

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

Volume 1 | Issue 14

31 May - 06 June 2021

Taskheer-e-Jabal **CPEC** Protests
Provisional Constitutional Province
Bajwa **Gilgit-**
elections **Baltistan**
hydropower projects
Council elections
Shandur-Gilgit Road
National Command and Operations Centre

Gilgit-Shounter **Astore-Shounter**



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DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

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Political Developments

Ignoring NCOC's recommendation: AJK going ahead with holding elections before July 29

Daily Heights, 02 June 2021

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Election Commission (AJKEC) is going to issue the poll schedule for general elections to the AJK Legislative Assembly within a week. "The final decision will be taken by the AJK Election Commissioner and the members of the AJKEC," a senior AJKEC official who did not wish to be named, told the media

He said the AJKEC has not so far received any letter from the National Command and Operations Centre (NCOC) in which it has reportedly recommended postponement of elections for two months due to the Covid-19 pandemic. "I have unofficially got a copy from someone to read. But we can't give our formal response unless we formally receive the communication." He also said that under Article 22 of the AJK Constitution, the general elections have to be held before July 29 this year. He also cleared that there was no constitutional provision for the deferral of the polls and that an attempt to make any such move will be unconstitutional."

<https://heights.com.pk/page-heights.php?id=1&edition=heights&dt=02-06-2021>

AJK president for conservation of forests to maintain natural ecosystems

The News, 02 June 2021

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) President Sardar Masood Khan lauded the Forest Department for doing great work in efforts to conserve the forest resources and urged the people to cooperate with the Forest Department for conservation of forests to maintain natural ecosystems. The AJK president made these remarks after a briefing given to him by Secretary Forest, Wildlife and Fisheries.

In addition to highlighting the importance of forests for the sake of maintenance of natural ecosystems and preservation of the water table, the President also said that the beauty of the region was largely due to the lush greenery present there which attracts lakhs of tourists to AJK every year and hence forest conservation also has a direct impact on tourism sector as well. He also said that other parts of Pakistan must take notes from AJK and that will help in improvement of the country's environment and protection from the ill effects of climate change.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/843462-ajk-president-for-conservation-of-forests-to-maintain-natural-ecosystems>

General Qamar Bajwa witnesses military exercise in AJK

Pakistan Observer, 03 June 2021

Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited the field training area near Kotli in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, according to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations. The army chief was briefed about the conduct modalities of a Corps level exercise "Taskheer-e-Jabal". It said that the troops and units participating in the exercise will rehearse various defensive and offensive manoeuvres in the mountainous terrain. Appreciating the dedication and professionalism of participating troops, the COAS expressed satisfaction over combat readiness of the formation. "Rigorous training and continued practice of operational drills are imperative for effective response to wide-ranging threats," Gen Qamar emphasized. On arrival in the field area, the COAS was given a detailed briefing by exercise commander on the aim and objectives of ongoing exercise and drills/procedures being practiced to ensure complete dominance of the battlefield.

<https://pakobserver.net/gen-qamar-witnesses-mily-exercise-in-ajk/>

PTI trying to ignite tensions to postpone elections: AJK minister

Express Tribune, 04 June 2021

A Needless controversy is being dredged up over the upcoming elections in Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The PML-N and the PPP have both objected to a proposal by the National Command and Operations Centre to delay the polls due to the Covid-19 situation. The NCOCC has written a letter to the AJK prime minister suggesting that a delay in the polls would enable a large number of people in the area to get vaccinated. The letter also says election campaign activity could lead to a surge in infection and therefore it may be better if the schedule is pushed ahead. The two parties, however, say that the PTI is deliberately trying to delay the elections because it is in a weak position and wants time to break away candidates.

Replying to a question regarding the upcoming general elections in AJK, Senior Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Chaudhry Tariq Farooq accused the rival Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) of igniting tensions to put the elections on hold.

