

POK

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News Digest

A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

• **Political Developments**

Gilgit-Baltistan as the fifth province

Elections for GB Assembly likely to be postponed

Whole Kashmir desired to accede to Pakistan in 1947: AJK president

China could be one-step away from developing a military base in Pakistan

Youth have vital role to play in Kashmir struggle: AJK president

Judicial Reforms in AJK are necessary!

• **Urdu Media**

PTI does not have candidates to win elections, former GB CM

Construction of Diamer Bhasha Dam

GB should be given its rights



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Jammu & Kashmir

(Source: GIS Section MP-IDSA)

In this Edition

This month it was reported that the date of GB election would be postponed till October 2020, because GB Election Commission was not in a position to make arrangements for elections in August, given the pandemic situation in the region. However, political parties have started their campaigns in right earnest.

Imran Khan's PTI is eyeing the elections with lot of hopes as many members from other two principal opposition parties are offering to join PTI and contest the upcoming elections, to take advantage of the electoral trend in both AJK and GB in favour of the incumbent party in power in Islamabad in past.

There is a feeling amongst the political leadership in the region that yet another king's party is in the making and the PTI government would not announce the election schedule until it is not sure about its prospects of the ongoing process of political engineering it has started in GB. Some political observers in GB even see a bigger design behind the delay of the electoral process.

The debate about GB becoming fifth province of Pakistan is gaining currency in GB in the wake of the upcoming elections. In Pakistan newspapers, this issue was flagged saying that the people of the region have been demanding merger with Pakistan and their representation in the political and constitutional structure of the country for the last 73 years. It was observed that at the local level, PTI took up the issue with the hope that doing so would endear itself to the people of GB and enhance its electoral prospects in the coming elections.

There was an investigative report in international media that China was using its military & economic power to develop infrastructure in GB in a bid to counter India's newly articulated position that it would do everything to acquire the disputed region. It was argued that China knew that India had a legal claim on the region and given the international support it has gained in recent years, it would be difficult for Pakistan to withstand pressure from India in this regard. Therefore, China is busy consolidating its strategic presence in GB.

Coordinator, PoK Project

Political Developments

Masood asks UK to avoid diplomatic escapism on Kashmir

Dawn, 05 July 2020

“Azad” Jammu and Kashmir President Sardar Masood Khan has urged the British government to **avoid diplomatic escapism and refrain from terming the Kashmir dispute a bilateral issue**. Speaking at a webinar titled “Twin Lockdown in Kashmir and Global Response” organised by the Tehreek-i-Kashmir-UK on Saturday, he asked parliamentarians and civil society of Britain to have a dialogue with 10 Downing Street, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Dominic Raab and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office over the deteriorating situation in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. ... **According to a statement, Labour MP Liam Byrne said the United Kingdom had to drop the pretence that this disputed issue must be resolved bilaterally**. There should be impartial third-party mediation for the resolution of the issue in accordance with the UN Security Council resolutions on Kashmir. He said there was a risk of war if the situation escalated amongst the two neighbours.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1567029/masood-asks-uk-to-avoid-diplomatic-escapism-on-kashmir>

Elections for GB Assembly likely to be postponed

Dawn, 10 July 2020

The Gilgit-Baltistan Election Commission has decided to postpone elections for the GB Assembly till October this year, according to sources. The new schedule of the elections will be issued in a couple of days. The GB Assembly elections were scheduled for August 18. The election schedule was announced after the assembly completed its five-year tenure on June 24, after which a caretaker government was

formed. However, the sources said, the GB Election Commission was not in a position to make arrangements for elections in August.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1568079/elections-for-gb-assembly-likely-to-be-postponed>

Gilgit-Baltistan as the fifth province

Masud Ahmad Khan, The Nation, 13 July 2020

On August 5 2019, India revoked the special status of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJ&K) by abrogating article 370 and 35A of the Indian constitution thereby bulldozing all UNSC resolutions and annexing the IOJ&K. This was followed by the issue of the map where Gilgit-Baltistan was shown in the union territory of Ladakh. The aim of issuing a new map was to permanently change the status of Occupied Kashmir by giving India control of a region that it did not physically possess. The demand of people is a merger with Pakistan and their representation in the political and constitutional structure of the country—a demand that has remained for the last 73 years because they liberated the region without any outside support or backing. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan are loyal and true patriots who want their identity with Pakistan. Their demand is that they be declared as constitutional citizens of Pakistan with Gilgit-Baltistan being made the fifth province of the country. Its assembly has already adopted a unanimous resolution for a full-fledged provisional provincial status for the region. **Their people are convinced that Imran Khan’s government can take this historic decision and grant them their basic rights by making Gilgit-Baltistan the fifth province of the country.**

