

POK

News Digest

A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

Compiled & Edited by Dr Priyanka Singh &
Charisma MS Kundan

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INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE
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Jammu & Kashmir

(Source: Based on the Survey of India Map, Govt of India 2000)

In this Edition

Even though Gilgit Baltistan has been under Pakistan's control since 1947, neither is it a part of Pakistan's constitution nor does it have a provincial status. This ambiguity in political status and long deprivation of political rights has caused considerable unrest in the region for a long time. In 2009, the government of Pakistan introduced a presidential order, the Empowerment and Self-rule package, which supposedly was done to give the region and the people a sense of political status and identity. The package elicited much enthusiasm but later upon realisation, it was rejected as a mere eyewash. This was done in 2009, the year Gilgit Baltistan witnessed its first general elections. The elections were again due in 2014 after the previous government led by Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) completed its term. Keeping in view the election year, the government of Pakistan has come up with the Local Government Act in August 2014. As part of this act, local representative in the Gilgit Baltistan region will be elected through adult franchise and there will be reservation for women and minority communities. Elections will be based on single ward electoral system keeping in mind the diverse nature of the society in the region. How effective the latest local government act really is, needs to be seen in due course.

The political upheaval in Pakistan led Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) and Tahirul Qadri caused problems in the so called AJK also. The supply routes were sealed in view of security considerations resulting from the protest rallies. Therefore, the people in the 'AJK' faced immense problems as supply of essential goods coming from Pakistan was cut abruptly. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister of 'AJK', Chaudhry Abdul Majeed, slammed both Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri for challenging a democratically elected PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz) government led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Priyanka Singh

Political Developments

“PM's visit to AJK postponed”

The Nation, August 10, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visit to Azad Kashmir has been postponed due to Pakistan Awami Tehreek's (PAT) long march call for August 11. The Prime Minister was scheduled to visit Muzaffarabad to inaugurate Muzaffarabad Bridge but due to announcement by the PAT for staging a long march on August 10 to observe Yum-e-Shuhada, the visit has been postponed. New date for PM Nawaz Sharif visit to the AJK will be announced after August 14. Meanwhile, the Federal government has called heavy contingent of police from Azad Kashmir to prevent the PAT long march. The government has called 1000 policemen from the AJK for their deployment on all avenues of the federal capital to ensure security arrangements.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/national/10-Aug-2014/pm-s-visit-to-ajk-postponed>

Parvez Jabri, “Arrangements final to hold Pakistan Zindabad Rallies in AJK”

Business Recorder, August 8, 2014

MIRPUR: All arrangements have been finalized to hold 'Pakistan Zindabad' rallies in all parts of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) on August 10 to mark the ongoing hectic arrangements for celebration of the Independence Day. The rallies of the people representing all segments of the civil society including in the capital city of Muzaffarabad, Mirpur and Rawalakot division will be the hallmark of the scheduled nation-wide Jashan-e-Azadi Pakistan celebrations. Deputy Commissioner Ch. Muhammad Tariq chaired the meeting which was attended by social and political workers, traders, lawyers, private and government employees' organizations.

<http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/general-news/187561->

[arrangements-final-to-hold-pakistan-zindabad-rallies-in-ajk.html](http://www.brecorder.com/pakistan/general-news/187561-arrangements-final-to-hold-pakistan-zindabad-rallies-in-ajk.html)

Shabbir Mir, “Levelling accusations: PML-Q legislator calls Gilgit-Baltistan chief minister 'a corrupt man'”

The Express Tribune, August 12, 2014

GILGIT: A senior lawmaker from Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid, Mirza Hussain, on August 11 levelled harsh accusations against Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Mehdi Shah. Speaking on the floor of the G-B legislative assembly, Hussain termed Shah a corrupt man “who keeps his personal interest above the [wellbeing of the] masses”. “Shah has been involved in so many corrupt practices over the years. That is why he is unable to speak against bureaucracy,” claimed Hussain during the first day of the current session chaired by Speaker Wazir Baig.

He, however, failed to touch upon why, despite the alleged corruption, his party, the PML-Q, chose to enter the government as a coalition partner four years ago. Hussain also criticised the attitude of bureaucrats towards the assembly and elected representatives.

The criticism was triggered by PML-Nawaz's Fida Nashad after he drew the speaker's attention towards the shortage of “seasonal labour” in the remote hilly areas of the region. “The issue is serious, but unfortunately the government is taking it lightly,” stated Nashad, alluding to the labour needed to keep the roads clear.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/747334/levelling-accusations-pml-q-legislator-calls-gilgit-baltistan-chief-minister-a-corrupt-man/>

“ISI creating sectarian strife in Gilgit”

ANI, August 6, 2014

GILGIT BALTISTAN: Pakistan's notorious spy

agency ISI is creating a deep wedge amongst the Shias and Sunnis in Gilgit Baltistan, wherein no rule of law prevails there, and people are picked up and killed at will. ISI has a nefarious plan to create unrest in the region, to disunite the locals in the region so that no nationalist forces can come together against Pakistan.

