

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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Chinese tourists violent protests
subsidies Neelum-Jhelum
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CPEC Power electricity
subsidies prices
Additional Grant



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES
मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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Political Developments

Govt subsidy fails as three killed in 'AJK' violence

Dawn, 14 May 2024

A government decision to dole out a Rs23 billion subsidy to placate violent protests in 'Azad Jammu Kashmir' (AJK) failed to pacify the region after three people were shot dead and six sustained injuries due to firing and teargas shelling by the paramilitary Rangers in Muzaffarabad. Shortly before the violence, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and 'AJK' PM Anwarul Haq after a meeting approved the release of Rs23 billion for 'AJK' on account of power and wheat subsidies. The subsidised rate for 40kg flour will be Rs2,000, down from Rs3,100. The electricity tariff was reduced to Rs3, Rs5 and Rs6 per unit for up to 100, 300, and more than 300 units, respectively.

The 'AJK' government also issued notifications to this effect for the satisfaction of protesters. Rangers, called in to maintain law and order in the state, were supposed to return to the Pakistani territory after the PM's announcement. Instead of moving out of the territory via Brarkot — the village bordering Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — they chose to exit the region from Kohala. As the 19-vehicle convoy, including five trucks, reached Muzaffarabad in a charged atmosphere, it was pelted with rocks near Shorran da Nakka village, to which they responded with teargas and firing.

Cautious JAAC leaders

Speaking to a gathering in an open space along Eidgah in the evening, Shaukat Nawaz Mir, one of the key JAAC leaders, said their legal team would 'legally examine' the notifications issued by the government. If these notifications do not fulfil legal requirements in accordance with our charter of demand, we, the joint action committee members will unanimously decide our next course of action tonight, he said. He alleged that the 'AJK' government had previously extended them a 'non-serious and irresponsible' attitude which was why they could hardly believe its actions. According to witnesses, the arrival of rallies from the Poonch division had not stopped even after 9:30pm.

On the other hand, the bodies of two of those who were killed in the violence had been taken by their kin to the ground adjacent to Eidgah, where slogans were heard against the government and the civil armed forces. There is tension and anger in the air, said Adil Hameed, a resident of the old city of Muzaffarabad. Reports received from other 'AJK' towns said that people had staged demonstrations to express wrath and indignation at the killings in Muzaffarabad.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1833377/govt-subsidy-fails-as-three-killed-in-ajk-violence>

'AJK Protests': A Reality Check

The Nation, 14 May 2024

The current situation in 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) has taken a violent

turn in the wake of recent protests in the region. The tragic killing of Sub Inspector Adnan Farooq Qureshi by protestors, an esteemed and responsible official, in Mirpur has further intensified the situation. Investigating the underlying causes and intricacies of this scenario is crucial as the anger and frustration continue to grow. The puzzle of complexity unravels if one closely analyzes the landscape of grievances and unresolved concerns that have simmered beneath the surface for far too long. The involvement of activists in violent protests during the present uprisings raises serious concerns because using such confrontational tactics is intrinsically harmful to resolving fundamental issues.

Furthermore, the death toll during these protests not only transgresses moral and legal requirements but also raises questions about the intentions behind such acts. It makes one consider the serious consequences of eschewing morality and legal logic in favor of dissent. Indeed, the question arises as to whether the prevalence of such violent outbursts could have been mitigated had the perpetrators of the 9 May incident been swiftly and decisively brought to justice nationwide. The nexus between accountability, justice, and the prevention of further violence becomes glaringly apparent in the wake of such tumultuous events, necessitating a concentrated effort to promote accountability and obedience to the law. After a close examination of the

demonstrators' expressed complaints, it is evident that the basis of their demands is not well-reasoned or practical. The proposal that calls for the price of electricity to match the cost of production ignores the complex network of expenses that are necessary to produce electricity.

Apart from the obvious costs of raw materials and infrastructure upkeep, a wide range of operating expenditures, such as fuel, salaries of employees, and maintenance costs, all play a substantial role in determining the ultimate tariff. Therefore, it ignores the complexity of the system that produces power to assume that production costs and consumer bills will always be directly correlated. Similarly, the demand for subsidies—a measure already offered by the Pakistani government on necessities like wheat—reveals a basic misapprehension. The 'AJK' administration's taxation of these particular commodities exacerbates this misperception and creates a complex fiscal environment for commoners. In addition, the difficult terrain and scattered habitation that characterize 'AJK' lead to increased transportation expenses, which in turn raises the cost of products and services. Because people are entangled in the intricate web of the socioeconomic environment, the widespread impact of the Government's sincere efforts to control inflation and guarantee fair access to necessities has unfortunately not reached the general public.

