

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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Agri Tourist Farms



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DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

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Political Developments

Mentally ill elements be not allowed to mislead the entire society of GB, said Chief Minister GB

Associated Press of Pakistan, 29 March 2021

Mentally ill elements would not be allowed to mislead the entire society of Gilgit-Baltistan and they would be dealt with iron hands said Chief Minister GB Khalid Khurshid while addressing an emergency press conference on the recent terrorist incidents in Gilgit. Khurshid also said that all terrorists involved in the Naltar shooting incident were arrested and he hoped that their arrest and their subsequent prosecution will bring a certain amount of relief to the families of the victims.

Reiterating that fake nationalism and fake sectarianism had been longstanding problems which had negatively impacted the region, these two evils would not be allowed to hold GB to ransom. CM Khurshid further went on to say that GB was on a very important point in its history. It is about to receive constitutional rights and a huge developmental package along with it. Miscreants cannot be allowed to thwart these efforts with their nefarious intentions.

<https://www.app.com.pk/national/mentally-ill-elements-be-not-allowed-to-mislead-the-entire-society-of-gb-said-chief-minister-gb/>

Govt has fulfilled election promises, says Farooq Haider

Express Tribune, 30 March 2021

Speaking to a people's representative delegation of Hajira in the Jammu and Kashmir House, AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider said that his government had fulfilled all the pre-election commitments it had made to the people of the state. Haider then recounted the developmental work completed by the incumbent government and pointed to the fact that the developmental projects were spread out in all the constituencies irrespective of the political affiliations. PM Raja Farooq Haider also said that the amount of work done outside the urban zone under the present administration is unprecedented in the history of AJK.

The Hajira delegation in response paid glowing tributes to the Prime Minister of AJK and his government and lauded their efforts to bring growth into the state. The also expressed hope that all this good work would lead to political goodwill that will bring the present government back to power after the upcoming elections

<https://tribune.com.pk/epaper/news/Karachi/2021-03-30/YjKxMmOxOTNjMiRkYjU2ZWQ2MGNiNjRlNmFkZWFiZDMuanBlZw%3D%3D>

AJK Premier Announces To Establish Special Funds for Orphan and Destitute Families

Urdu Point, 30 March 2021

Azad Jammu and Kashmir Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan on Tuesday announced establishment of special funds for orphan and destitute families in Azad Kashmir for which a

deduction from the salaries of cabinet members and grade-1 government employees would be made to help the needy people. Smaller deductions ranging from Rs. 50 to Rs.100 would be made in the salaries of lower grade employees to register their contribution in the project. This announcement was made by the AJK Prime Minister at a cabinet meeting held in Muzaffarabad.

The PM was of the view that the sponsorship of the needy people of the society is the responsibility of the state and hence he said that this project was much needed. Secretary of Law, Irshad Qureshi was directed to devise a comprehensive plan under which orphans, widows and other needy people would receive monthly allowances from the government.

The authorities on this occasion also banned all social gatherings and ordered a strict implementation of the SOPs as the new wave of Covid 19 continued to surge in AJK along with many other states in Pakistan.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/en/pakistan/ajk-premier-announces-to-establish-special-fu-1209102.html>

No change in Pak stance on Kashmir: Foreign Office

The Nation, 01 April 2021

Terming the recent understanding between India and Pakistan to maintain ceasefire along the LOC as an attempt to protect Kashmiri lives and not as a major change in Pakistan's Kashmir policy, Foreign Office spokesperson Zahid Hafeez Choudhary said Pakistan's position on the dispute of Jammu and Kashmir was still anchored on the United Nations resolutions on the issue.

“There is no change in our Kashmir policy. Prime Minister Imran Khan's statement made in Kotli, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, was consistent with Pakistan's longstanding policy on Jammu and Kashmir dispute and Pakistan would continue its support of Kashmiris at all forums,” he said while briefing the members of the Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir here at the Parliament House. Violations of ceasefire only jeopardize regional peace and endanger the common Kashmiris living on both the sides of the border.