<http://www.aninews.in/videogallery9/26449-isi-creating-sectarian-strife-in-gilgit.html>

Khaleeq Kiani, “World marketing of Bhasha dam planned”

Dawn, August 25, 2014

ISLAMABAD: The government plans to launch in October a 'marketing initiative' for \$13 billion Diamer-Bhasha dam in the international market for attracting commercial financing of the project through a 'special purpose vehicle'. Sources noted that multilateral institutions, primarily the Asian Development Bank, had been advising the government to adopt a professional approach towards the objective of building the big dam which no single institution, country or group could finance given its mammoth funding requirements and the risks involved.

About 80 per cent of the total financing required—more than \$10 billion (Rs1.1 trillion) — has to be raised through external sources and the remaining through domestic arrangements. While a part of the external financing can be arranged by a few institutional lenders, the major financing has to be arranged through the international capital market as a specific infrastructure bond in the name of Diamer-Bhasha Dam Company (DBDC) — a special purpose vehicle.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1127582/world-marketing-of-bhasha-dam-planned>

“Protest ends in Gilgit”

Dawn, August 25, 2014

GILGIT: Majlis-i-Wahdatul Muslimeen (MWM), Pakistan Muslim League-Q and Sunni Ittehad Council on August 24 ended their six-day-long protest sit-in staged on the Karakoram Highway to show solidarity with the participants of the 'Inqilab March' and 'Azadi March' in Islamabad. The road

remained blocked during the time of the protest, suspending traffic between Gilgit-Baltistan and rest of the country.

Addressing a press conference on August 23, PML-Q GB president and parliamentary leader in the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly Mirza Hussain stated that the protest was ended keeping in view the problems faced by commuters.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1127586/protest-ends-in-gilgit>

Shabbir Mir, “Rock the boat: PML-N leadership on shaky ground in G-B”

The Express Tribune, August 25, 2014

GILGIT: Internal dissent is reportedly brewing within the Pakistan Peoples Party in Gilgit-Baltistan with Chief Minister Mehdi Shah losing popularity amongst the party's ranks. “There have been several corner meetings and it has been agreed to launch a joint struggle to oust Mehdi Shah,” a senior PPP leader noted on August 23. “Jafar Shah has agreed to lead the party if assigned the task by the central leadership. And efforts are under way to install him as quickly as possible.”

According to insiders, ministers Mohammad Jaffar, Muhammad Ismail, Muhammad Naseer and other prominent leaders have asked Jafar Shah to step in to salvage the party. Jafar Shah was the president of PPP's Gilgit chapter till 2008 but then chose to become a judge at the Supreme Appellate Court. He retired in 2011 after serving as a judge for three years. Some senior leaders, meanwhile, have contacted the National Assembly Opposition Leader Khursheed Shah to convey grievances of the regional leadership to PPP co-chairperson Asif Ali Zardari.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/752770/rocking-the-boat-rifts-brew-in-ppps-g-b-chapter-as-mehdi-shah-loses-popularity/>

“Dam-affected people neglected in GB”

Dawn, August 24, 2014

GILGIT: Muttahida Qaumi Movement, Diamer district chapter demanded of the Gilgit-Baltistan government to ensure fair distribution of compensation among the affected people of Diamer-Bhasha Dam project as it claimed that deserving people had been neglected in the money disbursement process.

On August 23, MQM district in-charge Haji Abdul Aziz stated that a meeting held at Chilas on August 22 demanded distribution of compensation on merit. He stated that the workers and leaders of MQM were in attendance. Mr Aziz accused the local administration of neglecting the real affected people of the dam project in the compensation, and claimed that millions of rupees had so far been paid to non-deserving people.

He further claimed that MQM would not compromise on the rights of the dam affected people and stated that the party's central leadership had been informed about the irregularities in distribution of compensation. He warned that construction work on the project would be stopped if their demands were not met. Meanwhile, talking to reporters in Islamabad the other day, MQM MNA Syed Haider Abbas Rizvi had stated that poor landowners affected by Diamer-Bhasha Dam had been awaiting compensation. He announced that MQM would raise the issue in the National Assembly.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1127412/dam-affected-people-neglected-in-gb>

“Oath administered: AJKPSC chairman appointed”

The Express Tribune, August 21, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: The acting President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Sardar Ghulam Sadiq on August 20 administered oath to former chief justice of AJK Supreme Court Khawaja Shahad Ahmed as the chairman of the AJK Public Service Commission chairman. The oath-taking ceremony was held at the President's Secretariat and was attended by ministers and high-ranking government officials. The term of office for the chairman and members of AJKPSC is three years. Former secretaries Saleem Bismil, Manzoor Ahmad Kiyani, Saeed Mughal, former commissioner Ghulam Mustafa, Aslam Zaffar, Kabir Chughtai, Advocate Khurshid Ahmad Rathore and Rafia Shireen also took oath of members of the commission.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/751333/oath-administered-ajkpsc-chairman-appointed/>