Ironically, social media platforms have contributed to the transmission and

amplification of violent protests, which has created a false impression of the public's support for the demonstrators. The reality on the ground, however, tells a different story. In the past, 'AJK' has been mostly dependent on Pakistan to supply essential goods; this dependence has been made worse by the recent unrest. The effects of these violent protests have affected the everyday life of the average person, leading to a generalized dissatisfaction among the public. A closer look at the core of the issue indicates that the residents of 'AJK' are facing a startling debt of between Rs. 60,000 and 70,000 dues. Demonstrators' demands include the cancellation of these outstanding debts, which is a step that will help ease the financial burden on the public.

The people's support or solidarity is primarily due to this factor of hope that their outstanding electricity dues will be exempted if these protestors succeed in their efforts. It is noteworthy that, in contrast to the leading political personalities, the local leadership in 'AJK' has taken on a more prominent and aggressive role amid the emerging instability. These high-profile individuals' noticeable absence has plausible ramifications, as it is assumed that they are using their quiet to emphasize how indispensable they are to resolving the issue. Furthermore, there's a strong feeling that their ultimate participation is aimed at their limited political interests expected to be met after they succeed in settling the issue. This calculated stance underscores the intricate interplay between political dynamics and

personal agendas, casting a shadow of skepticism on the sincerity of their commitment to addressing the grievances of the people.

It is pertinent to note that protesters are led by local leaders belonging to different parts of the federating unit. These leaders are confronted with the challenge of adopting a unison approach towards the resolution of the issue. Their varying opinions are a major stumbling block in reaching a conclusive solution of the issue. It is quite evident from the trajectory of these protests that India, our enemy, has opportunistically taken advantage of the unstable situation to pursue its own goal. Together with social media, Indian media channels have coordinated a deliberate attempt to present a distorted and negative story, spreading lies and misinformation with the intention of damaging Pakistan's reputation.

More than ever, public education and awareness-building about the malicious influence of India's dark propaganda apparatus are essential. We must unwaveringly support and appreciate the sincere attempts made by the Government of Pakistan (GOP) and the 'AJK' government to address the underlying problems and bring stability back. On the other hand, unity and solidarity are critical in the face of internal and external challenges, and any attempts to maintain a culture of political opportunism and division within the government ranks should be strongly rejected.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/14-May-2024/ajk-protests-a-reality-check>

Protesters call off March in 'AJK' after demands met

Dawn, 14 May 2024

The Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), an alliance of civil rights group called off a protest march in 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) after several days of clashes over high prices in which four people were killed and over 100 injured, officials said. Protesters called off the march a day after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved a grant of 23 billion rupees to help meet most of their demands, which included subsidies on flour and electricity prices. The alliance's head, Shaukat Nawaz Mir, announced the decision in Muzaffarabad, the capital city of the scenic Himalayan region. 'The government has accepted all of our demands,' he said, calling on protesters to return to their homes and businesses. Mir also demanded the government give financial compensation for the families of three protesters and a police official who were killed in the violence. The protesters were killed after the Rangers opened fire when they were attacked, said local government official Adnan Khurshid. The police official died in clashes over the weekend.

Committee announces 'day of mourning' for three killed

Three people lost their lives and at least another six sustained injuries following firing and teargas shelling by the Rangers personnel in the state capital, according to officials and witnesses. The Rangers, who had been invited to

maintain law and order were supposed to return after the announcement in Islamabad by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif regarding provision of Rs23bn to 'AJK' and subsequent issuance of notifications by the 'AJK' government, considerably cutting down the price of electricity and wheat flour. However, instead of returning back from Brarkot-'AJK's last village on its border with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) — their convoy, comprising 19 pick-ups and five trucks, drove to Muzaffarabad to exit the territory via Kohala.

Video clips shared on social media showed that while the convoy was on its way to Muzaffarabad, it was first pelted with stones near Shorran da Nakka village, to which they responded with firing and teargas shelling. A social media clip verified by Dawn showed three Rangers vehicles ablaze on the Muzaffarabad-Brarkot road. After entering the city through the Western Bypass, the Rangers were welcomed with rocks again, prompting them to use teargas and bullets. The shelling was so intense that the entire neighbourhood reeled from it. This correspondent saw two local elders approaching the Rangers and escorting them to safety via a link road. However, witnesses said that the Rangers had resorted to teargas Shelling and firing in the air in another area as well before the administration drove their vehicles to safety.

