

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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09 September - 15 September 2024

protest hydropower projects **POK**
Ratle Kishenganga **CPEC**
wheat quota Gilgit-Baltistan
Arbitration trekking permits
GB Adventure Tourism



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

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Political Developments

GB sees plot behind attacks in Balochistan

Dawn, 9 September 2024

The Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) government and opposition leaders have condemned recent militant attacks on civilians and security personnel in Balochistan and termed them a conspiracy to destabilise the country and undermine the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. They demanded strict action to eliminate increasing militancy in Balochistan in order to ensure safety of CPEC as GB is its gateway. GB home minister Shams Lone while talking to journalists said that such attacks are aimed at destabilising the country and they are a plot against CPEC project. These horrific attacks indicate that Baloch militants have intensified their violent campaign against security forces, public installations, Chinese interests and civilians to create anarchy and uncertainty in the country, he said.

Opposition leader Kazim Mesum said international powers have plans to sabotage CPEC project through militants. As gateway to CPEC, the GB people are more concerned about the increasing violent acts in Balochistan, he said. The opposition leader regretted militant groups, particularly BLA, had involved women and children in acts of terror in Balochistan. Earlier, GB Chief Minister Gulbar Khan condemned the terrorist attacks in Balochistan and said that the

GB government shares the grief of the bereaved families.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1857828/gb-sees-plot-behind-attacks-in-balochistan>

Will not talking usher in peace?

Dawn, 10 September 2024

India's home minister says there can't be any talks with Pakistan until peace comes to Jammu and Kashmir first. It's not clear if he was posturing as politicians often do or stating it as conviction common with India's right-wing nationalists. The backdrop to the comments is the three-phase assembly elections scheduled in Jammu and Kashmir from 18 September, which Home Minister Amit Shah is keen to win for his party. Not talking to Pakistan till peace returns to violence-wracked Kashmir makes for a strange argument to keep aloof from an important, in fact, a critical neighbour. It's particularly strange coming from a country that purports to be working for peace in a distant conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

It's interesting nevertheless that India flaunts an appetite for resolving disputes abroad (not excluding Sri Lanka and the Maldives) while rejecting friendly offers from world capitals to help in its perpetually troubled ties with Pakistan. Of course, there are those in India's ruling pack that believe there's nothing to talk to Pakistan about. The only dispute, they say, is India's claim on 'Azad Kashmir', which the Rao government had formalised through a parliamentary resolution in the 1990s. Even that claim

needs talks, right? Or, as some ardent nationalists dream, the army would do the job. It's this kind of alarming rubbish that former US secretary of state Mike Pompeo referred to in his memoirs. He got a midnight call about a crisis that broke out in 2019 between India and Pakistan. Pompeo called it a terrifying stand-off between nuclear neighbours.

To stay with the argument, could Russia and Ukraine sort out their differences without addressing the interests of the Russian-speaking population of Donbas? Could the people of Donbas find peace without reference to the warring sides? Apart from the tautological infirmity in Shah's logic, there is grudging admission of a resounding failure wrought on hapless Kashmiris and, in fact, on the entire country. Team Modi had overreached its capacity to resolve burning domestic problems.

Step back a bit. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrecked India's economy on 8 November 2016, with his disastrous move to demonetise 80 per cent of the country's currency, he took the plea that it would rein in terrorism. One could quibble over Modi's definition of terrorism, but that is what he said. People for better or worse agreed to heed the claim at the time, and they obviously suffered for it. Their suffering hadn't ended, however, when Modi wrecked the state of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019, claiming that breaking it up and removing its special status guaranteed by the Indian constitution was another means towards ending terrorism.

Five years after heaping misery on the people, and after countless innocent lives were lost, people maimed and jailed, Shah indicated last week that he still hadn't succeeded in bringing peace to the region. Reports quoted him as telling BJP workers in Jammu that terrorism, a description for armed resistance against Indian rule, was only 70pc tamed in 10 years of Modi rule, whatever the faux statistics mean. Shah also said that the special status could never again be restored to the state. Assembly elections are being held in Jammu and Kashmir together with state polls in BJP-ruled Haryana, abutting Delhi.

