

POK

Volume 13 | Number 08 | August 2020

News Digest

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MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

**No. 1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg
New Delhi-110 010**



Jammu & Kashmir

(Source: GIS Section MP-IDSA)

In this Edition

Betraying his sense of fidgetiness about Indian move to abrogate Art 370 and change the status of Jammu and Kashmir, Imran Khan was seen taking up the issue in his address to a special session of the AJK (PoK) Legislative Assembly in Muzaffarabad on the occasion of the one-year anniversary of India's move. From the tone and tenor of his speech it seemed that he knew fully well that the Indian move was irreversible and Pakistan would not be able to do anything about it. In the midst of all this, in a bid to pander to the people of Kashmir, Pakistan conferred Nishan-e-Pakistan on Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the separatist leader from the valley for his services.

The difficulties being faced by people of GB on account of poor internet connectivity came up for discussion in GB. It was reported that a company called the Special Communication Organization (SCO) monopolized internet through a "Stay-Order" secured by SCO from the Chief Court, on the basis of the argument that SCO was a federal institution and all of its earnings went to the State, and they were not making any profits and therefore they would not be able to join any bidding process. There is a popular angst against the company and the state on account of the insensitivity shown by them towards the genuine needs of the people, especially in the days of the pandemic, when internet connectivity is so essential to the people.

The local media continued to carry local disenchantment with the CPEC. There was a genuine argument that despite the fact that the region was the gateway of the corridor project, successive PPP and PML-N governments have done little to share the benefits with the people of the region. These governments had announced two economic zones for the region but none of these has been implemented till now. PTI government in Islamabad, it was alleged, had stopped certain projects in GB, while the region remains the most backward region in the country.

Coordinator, PoK Project

Political Developments

‘PM Imran Khan addresses “AJK” Legislative Assembly’

Dawn, 05 August 2020

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Wednesday termed the revocation of the special status of the occupied Jammu and Kashmir on Aug 5, 2019 a “strategic blunder” by the Indian premier Narendra Modi. He said that the only conclusion to the Kashmir issue would be the valley’s freedom. The premier was addressing a special session of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Legislative Assembly in Muzaffarabad on the occasion of the one-year anniversary of India’s move to annex the disputed valley. He said that after listening to speeches by the Assembly members, he got the impression that they were “feeling a bit hopeless”. “I believe God is putting Kashmiris through a phase that will end in its freedom,” he added. The prime minister further said that Modi had revoked Article 370 on the basis of four assumptions: his majority, his assumption that Pakistan cannot do anything, size of India’s market and the focus of international community on China and India’s relevance as a counter balance to China. “Modi won the elections by playing the ‘hate card’ and after winning the elections, he decided to expand that base by revoking Kashmir’s status.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1572739>

“Monopolizing Internet in Gilgit-Baltistan”

Pamir Times, 12 August 2020

Special Communication Organization (SCO) has monopolized internet in Gilgit-Baltistan since the very beginning. Despite knowing all the facts, no one is going to stand against the monopoly. The ex-Chief Minister of GB Hafiz Hafeez ur Rehman said in an interview that the reason behind poor internet quality in GB is a “Stay-Order” taken by SCO from the Chief

Court. He further elaborated that in the past SCO maintained that as a federal institution all of its earnings goes to the State, and they are not making any profits. They are not ready to participate in the bidding process, as it would cost them more. They are, however, now ready for the bidding [spectrum] because of the funds released by the then PM Nawaz Sharif. These are the words of the former Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan. It is a need of the hour for the youth of GB to raise their voice and demand basic facility of internet. We cannot dream of an educated and peaceful Gilgit-Baltistan without having access to stable and high quality internet services. It is ironic that we have to struggle for basic facilities like internet and cellphone services. This while the world is testing and implementing 5th-generation (5G) internet technology. We, on the other hand, can’t even get a stable 2G services in this era and this age, despite of paying our dues!