Divisional Commissioner Muzaffarabad Sardar Adnan Khurshid told Dawn that at least three persons had died in firing by Rangers and

another six had suffered wounds. The commissioner identified the deceased as Saqib, son of Shabir from Plate; Waqar, son of Babu from Dara Batangi; and Azhar, son of Majeed from Chehla Bandi areas of Muzaffarabad. After the talks' failure on Sunday night, the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) had asked the protesters to resume their march on the state capital. The rallies made a stopover in Dhirkot, about 80km from the capital, where the administration engaged their leaders until the conclusion of the meeting convened by PM Shehbaz in Islamabad. After the subsidy was announced by the government, the movement leaders said they would decide about it after the issuance of notifications.

Subsequently, the 'AJK' food department issued a notification, bringing the price of flour/40kg to Rs2, 100 and that of electricity to Rs3, Rs5, and Rs6 per unit for up to 100, 300 and more than 300 units, respectively. The notifications immediately went viral on social media and preparations were underway to welcome the JAAC leaders in Muzaffarabad and to celebrate the victory. According to witnesses, some rallies clashed with the police in Chattar Chowk, where police had to resort to teargas shelling to disperse them. In response to the violence, the Public Action Committee in Muzaffarabad issued a statement after holding a joint meeting, demanding all cases be dropped and the release of those arrested. They also necessitated that the investigation by

the Muzaffarabad Judicial Commission be made public and those responsible should be punished. The Committee also announced a mourning day and shutter down strike today 'for the three martyred in protests.'

'AJK' PM expresses gratitude for relief package

'AJK' Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Chaudhry expressed gratitude towards prime minister Shehbaz Sharif for convening an important meeting of all stakeholders, where he announced an immediate relief package of Rs23bn for 'AJK' people. Both these issues which had been pending for a long time were linked with the federal government. And on the instructions of the Prime Minister of Pakistan these have been resolved in minutes for which I am grateful to him, he said, adding, the relief announced would be made part of the next budget. Responding to questions, he said no single cabinet member had cast aspersions on the policy of the government. Ours is a coalition government and each coalition partner has its own ideology and party politics, but the government is functioning under collective wisdom, he said.

The 'AJK' prime minister said that the funds would help lower some prices in the region. The subsidised rate for 40 kgs (88.2 lb) of flour will be 2,000 rupees, down from 3,100 rupees, he said. He also announced a substantial dip in the electricity prices. The protests coincide with the visit of an International Monetary Fund (IMF)

mission to negotiate a new long-term loan with Islamabad. The IMF has already warned that social tensions triggered by the high cost of living could weigh on policy implementation, adding that fiscal slippages could present a challenge for the government.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1833463/protesters-call-off-march-in-ajk-after-demands-met>

‘AJK’ PM indirectly blames JAAC for protesters’ deaths

Dawn, 16 may 2024

The ‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’ (AJK) Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq indirectly blamed the leaders of the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) that was behind Monday’s demonstrations in Muzaffarabad, saying that a tragedy could have been averted if its leaders had called off their protests once their demands were accepted. He was referring to the deaths of three young men who died after being shot by paramilitary personnel, at a packed press conference at the Civil Secretariat along with 24 members of the ‘AJK’ cabinet, where all coalition partners were represented. However, despite his assurances that internet services would be re--stored in ‘AJK’ by Wednesday afternoon, the area remained disconnected for a second day. He recalled that as soon as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif sanctioned Rs23 billion to address ‘AJK’s problems, notifications about the wheat flour subsidy and reduced power tariff were issued by his government.

The notifications were received by JAAC leaders, who should have sent a message to the charged public that their demands had been met, he said. However, without naming anyone, he said that some people from amongst the JAAC doubted the credibility of these notifications. Had they made the announcement in time, the tragedy in Muzaffar-abad could have been averted, he said. He said the JAAC had a right to protest, but condemned what he termed ‘mischief’, which caused the death of one police sub-inspector and injuries to 257 policemen.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1833759/ajk-pm-indirectly-blames-jaac-for-protesters-deaths>

PM Shehbaz stresses permanent solution to ‘AJK’ residents’ issues

Dawn, 16 may 2024

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the government would seek a permanent solution to the issues faced by the people of ‘Azad Jammu Kashmir’ (AJK). Addressing a special meeting of the ‘AJK’ cabinet during a daylong visit there, the premier ordered the formation of a committee to discuss issues like water charge, Neelum–Jhelum Hydropower Plant and others for the benefit of the residents. He said the country’s progress was linked with that of the region and assured the leaders that the government would ensure the implementation of mutual understanding. Referring to the recent protests, PM Shehbaz said the people had raised their voices for their genuine demands but amidst that some miscreants tried to create riots and

cause killings. He expressed his grief on the killing of a police official and three citizens during the clashes and announced that his government would support their respective grieved families under the Shuhada Package.