Elections in Jharkhand and BJP-ruled Maharashtra are also pending. The dismantled state of Jammu and Kashmir is currently only a union territory, in the way that Delhi is. J&K wasn't. The Modi government says it is committed to restoring statehood to J&K but without the special rights, and sans the region of Ladakh, which was detached from it in the Aug 2019 move. Most Kashmiri parties in the electoral fray are keen to see the feeble attempt at restoring democracy in the state as a potential harbinger of peace to end their exacerbated suffering under Modi's rule. If Shah has his way, he will install a BJP-led government in the Muslim-majority region. It would serve no intrinsic purpose though since the BJP is already ruling Kashmir with the help of its hand-picked lieutenant governor, a veritable viceroy representing Delhi. But the symbolism of a win would help the ruling party score brownie points in the face of possible defeat in the other state polls.

The way the chips are stacked, a BJP victory could yet be the outcome in J&K. The Congress has aligned with the National Conference of former chief minister Farooq Abdullah, but another member of the India-wide opposition alliance, the PDP of Mehbooba Mufti, is going on its own. On the other hand, a party set up by the jailed and newly elected MP Engineer Rashid is leading the charge against the BJP. In the multi-cornered melee, the BJP could emerge as the single largest party, and the lieutenant governor would be well within his rights to invite it to form government. The visuals of a Hindu nationalist party ruling predominantly Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir would lend a degree of heft to the celebrations in 2025 of 100 years of the foundation of the RSS. Wrecking the special status of Kashmir has long been a key quest for Hindutva groups.

Given the state of affairs, what kind of relationship could one foresee for India with Pakistan in the near or distant future? When Jinnah was asked about Pakistan's equation with India, he cited Canada and the United States as examples to follow. As for Gandhi, he was preparing to visit Pakistan on a peace mission when he was laid low by Hindutva conspirators whose sympathisers are ideologically connected with the party ruling India today. How shall we then contemplate peace ahead?

Jawed Naqvi: The writer is Dawn's correspondent in Delhi.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1858055/will-not-talking-usher-in-peace>

Kashmiris Voice Concerns at UNHRC Geneva General Debate on Human Rights Violations in 'Indian-Occupied Kashmir'

Daily Parliament Times, 12 September 2024

A high-level Kashmiris' delegation representing the internationally-acknowledged disputed Jammu & Kashmir, participated actively in the ongoing general debate at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, expressed grave concerns regarding the High Commissioner's updates that notably overlooked the dire human rights situation in 'Indian illegally-occupied Jammu Kashmir' (IIOJK) state. The delegation, comprising representatives from various organizations including the APHC and other relevant outfits led by Kashmiris, highlighted the alarming reality faced by the Kashmiri people, emphasizing the ongoing extrajudicial killings, torture in custody, and decades-long arbitrary detentions.

Ghulam Muhammad Safi, Convenor of the APHC, speaking on behalf of the World Muslim Congress, stated that the continued extrajudicial killings, torture in custody, and decades-long arbitrary detentions in Kashmir cannot be overlooked. The use of draconian laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Armed Forces Special Powers Act, and Public Safety Act, alongside the notorious National Investigation Agency, serves to stifle political dissent and undermine the rights of the Kashmiri people. Raja Sajjad Latief, representing United

Villages, further underscored the plight of political leaders, human rights activists, and journalists, noting that even when we speak, over 5,000 innocent people, including political leaders, human rights activists, and journalists, are languishing in different jails across India. The Indian government's acts of reprisals against human rights activists and political leaders include the confiscation of their properties.