The matter of giving enough coverage to the Kashmir issue on Pakistan television, radio and social media was also raised during the parliamentary committee meeting and the PTA was directed to overlook the compliance of state policy both by the national media and the international social media.

<https://nation.com.pk/01-Apr-2021/no-change-in-pak-stance-on-kashmir-fo>

Pakistan puts an end to illegal logging in north with armed forces

Daily Sabah, 01 April 2021

Pakistani government recently decided to employ a paramilitary force to stop organized groups from cutting down trees in northern parts of Gilgit-Baltistan and transporting them to other parts of the country, in a move that has seen success already. The Frontier Constabulary (FC), a civil armed force working under the federal government and led by police officers, was deployed in January to support the regional forest department, which officials say lacks staff, training and funding.

While forests around the world have seen encroachment, spike in COVID 19 cases during the pandemic and the consequent lockdown measures had left them unguarded. Chief conservator Zakir Hussain said illicit logging in Gilgit-Baltistan has all but stopped since the FC arrived. Demand for wood in Pakistan, a nation of about 220 million people, is three times higher than its potential sustainable supply, according to the most recent National Forest Policy published in 2015.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-puts-an-end-to-illegal-logging-in-north-with-armed-forces>

Economic Developments

Khunjerab Pass to reopen for trade on April 1

Pakistan Today Profit, 30 March 2021

After a year of freezing movement across Khunjerab by the Pakistani and Chinese authorities, the pass is scheduled to be reopened from April 1. Strict implementation of SOPs would be implemented along with stern screening of all people and objects that cross the border. After the locals protested and demanded reopening of the pass, Islamabad asked China to reopen the border so that cross border trade could be facilitated.

“To support the lives and livelihood of the local population on both sides of the border, it is imperative that regular cross-border trade and P2P exchanges may be resumed. Therefore, the border may be opened from April 1, 2021. The esteemed embassy is requested to take up the matter with relevant quarters to open the border on the said date for smooth and regular cross-border movement” said a letter from the Ministry of Foreign affairs to the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan.

The border has remained closed for over a year now except for a couple of instances when it was temporarily opened to release stranded containers and to carry medical equipment.

<https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/03/30/khunjerab-pass-to-reopen-for-trade-on-april-1/>

Imran Khan Approves Development Package for Gilgit-Baltistan

Newsweek Pakistan, 31 March 2021

After weeks of anticipation and conjectures, the Gilgit-Baltistan Integrated Development Plan was signed by Prime Minister Imran Khan in a high level meeting which was convened to review it. The development plan is expected to be ‘historical’ with its unprecedented scale and is aimed at solving various issues of federal territory and ensuring employment to the youth of GB.

A Statement issued by the Prime Minister’s Office said that the development of Gilgit-Baltistan was among the top priorities of the present government stating that special attention is going to be paid to the promotion of tourism in the GB region while keeping the fragility of the environment in mind.

The plan which mainly focuses on employment generation, infrastructure development, roads and electricity connectivity, environmental projects and tourism, is expected to be formally unveiled in the Prime Minister's planned visit to Gilgit-Baltistan in the next few days.

<https://www.newspakistan.com/imran-khan-approves-development-package-for-gilgit-baltistan/>

ZTBL announces to develop 'Agri Tourist Orchards' in GB

The Nation, 31 March 2021

In what can be considered as a 'first of its kind' development in Pakistan, establishment of 'Agri Tourist Farms' has been announced in Gilgit Baltistan with the financial help of Zarai Tarqiati Bank Ltd (ZTBL). These Agri Tourist farms are supposed to be tourist spot where people stay and can also buy the product from the local farmers directly without any intermediaries. This will bring together the two major industries of GB and try to make it more profitable for the locals.