The prime minister said that the provision of Rs23 billion approved by his government had been released, which 'AJK' premier Chaudhary Anwaarul Haq also confirmed receiving. Haq highlighted that PM Shehbaz's visit to his region manifested the value Pakistan accorded to 'AJK.' Shehbaz further assured that, after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) team's visit was over, the federal minister and secretary for power would consult with the 'AJK' authorities to seek a permanent solution to the issues and prevent the recurrence of such incidents. The premier asked his 'AJK' counterpart to constitute a committee in his region for necessary consultation with the relevant Pakistani ministries, urging him to take personal ownership of the matter.

He instructed the relevant authorities to immediately complete the construction of a bridge for the Mangla Phase-2 project. Regarding the Neelum–Jhelum Hydropower Plant, he said the federal water secretary and Kashmir Affairs Minister Amir Muqam would discuss the matter with the Kashmiri leadership to formulate short-, medium- and long-term solutions. The premier appreciated President Asif Ali Zardari, PM Haq, Muqam and 'AJK's assembly speaker,

chief secretary, and police chief for their constructive role and effective consultation for an immediate solution to the people's demands. The prime minister was accompanied by federal cabinet members and senior government officers during his visit.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1833851/pm-shehbaz-stresses-permanent-solution-to-ajk-residents-issues>

Law minister quits GB cabinet amid differences with CM

Dawn, 18 May 2024

The Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) Minister for Law, Parliamentary Affairs and Health Syed Sohail Abbas Shah quit the cabinet on Friday by submitting his resignation to the governor. However, Governor Syed Mehdi Shah has not accepted his resignation yet. Sohail Abbas was elected to the GB Assembly from constituency Gilgit-3 in the 2020 general elections on a Pakistan Tehre-ek-i-Insaf (PTI) ticket. He served as law minister during the PTI government led by former chief minister Khalid Khurshid Khan from 2020 till 2023. He was reappointed as GB Minister for Law, Health, and Parliamentary Affairs by incumbent GB Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan in July last year.

In a statement, Sohail Abbas expressed his gratitude to the people of his constituency, PTI founder Imran Khan, party leadership, and PTI local president Khurshid Khan, who is also the former GB chief minister and assembly member. He stated he had

tried to serve the public as a minister and had become part of the PTI like-minded group in the larger interest of the region. However, he had been disconnected from party leadership during the Chief Minister's election. Sohail Abbas said that for the past 10 months, he had tried his best to work independently, but there were attempts to interfere and dictate sensitive matters, which was not possible for him. He said that despite challenges, he had not compromised on any issue related to GB.

He criticised the current government for taking decisions, 'dictated from elsewhere', and accused them of making decisions based on nepotism and prejudices at the request of the CM and a few ministers. Sources said that differences between Sohail Abbas and Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan emerged when the former reestablished contacts with PTI and ex-CM Khalid. The CM asked the minister to resign, but he refused to tender resignation then. However, recently, the chief minister initiated a summary to remove Sohail Abbas from his cabinet and sent it to the governor. To avoid the move, Sohail Abbas presented his resignation to the governor, stating: I hereby tender my resignation as Minister for Health, Law, and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of GB.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1834205/law-minister-quits-gb-cabinet-amid-differences-with-cm>

[Economic Developments](#)

GB trophy hunting season revenue boosts to Rs309m

Dawn, 13 May 2024

As the Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) Trophy hunting season 2023-24 ended in April, official sources disclosed that more than Rs309 million revenue was generated during the season to protect and balance wildlife conservation with sustainable economic development. The figure shows a growth of over Rs89 million in the annual revenue, as during the last trophy season, Rs220m revenue had been generated. The trophy hunting season spans from November till the start of April every year. In October 2023, the GB Forest, Parks, and Wildlife Department auctioned four licences for the hunting of the prized Astore markhor, one of which fetched a record \$186,000. The licences included four for Astore markhors, 14 for blue sheep, and 88 for Himalayan ibex in various community conservation areas across GB. The second highest permit for the Astore markhor was sold for \$181,000, the third for \$177,000, and the fourth for \$171,000.

The base rate fees for blue sheep and Himalayan ibex permits were \$9,000 and \$5,500, respectively. Out of these, 51 Himalayan ibex, six blue sheep, and four Astore markhors were hunted by the end of the season. While the GB Forest and Wildlife Department received Rs309.5 million, 80 per cent of this revenue goes to the respective community-controlled hunting areas,

which distributes cheques among respective communities at special ceremonies, while the remaining 20pc goes to the national exchequer. The trophy hunting programme in GB, which began in the Nagar Valley in 1990, has since expanded to other areas within the region. Despite global controversies surrounding trophy hunting, proponents argue that such programmes help prevent poaching, empower local communities, and contribute to wildlife conservation.

