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News Digest

A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

• **Political Developments**

Debate on Gilgit-Baltistan: Implications for the Kashmir issue-I
Giving Gilgit-Baltistan provincial status could be a political masterstroke
Sedition case controversy takes new turn
Sit-in for Baba Jan's release continues on second day in Hunza
Rally demands provincial status for Gilgit-Baltistan

• **Urdu Media**

Work continues on development projects
The “fall of Kashmir” and Gilgit-Baltistan
Politics on Gilgit-Baltistan



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Jammu & Kashmir

(Source: GIS Section MP-IDSA)

In this Edition

As the date of election in GB (on 15 November 2020) came closer, the debate on future status of GB heated up in the Pakistani and local media. There were contradictory views on this. One section of the people argued that granting provincial status to GB was a 'dangerous' idea because it was part of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir state and any unilateral move by Pakistan would only strengthen Indian case. Moreover, the leaderships in AJK and Kashmir were opposed to this. The other section argued that while such concerns could be genuine, a via media could be worked in the shape of granting provision provincial status to GB, which would be a 'political master-stroke. There was a common refrain that Pakistan did not have anything to fear granting the people of the region more local autonomy given the fact that the region had cent percent Muslim population who would decide in favour of joining Pakistan, anytime the plebiscite were to be held.

Despite this, the local media held that so far, GB has remained outside the political mainstream and a hybrid system has been in place, where the local elected representatives compete with powerful 'unelected' bureaucrats appointed by the federal government and sitting in the federal capital to decide about the fate of the people in the region. It also pointed out that the federal government has been quite intolerant of local movements for rights of the people and have been quite harsh with local leaders demanding such rights. They have been put behind the bars, denied legal assistance and made to incarcerate in the prison. The case of Baba Jan was cited in the media as a proof of all this. He has been the face of local protests against Islamabad's highhandedness ever since this Hunza-based activist raised his voice in favour of the victims of the Attabad Lake burst. He was sentenced to 71-years in prison by an antiterrorism court. Taking advantage of the pre-electoral climate in the region, Baba Jan's supporters held a protest rally in Aliabad, Hunza demanding justice for him and 13 others who have been in jail since 2011.

The case of lodging of FIRs against t former premier Nawaz Sharif, Azad Kashmir Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider and 40 other main leaders of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) by a PTI activist was resented in AJK. It was argued that by targeting the Prime Minister of "Azad" Kashmir, India was being provided with enough reason to celebrate his arrest and division within Pakistan.

Coordinator, PoK Project

Political Developments

‘Debate on Gilgit-Baltistan: Implications for the Kashmir issue-I’,

Prof Khursheed Ahmed & Saleem M. Khalid, Daily Pakistan, 07 October 2020

It is a reality that sometimes hastily taken decisions has severe implications for nations. The case of Jammu and Kashmir has emerged as a volcano for modern international relations. All sympathetic people across the world are mourning the sufferings of the Kashmiris because of the helplessness of the UN, indifference of the international community and Indian atrocities in Kashmir. On 5 August 2019, the Government of India, supported by the RSS revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and made the valley a living jail. It became binding for the Government in Pakistan to highlight the Kashmir case and the sufferings of the Kashmiris and bring it to the notice of the international community. Nothing was done in that regard. Instead, the government is taking on a dangerous project: making Gilgit-Baltistan a new province of Pakistan. According to all evidence, the Northern areas are part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Right from the creation of Pakistan, it has been Islamabad’s position too. The position has been upheld by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The UN resolutions on Kashmir state the same. The population of Kashmir is 93 percent Muslims. The population of the Northern areas is entirely Muslim. In case of plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir, all these people would vote for joining Pakistan. In 1972 Bhutto had considered such a proposal. They were never implemented because of the possible negative implications on the Kashmir issue. Already, reactions from “Azad” Kashmir, “occupied” Jammu and Kashmir and from the Northern areas have been critical of the decision. The government had taken up a policy to develop the areas and work for the welfare of the local people. Now

they say that by merging the areas with Pakistan, the social, economic, and judicial situations would improve. This is hogwash. It was the responsibility of the government to help “Azad” Kashmir to improve the condition of “Azad” Kashmir and other adjacent areas which has not happened. Now they have come up with this wrong plan of merging this area with Pakistan.