Sardar Amjad Yousaf, President of the International Action for Peace and Sustainable Development, highlighted the intensified crackdown on human rights defenders following the detention of noted activists Khurram Parvez and Irfan Miraj. He stated, that now, other defenders who raise their voices for Kashmir have been included in the FIRs, signaling a dangerous trend against those advocating for human rights. In light of these alarming developments, the delegation called for the formation of a Commission of Inquiry and urged the Human Rights Council to send a commission to 'IoK' to investigate both past and ongoing human rights violations.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/09/12/kashmiris-voice-concerns-at-unhrc-geneva-general-debate-on-human-rights-violations-in-indian-occupied-kashmir/>

'AJK' PM slams Indian minister's 'ridiculous statement', rejects offer made to Kashmiris to join India

Dawn, 12 September 2024

The 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) leadership sharply criticised recent

remarks by Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who extended an invitation to 'AJK's residents to join India. 'AJK' Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq advised Indian leaders to abandon their 'ridiculous rhetoric' and instead allow the residents of the disputed region to determine their future on their own terms. Speaking at an election rally in Ramban last weekend, Singh had urged the residents of 'AJK' to join India, claiming they were considered 'our own', unlike in Pakistan, where they were treated as 'foreigners.'

The Hindustan Times reported that the Indian minister was referring to a statement made by Additional Attorney General (AAG) Munawar Iqbal Duggal, who claimed 'AJK' was a foreign territory. According to Aaj News, Duggal had argued that 'Azad Kashmir' has its own constitution and judicial system, and Pakistani court decisions are treated as foreign judgments there. In a response, the 'AJK' premier said: It requires an extraordinary level of shameless audacity to make such statements, and Indian politicians, particularly those affiliated with the Hindu fanatic BJP, are adept at it, despite their hands being fully stained with the blood of innocent Kashmiris on both sides of the Line of Control (LoC).

Haq claimed that India had brazenly deprived the Kashmiri people of their fundamental right to self-determination and its occupation forces were involved in the killing of hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. He highlighted grave human

rights abuses committed by Indian forces, including mass rapes, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances, dating back to 1947, but especially since 1989. The discovery of over 8,000 unnamed mass graves in the occupied Valley is a testament to the brutality inflicted upon Kashmiris by 'Indian occupation forces', he claimed. He said that the Indian government had turned 'occupied Kashmir' into an open prison, where citizens were forced to live in fear, stripped of their basic human rights and identity.

Haq also criticised India's aggression along the LoC in 'AJK', which, he said, had resulted in the deaths of countless civilians, alongside significant material losses. How can the people on this side forget the death and destruction caused by unprovoked and relentless shelling by Indian troops [prior to the ceasefire]? How can they forget the brutal murder of innocent people grazing cattle, cutting fodder, or plucking medicinal plants along the LoC? he asked. Instead of worrying about 'AJK' and issuing ridiculous statements about it, Mr Singh and his ilk should feel remorse and shame for their ghastly actions in Kashmir and focus on ending the illegal occupation of the region, PM Haq said.

He further called on the Indian government to respect the will of the Kashmiri people, withdraw its occupation forces from the territory, and allow Kashmiris to determine their political future in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions. He noted that while the Indian Army was viewed

as a murderous force by Kashmiris on both sides of the LoC, the Pakistan Army had always acted as a protector of the people.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1858531/ajk-pm-slams-indian-defence-ministers-ridiculous-statement-rejects-offer-to-join-india>

Pakistan rebukes India for crushing Kashmiris' rights

The Nation, 13 September 2024

Pakistan rebuked India for crushing Kashmiris rights and banning several Kashmiri political parties under India's so-called Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Speaking at a weekly news briefing, Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch strongly condemned the recent decision by Delhi High Court to uphold the ban on several Kashmiri political parties under UAPA. She described this as part of India's ongoing efforts to subjugate the Kashmiri people, stifle dissent, and consolidate its occupation of 'Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (IIOJK). She criticized the Indian judiciary for legitimizing these repressive actions, recalling that last year the Indian Supreme Court upheld the illegal acts of 2019 that revoked Kashmir's special status.