According to a GB-based conservationist Rashid Minhas, from 1990 till 2023, around \$5 million was generated through trophy hunting of markhor alone, of which US\$ 4.3m has been invested in social, economic and environmental development of local communities. GB Forests and Wildlife Department officials are exploring more areas within the GB region to declare as protected areas with public participation, which protects precious and rare wildlife from illegal hunting. Currently, 60pc of the area in GB has been declared a protected area. GB is rich in flora and fauna due to its varied climatic conditions and ecosystem. The region is home to many rare species, such as the Marco Polo sheep, ibex, markhor, urial, blue sheep, lynx, snow leopard, leopard cat, brown and black bears, wolf, fox, marmot, chakor, and ram chakor, and golden eagle. However, some of these rare species are facing the threat of extinction due to illegal hunting, negligence by the wildlife department, and climate change-related issues.

Environmentalists also oppose trophy hunting, citing that it causes a decline in the population of wildlife species and encourages poaching.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1833114/gb-trophy-hunting-season-revenue-boosts-to-rs309m>

GB facilities to help attract Chinese tourists

The Nation, 13 May 2024

Extensive tourist facilities, especially in the Northern Areas, offer Pakistan an opportunity to attract Chinese tourists. Managing Director of Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) Aftab ur Rehman Rana said that this can not only help ensure a sustainable livelihood for the locals but also bring the much-needed foreign exchange to the country. He said China and Pakistan were neighbouring countries with good diplomatic relationships, people-to-people contacts, and cultural exchanges. They are linked through air and land routes. Under the project China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an improved infrastructure from Khunjerab to Gwadar is established. Further, the roads and highways linked with the CPEC provide not only trade and business opportunities but also make the tourists' access to the tourist sites easier, he said.

He further said that if we travel toward Gwadar, the tourist sites in Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) can be reached. The main element in tourism is accessibility and

the CPEC is making it possible. The next step is the development of boarding and lodging facilities all along, which will open up new opportunities for investors to develop new hotels and resorts. Many Chinese companies or individuals are even interested in coming and investing in developing tourism resorts in Pakistan. Aftab noted that the two governments held a dialogue on improving the tourist inflow. In 2023, he said, a number of meetings were held between the embassy officials on both sides, and a tour operator exchange program was also launched.

The Chinese operators visited their Pakistani counterparts and the PTDC officials visited Urumqi in Xinjiang. A plan to increase the flight frequency toward Urumqi and Kashgar is also under discussion. He said, Xinjiang is now a tourist hub in China with a well-developed infrastructure. It is expected that from 2024 onward, a better mechanism will lead to much better tourist traffic between Xinjiang and GB through the Khunjerab border. The Pakistani government is working to improve the infrastructure facilities in GB. The Skardu airport has also been declared as an international airport and hopefully, very soon Urumqi and Skardu will be well-connected. On the same route, a tourist bus service is also part of the agenda to provide economic transport service to visitors from both sides.

He said that there were a lot of cultural, language, food, and other social differences among the two

countries. To bridge this gap and to make the communication better between the two nations, the PTDC has published a literature in the Chinese language explaining the tourist sites, local culture, facilities, and accessibility sources. A lot of digital material is also available in the Pakistani embassy in Beijing. Speaking to WealthPK, Deputy Director of Tourism and Culture, Youth Affairs, Archaeology and Museums Department, GB, Sajid Hussain said, the CPEC is a window of opportunity, especially for GB concerning tourism promotion.

Karakoram Highway passes alongside Hunza, Gilgit, and Diamer districts covering around 1,000 kilometres. A lot of Chinese tourists visit here to enjoy the nature and adventure tourism. After the pandemic, the footfall of Chinese adventure tourists has been tremendous. Per annum, at least 80,000 to 10,000 Chinese tourists visit the region for adventure tourism. He said GB region was full of unique landscapes and archaeological aspects to explore. The whole region is full of tourism potential and it is also a major source of livelihood. Much of tourism here revolves around eco and adventure tourism. Only 20 percent of the area has been discovered so far while the remaining 80 percent is still a panorama of exploration.

To date, Sajid said, at least 38,000 Buddhist inscriptions, carvings, and models have been explored while a great historical asset is still there to be dugged out. Sajid shared with WealthPK that after the snow melts

(from May to the end of November), traders from Pakistan also visit China in good numbers to buy different products or to attend trade fares. The GB tourism department coordinates them in this concern and business promotion activities get hiked across borders. The GB tourism department is working extensively to promote tourism-related activities in the region. But still, there is a need to work more with the coordination of all related provincial and federal departments to explore and showcase more hidden areas of the region.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/13-May-2024/gb-facilities-to-help-attract-chinese-tourists>

ML-I, KKH realignment figure in Sino-Pak talks

The Express Tribune, 15 May 2024

Pakistan and China expressed joint determination to accelerate progress on all projects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), including upgradation of ML-I, Gwadar Port and realignment of the Karakorum Highway. The bilateral ties and cooperation were discussed in a meeting between Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar and Minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC), Liu Jianchao. The deputy prime minister is on a four-day visit to China mainly to co-chair the 5th Pakistan-China Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. In the meeting, the two leaders also reaffirmed the

importance of the all-weather strategic cooperative partnership between Pakistan and China and to further reinforce mutually beneficial collaboration.