<https://dailypakistan.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2020-10-07/page-9/detail-6>

‘Giving Gilgit-Baltistan provincial status could be a political masterstroke’,

Riaz Akbar & Yawar Abbas, The Express Tribune, 07 October 2020

Giving G-B provincial status will remove these roadblocks and help spur economic growth in the region especially in attracting private sector investment. This was highlighted by the G-B government and was communicated to the national government and other international development partners like the World Bank as one of the major development issues of G-B. Issues of economic integration, regional trade linkages have kept G-B arguably the least industrially developed part of Pakistan. Legalizing Pakistan’s control over G-B also brings in the prospects of development. Chinese ambassador to Pakistan has suggested joint development of the GB-Xinjiang region as sister provinces and turning them into a single economic and strategic theatre at the BRI’s point of origin. Such a venture will not just give an international flair to BRI’s starting point, but will also bring innumerable economic, strategic, and cultural benefits to Pakistan via Central Asia, West Asia and Eastern Europe. The Pakistani government, media organisations, and the people of G-B need to highlight this and push for

this joint venture as it will plug Pakistan into an economic, infrastructure, strategic and cultural matrix that will further the country's interests.

<https://tribune.com.pk/article/97190/giving-gilgit-baltistan-provincial-status-could-be-a-political-masterstroke-part-2>

'GB politics', Editorial,

Dawn, 09 October 2020

With elections due in Gilgit-Baltistan next month, this would be an opportune time for those who make decisions in Pakistan to study the northern region's political situation, particularly the legitimate demands of its people. While the region opted for Pakistan soon after the partition of the subcontinent, successive governments in Islamabad have been very slow to grant full political rights to GB. Even today, while progress has been made, GB remains outside the political mainstream, with a hybrid system in place where the local elected representatives compete with powerful unelected bureaucrats sitting in the federal capital to decide its fate. Moreover, when movements for rights gather steam, they are quickly subdued with harsh penalties often imposed on political leaders. Take the case of Baba Jan. The Hunza-based activist was handed down a 71-year sentence by an antiterrorism court for raising a voice for victims of the Attabad Lake incident. Hundreds of people held a protest in Aliabad, Hunza, on Monday demanding justice for Baba Jan and 13 others who have been in jail since 2011. The protesters slammed the charges of terrorism slapped against the activists, and called for the release of all political prisoners. Instead of clamping down on all those who demand their rights and terming them as 'anti-state', the rulers need to deal with the issues that confront GB in a democratic manner. Using heavy-handed tactics will only add to the discontent that is bubbling in the region. Moreover, the centre must give serious thought, while keeping possible drawbacks in mind. The plan to give the region provisional provincial status and thus representation in the National Assembly and Senate; rather than waiting endlessly for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute to which

GB is historically linked is unfair in the eyes of GB residents.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1583893/gb-politics>

Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan, Imran Malik,

The Nation, 20 October 2020

India finds itself hopelessly caught in a potential two-front war scenario and fears a joint Pak-Chinese pincer movement which could make its hold on IIOJ&KL untenable. Indian pretensions to regional hegemony have thus been dealt a fatal blow by the Chinese presence on the LAC and by Pakistan's unyielding military defiance. India has threatened to 'conquer and capture' AJ&K and GB as part of its frivolous claims on the Greater Kashmir Region. That could ostensibly meet many of its strategic objectives in the region. Quite obviously, India's utopian intentions and its real military capabilities are mutually exclusive. However, efforts will be made to destabilize GB by instigating sectarian disharmony, exploiting ethnic differences and manipulating economic woes. India and other hostile powers could sponsor terrorist attacks in GB at large. RAW-sponsored terrorists will target the communication infrastructure including bridges, tunnels, dams, power houses etc and will aim to make travel on the Karakoram Highway a hazardous undertaking. Pakistan must further integrate GB into its political spectrum and give it an unequivocal and unambiguous Pakistani identity; without prejudice to its stand on the resolution of the Kashmir issue under the relevant UNSC resolutions.

