

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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08 April - 14 April 2024

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MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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Political Developments

Chief Court of Gilgit-Baltistan allows minor girl to go with her 'husband'

Pamir Times, 8 April 2024

The Chief Court of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) has allowed a minor girl, Falak Noor, to stay with a boy she reportedly married against the will of her parents. After a final hearing that continued for around two and a half hours today, the court said that the 'alleged abductee is allowed to reside wherever she likes.' The court also ordered Gilgit Police to provide security to the girl. Terming the court decision controversial, several legal experts and child rights activists have said that decision provides a legal precedent that will encourage minors to elope and marry without their parents' consent. A medical board constituted on the court's order couldn't give an exact age for the child, Falak Noor, saying that she could be between 13 and 16 years of age, based on medical examinations.

According to the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) records, the child is 12 years and a few months old. The Court relied heavily on the statements of the girl, who said that she was 16 years old and had married of 'her free will' and that she 'wants to live with her husband.' Falak Noor's father, Sakhi Ahmad Jan is fighting a legal battle to get her daughter back. He had told the police that his minor daughter was abducted and married off without his consent. He had accused the police officials of colluding with the alleged abductors.

His media statements caused a furor in GB, triggering protest demonstrations in various cities and villages, with people demanding recovery of the child.

Media pressure and protests on the streets forced the police to recover Falak Noor and present her in court last week, after a lapse of almost 3 months; Falak Noor was allegedly 'abducted' on 19 January 2024. Sakhi Ahmad Jan was represented by Ehsan Ali Advocate and Advocate Rashid Omar, among others, while the defendant was represented by Advocate Asad Ullah Khan and team. Advocate Amjad Hussain was appointed by the court as 'Amicus Curie', or an Impartial Advisor/Friend of the Court!

<https://pamirtimes.net/2024/04/08/chief-court-of-gilgit-baltistan-allows-minor-girl-to-go-with-her-husband/>

Dimming Women's Safety: Escalating Waves of Social Crimes in Gilgit-Baltistan

Pamir Times, 9 April 2024

Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) has long been renowned for its natural beauty and the hospitable nature of its people towards tourists and guests. It has maintained one of the lowest crime rates among regions administered by Pakistan and has been considered a safe space for women. However, these attributes are gradually being reversed, with the region now exhibiting signs of becoming a hyper-patriarchal crime zone. Within a span of just one and a half months, a 13-year-old girl was

abducted from Gilgit, and a 19-year-old girl from Yasin was murdered in Danyor, Gilgit. One month ago a class 6th student Falak Noor aged 13 was abducted from Sultanabad Gilgit. Falak Noor's father, a daily wage worker, went to the police station to report her missing, but the police refused, citing the accused's ties to a powerful mafia group.

The mafia had threatened the parents and attempted to dissuade them from filing a case. The news quickly spread on social media, sparking concern and garnering support from civil society and activists nationwide. The GB nationals and activists staged protests at major press clubs in Pakistan, highlighting the issue and questioning the government and law enforcement agencies' negligence. Under pressure, the GB Police Department issued a press release stating that an FIR had been registered against the accused and that police search teams were actively working to locate them. Following the police press release, a video surfaced on social media featuring Falak Noor, claiming to be 17 years old. She stated that she had voluntarily gone with a boy of her choice and got engaged at a court in Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

However, her age in the official records, such as the FORM B and school records, is 13 years old. According to Pakistani law, she is a minor, and her consent is not valid; she must be returned to her parents. In the latest developments, the GB High Court has ordered the police to present

Falak Noor and all the accused individuals before the court on 5 April 2024. Furthermore, the accused have lodged a petition against this order in the Supreme Appellate Court of GB. Another video message from the girl was circulated after the court's order, where she reiterated her previous claims and denied that the video was coerced or scripted. She also accused her father of lying. This case draws parallels with the case of Karachi's Dua Zehra, where she was similarly compelled to make video statements.

In another case, Anara, a 19-year-old girl from Yasin, went missing from her hostel in Danyor, Gilgit, one month ago and was later found murdered. Her body was discovered on the bank of the Gilgit River near Danyor a week earlier. Despite her parents registering a missing person report on 5 March 2024, they accuse the police of not cooperating with them.