They discussed the longstanding cooperation and exchanges between the political parties of Pakistan and the Communist Party of China. Senator Dar reaffirmed Pakistan's firm support to China on its core issues while Minister Liu expressed China's support for Pakistan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and high-quality socioeconomic development. The deputy prime minister and foreign minister expressed condolences and shock over Chinese casualties in the heinous Shangla attack. He reiterated Pakistan's firm resolve to counter terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and to bring perpetrators of the Shangla attack to justice. He underlined the measures taken by Pakistan to ensure enhanced security of Chinese projects, personnel and institutions in Pakistan. Senator Dar invited Liu Jianchao to visit Pakistan to co-chair the next meeting of CPEC Joint Consultative Mechanism of Political Parties this

Meanwhile, the foreign minister outlined the comprehensive reform agenda of the government that sought to foster economic growth and development by enhancing revenue, promoting austerity and harnessing foreign investment. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to creating an enabling environment for the overseas Pakistanis and harnessing

their ideas and potential for national development agenda. The deputy prime minister and foreign minister held an interactive session of Pakistani professionals and students in China.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2466656/ml-i-kkh-realignment-figure-in-sino-pak-talks>

Key water project faces the axe

The Express tribune, 14 may 2024

The ambitious project to bring water from the confluence of the Neelum Jhelum river in 'Azad Kashmir' and Murree to Rawalpindi has been terminated due to a significant increase in estimated costs. The project, approved in 2005 during the tenure of former Punjab chief minister Chaudhary Pervaiz Elahi, was initially valued at Rs2.55 billion. However, after multiple delays and revisions, the estimated cost has skyrocketed to over Rs12 billion, prompting the authorities to abandon the project. The project aimed to supply water to the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad by laying pipelines from the Neelum Jhelum River to the Rawal Dam filtration plant. The Asian Development Bank was also providing funding for the project. However, the change in government in 2008 led to a halt in work, and subsequent revisions in 2012 further increased the estimated cost to Rs 5 billion. Despite efforts to revive the project, the escalating costs have made it unviable.

According to sources in the District Coordination Committee Rawalpindi, the matter will now be sent to the

Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) to seek additional funding from the federal government. If approved, the Capital Development Authority (CDA), Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), and Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) will also contribute to the project. However, for now, the project remains terminated, leaving the residents of Rawalpindi and Islamabad without a vital source of water supply.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2466600/key-water-project-faces-the-axe>

Mangla Refurbishment project to add additional 310MW to national grid

The Nation, 15 may 2024

The power generation capacity of Mangla Hydel Power Station will increase from 1000 megawatts (MW) to 1310 MW after the completion of the Mangla Refurbishment Project. After the completion of the project, the average annual generation will also jump from 5 billion units to 6.6 billion units. Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) is executing the project with an approved PC-I cost of Rs.52.224 billion. USAID is providing US\$150 million as a grant and Agence Française de Développement (AFD) France is providing Euro 90 million as a loan for the project, while the rest of the amount is being arranged by WAPDA through loans and from its resources, they said.

The Project is being carried out in various phases, wherein the generating units are to be refurbished by closing

down one tunnel (two generating units) at a time. Refurbishment of the first two units had already been completed in 2022, while refurbishment of all 10 generating units is likely to be accomplished by the year 2027-28 in a phased manner. Meanwhile, WAPDA has also awarded contract Package III C amounting to \$ 6.28729 million for the design and supply of two 220 KV, 168.75 MVA Generator Step-up (GSU) Transformers for Unit No. 9 and 10 of Mangla Refurbishment Project.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/15-May-2024/mangla-refurbishment-project-to-add-additional-310mw-to-national-grid>

ECC approves summary for provision of Rs23b as additional grant to 'AJK' govt

The Nation, 16 May 2024

The Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) gave approval to the summary for 'Provision of Rs23 billion as Additional Grant to the 'AJK' Government.' The Federal Finance and Revenue Minister Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb presided over a meeting of the ECC. The meeting was attended by the Minister for Power Sardar Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari, Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain, Minister for Petroleum Dr Musadik Masood Malik, Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan and concerned federal secretaries. Secretary Kashmir Affairs and GB briefed the committee that during a high-level meeting, the Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif

had authorised an additional grant of Rs23 billion to the Government of 'AJK', in the paramount national interest. The ECC gave approval to the summary for 'Provision of Rs23 billion as Additional Grant to the 'AJK' Government' through Technical Supplementary Grant as proposed by the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and GB.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/16-May-2024/ecc-approves-summary-for-provision-of-rs23b-as-addl-grant-to-ajk-govt>