<https://nation.com.pk/29-Oct-2020/pakistan-s-gilgit-baltistan>

'Sedition case controversy takes new turn',

Zulqernain Tahir, Dawn, 07 October 2020

The controversy over the FIR against former premier Nawaz Sharif, Azad Kashmir Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider and 40 other main leaders of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) took a new turn when its complainant turned out to be a ruling

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) worker having a criminal record. In a related development, the Punjab government decided to strike the name of Raja Farooq Haider off the FIR apparently after criticism from different quarters which saw the move could be damaging for the Kashmir cause.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1583601>

‘Sit-in for Baba Jan’s release continues on second day in Hunza’,

The Express Tribune, 07 October 2020

Hundreds of men, women and children have staged a protest demonstration in the Hunza valley of Gilgit-Baltistan, demanding the immediate release of the jailed progressive leader Baba Jan along with 14 other political prisoners. The sit-in staged at Hunza’s major Ali Abad town entered into the second day on Tuesday as protestors refused to end it till their demands are accepted. “We will not go back till the political prisoners are not released,” said leaders addressing the crowd in Ali Abad, a town located about 100km from Gilgit. Meanwhile, family members of the incarcerated leaders have called for a boycott of the forthcoming elections for Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly due next month. The lawyers in Hunza have also announced a boycott of courts on Wednesday to show solidarity to the jailed leaders.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2267225/sit-in-for-baba-jans-release-continues-on-second-day-in-hunza>

‘GB protests’, Editorial,

Dawn, 14 October 2020

With an election in the region due next month, the authorities need to handle the situation with care. Demonstrations have until now been peaceful, but discontent is brewing, mainly due to the harsh penalties imposed on people exercising their democratic right to politically organize themselves. But beyond the Aliabad incident, the leaders in Islamabad must ensure that an atmosphere of political freedom and a democratic culture are allowed to flourish in GB. Muzzling the people’s opinions

simply because they differ from the official line will have counterproductive results, and will add to discontent in a geopolitically sensitive region. We have seen the failure of this approach before particularly in the context of Balochistan. In that province, due to the mistakes of the establishment, alienation from the national mainstream grew; and this was exploited by internal and external forces. The same mistake must not be made in GB. The educated, politically aware populace must be allowed to make informed decisions at the ballot box, while more needs to be done to give the region the same rights like the rest of Pakistan enjoys. Heavy-handed tactics must be abandoned in favour of a democratic and inclusive approach.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1584953/gb-protests>

‘Rally demands provincial status for Gilgit-Baltistan’,

Dawn, 25 October 2020

A large number of people belonging to Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) staged a protest rally from the National Press Club to D-Chowk, seeking provincial status for GB. The rally was also attended by representatives from political parties, students’ organisations and residents of the region living in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The participants held placards and national flags, chanting slogans like “Make GB province of Pakistan, GB Banega Pakistan, Pakistan Zindabad, etc”. Representing the caravan from Gilgit, former GB minister Dr Iqbal from PTI said the people of Gilgit-Baltistan had arrived in Islamabad with the hope that their long-standing demand would be taken seriously and the provision of constitutional rights to the people of Gilgit-Baltistan would be ensured immediately. Imtiaz Gilgiti said the federal government should not wait for the election in GB for the announcement of the provincial status as there was a complete consensus among political parties in GB regarding their demand for constitutional rights.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1586860/rally-demands-provincial-status-for-gilgit-baltistan>

Extracts From Urdu Media

‘The government should identify rebels in its own rank and files’,

Editorial, Ummat, 07 October 2020

The other day a highly contentious case was filed in a police station in Lahore. Its effects were felt in India and “occupied” Kashmir. Indian media is happy that a case of treason has been filed against a person who has been three-time Prime Minister of Pakistan and against three retired generals who have fought war with India. In the similar vein, Kashmiris across the world are unhappy that a case of treason has been filed against the Prime Minister of “Azad” Kashmir. And this case is filed in Pakistan. This indeed is an occasion to celebrate in the Rashtrapati Bhawan (India). Anti-Pakistan propaganda has been part of the agenda of India. New Delhi always portrays an image of Pakistan where the relevance of Kashmiris for Pakistan is not more than being used as pawns against India. But the propaganda hardly have made an impact on Kashmiris because they know who was saying this. How would they react now when the Prime Minister of “Azad” Kashmir is declared a rebel? The allegations are that Nawaz Sharif is issuing provocative statements by sitting in London so that Pakistan continues to remain in the FATF grey-list. The case has named of three generals, Lt Gen (R) Abdul Qayyum, Lt Gen (R) Abdul Qadir Baloch and Lt Gen Saluhuddin Tirmizi and the Prime Minister of “Azad” Kashmir Raja Farooq. The hatred of the PTI government against Nawaz and his party is understandable. But such a blind hatred of three former generals who fought three wars for the country and were also not spared does not go well with the country’s interests. By targeting the Prime Minister of “Azad” Kashmir, India was provided enough food to celebrate. After the case of rebellion was filed against him, Raja Farooq said that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be happy that whole Pakistan has become his agent. After receiving highly critical reactions from the people of the country, PTI

