

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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tourism
gateway POK
covid-19
battle
protest rigged Election CPEC airport
Commission
digital tax Gilgit-Baltistan



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Contents

Political Developments

- PM thanks Kashmiris for PTI's first victory in AJK
- Sharp rise in number of covid-19 related deaths in Gilgit-Baltistan
- PML-N' rejects 'AJK' election results, announces movement against 'rigged election'
- Pakistan rejects India's 'self-serving' comments on 'AJK' elections
- Khawaja Farooq Ahmed likely to be appointed as new 'AJK' PM
- Herschel Gibbs slams BCCI for intimidating cricketers playing KPL

Economic Developments

- Gilgit Baltistan sees boost in tourism as 700,000 people visit region since May
- AJK connects with national tax system

Vernacular Urdu Media

- The Election battle of 'Azad' Kashmir and results.
- Pakistan, KSA agree to work on Kashmir, Palestine and Yemen
- Haider's 'Money laundering' remarks a conspiracy to damage relations between the people of Kashmir and Pakistan: PTI leader
- "Building an airport in Gilgit is imperative, GB is the gateway of CPEC": GB CM Khalid Khursheed

Political Developments

PM thanks Kashmiris for PTI's first victory in AJK

Dawn, 27 July 2021

Thanking the people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir for the mandate handed to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf, Prime Minister Imran Khan pledged to bring the masses of the region out of poverty. The PTI clinched 25 general seats of the AJK Legislative Assembly, followed by 11 by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), six by PML-N and one each by state-based AJK Muslim Conference (AJKMC) and Jammu Kashmir Peoples Party (JKPP), as per the official results of July 25 polls.

In a couple of tweets after the official results were out, PM Khan congratulated all successful candidates and thanked the people of AJK for placing their trust in PTI through their votes, which resulted in PTI's electoral victory. He pledged to bring the masses of AJK out of poverty through the implementation of 'Ehsaas' and 'Kamyab' programs. Imran Khan also reiterated that he will continue to be an ambassador for Kashmir and will continue to raise his voice in all international fora including the United Nations urging the international community to fulfill their commitment of self-determination to the Kashmiri people.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1637080/pm-thanks-kashmiris-for-ptis-first-victory-in-ajk>

Sharp rise in the number of covid-19 related deaths in Gilgit-Baltistan

Pamir Times, 28 July 2021

5 deaths were reported on the 27th of July due to Covid infections in Gilgit-Baltistan. The region's Chief Minister condoled the deaths through a message and assured the masses that the government is taking appropriate measures to facilitate the patients while urging the public to follow SOPs. Based on the official statistics, at least 15 deaths have been reported during the last 17 days. The total death tally for the region is up to 125. The official situation report mentions the number of active positive cases as 752, which suggests a significant rise in the number of positive cases, because in March of this year the government had declared Gilgit-Baltistan as a "Covid-free" area, claiming zero active cases.

Opposition leaders and local journalists have been accusing the government of concealing deaths through under-reporting. The government has categorically denied these assertions. Leader of Opposition in GB Assembly, Amjad Advocate and former Chief Minister Hafiz Hafeezur Rahman have sharply criticized the government for failing to take measures against the spread of COVID-19 infection.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2021/07/28/sharp-rise-in-number-of-covid-19-related-deaths-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

PML-N' rejects AJK election results, announces movement against 'rigged election'

Parliament Times, 29 July 2021

PML-N rejects July 25 election results and announces a full-scale protest movement in Azad Kashmir, Pakistan and abroad. At a high-level meeting between the PML-N ticket holders including the outgoing AJK PM, Raja Farooq Haider Khan, and former Pakistan Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, a resolution was unanimously passed rejecting the recently held AJK General election. The PML-N raised questions as to how did their party manage to win only 6 seats despite getting more than 500,000 votes. The PML-N blamed their loss on the electoral engineering. They also announced the formation of a fact-finding team that will collect evidence to expose interference and fraud in the elections.

Addressing the meeting, former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said that he paid tribute to the people of Azad Kashmir who stood against fraud and made a promise to the ticket holders their hard work will not go in vain

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2021/07/29/full-strike-against-rigging-in-ajk-polls-pml-n-rejects-results/#.YQegvY4zbIV>

Pakistan rejects India's 'self-serving' comments on AJK elections

Express Tribune, 30 July 2021

The Indian Charge d'Affaires was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs to convey Pakistan's complete rejection of India's sham protest and to reiterate its clear and consistent position on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. Pakistan on Friday categorically rejected the "false, untenable and self-serving comments" made by the spokesperson of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs on the recently-held elections in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

The Foreign Office maintained that while the people of AJK enjoyed the fruits of the free and participatory electoral process, IIOJK bleeds under India's illegal occupation.