Baloch called upon India to lift the ban on political parties, respect the rights of the Kashmiri people, release political prisoners, and implement UN Security Council resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir. In response to questions regarding Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attendance at the upcoming Shanghai Cooperation

Organization (SCO) summit in Pakistan, Baloch clarified that Pakistan had extended invitations to all SCO member states. At this point, she said, no official communication had been received from India regarding Modi's attendance. She assured that Pakistan, as the host nation, was taking all necessary measures to ensure the smooth and secure holding of the summit in mid-October.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Sep-2024/pakistan-rebuked-india-for-crushing-kashmiris-rights>

Economic Developments

Pakistan, India set to face off over controversial hydropower projects today

The Nation, 10 September 2024

Pakistan and India are set to meet on 10-11 September in The Hague at the neutral expert forum to address disputes over the designs of India's Kishenganga (330 MW) and Ratle (850 MW) hydropower projects. These projects, built on Pakistan's rivers Jhelum and Chenab, have heightened tensions due to concerns about water flow impacts. Pakistan, led by Federal Secretary of Water Resources Syed Ali Murtaza, has raised objections to the designs. It argues that the Kishenganga project's pondage of 7.5 million cubic metres should be reduced to 1 million cubic metres and seeks modifications to the intake and spillways. For the Ratle project, Pakistan wants the pondage reduced from 24 million cubic metres to 8 million, among other design changes.

Pakistan prefers the case to be decided by the Permanent Court of Arbitration

(PCA), which India boycotts, favoring a neutral expert instead. The PCA, however, ruled in July 2023 that it has jurisdiction over the case, rejecting India's objections. Pakistan argues that the Ratle project in its current form could harm water flow in the Chenab River, affecting irrigation in Punjab. The World Bank has constituted both the PCA and neutral expert to handle the dispute under the Indus Waters Treaty.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/10-Sep-2024/pakistan-india-to-face-off-over-controversial-hydropower-projects-today>

K2 permit and trekking fee hiked for international climbers

The Express Tribune, 15 September 2024

The Government of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) has issued a notification detailing new fees for mountaineering and trekking permits, including a significant hike in the cost of permits for climbing K2. According to the notification from the GB Tourism, Sports, Culture, Archaeology, and Museum Department, the permit fee for foreign climbers to scale K2 has been set at \$5,000 for the summer season (April-September), \$2,500 for autumn (October-November), and \$1,500 for the winter season (December-March). For Pakistani climbers, the new K2 permit fees are Rs100,000 for the summer season, Rs50,000 for autumn, and Rs 30,000 for winter.

Additionally, the trekking fees for foreigners have increased, now set at \$300 for the summer season, \$200 for

autumn, and \$100 for winter. The notification also specifies several important regulations: climbers can only scale one peak per permit, groups are limited to a maximum of 20 members, and high-altitude porters must now be insured for up to Rs2 million. Low-altitude porters will be insured for up to Rs 1 million. Environmental fees are to be deposited into the GB Adventure Tourism Account, and all expedition briefings and debriefings will be conducted at the tourism offices in GB.

During 2023 and 2024, K2 climbing permits were granted collectively to groups of seven climbers at \$12,000. Each additional climber cost an extra \$3,000. For 2025, Gilgit-Baltistan authorities have got rid of the collective fee and established an individual royalty of \$5,000 per climber. A group of seven climbers that paid \$12,000 this year will therefore pay \$35,000 in 2025. That's nearly a 200% increase. The revised fees and regulations are aimed at streamlining mountaineering operations in the region and are set to take effect immediately.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2496362/k2-permit-and-trekking-fee-hiked-for-international-climbers>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

India needs to outline the time frame for an independent referendum in 'occupied Kashmir': Farooq Haider Khan

Daily Jammu and Kashmir, 10 September 2024

Raja Muhammad Farooq Haider Khan, the former prime minister and

member of the Legislative Assembly of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK), declared that the current people movement in 'Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (IOJK) is about a free, impartial, and unbiased plebiscite overseen by the United Nations (UN), rather than the so-called local elections held under 'Indian military occupation.' He stressed that, in compliance with UN Security Council resolutions, India should set a deadline for an independent referendum and make preparations for it rather than conducting assembly elections in 'occupied Kashmir.' He expressed these opinions at a dinner party alongside patron-in-chief, Sardar Zahoor Iqbal, chairman of the Jammu and Kashmir Forum France, member of the Pakistan Muslim League (N) Central Executive Committee, and Chaudhry Naeem Akhtar, the former coordinator of the prime minister of 'Azad Kashmir' for Europe.

