

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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Vaccination COVID-19 Swat
regional assembly POK tourism Motorway
power projects Shandur-Chitral
vote energy route
Gilgit-Baltistan
CPEC Western Corridor



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Political Developments

PTI govt pledges transparent elections in AJK

Bol News, 12 July 2021

Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed addressed a press conference after attending a consultative meeting chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan regarding the AJK elections which was joined by the federal minister and PTI senior leadership.

Rasheed stated that PM Imran Khan has guaranteed to organize transparent and fair elections in AJK. The interior minister said that the government will demonstrate the conduction of transparent polls for the first time in antiquity. Regarding the security preparations, he said that 7,200 workers of Rangers and Frontier Corps (FC) will be deployed during AJK polls on July 25 following the appeal of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

In addition, Rasheed also announced PM's schedule of campaign in AJK stating that PM Imran Khan will address three rallies in AJK on July 17, 18 and 19.

<https://www.bolnews.com/latest/2021/07/pti-govt-pledges-transparent-elections-in-ajk/>

Caste, ethnic loyalties decide poll favorites in Pakistan-administered Kashmir

Anadolu agency, 17 June 2021

As the election fever picks up in the region, which is electing regional assembly on July 25, the loyalties to their own biradaris reign supreme in

the minds of voters. Six major castes or biradaris, Gujjar (Chaudhry), Sudhan, Rajput, Syed, Khawaja, and Awan have been dominating the political scene in the region. Political parties have distributed constituencies among the representatives of these castes depending on the concentration of their populations in the particular constituencies.

In the outgoing state assembly, over a dozen lawmakers are Gujjar, the largest caste in AJK. In several constituencies in Muzaffarabad, Mirpur, Rawalkot, Bagh, and other districts, the candidates of the PTI, the PPP, and the PML (N) are from the same caste. The caste system is a powerful factor to decide loyalties and voters' preferences in AJK politics. In many constituencies, people have changed their party loyalties based on the candidate of their caste switching political parties. This goes on to show that for many voters in the AJK caste loyalty is above party loyalty and thus caste politics is going to be a major determining factor in the upcoming elections which are to be held on the 25th of July.

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/caste-ethnic-loyalties-decide-poll-favorites-in-pakistan-administered-kashmir/2307296>

Less than 100 beds available for COVID-19 patients in Gilgit-Baltistan as positivity rate remains 10%

Pamir Times, 17 July 2021

The Gilgit-Baltistan government has urged the public to observe standard operating procedures (SOPs) to contain the spread of COVID-19 infection rates. In a statement shared by Imtiaz Ali Taj,

the CM's spokesperson, it has been revealed that the positivity rate has lingered around 10% during the last few weeks, thus creating shortage of beds in the region. The statement reads that there are not more than 100 beds available for COVID-19 patients in hospitals managed by the GB Department of Health.

"Major reason behind the fast spread of infection is non-adherence and non-compliance with the SOPs", Taj told Pamir Times, in a statement. He urged the masses to take the situation seriously and follow the SOPs and get vaccinated as soon as possible.

The GB Government has also confirmed that vast majority of the new COVID-19 infections in Gilgit-Baltistan have been identified as the "Delta Variant", the mutated virus first detected in India. In view of the growing rates of infection, the Gilgit-Baltistan government has closed down offices and directed staff in multiple districts to work from home.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2021/07/17/less-than100-beds-available-for-covid-19-patients-in-gilgit-baltistan-positivity-rate-remains-10/>

Over 27,000 govt servants vote in first phase of AJK polls

The Nation, 18 July 2021

The first phase of elections in 33 constituencies of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) started on Sunday with more than 27,000 government employees set to exercise their right to vote. The 27,000 government servants, who have to perform duties during elections for the state assembly on July 25th, cast their votes in the first phase.

