to occupy indigenous land but also to eradicate the indigenous people who resist them. Consequently, as non-Kashmiris migrate to the region as new residents, India's identity as a settler state becomes increasingly evident. The suffering of Palestinians and Kashmiris is undeniable, yet there's a heated debate about the world's ostrich-like policy, which has turned a blind eye to these enduring atrocities for decades. The recent failure of the UN to enforce a ceasefire in Gaza vividly illustrates how power dynamics and military dominance continually overshadow the principles of a fair and just order. The images and reports emanating from Gaza depict the tragic plight of the Palestinian people, raising poignant questions about the whereabouts of Muslim rulers and those who profess to be advocates of conscience.

In my reflection, the deafening silence of world leaders echoes through the plight of our Muslim brethren in Palestine and Kashmir, where lives hang in the balance. While the Palestinian issue has garnered widespread attention and advocacy

from various quarters, the suffering of Kashmiris remains largely unnoticed, shrouded in the shadows of neglect and indifference. Indian authorities paint a rosy picture of Kashmir's transformation, boasting of eradicating terrorism and restoring peace. The rich culture of the valley has been blanketed by the forceful practices of the occupiers. Yet, beneath this facade lies a harrowing reality—a reality where Kashmiris find their voices stifled, their dissent crushed, and their aspirations ignored. Their narratives have been forcefully molded to fit the narrative of the authorities, coerced into echoing sentiments that betray their truths.

Amidst the facade of development, Kashmir is depicted as a serene paradise, a tourist's dream destination. While there has indeed been progress in Kashmir, it has largely been at the expense of its indigenous inhabitants, who find themselves marginalized and disenfranchised in their land. Unemployment plagues the youth of Kashmir, especially those with higher education, who find themselves trapped in a cycle of despair with limited job prospects and meager salaries. The government's policies favor outsiders, as land is seized from innocent civilians to accommodate settlers, echoing the dark shadows of colonialism and dispossession. The Kashmiri people, caught in the crossfire of political agendas and power struggles, face an uncertain future. In the face of such adversity, we must amplify the voices of the marginalized

and oppressed, shining a light on their struggles and advocating for their rights.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/03/13/crossroads-of-conflict-kashmir-slowly-turning-into-another-palestine/>

Tombstone on Soldier's Grave among two Desecrated in 'AJK' Village

Friday Times, 15 March 2024

Tombstones on another two graves belonging to the Ahmadiyya community in a village of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) have been desecrated, including the tombstone on the grave of a soldier. This is the second such attack on the graves of the community in this village within the past seven days. A statement issued by the Ahmadiyya community said that earlier in the week, unidentified miscreants had destroyed the tombstones installed atop two graves located in a cemetery in the Patiara area of Barmoj Goi in the Kotli district of 'AJK.' The community noted that Tuesday's attack followed a similar incident in the same village last week when tombstones on eight graves of Ahmadis were destroyed.

One of the tombstones desecrated was installed on the grave of Naik Ghulam Shafi, a soldier who had laid down his life while serving in the Pakistan Army at Siachen - one of the world's highest, coldest and most treacherous battlegrounds between the two nuclear-tipped hostile neighbors Pakistan and India on the Line of Control (LoC) flashpoint. This attitude

is simply not acceptable as the ones who lay down their lives while serving Pakistan are considered martyrs of the land, a community spokesperson said.

The community further warned that anti-Ahmadiya activities in the Kotli district of 'AJK' have been gathering momentum in the past few months. The way these acts have been carried out, the community feared that it reflects that they could be part of an organised effort targeting innocent and peaceful members of the Ahmadiya community. The community noted that the recent wave of attacks targeting members of the Ahmadiya community throughout Pakistan seems to have no end. They urged the relevant authorities to look into this matter immediately and find a way to stop the hateful activities from recurring.

<https://thefridaytimes.com/15-Mar-2024/tombstone-on-soldier-s-grave-among-two-desecrated-in-ajk-village>

11 lakh outsiders' voters added to 'IIOJK' voter lists since the revocation of Article 370

Pakistan Observer, 15 March 2024

In light of the measures implemented by the Narendra Modi-led Indian government to alter the demographic composition of 'occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (OJK), 11 lakh new voters, mostly outsiders, have been incorporated into the territory's voter lists following the revocation of Article 370, which granted special status to Jammu and Kashmir. According to Kashmir Media Service, before 2019,

the total number of voters stood at around 76 lakhs. As per Hindustan Samachar, by January 2024, the voter count surged to over 86 lakhs, indicating an addition of nearly 11 lakhs, predominantly comprised of outsiders, since the revocation of Article 370. This increase is attributed to the rise in the number of outsiders acquiring citizenship rights post-Article 370 abrogation.