Gul Wani, “Surveying a Complex Social Structure, Greater Kashmir”

Greater Kashmir, August 30, 2014

For various obvious reasons the Youth in Jammu and Kashmir have remained the object of attention for society in general and policy planners in particular. Many youth studies were conducted to understand the socio-political and psychological problems of Kashmiri youth. These studies provided policy relevant inputs to state managers and all other stakeholders. The aspirations of youth in Pakistani part of Kashmir have generally remained a neglected area of research. This gap has been filled up by a study carried in AJK by an organization known as Centre for Peace, Development and Reforms (CPDR) supported by London based Conciliation Resources. The CR is an independent organization working in conflict places in different parts of the world. The study has brought to light some very interesting findings which have potential to mitigate the problems of youth in AJK.

The research was conducted by CPDR in all three divisions of AJK, namely Muzaffarabad, Mirpur and Rawlakote. To measure youth opinions comprehensive questionnaire was disseminated among 650 stakeholders in three divisions. Apart from this focus group (FG) discussions were also conducted. The study considers youth as those falling in the age group of 18 to 35. According to 1998 census, the state of AJK had a population of 2.973 million. Over half of AJK population is under 35.

<http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2014/Aug/30/surveyin-g-a-complex-social-structure-17.asp>

“Recruitments: AJK public service commission resumes work”

The Express Tribune, August 30, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir Public Service Commission (AJKPSC) on August 28 resumed work after a hiatus of more than two years. The commission has called the candidates of various posts for interview from September 8. The candidates who have passed the test for the lecturer posts of maths and economics

will be interviewed on September 8. Interviews of applicants for chemistry lecturer posts in Kotli district have been stayed by the court after a candidate working on ad hoc basis moved court. The commission has marked the papers of the written test for the 12 posts of BPS-17 Tehsil Qazi and lecturers in botany. The result will be announced next week. The newly-established public service commission has made it compulsory in the interview for the candidates to speak on a topic of their own choice.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/755073/recruitments-ajk-public-service-commission-resumes-work/>

“Interim body of AJKBC soon”

The Nation, August 5, 2014

Azad Jammu & Kashmir Bar Council has granted approval for the formation of the interim body comprising seasoned legal experts from across AJK for the formal establishment of the AJK High Court Bar Association. Granting the formal approval, Vice Chairman of AJK Bar Council Raja Khalid Mahmood Khan ordered that besides inking the constitution of the new forum of the AJK HC Bar Association, the interim body would take appropriate steps for the formation and holding of the elections to the office bearers in December this year.

The interim body would be comprising Sardar Muhammad Raziq Khan Advocate from Mirpur and former Additional Advocate General of AJK (President), Sardar Ejaz Khan Advocate from Rawalakot (SVP), Muhammad Khawir Minhas Advocate from Kotli and Khawaja Imtiaz Ahmed Advocate from Muzaffarabad (Vice Presidents), Raja Atif Fareed Advocate from Muzaffarabad (General Secretary), Sardar Khaleeq ur Rehman Advocate from Palandri (Joint Secretary), Zaffar Iqbal Advocate from Samani (Finance Secy) and Khawaja Nasir Bashir Lone Advocate from Bagh (Secretary Librarian). The newly inducted president has distinguished career in the legal field since over last 38 years.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/05-Aug-2014/interim-body-of-ajkbc-soon>

“Suffering official neglect: Kashmir's forgotten forts and temples”

The Express Tribune, August 15, 2014

A research group of the Taxila Institute of Asian Civilisation (TIAC) has mapped 100 heritage sites in four AJK districts that need to be mapped. The research shows that most of the monuments are on the verge of destruction. AJK Tourism and Archaeology Department has the mandate to identify and preserve historical sites. The department, however, has been focusing on tourism only. AJK

AJK Tourism and Archaeology Department Director Arshad Pirzada stated the department lacks funds to carry out documentation and preservation of the sites. “The tourism department has only the word 'archaeology' attached to it. We do not have funds or staff for archaeological projects,” he stated. He stated the department is collaborating with the Federal Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage and some universities in Pakistan to start excavation work on these sites. The department is also trying to get Rs1 million funds from Unesco for archaeological projects.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/748803/suffering-official-neglect-kashmirs-forgotten-forts-and-temples/>

“Unemployment level rising in AJK”

The Nation, August 16, 2014

Unemployment levels in AJK are rising, especially for the highly educated youth and to fill in the vacant posts. The lack of a proper Public Service Commission in AJK comprising required capable members for years is one of the main factors of the sadder state of affairs.