PM directs to constitute committee on Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower Project matters

The Nation, 16 May 2024

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has directed to constitute a high-level committee for consultation over matters related to Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower Project (NJHP). Addressing the 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) Cabinet in Muzaffarabad, he said the committee comprising senior officials from federal and 'AJK' governments will finalize the short, mid and long term plans within next two weeks. The Prime Minister directed the officials concerned for immediate and earliest possible completion of the bridge at Mangla phase II, so no chaotic elements can ever misuse and exploit this little incomplete portion of bridge for their sordid political gains. He said the federal and AJK governments will hold discussions soon after IMF team leaves the country to finally settle the pending issues so no such incident like recent

protest in AJK arises again. Shehbaz Sharif expressed condolences over the death of civilians and a police personnel during the protests and announced a package for heirs of Shuhada.

He said the funds worth 23 billion rupees announced by federal government for 'Azad Kashmir' have been transferred into the 'AJK' government account. He said development and prosperity of Pakistan is directly linked with the prosperity of 'AJK'. Shehbaz Sharif said Pakistan holds the people of 'IIOJK' in high esteem and will continue extending its moral, political, and diplomatic support to them. He said the day is not far when people of 'IIOJK' and Palestine will get their inalienable rights.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/16-May-2024/pm-directs-to-constitute-committee-on-neelum-jhelum-hydropower-project-matters>

Wapda chairman visits Diamer Basha Dam site

Dawn, 18 May 2024

Diamer Basha Dam Project (DBDP) is progressing ahead, as construction work is simultaneously underway day in and day out on as many as 14 key sties of the project, being constructed by WAPDA across River Indus, 40-km downstream of Chilas town. Chairman WAPDA Engr Lt Gen (r) Sajjad Ghani reached DBD site to witness construction activities on the project. He visited, in detail, the sites of diversion canal, guide wall, diversion tunnel, upstream and downstream

coffer dams, permanent bridge and left and right abutments of the main dam. The project team consisting CEO DBD Company, General Manager/Project Director, DBD Project, the consultants and the contractors, briefed the chairman about progress on each site. It was briefed that diversion system is functioning satisfactorily.

The permanent access bridge, downstream of the main dam site, has been completed while adjacent approach roads are scheduled to be completed by next month. The chairman directed the consultants and the contractors to strictly adhere to the construction standards laid down for ensuring quality of the works. During his visit to DBD, the chairman also participated in a jirga with the GB ministers and the civil administration, therein a thorough deliberation was made upon resettlement of the affectees, chulha package in particular.

The chairman said WAPDA highly values the sacrifices of the locals for construction of the project, therefore, every effort is being made to bring positive change in life of the people through economic empowerment and social uplift. WAPDA has been spending a hefty amount of Rs. 78.5 billion for resettlement of the affectees and development schemes in health, education and infra-structure in the project area. Moreover, priority is also being accorded to the locals in employment opportunities at the project.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/18-May-2024/wapda-chairman-visits-diamer-basha-dam-site>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

The prime minister of Pakistan has approved floor and power subsidies for 'AJK' and promised a relief package

Jammu and Kashmir Times, 14 May 2024

In response to the continuing protests against inflation in the area, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif ordered the immediate release of Rs23 billion to address the issues affecting the people of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK). Massive subsidies on grain and energy bills are also being considered. In order to have a thorough assessment of the current state of affairs in 'AJK', Shehbaz called a special meeting that was attended by the leaders of 'AJK' and his coalition government's members. He declared that the government will not abandon the people of Kashmir and that it stood with them. In a statement, the PM Office stated that the PM had decided to provide cash after carefully assessing the circumstances in the territory and added that the PM ordered the immediate release of Rs23 billion to resolve the issues confronting the people of 'AJK.' Following five days of protests, PM Shehbaz also called a meeting of the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), which predominantly consisted of local traders among others.