"Earlier PTI tried in vain to get the polls postponed in the name of Covid-19 pandemic and now they want to achieve this target by provoking emotions and creating law and order situation across the state," said Farooq, who is also PML-N's senior vice president in AJK.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2303439/pti-trying-to-ignite-tensions-to-postpone-elections-ajk-minister>

AJK govt failed to highlight Indian atrocities in IIOJK: PML-N

Express Tribune. 04 June 2021

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) senior minister Chaudhry Tariq Farooq has admitted that Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government in the region could not properly exploit the situation in favor of the oppressed Kashmiris in the wake of August 5, 2019 developments in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). Answering questions on Thursday at “Dialogue with Capital Journalists Forum”, an organization of AJK based senior journalists, Farooq said he personally talked to former premier Sardar Attique Ahmad Khan, Jamaat-e-Islami leader Abdur Rashid Turabi and Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider to evolve a joint strategy including organizing sit-ins at divisional headquarters across AJK to express solidarity with IIOJK people but both the leaders as well as PM Haider did not consider his suggestion.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2303296/ajk-govt-failed-to-highlight-indian-atrocities-in-iiojk-pml-n-minister>

Normalising relations with India at present would be a major 'betrayal' to Kashmiris: PM Imran

Dawn, 30 May 2021

Prime Minister Imran Khan cited moral reasons for not normalising relations with India in spite of the improvements that have been over the course of last few months. Imran Khan said that Pakistan could not improve its trade with India at the cost of the blood of the Kashmiris spilt by India, stressing that any normalization with New Delhi under the current circumstances would be a major "betrayal" to the people of the occupied territory.

While conceding that trade and connectivity with India can prove to be immensely beneficial for both countries, Imran Khan however pointed out that under present circumstances, such a move would be a betrayal to the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The premier added that talks could be initiated and a roadmap to solve the Kashmir issue could be devised if India took back its actions of August 5, 2019. He had also said that it was Pakistan's duty to bring the issue of Jammu and Kashmir to the UN platform with more vigour.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1626579/normalising-relations-with-india-at-present-would-be-a-major-betrayal-to-kashmiris-pm-imran>

Economic Developments

GB CM hopeful about CPEC to revolutionize entire region

Pak Observer, 31 May 2021

Speaking to the media while on a visit to Challenge Textile Factory on Lahore-Multan Road with Chinese investment, Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid has said that billions of dollars of Chinese investment under CPEC will bring economic revolution in Pakistan which will majorly benefit Gilgit-Baltistan. He also pointed out the problem of hydropower projects under construction in Gilgit-Baltistan under CPEC is being made a part of the national Grid. Unfortunately Gilgit-Baltistan is not connected to the national grid. He however assured that the GB government is discussing the issue with the federal government.

Praising the federal government's role in the newfound development program for GB, The CM said, "Imran Khan's government has increased our share from Rs2 billion to Rs 10 billion," adding that the recent election in Gilgit-Baltistan was the most transparent election in history. Actually the competition with Nawaz League was in only in two constituencies.

<https://pakobserver.net/gb-cm-hopeful-about-cpec-to-revolutionise-entire-region/>

PM AJK Inaugurates Rs 85m fully-equipped Rawalakot District Complex

Urdu Point, 03 June 2021

Azad Jammu and Kashmir Prime Minister Raja Muhammad Farooq Haider Khan on Thursday inaugurated Rs. 85 million fully equipped District Complex in Rawalakot Divisional Headquarters. Speaking on the occasion, Haider said his government has completed record developmental schemes to bring about socio-economic changes in the lives of the people of the State.