ministers have started to give clarifications. Fawad Chaudhry said that Prime Minister Imran Khan has expressed unhappiness over the charges. The government said it had no hand in the FIR. But the reports said that the plaintiff was a PTI regional member. The people of Pakistan would only trust the PTI members if they immediately start an investigation against the person who has filed the case. Also, it would be good for the government to identify traitors within, who in reality are disloyal to the party.

<http://ummat.net/2020/10/07/news.php?p=idr1.gif>

‘A discussion with Sardar Attique Ahmed on Gilgit-Baltistan’,

Assadullah Ghalib, Nawa-i-Waqt, 14 October 2020

Sardar Attique Ahmed, the former Prime Minister of “Azad” Kashmir, said to me that we have sacrificed 6 Lakh Kashmiris for Pakistan. Whatever is Pakistan’s interest, we are ready to accept that. He added that few things need to be mentioned. First, Quaid-i-Azam had expressed his faith in Muslim Conference, not in Muslim League. Second, Maulana Mawdudi was also asked to create Jamaat-e-Islami in “Azad” Kashmir but he refused by saying that Muslim Conference was already there. It was later that political parties and groups moved to “Azad” Kashmir and divided the people here. One thing should be clear that the future of Jammu and Kashmir is to be decided by the local people. PML-N, PPP or PTI has no role in that. In the past attempts were also made to change the status of “Azad” areas of Kashmir. Zulfikar Bhutto had said that East Pakistan was gone, he would give Pakistan Gilgit-Baltistan by making it a province. Bhutto visited “Azad” Kashmir for the same but got a strong reaction from the locals and had to change his plan. Later, Benazir Bhutto and Asif Zardari also tried to change the status of “Azad” Kashmir but they had to retreat from taking

any such move. In 1949, Quaid-i-Azam had signed an agreement with Muslim Conference which stated that Muslim Conference had full authority to decide the future of “Azad” Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. Ayub Khan gave some part of Kashmir to China by signing an agreement. In clause 5 of the agreement it was mentioned that when the issue of Kashmir would be resolved, the same decision would apply to China’s part of Kashmir, Aksai Chin. Prime Minister Imran Khan said at the UN General Assembly meeting that India was involved in war crimes in Kashmir. It is true that New Delhi is changing the demography of the state. Why should Pakistan do the same? My father had raised the slogan that Kashmir would become Pakistan. I support the slogan. Whatever Pakistan thinks is its national interest, I support that.

<https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2020-10-14/page-10/detail-6>

Why Pak political parties are in G-B?

Assadullah Ghalib, Nawa-i-Waqt, 19 October 2020

Bilawal Bhutto keeps on warning every third day that if free and fair elections are not held in Gilgit-Baltistan, the consequences would be severe. It seems that Bilawal is planning to have a Bilawal-House next to Shangri-La as well. But he does not know perhaps that he would have to remove Article 35a from Gilgit-Baltistan: so he is required to do what (Narendra) Modi did in “occupied” Kashmir. Bilawal does not seem to know the history of Kashmir, but PPP knows it (it should brief Bilawal). Whenever efforts were made to make “Azad” Kashmir a province of Pakistan, they were rejected by the people of “Azad” Kashmir. Pakistan is a signatory to the UN resolutions which state that until the fate of Kashmir is decided by the people of Kashmir, Pakistan would be running defence and financial affairs of “Azad” Kashmir. And India would be running defence and financial affairs of “Indian administered Kashmir”. The UN resolutions do not allow India or Pakistan to do politics in either part of Kashmir. India has established its political parties in “Indian part of Kashmir”. Now Pakistan has also allowed national political parties to function in “Pakistani part of Kashmir”. This is