There is unrest among thousands of jobless youth as the PSC could not hold requisite examinations of the candidates who have applied for various vacant positions in response to the invitation of the applications by the PSC since 2011.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/16-Aug-2014/unemployment-level-rising-in-ajk>

“G-B province: AJK premier slams Qadri's Stance”

The Express Tribune, August 18, 2014

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister Chaudhry Abdul Majeed took strong exception to Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) chief Dr Tahirul Qadri's demands wherein he stated that Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) be declared a separate province. “I don't know what kind of revolution Qadri wants in Pakistan as he has no knowledge about the history of Jammu and Kashmir dispute. Such statements are unacceptable to the people of Jammu and Kashmir and G-B, and would serve nobody except our enemies,” Majeed added. The AJK premier stated both Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri were working on a specific agenda to derail democracy in the country. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz AJK Secretary General Shah Ghulam Qadir, while giving his party's reaction on Qadri's statement, stated when a territory is not constitutionally part of Pakistan, how could Qadri propose a provincial status for it. “Such a statement is a bid to weaken Pakistan's principled stand on Jammu and Kashmir and G-B,” stated Qadir. He accused Qadri and Imran of weakening Pakistan Army by involving them in internal politics through their protests. Jamaat-i-Islami AJK Naib Ameer Shaikh Aqeelur Rehman condemned Qadri's statement and termed it harmful for the liberation movement in Kashmir.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/750096/g-b-province-ajk-premier-slams-qadris-stance/>

“Supply Lines cut: AJK feels adverse impact of capital rallies”

The Express Tribune, August 20, 2014

The capital of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and other areas in Bagh, Neelum and Hattian Bala are facing an acute shortage of essential commodities like vegetables, frozen food items, dairy products and fresh fruits due to the marches in Islamabad. The main road connecting the country's capital with AJK has been closed near Bharakahu and has hampered all kind of vehicular traffic to the region. The three main fuel stations of Muzaffarabad were without petrol as tankers have not been allowed to cross Murree Road through Bharakahu as

Islamabad Police have blocked the road with containers. The traders' community has appealed to both Tahirul Qadri and Imran Khan to end their marches and settle all issues through dialogue as their protests are having an adverse impact on business.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/750899/supply-lines-cut-ajk-feels-adverse-impact-of-capital-rallies/>

Shabbir Mir, “Rifts within Nurbakhshiyas: Dozens arrested after clashes in Ghanche Valley”

The Express Tribune, August 4, 2014

Police rounded up over three dozen people and booked many others in Ghanche district of Baltistan on August 3 after clashes between two groups left dozens injured. The fighting erupted a day after Eidul Fitr between followers of the Sofia and Imamia groups of the Nurbakhshiya sect, bringing life to a standstill in the valley. The Nurbakhshiyas are a Sufic order.

According to locals, more than 50 people were injured as people pelted each other with stones. A policeman was also critically injured and was admitted to a hospital in Skardu. A rally organised by the Sofia sect was reportedly on its way to meet cleric Faqir Ibrahim a day after Eid, when it encountered followers of the Imamia group. “At first it was just an exchange of angry slogans. Then a brawl erupted, which turned into a fight with both sides firing at each other and pelting each other with stones,” stated one resident of Skardu. The incident caused a cascade of panic across Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B), prompting the authorities to crack down on the trouble makers. “At least 47 people have been arrested for disrupting law and order in the valley,” Ghanche Deputy Commissioner Mir Waqar noted on August 3. “An FIR has also been registered against two clerics [from the opposing groups] in connection with the clashes.”

The DC put the number of injured people at 10 and stated most of them had been hit by stones. This is in addition to the three policemen who were also wounded, stated Waqar, who was recently transferred to the valley. He described the incident as unfortunate but vowed to bring the culprits to

justice. To nip the potential for violence in the bud, the administration took a bold decision and booked the clerics heading the two sects. Physical remand of four others was also obtained from a court. The absence of Chief Minister Mehdi Shah, who is in China on an official trip, elicited a bad reaction. "Baltistan is on fire and the CM is enjoying his stay in China," stated Fida Nashad, a leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. His foreign and national trips are just a burden on the exchequer as they have never yielded any positive results for the region, added the lawmaker in the G-B Assembly and a resident of Skardu.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/743930/rifts-within-nurbakhshiyas-dozens-arrested-after-clashes-in-ghanche-valley/>

"Tourism Promotion in GB"

Pakistan Observer, August 4, 2014

SKARDU: Baltistan Tourism sector is being given priority and different development schemes are being implemented to promote the important sector, stated a spokesman of Planning and Development Department noted on August 3. He stated a mountaineering school was being constructed near Jarbaso Lake near Shiger at the cost of Rs 100 million, where local youth would be trained by master trainers from abroad and local climbers. As regard touring sites of Gilgit-Baltistan, a report published in a foreign journal reveals that Gilgit-Baltistan is a mountainous territory in the Himalayas in the far northeast corner of country. It is home to 12 of the world's 30 tallest mountain peaks, including K2 and Nanga Parbat. Pakistan considers it to be of extreme strategic importance because it borders ally China and is home to the only land route between the two countries. This route is the breathtakingly beautiful Karakorum Highway, the highest paved international road in the world. The region is also quite distinct from the rest of Pakistan, and indeed the world, in terms of its people. Additionally, the Burusho people of the Hunza Valley speak a language unrelated to any other in the world. Most of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan are Shia Muslims, unlike the rest of Pakistan.