The parents of both girls are desperately seeking justice, yet our society is divided, focusing more on assigning blame than seeking justice. This reflects a recurring patriarchal mindset that justifies crimes by blaming women, their families, and their religious affiliations. Our activism has become selective and biased, and the GB Government and law enforcement agencies in Gilgit have failed in their duty, demonstrating a cruel and pathetic performance throughout. The GB government should immediately establish an independent judicial investigation commission to thoroughly investigate

both cases and ensure that all culprits, including any involved police officials, are strongly punished for their heinous crimes. Concrete steps must be taken to formulate a robust social safety policy for women, ensuring a safe and healthy environment for them in all aspects of life.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2024/04/06/dimmi-ng-womens-safety-escalating-waves-of-social-crimes-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

Nation celebrates Eidul Fitr with special prayers for Palestinians, Kashmiris

The Nation, 10 April 2024

The nation is celebrating Eid-ul Fitr that falls after the culmination of the holy month of Ramazan along with the Muslims world seeking Allah's special blessings for the oppressed Palestinians, Kashmiris and other regions. Big gathering for offering Eid prayers were held in Eidgahs, mosques, grounds and other open places throughout the city and all over the country with prayers for prosperity, progress and peace in the country and world over.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/10-Apr-2024/nation-celebrates-aidul-fitr-with-special-prayers-for-palestinians-kashmiris>

APHC denounces BJP's election ploy to hide crimes in 'IIOJK'

Pakistan Observer, 13 April 2024

The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) has said that the BJP-led Indian regime is using the Lok Sabha elections as a veil to hide its atrocities

and mislead the international community about the dire situation in 'Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (IIOJK). According to Kashmir Media Service, APHC spokesman Advocate Abdul Rashid Minhas in a statement in Srinagar highlighted that India has deployed an excessive military presence of over 1,100,000 troops in the UN-mandated disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir, treating civilians as enemies with a soldier-to-civilian ratio of 1:10. The troops are not confined to the Line of Control (LoC) and borders but are also stationed within civilian areas, subjecting the populace to widespread raids, arrests, and collective punishment for demanding the UN-pledged right to self-determination. Minhas emphasized that India's use of brute force violates international laws, despite UN resolutions affirming the Kashmiris' right to self-determination through a plebiscite.

He lamented the rampant human rights abuses, including fake encounters and torture in military camps and interrogation centers across the Valley. The APHC drew attention to alarming warnings from international bodies, such as the Genocide Watch statement in February 2019, and recent US intelligence reports foreseeing heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, and India and China. These warnings underscore the urgent need for democratic countries to recognize India's diplomatic deceit, which exacerbates an already volatile situation.

Furthermore, the APHC hailed senior Hurriyat leader Mushtaqul Islam's resilience after completing two years of illegal detention in an Uttar Pradesh jail under the draconian Public Safety Act (PSA). His arrest, deemed as blatant harassment to stifle political dissent in Kashmir, reflects the ongoing suppression of voices advocating for self-determination. The APHC urged the UN to fulfill its duty to resolve the Kashmir dispute and halt the bloodshed in 'IIOJK', emphasizing the imperative for international intervention to address the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the territory.

<https://pakobserver.net/aphc-denounces-bjps-election-ploy-to-hide-crimes-in-iiojk/>

UNSC resolutions' implementation can bring peace in Kashmir and Palestine: Chairman Pasban-e-Hurriyat

Daily Parliament Times, 14 April 2024

Chairman Pasban-e-Hurriyat Jammu and Kashmir Uzair Ahmed Ghazali has said that United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has failed to resolve global conflicts like Palestine and Jammu and Kashmir according to its own (UN) resolutions. While describing the failure of international forces to stop Israel's worst terrorism in Palestine besides Indian state terrorism in 'occupied Kashmir', he said that India's 'illegal occupation' of the state of Jammu and Kashmir is illegal and similar to the genocide of Palestinians by Israeli forces.