The FO said, "The Jammu and Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India has been on the agenda of the UN Security Council since 1948. It remains an internationally-recognized dispute, as affirmed by relevant Security Council resolutions." The FO also cautioned India to immediately end its illegal occupation of parts of Jammu and Kashmir and stop the egregious human rights violations in IIOJK.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2313023/pakistan-rejects-indian-meas-self-serving-comments-on-ajk-elections>

Khawaja Farooq Ahmed likely to be appointed as new 'AJK' PM

Daily Times, 30 July 2021

Former AJK minister and PTI's central joint secretary, Khawaja Farooq Ahmed, is likely to be appointed as new Azad Jammu and Kashmir Prime Minister. Khawaja Farooq Ahmed's

name for the PM of 'AJK' emerged after Prime Minister Imran Khan chaired a meeting in Islamabad and discussed matters related to forming government in 'AJK' after ruling PTI grabbed 26 seats in the recently held elections.

Sources said that Khawaja Farooq Ahmed is likely to be made the new Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, while Barrister Sultan Mahmood, who is PTI's regional President, will be nominated as the President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. This shows a sudden change in PTI's stand as it was learnt that former AJK Prime Minister Barrister Sultan Mehmood and Sardar Tanveer Ilyas were favorites for the AJK PM's post.

The final decision obviously lies with Prime Minister Imran Khan who recently conducted a series of interviews for the post of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Prime Minister. The probable who were interviewed also included Azhar Sadiq in addition to Tanveer Ilyas, Khawaja Farooq and Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhary.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/798955/khawaja-farooq-ahmed-likely-to-be-designated-new-ajk-pm/>

Herschel Gibbs slams BCCI for intimidating cricketers playing KPL

Dunya News, 31 July 2021

Herschel Gibbs, a South African cricketer, blasted the Board of Cricket Control in India (BCCI) on Saturday for intimidating players and preventing them from participating in the Kashmir Premier League (KPL).

"Completely needless for the @BCCI to bring their political agenda with Pakistan into the mix and try to prohibit me from participating in the @kpl_20," Gibbs said on Twitter, criticizing the Indian board's stance.

"They also threatened me with not allowing me to enter India for any cricket-related job. Ludicrous". After it was revealed that the BCCI had threatened international players through their agents, warning that if they travelled to Kashmir, the doors of Indian cricket, including the IPL, would be closed to them, he took to twitter.

Sources said that the BCCI officials contacted the English and African cricket boards and threatened to ban their players from entering India if they participated in the KPL. The English and African boards stopped their players from taking part in the KPL until further orders.

The first edition of the league is set to begin on the 6th of August 2021 in Muzaffarabad Cricket Ground.

<http://dunyanews.tv/en/Cricket/612889-Herschelle-Gibbs-slams-at-BCCI-for-threatening-cricketers-playing-KPL>

Economic Developments

Gilgit Baltistan sees boost in tourism as 700,000 people visit the region since May

Geo News, 26 July 2021

The Multi-pronged approach of the GB and the Federal governments for the promotion of tourism in Gilgit-

Baltistan seems to be working out as the tourist count saw a surge in the ongoing summer leading to a revival of the sector after suffering heavy losses in last year's lockdown. So far, up to 700,000 local and foreign tourists have visited the province during the ongoing summer to enjoy its mesmerizing weather and eye-catching mountainous terrain. The statistics were of the last three months, as tourism season started this year after Eid-ul-Fitr in May when the restrictions on the sector were lifted.

Gilgit-Baltistan's Minister for Tourism, Sports, Culture, Archeology, and Youth Affairs Raja Nasir Ali Khan informed APP that the significant surge in tourists' footfall in GB had helped the sector revive, which was affected last year due to coronavirus related travel curbs. Raja Nasir also said that all tourists are being allowed to visit GB and there are no plans to impose any ban on tourist activities. He, however, asserted that implementation of anti-coronavirus SOPs in the area was being ensured to keep the virus at bay.

<https://www.geo.tv/latest/361710-tourism-revives-as-up-to-700000-tourists-visit-gb-since-eid-ul-fitr>

AJK connects with the national tax system

Urdu Point, 29 July 2021

AJK Chief Secretary Shakeel Qadir Khan inaugurated the digital system of income tax at a ceremony held at the Jammu and Kashmir House. He called the linkage of the digital tax system a 'historical step' towards national unity and also improvement in tax collection.

Briefing the chief secretary about the digital tax system, Income Tax Commissioner Sardar Zafar Mehmood said the system would improve tax collection and "close the door of bogus invoices." He said the services of facilitation officers would be available to the Inland Revenue Department to provide guidance to the taxpayers and the need for physical interaction between tax collectors and taxpayers would be completely eliminated. E-filing facility would be available through IRIS application. When the taxpayer would pay the tax, the CPR would issue a computerized payment receipt which would automatically appear in the IRIS.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/en/pakistan/chief-secretary-ajk-inaugurates-digital-tax-s-1313611.html>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

The Election Battle of Azad Kashmir and results.

Editorial, Nawai Waqt, 28 July 2021

Election statistics or election data which float around in social media these days are very effective in raising vexing questions. An important question is being raised after the AJK election is regarding the total vote count of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). The cumulative vote places it at the third position. However, the number of seats won places it comfortably above the PML-N at the 2nd position. This miracle which could be due to the 'first past the post system' of election. However, this is suggestive

that a 'Laadla' or 'favourite' status is being conferred on Bilawal Bhutto.