The government officers deputed to fulfill their electoral duties have been directed to cast their vote at the polling stations established by the ROs of their respective constituencies. Some 5,114 presiding officers, 7,336 polling officers and 14,672 polling assistants cast their votes in the first phase. Meanwhile, election fever has taken over the region, which is going to elect regional assembly on July 25. Over 3.2 million voters will elect a 53-member assembly for a five-year term. Out of 53 seats, 45 are general, while eight are reserved for women, technocrats and religious scholars.

<https://nation.com.pk/19-Jul-2021/over-27-000-govt-servants-vote-in-first-phase-of-ajk-polls>

Ballots replace bullets in remote part of Azad Jammu and Kashmir

Express Tribune, 18 July 2021

Just a few months ago, the remote mountainous northern strip of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) called Neelam Valley was blazing with bullets as Indian and Pakistani forces were exchanging fire along the Line of Control. Public gatherings in this area were also unheard of. But now, the ceasefire has allowed the people of this area to be completely involved in the upcoming general assembly election with political rallies, banners and speeches being seen all over the valley. Party songs are blaring at many shops, which have been converted into temporary election offices. Even in small villages along the Neelam River, party flags are hoisted on the houses and shops, indicating their affiliations.

"Elections activities in 2011 and 2016 were restricted due to fears of shelling

from across the border," a local said pointing to nearby trenches resulted due to shelling from across the LoC. The area was witnessing a daily dose of shelling and sniper attacks until February this year, killing hundreds of troops and civilians from both sides.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2311262/ballots-replace-bullets-in-remote-part-of-pakistan-administered-kashmir>

Economic Developments

NCOC makes Vaccination certificate a must for hotel bookings in AJK, Northern Areas

Business Recorder, 12 July 2021

The NCOC while taking a serious note of deadly Covid-19 virus strains prevailing in the country along with the violations of standard operating procedures has declared vaccination mandatory for hotel bookings for tourists visiting Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This is being done to prevent COVID-19 and the risk of pandemic spread in view of the arrival of Eid-ul-Azha. The Forum has also issued an elaborate procedure for verification of vaccine certificate at the entrances of tourist sites and hotels.

Special directives for public places and those for transportation have been put out by the NCOC as well. The Forum has also warned of strict disciplinary action against the violators and the institution not complying with the SOPs. In view of the arrival Eid-ul-Azha, the forum has also come up with special directives and guidelines for the

cattle markets which see a tremendous footfall this time of the year.

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40106622/ajk-northern-areas-vaccination-certificate-a-must-for-hotel-bookings>

Govt decides to extend western route of CPEC to Gilgit

PT Profit, 17 July 2021

In a high level meeting which was chaired by the Federal Minister of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar, it was decided to make Gilgit-Chitral section a part of the CPEC Western Corridor. The meeting was attended by Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid, Chairman CPEC Authority Asim Saleem Bajwa and other officials.

With the inclusion of new routes like Swat Motorway, Gilgit to Chitral highway, the Western Corridor, which was earlier estimated to be 1153 kms, would now be of 1617 kms. This decision can have a major impact on GB as it would be provided with an alternate route to existing Karakorum Highway to link with other provinces of the country. Also, with the addition of 464 km the western corridor project would not only boost economic activities of the country but also tourism in GB.

It may be recalled here that the government has already included the Gilgit Shandur project in the historic development package announced for GB this year. The Shandur-Chitral route project has also been approved by ECNEC recently.

<https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/07/17/govt-decides-to-extend-western-route-of-cpec-to-gilgit/>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

Martyrs day celebrated across AJK and IIOJK

Daily Ausaaf, 14 July 2021

Kashmiris living both sides of the Line of Control and the world over observed the Kashmir Martyrs' Day to pay homage to the martyrs of July 13, 1931.