<https://nation.com.pk/13-Jul-2020/gilgit-baltistan-as-the-fifth-province>

Whole Kashmir desired to accede to Pakistan in 1947: AJK president

Dawn, 20 July 2020

Azad Jammu and Kashmir President Sardar Masood Khan has said that on July 19, 1947, the whole Kashmir State had desired to accede to Pakistan and that spirit still lives strong today. Had it not been for the connivance of the Indian Army, Dogra Raj and the British rulers, true aspirations of the Kashmiri people would have been realised and they would have become a part of Pakistan on Aug 14, 1947, he said. The AJK president said this while speaking at a seminar titled, “Kashmir Accession Day and our Responsibilities”, organised by BTM Global and National Press Club in collaboration with Jammu and Kashmir Self-Determination Movement (JKSDMI), led by its chairman Raja Najabat Hussain.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1570083>

China could be one-step away from developing a military base in Pakistan

The Eurasian Times, 20 July 2020

China is using its military & economic power to develop infrastructure in Gilgit Baltistan (GB) in a bid to counter India’s plan of seizing the disputed region. New Delhi has frequently expressed its ambition to capture Gilgit Baltistan, which is a part of Pakistan-controlled-Kashmir, a region India considers an integral part of the country. **Concerned about India’s plan to re-take the disputed region of Gilgit Baltistan, Beijing has ramped up construction using its military power.** Speaking to ANI, Senge H Sering, director of the Washington-based Institute of Gilgit Baltistan Studies said that China is concerned about India’s growing interest in acquiring control over Gilgit Baltistan. “China knows that Gilgit Baltistan is a legal part of India and if the international community helps India then Pakistan will not find many friends to resist India’s advances. Starting Diamer Dam is China’s way of marking the territory. China is using military power to claim land in Aksai

Chin and it is doing the same in Gilgit Baltistan by building mega infrastructure,” he said.

<https://eurasianimes.com/china-could-be-one-step-away-from-developing-a-military-base-in-pakistans-gilgit-baltistan-region/>

Youth have vital role to play in Kashmir struggle: AJK president

Daily Times, 22 July 2020

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) President Sardar Masood Khan has stressed upon Pakistani and Kashmiri students studying across the world particularly in the UK to gear up their efforts to mobilize world opinion and create public awareness on the global level over India’s unlawful and illegitimate occupation of the occupied Jammu and Kashmir state. Talking to a delegation of the UK-based Pakistan Leadership Association of Students and Alumni (PLASA) here at the Kashmir House on Tuesday under the leadership of student leader and founder of PLASA Adil-ur-Rehman, he said the delegation apprised him about the activities of their organization and discussed the latest situation of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, said a press release.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/643909/youth-have-vital-role-to-play-in-kashmir-struggle-ajk-president/>

AJK people tell foreign journalists tales of pain caused by Indian firing

Dawn, 23 July 2020

A group of Islamabad-based foreign correspondents visited Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) on Wednesday to gain first-hand knowledge about the situation along the Line of Control (LoC) amid “unrelenting and unprovoked” ceasefire violations by the Indian army. ... **The locals expressed admiration for their brethren across the LoC during their interaction with the foreign journalists, saying they were confident Kashmiris would soon succeed in throwing off the Indian yoke.** “We condemn India’s

desperate attempts to separate us [Kashmiris] from each other by repealing some articles of its constitution,” said an elderly man, referring to articles 370 and 35-A of the Indian constitution. *Some victims of the Indian shelling shared their ordeal with the visiting media persons. A teenage girl told them that she was playing with other children outside her home when Indians fired a shell, wounding her. A man told them he had lost vision in his right eye after a bullet fired by the Indians pierced his forehead and came out through his neck.*

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1570589>

Political landscape of GB

Muhammad Amir Rana, Dawn, 26 July 2020

23 Political parties in GB are not happy with the decision of postponing the election by the GB Election Commission and view the move with suspicion. They declared that the commission needed to delay the election for at least two months so that appropriate arrangements could be made. *There is a popular perception that another king's party is in the making and the election schedule will not be announced until the ongoing process of political engineering is complete. Some political observers in GB also see a bigger design behind the delay of the electoral process and link it to a major constitutional shift for the region.* Many in GB believe, the process of forming a king's party has been accelerated during the last few weeks. Electable and strong candidates from the PPP, PML-N, Tehreek-e-Jafria and JUI-F are 'joining' the PTI. Though it yet remains to be seen how the incoming heavyweights will make a difference for the PTI, political manoeuvring is already sending a negative message to the people of GB, which is a politically sensitive region. ... The corruption mantra will not be an attractive one in a region that has very limited financial resources and control. Secondly, identity is a major issue for the people of the region, and it is linked with the political grievances of the people. Development and a proper share in CPEC is the

second major demand of the people of GB. Against the CPEC backdrop, a few observers think that Pakistan can give GB provincial status to consolidate its constitutional position in the region. ... This could be purely an internal decision to bring all the territories under its constitutional, administrative and political domain. This is essential for addressing the grievances of the marginalised communities.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1571211>

Judicial Reforms in AJK are necessary!