<https://pakobserver.net/11-lakh-outsiders-voters-added-to-iiojk-voter-lists-since-revocation-of-article-370/>

Kashmiris knock on UN rights office in Geneva

Daily Parliament Times, 15 March 2024

Amid graveyard silence imposed by India in 'occupied Kashmir', the streets of Geneva, home to the UN's top human rights office, were occupied by activists on Friday seeking attention to the world's largest open-air prison. Led by Altaf Hussain Wani, Fahim Kayani and Asif Jarral the Kashmiri leaders joined by their global allies and supporters, held demonstrations outside the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva seeking an end to the military occupation of Kashmir by India. The joint pro-Kashmir demonstration was organized by Tehreek-e-Kashmir Europe, the Kashmir delegation to Geneva as well as Jammu Kashmir Democratic Forum France.

Wani, who heads the Kashmir Delegation to Geneva, reminded the world's top human rights body of its

responsibility for Kashmir. The UN is the embodiment of aspirations of millions of Kashmiris who have been promised a right to decide their political future, said Wani, a native of 'Indian Illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (IIOJK). But India has turned Kashmir into the world's largest open-air prison and is brazenly violating the human rights of Kashmiris which demands the attention of the UN Human Rights Council said Wani.

Fahim Kayani, prominent Kashmiri diaspora activist and leader of Tehreek-e-Kashmir UK, said the time was ripe for the 'illegal occupation' of Kashmir by India was end. There is a global movement towards de-colonization and Kashmiris need to grasp this opportunity to press the international community towards realization of the right to self-determination, Kayani said. Kayani reminded the council that a court in the UK has issued arrest warrants against Indian Hindu-radical Prime Minister Modi and his allied officials.

Emphasizing the need for international accountability of the Indian rogue regime led by Modi, Kayani recalled how New Delhi was engaged in extra-territorial murders including one in Canada. India cannot be given a free pass, Kayani said, addressing the UN Human Rights Council. Faiz Ahmed Naqshbandi, Hasan ul Banna, Attiq Zubair, and others also addressed the demonstrators, urging the world body to take cognizance of beleaguered Kashmiris. Referring to illegal arrests and abductions by Indian forces in

Kashmir, they sought urgent attention towards the jailed Kashmiri political prisoners.

Kashmiri political prisoners face critical situation in Indian jails, they said, referring to Masarat Alam Bhat, Asiya Andrabi, Nahida Nasreen, Fehmeeda Sofi, Yasin Malik, Shabir Shah, Nayeem Khan, Ayaz Akbar, and Peer Saifullah. They are suffering various ailments and must be released on an urgent basis," they said, urging attention from the international community. Kashmir is the world's largest open-air prison where India has deployed over a million forces, against international law since the United Nations declared the region as a disputed territory. India has been regularly blocking any attempt to hold a free and fair plebiscite as declared by the UN, this challenges international law and conventions which must be condemned and New Delhi held accountable.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/03/15/kashmiris-knock-un-rights-office-in-geneva/>

Economic Developments

'AJK' to get telecom licence fee

The Express Tribune, 12 March 2024

The federal government has made amendments to the law for transferring the licence fee, renewal fee and spectrum auction proceeds received from telecom operators working in 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) to the regional government. So far, the fee and proceeds got from the licensees have been parked in Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)

as an agent of the 'AJK' Council. Now, the government has amended the law to provide the fee to the 'AJK' government. The decision was made in a recent meeting of the cabinet. The Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and GB recalled that the matter was earlier submitted to the cabinet in its meeting held on 6 February 2024 by the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication.

The cabinet directed the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs to prepare a summary, in accordance with the Rules of Business, 1973 and by incorporating the views of relevant ministries, for consideration in the next cabinet meeting. Explaining the background, the meeting was informed that the prime minister had constituted an inter-ministerial committee with the defence minister as its convener to examine and make recommendations relating to the payment of licence fee, renewal fee, and spectrum auction proceeds to the 'AJK' government. The inter-ministerial committee, in its meeting on 29 December 2023, decided to form a sub-committee to examine the issue. After detailed discussion, the sub-committee recommended that since the licence fee, renewal fee, spectrum auction proceeds, etc received from the licensees operating in 'AJK' were parked with PTA as an agent of the 'AJK' Council, the IT ministry may initiate a summary on the release of such fee to the AJK government for approval of the cabinet.