against the UN resolutions. This is also against the statement of the Quaid-i-Azam: in Jammu and Kashmir Muslim conference would represent him, not the Muslim League. If Pakistan disregards the UN resolutions, the statement of the Quaid and the Karachi agreement, why should India follow them? It has anyway “occupied” Kashmir, Jammu, Poonch and Ladakh on 5 August 2019. Modi has “occupied” Kashmir; Nawaz Sharif has been “occupying” “Azad” Kashmir; now if Bilawal gets control over Gilgit, then who would vote when the UN resolutions are implemented? By pursuing such an agenda, our position would be weakened. Bilawal should study the UN maps which show “occupied” Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Kargil, and Gilgit-Baltistan as part of the disputed Northern Areas. If these maps are to be changed, that would be done only by the Kashmiris. If Bilawal and others persist, it would lead to a situation that his grandfather had created in 1971: we on this side and you on that side.

<https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2020-10-19/page-8/detail-3>

Fact Sheet on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir

Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK)

Administrative Divisions: Two, namely Mirpur-Muzaffarabad (referred to as Azad Jammu & Kashmir or AJK by Pakistan) and Federally Administered Gilgit-Baltistan (FAGB).

Area ceded to China by Pakistan: 5180 sq. kilometres (Area of Shaksgam Valley)

(Source: Jammu & Kashmir Government website at <http://www.jammukashmir.nic.in/>, accessed on November 14, 2010)

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)

Area: 13,297 square km

Population: 2017 Census: 4,045,367 (Male: 1,980,794; Female: 2,064,421)

Capital: Muzaffarabad

Divisions: 3

Districts: 10

Sub Divisions (Tehsils): 32

Constituencies in AJK: 29

Kashmir (Muzaffarabad Division) comprises of 3 districts: Bagh, Muzaffarabad and Neelum, Hattian

Jammu (Mirpur Division) comprising of 5 districts: Bhimber, Kotli, Mirpur, Sudhnati/Pallandari and Rawalakot/Poonch, Haveli

President: Sardar Masood Khan

Prime Minister: Raja Farooq Haider Khan

AJK Council: Total 17 members

AJK Legislative Assembly: Total seats are 41

Ethnic Groups: Gujjars, Jats, Mughal, Rajputs, Sudhan, Awan, Qureshi, Pashtuns, Shins, Ladakhi, Baltis etc.

Religious Groups: Sunni, Ahlehadith, Shia, Nurbakhshi, Christians, Qadianis, Hindus

Languages: Punjabi, Hindko, Pahari, Kashmiri, Balti, Puriki, Shina

Political Parties and Groups: United Jammu and Kashmir Peoples' National Party, AJK Muslim Conference, International Kashmir Alliance, JK National Party, Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (Amanullah), Peoples United Action Committee, All Parties National Alliance (APNA)

(Source: <https://pnda.jk.gov.pk/statyearbook.php?page=AJK%20at%20a%20Glance> accessed November 2020)

Gilgit-Baltistan

Area: 72,496 sq. kilometers

Population: 1.4 million (2017 census)

Capital: Gilgit

Districts: Fourteen

Baltistan Region (part of Ladakh) is divided into Ghanche, Skardu, Shigar, Kharmang, Rondu

Gilgit Region is divided into Astore, Ghizer, Diamer, Hunza, Nagar, Gilgit, Darel, Tangir, Yaseen

Ethnic Groups: Shin, Balti, Puriki, Ladakhi, Wakhi, Yashkun, Tibetan, Mongol, Tatar, Mon, Pashtun, Khowar, Dom, Gujjar, Rajput and Kashmiri

Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly: 33 (3 reserved for technocrats and 6 for woman)

Governor of G-B: Raja Jalal Hussain Maqpoon

Chief Minister G-B: Khalid Khurshid Khan

Political Parties and Groups: Balwaristan National Front (BNF), Gilgit-Baltistan Thinkers Forum, Gilgit-

Baltistan, United Movement (GBUM), Baltistan National Movement, Karakoram National Movement, Gilgit Baltistan Democratic Alliance (GBDA), Gilgit Baltistan

National Alliance (GBNA), All Parties National Alliance (APNA)

(Sources: <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/06/17/gb-notifies-four-more-districts-total-number-of-districts-now-14/>)

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Disclaimer

PoK 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.

POK NEWS DIGEST



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