In order to facilitate the poor farmers, the ZTBL said it will pay Rs1.5 million per borrower for establishment of Agri Tourist Outlets/Orchards where tourists can get fruits and vegetables in real time environment thus eliminating the role of middlemen and the benefits will be passed on to the poor farmers directly. All residents of Gilgit-Baltistan who have existing orchards and intend to establish an agri-based outlet are eligible to apply for getting the loan on lowest mark-up in financial market.

<https://nation.com.pk/31-Mar-2021/ztbl-announces-to-develop-agri-tourists-orchards-in-gb>

Italy to establish gemstones training institute in GB

PK News, 04 April 2021

Italy's Ambassador to Pakistan, Andreas Ferrarese, in a meeting with the President of the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Qurban Ali said that Italy will establish a training institute for gemstones in Gilgit-Baltistan to exploit the potential of these areas as well as to improve mutual cooperation between the two countries.

He said Italy wanted to start a new era of economic and trade cooperation with Pakistan through the transfer of technology and the improvement of the textile industry in Pakistan. "We have considered establishing a training institute that will promote the jewelry and jewelry and gemstone industry in Gilgit-Baltistan to promote trade and investment opportunities in these areas," he added.

Qurban Ali said at the event that the move by the Italian government would be a milestone in the development of the jewelry and jewelry industry in Gilgit-Baltistan, which could also achieve the goal of generating jobs in the region as the area is rich in precious stones and minerals.

<https://pk.news/2021/04/04/italy-to-establish-gemstone-training-institute-in-gb/>

Vernacular Urdu Media

Religious Advisory Council demands special operation against the miscreants in Gilgit-Baltistan

Daily K2, 29 March 2021

Addressing a press conference at Central Press Club Gilgit, Religious Advisory Council Gilgit-Baltistan's members Maulana Ataullah Shahab, Maulana Sultan Raees, Maulana Khalil Qasmi and other clerics in strong words condemned the recent terrorist attacks in GB and said that the Naltar incident was a failure of the government. The incident has been condemned by clerics, political, religious leaders and the public. The Council also pointed to the fact that the religious scholars have an important role in maintaining peace in the region and not letting any violent incident be painted a sectarian colour. The Religious Advisory Council also demanded a compensation of 5 million rupees for the martyrs of Naltar and 2.5 million for the wounded. They also demanded launching of Operation *Rad ul Fasaad* against the elements involved in terrorism in Naltar Payen, Bala and Nomal.

An alternative and safe route should be made from Gilgit to Naltar Bala and Rangers outposts should be set up along the way. The Clerics also condemned the incident on Konodas RCC Bridge and demanded a transparent investigation. "People of all schools of thought played a role in maintaining the status quo. Tourism was supposed to be promoted on March 25, but unfortunately terrorism and unrest were revived. It is a great tragedy. It could be a conspiracy against Gilgit-Baltistan. Gilgit-Baltistan's positive face has been tarnished."

They said that the hopes expectations from this government are very low. People in Gilgit-Baltistan sometimes also portray their personal enmities in the guise of sectarianism. We all need to wake up. So far, the elements involved in any of these terrorist incidents have not been punished.

<https://bit.ly/3umwOWG>

There would be no coalition with any other political party in AJK

Jammu Kashmir Times, 29 March 2021

Former Prime Minister of AJK and the serving President of PTI AJK, Barrister Sultan has clarified that PTI will not form of pre-election coalition with any other political party in the upcoming AJK election. Ridiculing claims that PTI is in talks with other political parties without his knowledge, Barrister Sultan commented that as long as he is in the PTI, no coalitions are possible.

He said that the PTI is ready to sacrifice power for the sake of their principles. They would not align with any corrupt forces of the State. Barrister Sultan said that Imran Khan is the only Pakistani leader who has openly spoken about the Kashmir cause without any hesitance. Imran Khan's Kotli speech shows his faith in the people of Jammu and Kashmir. In his Kotli speech, Imran Khan promised that once the people of Jammu and Kashmir accede to Pakistan in a

plebiscite, they will have the freedom to choose whether they want to form an independent country or stay in a confederation within Pakistan Now the people need to return that faith by voting PTI into power. Once the PTI comes to power, all corrupt officials and politicians will be taken to the task.