Ghazali said that the two major conflicts of the world, Palestine and Jammu and Kashmir, on which there are un-implemented resolutions of the United Nations are proof of the failure of the Security Council. He said that for the lasting peace, the world concise must play their role for the freedom of the states of Palestine and Jammu and Kashmir. Uzair termed the Indian government's imperialist actions in 'IIOJK' as the worst oppression against humanity and said that India cannot maintain its military rule over the occupied state for a long time. He demanded the UNSC to implement its resolutions on Kashmir and Palestine for the peace otherwise such delay may jeopardise the situation and lives of innocent people in the region.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/04/14/unsc-resolutions-implementation-can-bring-peace-in-kashmir-and-palestine/>

How did Gaza & Kashmiri children observe Eid?

Pakistan Observer, 14 April 2024

EID is an Arabic word that means 'festival' or 'feast'. Muslim children celebrate Eid at the end of the holy month of Ramadan. They offer Eid prayers with their families, wore new clothes, enjoy special Eid delicacies, visit relatives and friends, receive gifts but alas the children of Gaza and 'Indian Occupied Kashmir' (IOK) had none of those privileges. After the 7 October 2023 deadly raid by Hamas on Israeli positions, which took a toll of 1400 lives, Israel has battered Gaza

with deadly raids from the air, land and sea, taking a toll of more than 34,000 lives and causing injuries to over 85,000 residents of Gaza. The children are among the worst hit. The holy month of Ramadan was a nightmare for them.

The children's of 'IOK' also faced immense challenges and hardships, but for decades, Kashmiri children have grown up amidst violence. The region has been a subject of dispute between India and Pakistan since 1947. The heavy 'military occupation' by India and wars have taken a toll on the lives of children, who bear the brunt of the unresolved conflict. Girls and boys alike have been affected, with many facing trauma, loss and insecurity. In August 2019, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi revoked Indian Constitution's Article 370 which granted Kashmir a special status and relative autonomy, amalgamating 'IOK' and Ladakh into the Indian Territory.

Resultantly, the entire region has been in a state of lockdown, fearing retaliation by Kashmiris. The internet and communications blackout in 'IOK' further isolates the region, making it difficult for Kashmiris to communicate their plight to the world. Kashmiri children have witnessed violence and experienced disruptions in education and daily life. Indian security forces have detained hundreds of children between the ages of 9 and 17, on national security-related charges. Boys have been abducted during midnight raids and girls and women have faced molestation during nighttime

operations, where rape is used as a weapon of war. The scars of this deadly conflict persist, affecting the mental and emotional well-being of Kashmiri children.

Despite these challenges, Kashmiri children continue to display resilience and hope. On Eid, like children everywhere, they sought moments of joy and connection, even amidst adversity. On Eid day in 'IOK', the situation was complex and challenging for worshippers. The Jamia Masjid in Srinagar, a significant religious site remains locked on Fridays, which is the main day of worship in Islam as well as on Eid day. Indian authorities view the Jamia Masjid as a trouble spot and a nerve centre for anti-India protests and clashes that challenge New Delhi's sovereignty over disputed Kashmir. Despite this, for the local community, the mosque represents their unwavering faith and their struggle for rights in a region marked by turmoil and conflict.

The closure of the mosques reflected the complex interplay of religious freedom, political tension and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. Among the major challenges faced by the children of 'IOK' is that over 3,600 children have been blinded permanently because Indian Security forces targeted their faces, used pellet guns. Let us hope for peace and stability in the region, allowing these young lives to flourish and dream of a better future. The children of Gaza and 'IOK' question in the words of Faiz: If humanity were to vanish, would you

still seek justice? If you are truly just (oh God), why not raise the Day of Judgment now?

<https://pakobserver.net/how-did-gaza-kashmiri-children-observe-eid/>

Economic Developments

PM Shehbaz announces expansion of Daanish Schools to GB, 'AJK', Sindh

Pakistan Today, 9 April 2024

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced that the federal government would establish Danish Schools in 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK), Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and remote areas of Balochistan and Sindh to deliver quality education to children coming from economically disadvantaged families. This is not the fault of the poor children if their parents cannot afford quality education despite working hard or those who are orphans...If the iron gates of the Atchison College or Grammar School are obstructing their way (to quality education), the door of Danish Schools are open for them, the prime minister said while addressing a ceremony after inspecting the site for a Danish School being established in the Kuri area of the federal capital.