<http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=172399>

"In anticipation: With little stake, G-B watches crisis unfold in Islamabad"

The Express Tribune, August 13, 2014

GILGIT: Gilgit-Baltistan is not represented in the parliament. The nearly 1.5 million residents of G-B are not allowed to vote in the general elections. It is also the least likely to be affected by any political upheavals. Six hundred kilometers from the federal capital, a school teacher in Gilgit is feeling the anguish of the looming political crisis in Islamabad. "I am disturbed over the impasse although I had no role in electing the prime minister," Masroor Ahmed noted. "But still, my heart beats with those who voted the government into power."

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Yet, the uncertainty created by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and Pakistan Awami Tehreek's call to march to Islamabad on August 14 for 'change' and 'revolution' has captured every one's imagination, and fears. It is not just politicians who are keeping a close watch on developments. Many others like Ahmed are anxious about what the country's future holds, eagerly waiting to see if democracy is still as elusive as ever.

PTI chief Imran Khan and PAT chief Tahirul Qadri have both vowed to rid the nation of the 'corrupt government'. And despite hectic efforts by the government to frustrate their efforts, none of the two seem to be in any mood to give the ruling party room to manoeuvre. Politicians associated with mainstream parties in G-B are especially keen to know what will become of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

At the PML-N Secretariat in Gilgit, party workers are flocking to regional chief Hafizur Rahman, discussing the likely outcome; starving for insight on the imminent turmoil. "It is unfortunate, PTI has been hijacked by undemocratic forces," stated Rahman, asking Imran Khan to part ways with Tahirul Qadri, whose demands have been vague at best and provocative at worst. "But we are quite

confident democracy will triumph,” stated Rahman, not willing to dwell too much on the many 'what ifs'.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/747738/in-anticipation-with-little-stake-g-b-watches-crisis-unfold-in-islamabad/>

“Senate for empowering people of Gilgit Baltistan”

Daily Times, August 18, 2014

The Senate on August 18 unanimously adopted a resolution moved by Senator Farhatullah Babar of the Pakistan People's Party calling upon the government to amend the Gilgit Baltistan (Empowerment and Self-Governance) Order 2009 to empower the people of the area. Speaking on the resolution, Senator Babar stated that the people of Gilgit Baltistan have critical geo-strategic importance for Pakistan. He pointed out that this supreme body the Legislative Council was manned by the bureaucracy of the federal government. He added that that it was a colonial mindset that seeks to control Gilgit Baltistan through executive order from Islamabad and refuses to empower the local assembly to control their own affairs.

<http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/national/18-Aug-2014/senate-for-empowering-people-of-gilgit-baltistan>

“Kargil's divided families yearn for reunion with relatives across LoC, Greater Kashmir”

Greater Kashmir, August 19, 2014

Zakir Hussain vividly remembers his last visit to Skardu in Baltistan to meet his relatives, displaced after 1965 Indo-Pak war. His eyes lit up the moment he talks about his three month stay in Skardu in 2008. Chief Executive Councilor of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) Kargil, stated they have umpteen times taken up with the Government of India the opening of the Kargil-Skardu road. “It is the most peaceful route with no history of any security related incident. But unfortunately there has been no progress as both India and Pakistan are unwilling to take the step,” he stated. Undeterred by the cold response from both the countries, a group of youth in Kargil, joined by their brethren in Baltistan and Gilgit, have launched a joint campaign on the social networking sites like

Facebook, Twitter, seeking opening of the road. “We started this campaign to create awareness across India and Pakistan about the sufferings of the divided families and the need for opening this route,” stated Mukthar Zahid. “The movement is growing day-by-day. The aim is to create the pressure on India and Pakistan to take the long awaited Confidence Building Measure.”

<http://www.greaterkashmir.com/news/2014/aug/20/kargil-s-divided-families-yearn-for-reunion-with-relatives-across-loc-30.asp>

“GBLA Passes Local Govt. Act 2014”

Pakistan Observer, August 20, 2014

Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly (GBLA) has unanimously passed the Local Government Act 2014. The Select Committee was provided technical support in this process by Strengthening Participatory Federalism and Decentralization Project of UNDP-Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan Policy Institute. Gilgit-Baltistan has had the Punjab Local Government Ordinance of 1979 enforced in the region since September 1979. A participatory and consultative process had been adopted for drafting the local government bill 2014 similar to the Parliamentary Committee for Constitutional Reforms that drafted the 18th Constitutional Amendment. The thirteen-member Committee had representation from all political parties represented in the Assembly and conducted multi-stakeholder consultations in both Gilgit and Skardu to incorporate their feedback on the draft law.