He said that many mega developmental projects have been completed and funds were allocated judiciously to accelerate the pace of developmental activities in all the Constituencies of the State, indiscriminately. Haider also thanked the former federal government of Pakistan led by the PML-N for extending generous financial assistance for the development of Azad Jammu Kashmir and expressed his resolve to serve the people after retaining power through winning the forthcoming general elections in the State.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/en/pakistan/pm-ajk-inaugurates-rs-85m-fully-equipped-rawa-1268136.html>

ECNEC approves roads to connect Gilgit Baltistan with KP, Azad Kashmir

PT Profit, 04 June 2021

The federal government on Friday approved two inter-provincial road connectivity projects in Gilgit Baltistan (GB) to link the region with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The move seems to be aimed at providing alternate routes to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The cumulative cost for the approved *Gilgit-Shouner* and *Astore-Shouner* (AJK) road projects is expected to be over Rs70 billion.

The northern province-to-be will thus be connected to neighboring regions of AJK and KPK, ultimately closely linking it to the rest of the country.

The ECNEC has also approved the much-awaited project of construction of the 2016 kilometer Shandur-Gilgit Road at the cost of Rs49.946 billion. The project road is located in Gilgit- Baltistan province and will be executed by the NHA. According to officials, this road is also being considered as another alternate route to CPEC as the same would connect the main corridor linking Khunjerab Pass.

<https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/06/04/ecnec-approves-roads-to-connect-gilgit-baltistan-with-kp-azad-kashmir/>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

AJK Government to amend law safeguarding orphans and widows rights

Daily Muhaasib, 01 June 2021

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Prime Minister Raja Muhammad Farooq Haider Khan has said that the government has fulfilled all its commitments made to the people and has completed projects under comprehensive developmental strategy launched for the socio economic upliftment of the people of Azad Kashmir. Addressing public meeting after inaugurating various developmental projects here on Tuesday, he said present government has approved the law to extend financial assistance to orphans and widows to mitigate their sufferings. This law will protect widows' and orphans' rights and safeguard their lives against any economic exigency.

On the occasion, he also He ruled out postponement of next general elections in Azad Kashmir and made it clear that election will be held on schedule and any interference in the election process will be resisted with full force. He said his party is prepared to

respond positively in the wake of any complain of rigging in the forthcoming general elections in Azad Kashmir.

<https://mahasib.com.pk/epaper/page.php?id=1&edition=muzzaaffarabad&dt=01-06-2021>

No need for Council elections if GB is to be made a province: Opposition

Daily K2, 02 June 2021

PPP Gilgit-Baltistan President and Leader of Opposition Amjad Hussain Advocate has said that if Gilgit-Baltistan is to be made a transitional constitutional province then there is no need for a dummy council and Gilgit-Baltistan Council elections should not be held if the federal government insists on holding Baltistan Council elections, we will conclude that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan have been deceived in the name of the Provisional Constitutional Province.

If the Gilgit-Baltistan Council elections are formally announced, not only will we be forced to boycott the council elections, but we will also contact other parties in this regard and try to persuade them to boycott the elections as well. "After the boycott of the election, we will go to the people and start a peaceful protest movement with the cooperation of the people," he told reporters in his chamber on Tuesday.

<https://www.dailyk2.com/Post/2177>

Gilgit turns into a battlefield, clashes between police and employees intensify

Daily K2, 05 June 2021

The employees of Line Department continued their protests on the second day and clashed with the police while attempting to move towards the Chief Minister House. The police charged the protesters, fired tear gas shells and air firing to push the protesters behind the Red Zone. As per reports, the employees on Friday tried to enter Red zone to get out of Chief Minister House which led to the clashes. Two protesters were injured due to tear gas shells hitting them.

Demonstrators blocked the roads leading to the Chief Minister's House and staged a sit-in outside the Chief Minister's Secretariat where a large number of employees participated in the sit-in. "We are not terrorists. The police is using force indiscriminately," said one of the protestors. "We were peacefully going to the chief minister's house with our demands. Had the government kept its promises, there would have been no need to protests". The protestors demanded that their demands be met failing which they threatened to call all employees of Gilgit-Baltistan to march towards Gilgit in one grand demonstration.

<https://www.dailyk2.com/Post/2241>

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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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