The inter-ministerial committee, while endorsing the proposal of the sub-

committee in a meeting held on January 18, 2024, directed the IT ministry to send a summary to the federal cabinet as a top priority. The IT ministry explained that Section 5(2) of the 'AJK' Council Adaptation of Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-organisation) Act, 2005 (the Adaptation Act) provides that PTA shall transfer 50% or more of the fee received from licensees to the AJK Council. It was added that by virtue of Article 51(2) of the AJK Interim Constitution, 1974, all laws made by the 'AJK' Council prior to the 'AJK' Interim Constitution (Thirteenth Amendment) Act, 2018 shall continue to be in force and the reference of words 'AJK' Council made in existing laws shall be construed and understood to be a reference to the 'AJK' Assembly, the government of Pakistan, or the government of 'AJK', as the case may be.

In the instant case, as the subject of telecommunication falls under Article 31(3), read with Part-A Third Schedule of the 'AJK' Constitution, the words 'AJK' Council in Section 5(2) of the Adaptation Act shall be construed as government of Pakistan. It was explained that since that created an anomaly, the IT ministry submitted a summary to the cabinet proposing that in the presence of Section 5(2) of the Adaptation Act in its current form, PTA was liable to transfer the fee received from the licensees operating in 'AJK' to the government of Pakistan, whereas the proceeds actually belonged to the government of 'AJK.'

During the ensuing discussion, it was explicated that Part-A of the Third Schedule of the 'AJK' Interim Constitution Act, 1974 referred to legislative competence, not necessarily to any direct service delivery obligations or rights to revenue collection; that as per scheme of the 'AJK' Interim Constitution, 1974, the competence to legislate on the subject of telecommunication rests with the government of Pakistan, which included amending Section 5(2) of the 'AJK' Council Adaptation of Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-organisation) Act, 2005, as had been proposed.

It was further explicated that the proceeds in question never formed part of the government of Pakistan's non-tax revenues and were passed on to the government of 'AJK' through the 'AJK' Council. Following the discussion, the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs sought approval of the cabinet for the requisite amendment in Section 5(2) of the Adaptation Act with effect from the date of promulgation of 'Azad Jammu & Kashmir' Interim Constitution (Thirteenth Amendment) Act, 2018. The cabinet considered the summary titled 'Payment of Licence Fee, Renewal Fee and Spectrum Auction Proceeds to the Azad Government of the State of Jammu & Kashmir' dated 7 February 2024, submitted by the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs, and approved the proposal.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2459082/ajk-to-get-telecom-licence-fee>

MNCH program's Chief says the sit-in would continue until the acceptance of demands

Daily Parliament Times, 12 March 2024

The protesting Maternal Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) program employees slapped down the ruling class of the region for 'not giving a hoot about their peaceful agitation' despite ten days have passed. The protestors were stationed in and around the Chattar neighborhood of the 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) capital, Muzaffarabad. To pressure the 'AJK' administration to regularize their services and put them on a normal budget in line with the policies of four provinces and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), the staff of the project that was previously sponsored by the federal government began a sit-in on 4 March, the fourth protest since June 2020.

There are around 1218 employees in 'AJK', - 80 percent of whom are women who were inducted in the MNCH program in 'AJK' between 2008 and 2018 as managers, doctors, lady health visitors (LHVs), community midwives (CMWs), clerks drivers, etc. However, unlike the four provinces and GB, the 'AJK' government could not fulfill its commitment to take these employees on its normal budget in post 18th Amendment scenario. In December 2022, the 'AJK' finance department reportedly gave concurrence to the creation of around 348 posts of MNCH in the normal budget. However, according to protesting employees, any notification to this effect was yet to see

the light of the day. Even though the green belt where the protesters had been gathering since 4 March catches the attention of everyone walking or driving past it. The protesting employees said that they had been hurt by the impassivity and mercilessness of the ruling elite. It had rubbed salt into their wounds, they said.

In an attempt to raise awareness among public office holders and senior bureaucrats who regularly drive past protestors in their opulent vehicles, many female protestors from the district were sitting under their umbrellas to escape the heat during the Holy Month of Fasting. Ms. Sadaf, a Kotli resident said that they have worked for this program for the past 15 years, and it is the utmost injustice to take away our livelihood on pretenses. Ansa Javed, an employee for the past six years in the project in Rawalakot, maintained that the female employees, some accompanied by children, were sitting under the open sky for more than a week, but so far no minister or secretary had bothered to contact and console them, even on humanitarian grounds if not as part of their responsibilities.