The key features of the Gilgit-Baltistan Local Government Act 2014 include: notification of urban and rural areas in which local governance structures will be formed comprising of elected representative through adult franchise basis and indirectly elected members on reserved seats for women and religious minorities, party basis local government elections under single ward electoral system for encouraging greater cohesion amongst different religious groups and ensure sectarian harmony in the region, introduction of standing committee system has for effective participatory development policy planning, monitoring and implementation, formation of Local Government Commission to

ensure a link between the Gilgit-Baltistan Government and Local Government structures, establishment of Local Council Board to oversee the appointments and other service related matters of local government employees, establishment of two city metropolitan corporations in Gilgit and Skardu districts headed by a Mayor and a Deputy Mayor, formation of Jirga Anjuman at District Council and District Council levels for out-of-court settlement of disputes, reservation of seats for women, (the law specifically mentions that any local council will not be considered effective and functioning unless the required number of women seats has been filled) and performance audits of the line departments etc—NNI

<http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=250099>

“Talking about devolution: Senate resolution on empowering G-B sparks hopes”

The Express Tribune, August 21, 2014

GILGIT: The resolution adopted by the senate on August 19 to amend Gilgit-Baltistan's (G-B) self-governance order to empower the de facto province has given hope to the region's lawmakers and politicians. To shift powers from the G-B Council to its legislative assembly has been a longstanding demand of politicians in the region. The G-B Council is a 12-member body headed by the prime minister. It is equally represented by the G-B and federal governments, unlike the assembly which is populated by elected representatives. The resolution adopted by the Senate on August 19 to amend Gilgit-Baltistan's (G-B) self-governance order to empower the de facto province has given hope to the region's lawmakers and politicians. The senate unanimously adopted a resolution on August 19, moved by Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP) Farhatullah Babar. It called upon the government to amend the G-B (Empowerment and Self-governance) Order 2009. “If this resolution is acted upon, the G-B assembly could have powers to legislate on issues like minerals, power and forests,” Amjad Hussain, a member of the G-B Council noted.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/751341/talking-about-devolution-senate-resolution-on-empowering-g-b-sparks-hopes/>

Shabbir Mir, “Facing a delay: With protest in Islamabad, elections in G-B take a hit”

The Express Tribune, August 31, 2014

Elections in Gilgit-Baltistan — earlier expected to be held by the end of 2014 — have apparently fallen victim to the ongoing protests of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) in the federal capital. The beleaguered federal government has not been able to find enough time to address the issue of elections in G-B, giving rise to speculation of a 'constitutional breakdown' on December 11, when the tenure of the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party comes to an end. “The G-B government will step aside on December 11 after completing its five-year term, and with it G-B will plunge into a constitutional crisis as the Governance Order 2009 has no provision for a caretaker setup,” Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's regional chief Hafeezur Rahman stated while talking to a select group of journalists in Gilgit on August 30.

“The federal government was working on an election schedule, but the dharnas have resulted in a delay as the government's attention is on resolving them,” explained Hafeez. G-B has not been immune to the political impasse in Islamabad. Residents and politicians in the region are anxiously awaiting the outcome. “This should come to an end. This isn't going to give us anything,” Murtaza, a resident of Gilgit, hoped for a timely end to the crisis. Pro-government parties led by PML-N also organised a car rally in Gilgit on to express solidarity with the government. “We will not allow anybody to rob peoples' mandate,” Hafeez told participants of the rally.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/755837/facing-a-delay-with-protests-in-islamabad-elections-in-g-b-take-a-hit/>

“Pak, India troops exchange fire at LoC Astore sector”

Pakistan Today, August 1, 2014

ISLAMABAD: According to a statement released by the Inter Services Public Relations on August 1, Indian troops resorted to firing early on August 1 at Line of Control in Gultri sector near Astore (Gilgit-Baltistan). This is the first incident of ceasefire

violation at Astore sector of LoC. The statement added that Pakistani troops retaliated with full force in response to the Indian forces.

<http://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2014/07/31/national/indian-troops-violate-ceasefire-at-loc-astore-sector/>

Maha Mussadaq, “Pakistan K2 Expedition: Mountaineers get cold shoulder from G-B government”

The Express Tribune, August 3, 2014

ISLAMABAD: The K2 climbing anniversary mission may have made international headlines last week when its team of mountaineers conquered the “killer mountain” but they failed to capture the imagination of the country's highest officials. Not a single senior government official from Gilgit-Baltistan is likely to welcome the triumphant mountaineers when they return to Askole. Repeated attempts via phone and email have been made by the organisers to the G-B chief minister and chief secretary's office to invite them to the reception upon the mountaineers' return. However, they have refused to commit at the moment.