To be established over 30 acres of land, the school will provide free education and accommodation to the children from the capital city and its suburbs with a vision to provide equal opportunity for quality education. Calling the alarming figure of 26 million out-of-school children a criminal negligence, the prime minister said Quaid-e-Azam's dream about

Pakistan would remain unfulfilled without making arrangements for their education. He announced that the federal government would fully bear the expenses of constructing Danish Schools in 'AJK', GB, remote areas of Balochistan and Sindh. The premier also announced that the federal government would declare an education emergency in the country and would dole out all possible resources to educate children from disadvantaged families.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2024/04/09/pm-shehbaz-announces-expansion-of-daanish-schools-to-gb-ajk-sindh/>

Swift impounding of Mangla Dam reservoir in full swing

Daily Parliament Times, 10 April 2024

As a result of initial melting of snowfall on upper reaches of the Himalayan state of Jammu and Kashmir and resultant raise in rivers flow, the water level in the country's second biggest reservoir-Mangla dam has started rising as it was recorded 0.448 Million Acre Feet (MAF) as compared to 0.227 MAF recorded 08 days ago. The water level in Mangla dam was reported as 1103.75 feet on Tuesday against maximum conservation level of 1242 feet with the live storage capacity of 0.448 MAF in the reservoir. The rising inflows and declining outflows of the Jhelum River at Mangla reservoir was recorded respectively as 28300 and 20000 cusecs of water from the dam. Earlier water level in the reservoir had reduced to the verge of seasonal dryness getting very much close to

stipulated dead end of 1050 feet till Friday 29 March of this year, due to low inflows to the reservoir.

It may be added that Mangla Dam stands largest reservoir in terms of water storage in the country, was filled to its maximum seasonal conservation capacity of 1242.00 feet, on 17 August 17, last year. Agricultural experts believe that the ongoing seasonal impounding will leave far reaching positive impacts on the per acre yield of the agrarians products in the related down parts of the country.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/04/10/swift-impounding-of-mangla-dam-reservoir-in-full-swing/>

World Bank approves \$1 billion loan for Dasu Hydropower Project

The Nation, 14 April 2024

Pakistan received a much-needed boost for its energy sector as the World Bank approved a \$1 billion loan for the 2,160-megawatt Dasu Hydropower Project. This critical infrastructure project aims to provide Pakistan with affordable and reliable electricity. The loan approval comes after some delays, with initial reports suggesting a May approval. However, government sources now confirm the World Bank's board greenlit the financing in June. This represents the third major investment by the World Bank in the Dasu project, highlighting its significance for Pakistan's energy future. Pakistan's current energy woes stem largely from the high cost of electricity generated using imported fuel. This burden is felt across the country, with domestic consumers,

factories, and even institutions like mosques and hospitals resorting to installing solar panels to escape the expensive grid. The Dasu project has faced setbacks in the past, with its initial completion target set for December 2021.

However, the World Bank has now set a new target date of 2028 for completion. The project's cost has also increased by 13%, with the World Bank's revised estimate reaching \$4.9 billion. Despite these challenges, the project offers significant long-term benefits. The World Bank estimates that Dasu will save Pakistan a staggering \$1.8 billion annually in fuel import costs. Additionally, the project is expected to contribute to environmental sustainability by reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 5 million tons per year. The Dasu Hydropower Project is a significant step towards Pakistan's goal of achieving energy security and economic growth. With the World Bank's renewed commitment, the project is well-positioned to deliver a brighter energy future for the country.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/15-Apr-2024/world-bank-approves-dollar-1-billion-loan-for-dasu-hydropower-project>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