<http://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Resize-of-fp-29-3-021.jpg>

Election Commission suspends membership of 4 MLAs, registration of 5 parties cancelled.

Daily Ausaaf, Muzaffarabad, 31 March 2021

In a meeting presided by the Chief Election Commissioner of Azad Jammu Kashmir, Abdur Rashid Sulehria, the AJK Election Commission has decided to suspend the Assembly membership of Chaudhary Ali Shan Soni, Sardar Mohammad Sageer Khan Chughtai, Malik Mohammad Ishaq and Mohammad Nawaz. Members of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Assembly are required to disclose their assets every year by the 30th of December failing which the election commission can suspend membership. In this meeting, a committee was formed to look into the submitted files by the members of the assembly.

The Election commission also cancelled the preliminary registration of 5 political parties on account of not being able to fulfill the requirements to get registered. The parties whose registrations were cancelled are; *Jammu Kashmir Nizaam e Mustafa Conference, All Kashmir Party AJK, Jammu Kashmir Qoumi Movement, Pakistan Muslim League Functional AJK and National Labour Council AJK*. For the parties to get registered, they need to as per the Election Act 2020 (Section 128) to submit a list of 1000 members along with their names, registration fees of 2 Lakh rupees and paperwork related to the accounts of the party.

https://www.dailyausaf.com/epaper/popup.php?newssrc=issues/2021-03-31/132402/p1_03.gif

Resolution on the Gilgit-Baltistan issue introduced in AJK assembly

Muhaasib, 02 April 2021

In the ongoing session of the Azad Jammu Kashmir Legislative Assembly, a member of the ruling party Abdur Rashid Trali has introduced a resolution regarding the current Gilgit-Baltistan debate. Speaker Shah Ghulam Qadir however, subjected the discussion on the resolution to the presence of both the head of Cabinet and the leader of opposition respectively. He said that only once the head of Cabinet Raja Farooq Haider and the leader of the opposition Chaudhary Yaseen present their respective views on the resolution will the assembly be able to come to a decision. Hence, the resolution was not discussed and no conclusions could be made on the day.

In the introduced resolution, Abdur Rashid Trali has proposed a common President and a Common Council for Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. In addition to this, the whole of Jammu and Kashmir including northern areas (GB) should be able to maintain its disputed status as per the United Nations resolution and the constitution of Pakistan.

<https://mahasib.com.pk/epaper/page.php?id=1&edition=muzaffarabad&dt=02-04-2021>

Social Media

Ambiguity regarding the provincial status has caused a lack of investment in the region

Hunza News, Facebook, 30 March 2021

Raja Hussain Ahmad Khan, the President of Hunza Hotel Association in an interview with Hunza News spoke about the problems facing the tourism industry in Gilgit Baltistan and how the lack of facilities and infrastructure was a major hindrance in the development of the hospitality sector which has every GB household directly or indirectly dependent on it. Hospitality industry requires a number of specialized staff which requires training institutes. Lack of infrastructure related to internet and electricity is a significant impediment in the development of the region. He majorly accused the political ambiguity for the lack of investment and funds. The provincial debate has been going on for years but it has not yielded any significant dividend till now.

Development of the banking sector, inclusion of women in the working force and establishment of local small scale industries can go a long way in the growth of the region and the authorities need to work on these factors.

Another issue raised by Khan was increasing the jurisdiction and the activity of the local Tourism department which is still in its incipience and doesn't function with as much autonomy as it should and hoped that in the future, the GB Tourism department will be able to walk on its own two feet along with other local organizations.

<https://fb.watch/4B8Ipr7y83/>

Compiled by
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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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