“Even after all these efforts, as a native I feel ashamed that people from other countries come here and invest in us while our own government cannot give them some form of recognition,” stated Munir Ahmed, the spokesperson for the Pakistan K2 Expedition project. Six Pakistani mountaineers and four Italians teamed up for an expedition to challenge history after they made it to the summit on August 2. The Pakistani group consisted of Hassan Jan, Ali Durrani, Rahmatullah Baig, Ghulam Mehdi, Rozi Ali and Muhammad Sadiq. Two Italian mountaineers Michele Cucchi and Simone Origone, and documentary-filmmaker and climber Daniele Nardi were accompanying the climbers.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/743624/pakistan-k2-expedition-mountaineers-get-cold-shoulder-from-g-b-govt/>

“GB lawmakers laud Senate resolution”

Dawn, August 20, 2014

GILGIT: Ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and its coalition partner, PML-Q, on August 19 lauded passage of a unanimous resolution in the Senate calling upon the central government to amend the

GB Empowerment and Self-Governance Order 2009 to empower the people of Gilgit-Baltistan in real terms. Talking to mediapersons in Gilgit, PPP's Amjad Hussain stated that GB lawmakers, speaking at a meeting held on August 19, stated that the Senate resolution would help ensure constitutional rights to the people of GB, removing sense of alienation among them. Mr Hussain stated that the meeting was attended by lawmakers, including Wazir Baig, Nasir Khan, Mohammad Ali Akhtar, Mohammad Ayub Shah, Wazir Ibadat and Mirza Hussain. Meanwhile, according to a press release issued from the PPP media office, the Senate on August unanimously adopted the resolution, moved by PPP Senator Farhatullah Babar, calling upon the government to amend the Gilgit-Baltistan (Empowerment and Self-Governance) Order 2009 to reflect aspirations of the GB people.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1126503/gb-lawmakers-laud-senate-resolution>

Tariq Naqash, “AJK minister sets up office in the open in protest”

Dawn, August 29, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: While the attention of the whole country is focused on the ongoing sit-ins in the federal capital, a bizarre scene is being witnessed in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Civil Secretariat for the past four consecutive days, with a huffy cabinet member performing his duties in the open in protest against a 'lent officer.' Mohammad Tahir Khokhar, minister for transport and cooperatives and parliamentary leader of MQM in the AJK assembly, attends his visitors at what he describes his “camp office” on a mini roundabout that faces almost all important offices on the premises of the secretariat.

Every morning, his staff brings chairs and a table along with table flags of Pakistan and AJK as well as a portrait of MQM chief Altaf Hussain. Some small panaflax banners and placards were also displayed. The minister arrived after a little while and remained there till 1 p.m. He attended his visitors at his “camp office” on a mini roundabout. Not only this, they also installed two speakers and a CD player, loudly playing national songs throughout

the presence of Mr Khokhar, to the amusement of some and chagrin of others.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1128485/ajk-minister-sets-up-office-in-the-open-in-protest>

“AJK making police vibrant with skills, equipment”

The Nation, August 22, 2014

MIRPUR: Police forces in Azad Jammu and Kashmir are being strengthened to enhance its professional skills under a broad-based development plan in line with the needs of the modern age, disclosed the AJK police chief. Talking to newsmen at PWD Rest House, Inspector General of Police Malik Khuda Buksh Awan stated that the police force had been imparted the latest professional training related to all the disciplines and course including the anti-riots training. He revealed that the police had also been equipped with latest weaponry including shields for defense and helmets besides the latest swift means of communications. Flanked by SSP Mirpur Raja Urfan Salim and SSP Security for Chinese in Mirpur district Sheheryar Khan, the AJK police chief stated that the police force had also been dispatched in required number to Islamabad to join the local law enforcing agencies to deal with any eventuality following the ongoing marches staged by the PTI and PAT. The IGP stated that in view of the increased population and rapid progress and development in all the fields in AJK, immediate improvement in the police strength was the need of hour to maintain the sense of complete security among the masses.

<http://nation.com.pk/national/22-Aug-2014/ajk-making-police-vibrant-with-skills-equipment>

Shabbir Mir, “Patrons of the day: G-B govt, army join to organise festivities”

The Express Tribune, August 14, 2014

GILGIT: The government and army have joined hands in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) after a decade to mark August 14 with much fanfare. The festivities formally started on August 13 morning as legislators of the G-B Legislative Assembly paid visits to the families of martyrs and laid floral

wreaths on their graves. The decision was taken in the backdrop of Operation Zarb-e-Azb launched by the Pakistan Army in North Waziristan.

“This is a special occasion for us to pay tribute to our brave army fighting a war against militancy,” stated G-B Minister for Information Sadia Danish on August 13. The 'Azadi polo match' took place at about 5pm at Shahi Polo Ground, with the force commander participating as chief guest along with the chief secretary. At about 11pm, the armed forces held a march, followed by fireworks. The events are scheduled to continue well into August 14.