The prime minister's prompt action and the disbursement of funds were appreciated by the 'AJK' leadership and other attendees at the meeting. A prompt and peaceful resolution to the 'AJK' concerns is imperative, as

emphasized by the leaders of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Among the attendees at the meeting were Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, as well as Information Minister Atta Tarar and Law Minister Azam Nazir Tarar among others. Subsequently, the 'AJK' government announced increased flour and power tariff subsidies through two different notifications, one from the food department and the other from the electricity supply department, after the Centre's announcement of the financial package.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2466364/pm-approves-massive-subsidies-for-ajk>

Modi's attempts to plunge Pakistan into darkness will not succeed: 'AJK' Prime Minister

Jasarat, 15 May 2024

The Prime Minister of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) Chaudhry Anwar Haq said that a resilience people will thwart Modi's plans to push Pakistan into darkness. Haq said in a press conference that despite the economic problems, the federal government gave a historic package of 23 billion rupees and added that the Kashmiris will never be left alone. He stressed that Kashmiris have a strong and eternal relationship with Pakistan, which is our future and that will last for forever generations. Haq declared that our objective is to become a part of Pakistan and that 'Azad Kashmir' is a peaceful region whose atmosphere we will not permit to be disturbed. We sincerely apologize for the lives lost during the

protest movement. He emphasized that the forces of evil must be subdued, that anarchists cannot be pardoned, and that as long as he lives, no one would be allowed to strike at the philosophy of our forebears who chose Pakistan.

<https://www.jasarat.com/2024/05/15/chaudhry-anwar-haq/>

The actions of the malicious elements exacerbate the situation during the protest movement in 'Azad Kashmir': PM Shehbaz Sharif at the 'AJK' Cabinet meeting

UrduPoint, 16 May 2024

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif claimed that miscreants' attempts to inflame the region during the protest movement in 'Azad Kashmir' not only failed but it has backfired. He said that such violence making the locals fall more in love with Pakistan and that the protestor's issues were settled in a more positive way. He said that Pakistan is committed to advocating on behalf of the Kashmiri community globally, given the dire circumstances that persist in 'Occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (OJK) due to India's illegal rule. During his speech to the 'AJK' Cabinet, Shabaz appreciated the 'AJK' President and PM for their swift action in managing the circumstances. Shahbaz said that the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) was peacefully marching for their democratic rights; however, certain criminals had initiated vandalism during the otherwise democratic protest, which led to fatalities and infrastructure damages in 'AJK.'

The lively and powerful nation of 'Azad Kashmir' is always aware of its own interests and that Pakistan's 25 crore citizens cherish the sacrifices made by Kashmiris. He stressed that Kashmiris sacrifices will not go in vain and that Pakistan would continue its support to Kashmiris globally. He said that he had talked vehemently on Kashmir during the press conference held in honor of Iran's President, Dr. Ibrahim Raisi, in his recent visit to Pakistan. He said that the Kashmir topic generated a lot of discussion during his meeting and that it is more than words; it is an issue of the heart. We shall keep supporting Kashmiris in all forums with moral and diplomatic backing. According to him, the families of the martyrs would receive packages for every civilian and police officer who died during the latest protests in 'AJK'.

A 23 billion rupee package has been received by the 'Azad Kashmir' government and that we owe it to them; this is not a favor. Pakistan's arteries run via Kashmir and that there is a deep love between the people of Kashmir and Pakistan. Our diplomatic and moral assistance, as well as our nonviolent effort, must continue for 'Occupied Kashmir' and the Palestine, he added. The time when Palestinians and Kashmiris will be granted their rights is, hopefully, not far off. The growth and prosperity of Pakistan, he claimed, are inextricably linked to the development of 'AJK.' Pakistan is being visited by the IMF delegation soon. Following the team's visit, the outstanding issues will be settled

through thorough conversation as soon as possible to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-4019007.html>

From Social Media

Aasim Sajjad Akhtar @AasimSajjadA

11 May 2024

Pakistan- land of the pure where profiteers run riot, working people starve & Khaki Raj makes a mockery of democracy. Protestors in 'Azad' Kashmir speak for all masses & ethnic peripheries who want socioeconomic justice. Repression will breed more resistance.

https://x.com/il/bookmarks?post_id=1789304185726320993

Ammar Ali Jan @ammaralijan

10 May 2024

Solidarity to the people of AJK who are fighting against price hike and demanding their right to subsidized electricity and wheat. Govt is crackding down on protestors in Kashmir & farmers in Punjab while protecting mafias who made billions in wheat scam. Shameful!

https://x.com/il/bookmarks?post_id=1788979542121402821

Mohammad Zubair Khan @HazaraZubair

13 May 2024

Kashmir March has reached Poonch and remained active late night. They

have heavy machines who is removing different hurdles obstacles.

Video link:

https://x.com/il/bookmarks?post_id=1789393910252388569

Azeem Hunzai @azeem_hunzai

17 May 2024

We condemn the occupation of Gilgit-Baltistan's lands, minerals and resources in the name of green tourism and appeal to the youth that now is the time for resistance, the occupation is over.

#savegilgitbaltistan
#downwithcolonisers
#savemotherland

Video link:

https://x.com/il/bookmarks?post_id=1791516431344865694

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Disclaimer

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