JKLF remembered Maulana Shaukat on his Martyrdom anniversary

Urdu Point, 08 April 2024

The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) remembered Shaheed Maulana Shaukat on his martyrdom anniversary and paid rich tribute for

the services and sacrifices he rendered for the liberation of Jammu and Kashmir. According to a statement by the JKLF chief spokesman, Mohd Rafiq Dar, Maulana Shoukat tirelessly worked not only for the liberation of Kashmir but also for eliminating sectarian differences in the Kashmiri community, and his efforts towards such endeavor will always be remembered.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-3977762.html>

GB CM calls for full proof Security for Chinese and Foreign national engineers working on the Diamer-Bhasa Dam

Urdu Point, 14 April 2024

The Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), Haji Gulbar Khan has said that given the security challenges that Pakistan faces, it becomes necessary that full proof security is provided to Chinese and foreign national engineers working on Diamer-Bhasa Dam. For disrupting peace in the country, evil forces might target these engineers and we must take urgent measures to fail their designs, he added. The chief minister further said that to make the security system more efficient, the chairman Water and Development Authority (WAPDA) will be consulted so that WAPDA security guards are provided with better military training and better military weapons. The meeting was attended by GB Scouts, police, administration, and other senior officers. On this occasion, the Chief

Minister ordered Deputy Commissioner Diamer to provide compensation to the families of houses affected in the wake of work at Shatial River (Nalla) among others, and also steps to be taken for their stay at a safe location.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/gilgit/national-news/live-news-3981813.html>

Other than cutting our plans, the Government is doing nothing: GB Assembly Opposition Leader

DailyK2, 09 April 2024

Expressing deep anger over the soaring inflation, the opposition leader in Gilgit Baltistan (GB) Assembly, Kazim Maisam demanded immediate relief to the people. He further added that the current government has failed to deliver upon the promises it made to the public of GB. According to Kazim, the inflation is so high that people have not been able to do Eid shopping and there has also been a rise in suicides, and despite of all of these critical issues, government has become a mere spectator, watching people facing tough struggles for basic needs.

<https://www.dailyk2.com/Post/21577>

To fix underdevelopment and other issues in Diamer, the administration must take every possible step: GB CM

Urdu Point, 14 April, 2024

In an interaction with religious authorities in Chilas, the chief minister of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) Haji Gulbar Khan said that for fixing all issues faced

by the people, every possible step will be taken along with eliminating underdevelopment in the region. He said that a detailed discussion with the chairman of WAPDA will be held and that all demands will be carefully considered. The people of Diamer have given sacrifices and therefore injustice will not be tolerated by the people of Diamer. He said that the royalty of the dam is yet to be decided. The demands of the people of Diamer will be acted upon through a working committee so that the forests of the region are preserved. To improve the education system in the region, the chief minister has spoken to the Prime Minister, who has agreed to set up educational institutions on Danish patterns. Apart from making available teachers in schools, hospitals will be constructed so that people will benefit from modern health facilities.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/gilgit/national-news/live-news-3982075.html>

From Social Media

Basit Ali@bacitoo

8 April 2024

Chief Court's decision on the FalakNoor case once again proved that GB is a colony where rule of Jungle prevails. The decision is an utter non sense and a sheer violation of child rights and Islamic jurisprudence. #SolarEclipse

https://twitter.com/i/bookmarks?post_id=1777304500853703058

Basharat Issa @BasharatIssa

10 April 2024

Gilgit-Baltistan has been massively oppressed and marginalised to the extent that even our minors have no legal safety. They can be abducted and forced into marriages while the kangaroo courts allow it. This is what happens to a colonised people.

<https://twitter.com/BasharatIssa/status/1778131843235156475>

Khurram Husain@KhurramHusain

13 April 2024

Situation right now 10kms down from the Lowari tunnel, on the Chitral side. This is the only road that connects this district with the rest of Pakistan (aside from the Shandur road which leads to Gilgit, and is shut these days anyway).

Video link:

https://twitter.com/i/bookmarks?post_id=1779088583548399811

Roshan Din Diameri @Rohshan_Din

14 April 2024

A search operation by security agencies in Dumot area of Gilgit Jaglot. A suspicious person who recently targeted a passenger bus was arrested at Hador.

Video link:

https://twitter.com/i/bookmarks?post_id=1779463886451638380

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Disclaimer

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