She said that our prime minister, Chaudhry Anwarul Haq is sitting in the capital and his office is less than 500 yards from here, but he has no time to listen to us which speaks volumes about his insensitivity. She called upon the media to convey their plight to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif as well as to Punjab Chief Minister Maryam

Nawaz. She said since Ms. Nawaz was also the chief organizer of PML-N, which was a coalition partner in 'AJK', she could direct the 'AJK' cabinet members from her party to play a role in addressing the issue of MNCH employees. Sajid Azeem, the chief of the MNCH employees action committee, made it clear that the sit-in would continue until the acceptance of demands.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/03/12/mnch-programs-chief-says-sit-in-would-continue-until-the-acceptance-of-demands/>

'AJK' PM invites entrepreneurs to invest in tourism, industrial sectors

Pakistan Observer, 14 March 2024

The Prime Minister of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK), Anwar ul Haq has invited existing and intending entrepreneurs for investments in the tourism and industrial sectors of the state to explore opportunities. He was talking to a delegation of eminent world-famous hoteliers, the Hasho Group which called on him in the federal metropolis led by Deputy Chairman and CEO Hashu Group Murtaza Hashwani. During the meeting, Hashwani expressed his willingness to invest more in 'AJK'. Speaking on the occasion, the prime minister while referring to huge investment opportunities in the 'liberated territory' told the visiting delegation that there were vast opportunities for investment in tourism, hydropower generation, and other sectors in 'Azad Kashmir'. He

said that the agreement signed between the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) and Hashu Group would be instrumental in creating employment opportunities for youth.

He expressed optimism that the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Hasho Group and the government would also encourage investment in education, tourism, and other sectors in the state. He said that the government was also ensuring the provision of interest-free loans to the youth. He further said that providing interest-free loans to skilled people would help control growing unemployment in the region. On this occasion, Senior Minister Col. (retd) Waqar Ahmed Noor, Minister for TEVTA Sardar Amir Altaf, Chief Secretary Dawood Muhammad Barich, Secretary of Higher Education, and other officials were also present.

<https://pakobserver.net/ajk-pm-invites-entrepreneurs-to-invest-in-tourism-industrial-sectors/>

Lack of Political Will to Tackle Climate Change in Gilgit-Baltistan

Pamir Times, 17 March 2024

Natural Communication, a scientific journal study reveals that 'Fifteen million people worldwide are at risk of glacial-lake flooding.' Staggeringly, 2 million of these potential victims are located in Pakistan. The study should send alert signals to Pakistan, especially Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), where more than 7000 glaciers including

Siachen, Baltoro, Batura, Biafo, Biarchedi, Bilafond, and many more, are located. Glaciers are natural ice bodies that benefit mankind by sustaining lives and the environment. Glaciers are an essential (about 70%) source of freshwater for Pakistan. Their meltwater flows into rivers, supplies drinking water for humans, feed ecological habitats and agricultural activity, and even electricity. In GB, communities get water directly from glacier melt water running down the valley streams. 90% of the area of GB is mountainous, 4% is forest and 4.2% is cultivated waste.

The cropped area is about 1.2% of the total area. This cropped area sustains about 2 million population spread thinly over a vast terrain in the ten districts, stretching from the Chinese border in the North to KP province in the South. The region is increasingly being hit hard by climate change-related hazards. Locals have been witnessing and becoming victims of sudden high altitude lake outbursts, the phenomenon known as Glaciers Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF). The surge in the frequency of Lake Outbursts is particularly due to climate change that directly affects glaciers or ice bodies triggering the melting rate of glaciers that overflow the lakes at high altitudes. Around 90% of the residents of GB are dependent on agriculture and livestock for livelihood, despite their being very little land for cultivation.

Due to zero government interest in attracting private investors and

promoting local industries the region produces some unique business opportunities like a business of local fruits, especially cherry, mulberry, apples, walnut, apricot, grapes, almond, salted Irani pistachio, and many more. The locals are at risk of being exploited by private corporations or business elites of Pakistan to utilize their natural resources and earn huge capital in return while doing nothing beneficial to locals for sustaining their ecology and community welfare. The region is geo-strategically and geo-economically significant and catches the attention of major powers in the region including India and China.