<https://pamirtimes.net/2020/08/12/monopolizing-internet-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

“Pakistan confers Nishan-e-Pakistan on Kashmiri leader Syed Ali Geelani”

Daily Times, 14 August 2020

Pakistan has conferred the highest civil award of the country, Nishan-e-Pakistan, to Kashmiri leader, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, for his services and sacrifices against oppression in Indian-occupied Kashmir. The award was received by the Hurriyat leaders of Azad Jammu and Kashmir on behalf of Syed Ali Geelani during an investiture ceremony at the President’s House in Islamabad.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/653884/pakistan-confers-nishan-e-pakistan-on-kashmiri-leader-syed-ali-geelani/>

“Rally in Jehlum Valley to seek UN attention for Plebiscite in Kashmir”

Daily Times, 28 August 2020

A rally was staged under the aegis of Pasban-e-Hurriyat Jammu Kashmir against “Indian atrocities” in Indian Kashmir. Massive gathering was witnessed on the occasion, people were chanting slogans against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indian illegal occupation on Jammu and Kashmir. Protestants in the rally marched on main Srinagar Highway holding banners and placards stated pro freedom slogans besides demanding Plebiscite.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/660403/rally-in-jehlum-valley-to-see-un-attention-for-plebiscite-in-kashmir/>

“Di Amer Bhasha Dam: Many a slip between the cup & the lip”

Daily Times, 16 August 2020

Pakistan finds itself in somewhat similar confusion when it comes to decide on national issues. The Di Amer Bhasha Dam (DBD) project is “most critical for food security in Pakistan, was a high priority project for Pakistan.” It experienced decades of delay owing to lack of political will and conspiracies crafted by enemy’s false propaganda. With a struggling economy, Pakistan knocked on the doors of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Western allies for financial help. Most of these efforts failed to make any headway in arranging finances for the mega project, authorities decided to defer its construction at a time when Pakistan entered an acute level of water scarcity. It was China’s Belt and Road Initiative under concept of “Community of shared Dreams” that turned Di Amer Bhasha Dam into a tangible reality. It was decided in the Pakistan-China Joint Economic Group (JEWG) meeting in Beijing that two countries should speed up investment in energy. Though government acknowledges failures to execute construction of the project on time, it is yet to be seen how serious they are in providing a speedy work environment. Biggest looming danger is the growing threat of militants targeting the Chinese interests and workers. India’s diplomatic opposition

against the project is also a major concern. Moreover, what steps can the government take to ensure that it satisfies the grievances of the indigenous people of Gilgit Baltistan. It should accelerate the pace of the completion of the project.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/654897/di-amer-bhasha-dam-many-a-slip-between-the-cup-the-lip/>

“Play role in building interfaith and intra-faith harmony”

Pamir Times, 21 August 2020

The speakers at the University of Baltistan, Skardu, while speaking on the theme of the Seminar titled ‘Unity in diversity, National Integration and Social Cohesion through Interfaith Harmony & Dialogue’ on 20 August said that educational institutions including schools, colleges, and universities play a key role in the social cohesion, interfaith, and intrafaith harmony. Mr. Ali Muhammad Khan, Federal Minister Parliamentary Affairs addressed the audience and appreciated the efforts of the University of Baltistan, Skardu for providing a platform for the discourses of national cohesion and interfaith harmony. He expressed that diversity is our strength and together we make a difference.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2020/08/21/educational-institutions-should-play-role-in-building-interfaith-and-interfaith-harmony-speakers/>

Economic Developments

“Govt to provide Sehat Insaf Cards to all residents of AJK”

Dawn, 29 August 2020

After Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the government on Thursday decided to provide Sehat Insaf Cards to all permanent residents of Azad Jammu and Kashmir as registered in the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra). The decision was made during a

meeting of the National Steering Committee on Sehat Sahulat Programme. The services which are available under the Sehat Insaf Card include free of cost open heart surgeries, insertion of stents, management of cancer, neurosurgical procures, burn management, accident management, dialysis, intensive care management, deliveries and C-section.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1576862>

Extracts From Urdu Media

“A response to Maj Gaurav Arya”

Daily Salam, 01 August 2020

Like the Coronavirus, Hindutva is a severe disease. Anyone who is affected by the disease, suffers from anti-Islam and anti-Pakistan enmity. India is suffering from the Hindutva pandemic. One person who is severely affected by the Hindutva virus is Maj Gaurav Arya. He has been attacking the Pakistan Army in the past and trying to provoke Pakistanis for speaking up against the Pakistan Army. But in a recent programme on his YouTube channel, Maj Arya spoke against the Pakistan Army and explicitly tried to provoke the people of Pakistan which is a violation of international laws. Maj Arya is trying to provoke Pakistanis for committing violence and rebellion. He speaks only lies. India has always cheated Pakistan. Whenever Pakistan offered talks to resolve the issues between the two countries, New Delhi gave a cold response. It was a mistake that Pakistan did not try to exploit the 1962 China's victory over India. Otherwise, apart from Kashmir, the seven sisters would also have been freed.