Umair Pervez Khan, Daily Times, 27 July 2020

The Supreme Court of Azad Jammu and Kashmir passed a landmark decision a few days ago where it annulled the controversial appointments of the five judges in the high court that were made in May 2018. The decision said that no proper constitutional channel had been used for the appointment, so the appointments were illegitimate. The judicial controversy in AJK started two years ago when Sardar Khalid Ibrahim Khan (late), a member of the Assembly, criticised the Azad Kashmir government's appointment process of the newly-inducted five judges in the High Court. ... Undoubtedly, the recent decision of the Supreme Court of AJK has become an example in the history of the judiciary. This decision has restored the confidence of the people in the institution. *Now, it is the need of the hour that the government come up with a strategy to address the judicial crisis, which is likely to erupt after the appointment of these five judges is held void.* The government must devise a mechanism to prevent any kind of corruption in the induction process of new judges. ... The institution of the judiciary must be strengthened. For this, it is the right time to start a dialogue for judicial reforms in Azad Kashmir as the recent decision has already initiated the debate!

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/646445/judicial-reforms-in-ajk-are-necessary/>

GB status

Dawn, 30 July 2020

The people of Gilgit-Baltistan have for long been denied full rights as citizens of Pakistan thanks largely to the power games being played in South Asia, particularly the Kashmir dispute. Various governments over the decades have come up with 'packages' to bring GB closer to the Pakistani mainstream, and while progress has been made, the people of this geographically stunning and geostrategic region yearn for more namely full integration with Pakistan. Those who control GB's destiny in Islamabad must listen to these voices and resolve the region's issues through democratic means, instead of cracking down and imposing orders in

colonial fashion. As it is, nationalist parties are gaining ground in the region and unless GB is given genuine reforms instead of lollipops, the sense of alienation amongst local people may grow. We have witnessed the follies of a rigid approach in Balochistan as well as erstwhile Fata. Locals resent the fact that the unelected GB Council has more powers than the elected legislative assembly. This anomaly must be rectified while the recommendations of the Sartaj Aziz-led commission, which called for giving GB provisional provincial status, should be implemented. With a fully representative government, the region can stand on its own with an educated population keen to develop their area.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1571918/gbs-status>

Extracts From Urdu Media

PTI does not have candidates to win elections, former GB CM

Daily Salaam, 15 July 2020

Former Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan Syed Mehdi Shah has said that the Pakistan Tehrek-i-Insaf (PTI) does have candidates in GB that can win elections for the party. ***It is because of the fear of loss that the PTI led government is postponing elections in GB, he added. Syed Mehdi said that the government may postpone the elections till next year.*** If it does so PPP would come on streets.

<https://www.dailysalam.com/index.php>

Construction of Diamer Bhasha Dam

Daily Paksitan, 17 July 2020

While laying the foundation stone for the construction of Diamer Bhasha Dam, Prime Minister Imran Khan said that it would be the biggest dam in Pakistan. The dam would help in developing Gilgit-Baltistan, he added. He said in the past wrong decisions were taken. ***The construction of the dam would not only give free electricity to the people in the area but also would be harmless to the environment. Diamer Bhasha Dam will be completed in 2028-29. It would be a multipurpose dam, producing electricity and would irrigate a huge area; it would create many job opportunities and also would increase the age of Tarbela Dam in KP.*** Till now only claims were made but no action was taken. It is a fact that hydroelectricity still remains the cheapest, costing only 3 rupees per unit. But in Pakistan no big dam was constructed after Tarbela Dam. Instead, a lot of attention was given to thermal electricity which was costly. Pakistan's preferences in electricity production have always been wrong. When agreements were signed with independent power producers, hue and cry was raised to oppose them. Later, despite signing

the agreements, there was no relief from load shedding. Starting work on Diamer Bhasha Dam has raised a lot of hopes. It is expected that it would be completed on time so that consumers would get some relief from the costs of electricity.

<https://dailypakistan.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2020-07-17/page-9/detail-0>

GB should be given its rights

Editorial, Baad-e-Shimal, 25 July 2020

The vice emir of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and general secretary of Milli-United Council Pakistan Liyaqat Baloch has said that Gilgit Baltistan is part of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. ***He said that GB should be given constitutional rights, and its share in CPEC and other projects like Diamer-Bhasha Dam. He said that the federal government should stop using the Kashmir cause as an excuse to deprive the people of GB from getting their rights.*** Maulana Abdul Samey of JI said that CPEC originates in GB and ends in Balochistan. It is wrong that Balochistan is given benefits but not GB. He said that for constructing Diamer-Bhasha Dam, engineers and labour should be from GB. ***He said that GB is always linked with the Kashmir cause. The reality is that major areas of GB have never been part of Kashmir. The people of GB have always been Pakistani.*** There should be no delay in granting them constitutional rights.

<http://dailybaadeshimal.com/epaper/?page=cGFnZS00&dt=MDctMjUUMjAyMA==>

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

Religious Groups: Shia (Twelvers), Nurbakhshi (Twelvers), Ismaili, Sunni, and Ahlehadith

Languages: Shina, Balti, Wakhi, Khowar, Gujjari, Burushaski, Puriki, Kashmiri, Pashto

Gilgit-Baltistan Council: Total 15 members

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.

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