China under its One Belt One Road (OBOR) for regional and global connectivity, has been working on CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) since 2013 which is marked as a game changer for Pakistan economically as well as creating human resources. This pilot project is envisioned as the beginning revolution in the communication and infrastructure network in Pakistan but with more commercialization activities in GB through CPEC routes, continuous and uninterrupted flow of heavy vehicles through the region which would escalate the possible danger of speedy climate change and consequently risk of lakes outburst at high altitudes. According to the study discussed above, more than 3,044 glacier lakes have naturally formed in GB and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa out of which 33 glaciers are at serious risk of outbursts threatening human lives,

livestock, agriculture, and the environment.

Noted meteorologist Dr. Muhammad Hanif warns that in Pakistan, the frequency and intensity of GLOF events are increasing by 20 percent every year due to global warming and local factors, such as deforestation and human interference in stable glacier regions. The recent incident includes the sweep of Hassanabad Bridge, an important bridge on the CPEC pathway in Hunza due to a flash flood caused by the Shishper glaciers outburst. These climate hazards affect the local economy and GB's government has to now and then seek help from the federal for compensating affected people financially. The annual budget for GB is even very least for development projects in the region then in such circumstances as GB relies on Pakistan for all the grants or packages how could a region confront climate change hazards and take measures to make sure the locals are unharmed by any eruption or threats caused by climate change.

Since the GB Order 2009 has been promulgated the major regional issues including power, education, health, and climate change subjects are alienated and fall under the provincial concurrent list. The local political dynamics haven't yet evolved and understood the potentials of the region to translate those potentials into the welfare and well-being of the locals, instead, the local government and leaders have the habit of totally looking

up to the Centre for policy-making and executions over any important subject. The region could be the capital of tourism in the world and the best mountain adventure place hosting the world's 2nd largest mountain of the world i.e. K-2.

The other natural resources are Water Resources and Mineral Resources which should be discussed and debated in local political discourse like other issues including demand for constitutional rights and wheat subsidies etc. Unfortunately, the local political leaders have no policy on subjects like climate change and climate adaptation strategies that are viable and in the long run benefit GB. Such political attitudes and practices further expand the sphere of vulnerabilities of the locals. Before we reach the point of no return, political leaders in GB should lay down stress on their policies and come to the front to address the concerns and voices that are neglected and unheard.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2024/03/17/lack-of-political-will-to-tackle-climate-change-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

The Kashmiri people's voices are being muffled by the Modi government: Hurriyat leader

UrduPoint, 14 March 2024

The Indian government is penalizing local civil society organisations that advocate for the freedom to weaken the Kashmiri people's ongoing fight for independence and their right to self-

determination in the 'occupied state.' Uzair Ahmed Ghazali, the chairman of Pasban-e-Hurriyat, asserted that the imposition of restrictions and bans by the Indian government on local political, religious, and social groups operating in the 'occupied state' constituted an extreme form of reprisal.

He claimed that the government of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Narendra Modi, is trying to stifle the voices of the Kashmiri people by detaining their leaders and employees on pretenses, all in an attempt to further its Hindutva agenda in Jammu and Kashmir. The Indian decision, he claimed, to outlaw organizations headed by members of the Kashmiri civil society is part of a criminal operation to quell the people's demands for political, social, and human rights as well as to exact retribution on the leaders of these groups. The freedom-loving parties of the state of Jammu and Kashmir represent the legitimate rights and demands of millions of Kashmiri people, he said, and the Indian rulers should never forget this fact.

He added that the wishes and demands of the Kashmiri people cannot be crushed through neo-colonial tactics and conspiracies. No amount of unfreezing, unconstitutional limitations or property confiscation can stop them from voicing their justifiable demands for freedom and the right to self-determination.

He claimed that to undermine the resistance effort, Indian agencies are

engaged in illicit activity in Kashmir and that they are planning to split the populace along religious and sectarian lines. All the nefarious plans of the people of Kashmir will come to naught. He stated that the dream of long-term, sustainable peace in the area would never come true unless the issue of Kashmir is resolved fairly. He praised the green spirit of the Kashmiri people and stated that India was unable to reduce their resistance to any extent, even with all the coercion. He declared that with persistent sacrifice and fight, the Kashmiri people would undoubtedly be freed from 'Indian occupation.'