Protest rallies and demonstrations were held all over Azad Kashmir to invite the world's attention towards the unresolved Kashmir dispute and gruesome human rights violations by the Indian forces on Kashmiri people in Occupied Kashmir. A state holiday has already been declared in Azad Jammu Kashmir (AJK) on this occasion. AJK Prime Minister, Raja Muhammad Farooq Haider Khan, had appealed to the people of Jammu & Kashmir State inhabiting on both sides of the LoC and rest of the world to observe July 13 as the month of Kashmir Freedom Movement and the Struggle for the completion of Pakistan through annexation of its jugular vein – the Jammu & Kashmir State.

Prime Minister of AJK, while speaking to the media in the state metropolis on the eve of the Kashmir martyrs Day said that the supreme sacrifices offered by valiant Kashmiri martyrs on 13 July 1931 had infused spirit among the Kashmiri people to get the motherland liberated from the tyrannical Dogra rule.

https://www.dailyausaaf.com/epaper/popup.php?news=issues/2021-07-14/139839/p1_03.gif

In GB, Major energy projects recommended to be included in CPEC

Daily K2, 16 July 2021

Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid attended a high-level meeting where CPEC projects were discussed. Federal Minister for Planning Asad Umar and Chairman CPEC Authority Asim Saleem Bajwa were also present on the occasion. The meeting noted that with the efforts of Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid, the Gilgit-Chitral section has been made a regular part of the CPEC Western Corridor. In the meeting on CPEC projects, Gilgit-Shandur-Chitral-Chakdara project was approved to be made a part of CPEC Western Corridor. During the meeting, Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid also discussed the re-alignment of Thakot to Raikot section and inclusion of IU 100 MW power project, Phunder 80 MW power project and other mega power projects including Doiyyaan 500 MW power project into CPEC. Positive progress has already been made to include these mega power projects in CPEC

Gilgit-Shandur-Chitral-Chakdara project will make the Swat Motorway (M-1) part of the CPEC Western Corridor. It will link Gilgit-Baltistan with other provinces of the country through an alternative route. This important project will help boost economic activities and tourism in Gilgit-Baltistan.

<https://www.dailyk2.com/Post/2770>

Election Commission decides to seize Ministers' vehicles in AJK

Jammu Kashmir Times, 16 July 2021

After receiving complaints that the vehicles in use by the ministers of the state are being used for election campaigning, the Election Commission of Azad Jammu and Kashmir has ordered the seizure of all vehicles used by the ministers. The Election Commission has ordered the Secretary Services and General Administration, Government of AJK to seize all vehicles in usage by the esteemed ministers and to be transferred to the Transport department garage.

According to the election commission, the move was aimed to prevent the use of state apparatus for any unfair practices and to help conduct free and fair elections in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

<http://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Resize-of-front-16.jpg>

The government is playing with the lives of the people to save tourism: Jamaat-e-Islami

Daily K2, 18 July 2021

'The performance of the government of Gilgit-Baltistan is questionable. The government is playing with the lives of the people to save tourism. Deaths due to the Corona virus are increasing day by day. These views were expressed by Maulana Abdul Sami, the Ameer of

Jamaat-e-Islami Gilgit-Baltistan while talking to party leadership. He said that there was no space for patients in the hospitals and no facilities are being provided for their recovery. Sami also claimed that there was an open contradiction in the statements of the Chief Minister and other ministers regarding the Corona pandemic.

Deaths are on the rise, with the government and the opposition squabbling inside and outside the assembly for personal gain and diverting the public's attention from the real issues. He further said that the Chief Minister should stand in the front line for health and 'Jihad' needs to be waged against Corona. But he is sitting in Islamabad to get his development plans passed. The oppressed people have no welfare. The government has many ministers and advisers. The economy is burdened by hiring more coordinators. This is an abuse of the people of GB and the region. The government should immediately impose an emergency in the health sector to try and save the lives of the people by spending all the development budget of the year in the field of health. All facilities including medicines in hospitals, ventilators in Corona Centers should be provided for by the government, the Jamaat Chief added.

<https://www.dailyk2.com/Post/2805>

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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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