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

‘Prime Minister Imran Khan in “Azad” Kashmir assembly’

Assadullah Ghalib, Nawa-i-Waqt, 13 August 2020

Prime Minister Imran Khan had gone to “Azad” Kashmir and addressed the assembly to highlight the atrocities of Indian security forces in “occupied” Kashmir. However, the members of the Kashmir Assembly, barring two, behaved like the ‘opposition’ party in the federal assembly. This was uncalled for. If they did not feel like welcoming the premier, they could have abstained. They should not have criticized him. India must have been happy about the whole incident. The whole debate was focused on why

Pakistan showed Kashmir as part of Pakistan on the new political map. The issue they raised was: “Who was consulted for this? Kashmir belonged to Kashmiris and they would decide their own fate.” The new map was an answer to India's new map of the last year in which it had shown the whole Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan as part of India. Pakistan accepts the UN resolutions. It has always asked for its implementation. By issuing the new map, Pakistan has not abrogated any article, like India. Nor has it made “Azad” Kashmir a province of Pakistan. Indian forces torture people and commit atrocities in “occupied” Kashmir. In “Azad” Kashmir, the Pakistani Army protects the people by sacrificing their lives in defending the LoC and the local population. I appreciate the words of Attique Khan, the son of Sardar Abdul Qayoom, who said that the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslims Conference had decided long back that Kashmir would join Pakistan. He said that people in “occupied” Kashmir are dying while raising pro Pakistan slogans. I suggest that the assembly of “Azad” Kashmir should wait till the UN decides to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir. Imran had not gone there to decide the future of Kashmir. He was there to expose the inhuman policies of Narendra Modi.

<https://www.nawaiwaqt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2020-08-13/page-4/detail-1>

“Gateway of CPEC deprived of its benefits”

Daily Baad-e-Shimaal, 17 August 2020

PPP government signed CPEC with China. The project was started by the PML-N government. It will be completed in 2028. It is argued that the project would bring development and welfare in Pakistan. Gilgit-Baltistan is the gateway of CPEC. The gateway was ignored by the PML-N government. The government had announced two economic zones for the region but none was implemented. Many blame

PML-N senior leader Ahsan Iqbal for depriving GB of its share in CPEC. The same leader is asking votes from the people of the region. But the people know the reality. The PTI government has also stopped many projects in GB. The region remains the most backward region in the country. The government should build three economic zones in GB to provide jobs to the locals and to develop the region.

<http://dailybaadeshimal.com/e-paper/?page=cGFnZS00&dt=MDgtMTctMjAyMA==>

“PTI members banned for fighting election without party’s approval”

Daily Salam, 19 August 2020

PTI has started interviewing its candidates for the upcoming elections in Gilgit-Baltistan. Potential candidates from Gilgit, Nagar and Huzoo were interviewed the other day. The questions asked to the candidates was related to their political capability and influence. However, they are also asked a question: if they are not given the ticket, who are the other candidates they would support. The question is asked to make it clear that if they do not get the ticket, he/she cannot fight the elections.

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

“Govt funds did not reach to the deserving”

Daily Salam, 27 August 2020

Prime Minister Imran Khan has said that wrong people benefited from the government subsidies in the past. He said that the deserving people did not get anything. It is the government’s responsibility to correct the past mistakes and ensure that the subsidies reach to the rightful people. The Prime Minister said that it is the government’s responsibility to help the poor people.

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

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://pndajk.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/>)

Compiled and Edited by
Dr Ashok K Behuria (PoK Coordinator)
Dr Smruti S Pattanaik
Dr. Priyanka Singh
Dr Yaqoob ul Hassan
Dr Zainab Akhtar
Dr Nazir Ahmed Mir
Dr Mohammad Eisa

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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MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

No. 1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg

New Delhi-110 010

Telephone: 91-11-26717983; Fax: 91-11-26154191

Website: www.idsa.in; Email: lbscidsa@gmail.com