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-3948886.html>

EU can be a crucial mediator between India and Pakistan on Kashmir issue: President of 'AJK'

Jammu and Kashmir Times, 15 March 2024

Sultan Mehmood Chaudhry, the president of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK), has stated that the European Union (EU) might be a crucial mediator in the dispute between Pakistan and India over 'occupied Kashmir.' He shared his views with the EU ambassador to Pakistan, Dr. Riina Kionka, and Rukiye Komurcu, the political consul, during their visit to the president's house. Mehmood said that South Asia's peace and security are seriously threatened by the protracted conflict and that the issue in Kashmir must be resolved quickly. He warned

of a nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan in the wake of a pending Kashmir issue and emphasized that any incident, no matter how minor or large, might signal the start of a nuclear conflict between the two nuclear neighbors. Chaudhry stated that to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute, the EU ought to designate a special envoy in the region.

<http://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Resize-of-FRONT-PAGE-15.jpg>

The international community should play its part in granting freedom to Kashmiris: Experts at a Seminar

Urdupoint, 17 March 2024

According to speakers at a conference, the international community must intervene and uphold Kashmiris' right to self-determination to bring peace and tranquility to the area. The event titled; 'From Amritsar Treaty to Abrogation: Kashmir's Journey for Self-Determination and Peace,' was organized by the Jammu Kashmir Peace and Justice Organization (JKPJO) and was attended by prominent academics, young activists, and locals, including women. The two-day conference shed light on the harsh historical and contemporary struggles of the Kashmiri people and emphasized the terrible ramifications of the Treaty of Amritsar, which was signed on 16 March 1846, between the British East India Company and Ranjit Singh, the ruler of the Sikh kingdom of Punjab.

The speakers emphasized how decades of enslavement, exploitation, and marginalization under authoritarian Dogra authority were sustained by this terrible deal, which was arranged by colonial powers and regional actors. Kashmiri leader, peace campaigner, and JKPJO Chairman Tanveer-ul-Islam stressed how crucial it is to understand this historical context when narrating the story of the region's battle for independence. Tanveer stressed the importance of the Treaty of Amritsar to academics, researchers, and social scientists. In addition to creating Jammu and Kashmir as a single state, it also instituted an odd system in which the Kashmiri populace was subjugated to a king.

A distinguished group of civil society participants, including notables like Muhammad Yaseen Khan, Prof. Shahid Hussain Mir, Prof. Sajid Hussain, and renowned journalist Khizar Hayat Abbasi also spoke at the event. From the brutal Dogra reign to the current revocation of Articles 370 and 35A by India, they denounced the atrocities suffered by Kashmiris. Professor Shahid Hussain Mir highlighted the systematic oppression and prejudice they endured under different governments. He described horrific incidents like the carnage outside Srinagar Central Jail in 1931 and the murders of silk factory workers in 1924 with such poignancy that it revealed the profound psychological wounds that Kashmir's people still bear.

Chairman of JKPJO, Tanveer ul Islam delved into the aftermath of partition in 1947 and the subsequent human rights abuses perpetrated against Kashmiris. He fervently appealed to the international community, particularly nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait to proactively facilitate dialogue and advocate for the fundamental rights of Kashmiris. The seminar culminated with a resounding call to action for the international community to stand in solidarity with the oppressed Kashmiri people and work towards a just and peaceful resolution to the conflict. Participants expressed optimism that through collective efforts, the aspirations of the Kashmiri people for self-determination and peace would finally be realized.

They stressed the critical necessity for continued focus on the Kashmir problem as well as the critical role that international solidarity plays in ensuring justice and freedom for the Kashmiri people. The seminar was a devastating reminder of the need for coordinated action to ease the situation of Kashmiris and prepare the path for a future defined by decency, equality, and freedom, as long as the echo of suffering continues in the region.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-3951869.html>

[From Social Media](#)

Roshan Din Diameri @Rohshan_Din

14 March 2024

If this is the situation in Gilgit, the capital of Gilgit-Baltistan, then evaluate other areas. Women came out on the streets and blocked the road to protest against the lack of water supply. #GilgitBaltistan @csgbpbk @CMGBPK

Video link:

https://twitter.com/Rohshan_Din/status/1768216231465677066

Roshan Din Diameri @Rohshan_Din

16 March 2024

Chief Secretary, Gilgit-Baltistan wants to make a non-local as CEO of Karakoram Cooperative Bank Limited (KCBL). According to the sources, all the obstacles have been removed and the work is going on at full speed.

https://twitter.com/Rohshan_Din/status/1769060821219307692

Jamil Nagri @jamilnagri

18 March 2024

Prime minister @ CMShehbaz has announced the establishment of three Danish schools in both Gilgit Baltistan and AJK, in addition to one in Islamabad. These boarding schools will accommodate 1000 bright students each from marginalized segments of society.

<https://twitter.com/jamilnagri/status/1769653978474668522>

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Disclaimer

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