However, some things need to be put in perspective. Pakistan Peoples Party was the first national party that was able to properly introduce itself in the politics of 'AJK' in 1970 under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's leadership. Before that, the local parties especially Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference ruled the political roost in 'Azad' Kashmir. The PML-N's entry into Kashmir politics is relatively new. PPP has strong historical roots in 'AJK' which were well exploited in a vibrant election campaign. So, to be surprised at their relatively better performance is a fallacy.

Celebrating the conquest of 'Azad' Kashmir, the ministers of the Imran government should also keep in mind the fact that the main reason for their success is the 12 seats dedicated to "Kashmiri refugees" living in Pakistan. The number of voters in these constituencies is extremely small compared to the existing constituencies in 'Azad' Kashmir. It is very easy for the federal and provincial governments to manage them. Considering the election results, the PTI need to realise that it has not got a clean sweep in the so-called Azad Kashmir. Instead, it has had to battle hard for this success. The dream of the PTI to control the centre and also all the provinces is still a far-off dream and the PTI will need to perform a lot better in the Sindh provincial and 2023 general elections.

<https://www.nawawagt.com.pk/E-Paper/lahore/2021-07-28/page-2/detail-0>

Pakistan, KSA agree to work on Kashmir, Palestine and Yemen

Jung, 28 July 2021

In a meeting between Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud at the Foreign Office, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan agreed to work together on regional issues related to Kashmir, Palestine and Yemen with Saudi Arabia assuring Pakistan that both sides would work together to ensure stability in both their regions.

Pakistan says that Saudi Arabia has shown clarity and consistency in supporting Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. Both countries have also decided to appoint a focal person at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pakistan and in Saudi Arabia to oversee the progress on the bilateral front, which both countries say would institutionalize bilateral relations. Both countries also agreed to expand the dimensions of their bilateral relations through the SPSCC. Saudi Arabia says that there were expectations that the SPSCC would turn out to be a milestone in taking bilateral relations to new levels while also institutionalizing and exploring all possible opportunities.

In the meeting, Qureshi also highlighted the hardships being faced by the Pakistani nationals who had earlier been working in Saudi Arabia due to COVID-related travel restrictions. Earlier, the Prime Minister had also underlined the importance of timely measures for facilitation of their return to Saudi Arabia.

<https://e.jang.com.pk/07-28-2021/lahore/pic.asp?picname=68.png>

Haider's 'Money laundering' remarks a conspiracy to damage relations between the people of Kashmir and Pakistan: PTI leader

Roznama Muhaasib, 29 July 2021

Khawaja Farooq Ahmed, PTI's central joint secretary, during a conversation with reporters, denounced allegations of Money laundering and poll rigging levelled against PTI by outgoing 'AJK' Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider. Ahmed said that though he and his party could understand well that why Haider and the PML-N leadership were in a state of utter shock, yet he believed that such language was unbecoming of a person holding the top office in the base camp of freedom struggle.

Allegations of money laundering and use of money by the [PTI-led] central government in the July 25 elections are highly condemnable for two reasons. One: they are a pack of lies and deceitful, and two: they are aimed at providing material to India's propaganda machinery. They are creating misunderstandings between the Kashmiris and Pakistan due to their vested interests, Ahmad said.

The PTI leader also pointed out that the Election Commission was constituted by the former premier himself by exercising his authority and he also held sway in administrative matters till the last moment. So, his hurling accusations against the government of Pakistan for poll rigging is a sure sign of frustration.

<https://mahasib.com.pk/epaper/page.php?id=1&edit ion=muzzaffarabad&dt=29-07-2021>

"Building an airport in Gilgit is imperative, GB is the gateway of CPEC": GB CM Khalid Khurshid

Daily K2, 29 July 2021

A high-level meeting on the expansion of Gilgit Airport was held in the Presidency under the chairmanship of President Dr. Arif Alvi. Chief Minister Gilgit Baltistan, Khalid Khurshid, participated in the meeting. Giving a briefing on the existing facilities and future of Gilgit Airport, the Federal Secretary for Aviation and Director General Civil Aviation said that the services of a consultant are being sought for the construction of a new airport in Gilgit. The process of hiring a consultant will be completed by October 30, 2021, after which the relevant consultants will prepare and submit their recommendations by April 2022. Besides, referring to Skardu Airport, he said that Skardu Airport is also being upgraded.

Talking on the occasion, Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid said that construction of International Airport in Gilgit is a must as Gilgit-Baltistan is the gateway of CPEC. He also said that important projects like Diamer Bhasha and Bunji Dam were being worked on. Khurshid said that the government would provide all possible assistance to ensure the purchase and availability of land in Gilgit-Baltistan on the identification of suitable sites by international expert consultants.

<https://www.dailyk2.com/Post/2876>

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Disclaimer

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