He claimed that the state assembly elections being overseen by the Indian military are a flagrant breach of the Security Council's established resolutions and international law. He further claimed that neither India nor any Indian institution has jurisdiction over 'occupied Kashmir.' Any elections conducted under the military's supervision in India are therefore illegitimate and dishonest.

<http://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Resize-of-FRONT-PAGE-10.jpg>

A Delegation from Karakoram International University attended the cross-border summer course on e-commerce in China

Urdupoint, 10 September 2024

The manager of the business center at Karakoram International University (KIU), Kaleemullah Dar, led a KIU group to the Cross-Border E-Commerce Summer School in Nanning, China. The participation at the summer school is intended to increase educational exchange, advance international cooperation, and investigate e-commerce potential, according to the KIU Department of Public Relations. The university delegation received a comprehensive learning platform from the E-Commerce Summer School that combined theoretical knowledge with real-world experience. During the tour, the delegation learned about the latest innovations in technology, supply chain management techniques, and e-commerce employed by Chinese businesses. The visiting group had meetings with academics, businesspeople, and decision-makers to discuss ways to improve bilateral relations between Pakistan and China.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/gilgit/education/live-news-4151410.html>

The protest against the reduction of wheat quota in Gilgit will be postponed for a month

Urdupoint, 11 September 2024

The protest demonstration in Gilgit over the reduction of the wheat quota

allotment has been rescheduled for a month. Following fruitful discussions between representatives of civil society, flour dealers, and the district administration, it was decided to postpone the protest for one month. The Deputy Commissioner Gilgit has directed the officers of the food department to reinstate the prior wheat quota for the district for the upcoming month. Meanwhile, the spokesperson of the Public Action Committee (PAC) argues that if 11 kg of flour per capita is not delivered to the citizens per month we will again start a mass protests movement.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/gilgit/national-news/live-news-4152224.html>

From Social Media

Roshan Din Diameri @Rohshan_Din

16 September 2024

This is how roads are constructed in Gilgit-Baltistan. Due to frequent blasting, the mountains become unstable. After even a normal rain, landslides occur, causing loss of lives on the KKH. #GilgitBaltistan #Landslides #KKH #ClimateImpact

@ndmapk @ClimateChangePK
@aisha4climate

Video link:

https://twitter.com/Rohshan_Din/status/1835687475114586178

Diamer Basha Dam PR @DBD_PR

16 September 2024

#WAPDA & Gilgit-Baltistan Rural Support Program have signed a

memorandum of understanding to offer technical and vocational training to youth in #Diامر. MoU outlines training in 14 trades, aiming to equip participants with skills for national & int job markets. @gbrspofficial.

https://twitter.com/DBD_PR/status/1835651490259652963

Special Communications Organization @hq_sco

17 September 2024

A Freelancing Hub has been estb in Darel, Gilgit Baltistan by Pakistan Army (Special Investment Facilitation Council - SIFC) through Special Communications Organisation (SCO). The hub is designed to connect freelancers with the global market, empowering youth, enhancing skills and improving digital literacy. With these initiatives, the region is rapidly transforming into a technological hub.

#PakistanArmy #SCO
#SpecialCommunicationsOrganisation
#YouthEmpowerment
#DigitalPakistan #FreelancingHubs
Directorate of Education Colleges,
Gilgit-Baltistan ISPR.

Video link:

https://twitter.com/hq_sco/status/1835906898685460500

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Disclaimer

PoK weekly News Digest is a collection of news reports and press releases published in various newspapers and local media related to Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK), referred to as 'Azad Kashmir' and 'Gilgit Baltistan' by the government of Pakistan. The news reports have been edited and abridged to provide clarity. MP-IDSA is not responsible for the accuracy and authenticity of the news items.



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