Residents of G-B are not unfamiliar with 14 August celebrations. Until the mid-1990s, the day used to be marked on a massive scale in the region. The army and police would arrange parades to the beat of deafening drums and odes in front of huge crowds. Likewise, all cars, shops and homes would be adorned with Pakistani flags.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/748389/patrons-of-the-day-g-b-govt-army-join-to-organise-festivities/>

“Crackdown in AJK: Over two dozen nabbed”

The Express Tribune, August 11, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Police have arrested 27 alleged drug peddlers in the region's capital during the last two months and foiling dozens of bids to smuggle drugs, liquor and weapons. Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Ifran Masood Kashfi, while sharing details of police crackdowns against smugglers on August 9, stated during the last 60 days, 7,200 kilograms of hashish, 272 bottles of liquor, 250 grams of brown sugar and 20 litres of liquor have been recovered. Kashfi stated 16 of the 27 people nabbed were involved in the smuggling of firearms. Police also recovered seven AK-47 rifles, 12 12-bore guns, two air guns, 10 pistols, one mauzer, one seven millimeter rifle, an Uzi and 3,000 bullets of various calibers. The SSP stated following the North Waziristan operation, army officials along with policemen have been deployed at four entry and exit points of Muzaffarabad to ensure proper checking of people.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/746994/crackdown-in-ajk-over-two-dozen-nabbed/>

Economic Developments

“GB hydropower potential can help overcome energy needs: Mehdi”

The Nation, August 9, 2014

LAHORE: Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) Syed Mehdi Shah on August 8 visited Wapda House and held a meeting with Chairman Wapda Zafar Mahmood. Matters relating to various water and hydropower projects being implemented by Wapda in Gilgit-Baltistan particularly Diamer Bhasha Dam, Satpara Dam, Bunji, Harpo and Basho Hydropower Projects came under discussion during the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister stated that Gilgit-Baltistan was home to enormous water and hydropower potential. He stated that harnessing this potential would not only help overcome energy shortages in the country but also go a long way in socio-economic development of Gilgit Baltistan. During the meeting, the Chief Minister underlined the need of working out an arrangement for payment of water use charges to GB government. He stated that availability of additional funds worth billions of rupees in this respect would pave the way for uplift of Gilgit Baltistan.

Briefing the Chief Minister about the status of progress of various water and hydropower projects located in GB, the Chairman Wapda stated that the process of land acquisition for Diamer Bhasha Dam needed to be finalised as soon as possible. He also told the Chief Minister that funds availability was not the issue. He requested the Chief Minister to play his role for acceleration of process of land acquisition so that the work on the construction of main dam could be initiated at the earliest. He further noted that the government released Rs. 27 billion for Diamer Bhasha Dam in FY 2013-14 and earmarked another Rs 15 billion in PSDP for FY 2014-15 to complete the land acquisition and resettlement-related infrastructure development. He also stated that Diamer Bhasha Dam was a vital

project of national significance because of its multipurpose nature.

Apprising the Chief Minister about Bunji Hydropower Project, the Chairman stated that the PC-1 of the Project had been submitted to the government for approval. He noted that Wapda intended to initiate the process of land acquisition for the project and had also formally requested the GB government in this regard. He further stated that an officer had been deputed at the project for the purpose. He also assured the Chief Minister that Wapda would continue to extend technical cooperation to the GB government for construction of small hydropower projects.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/business/09-Aug-2014/gb-hydropower-potential-can-help-overcome-energy-needs-mehdi>

“33 development targets achieved in GB”

The Nation, August 3, 2014

In Gilgit Baltistan 33 development schemes were implemented during the end of June 2014 in Urban development sector, at a cost of Rs3639.308 million while 584.6 million rupees were spent on these schemes during financial year and targets were achieved. A spokesman of P&D Gilgit Baltistan noted on August 2 that during the financial year 24 old and 12 new schemes were implemented.

<http://nation.com.pk/business/03-Aug-2014/33-development-targets-achieved-in-gb>

“PIIB Extends Eois Date for Gadani Power Park”

Pakistan Observer, August 28, 2014

ISLAMABAD: The government is taking all possible steps to bridge the gap between demand and supply of electricity in order to accelerate the socio economic growth of the country and bring relief to the people. This was stated by the Federal Minister for Water and Power Khawaja Muhammad

Asif while chairing 97th meeting of the Board of PPIB (Private Power and Infrastructure Board) held on August 26. Hydropower projects were also discussed and it was decided to extend the Letter of Support of 870MW Sukki Kinari hydropower project on River Kunhar, District Mansehra, Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa, which is included in the “early harvest projects” priority list of the China-Pakistan Energy Corridor. This extension will allow the project to take necessary measures to implement

the project at the earliest. The Board also desired removal of all bottlenecks for early development of 132 MW Rajdhani Hydropower Project in AJ&K with due cooperation of the government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. PPIB acts as agent for and on behalf of the AJ&K Council for development, facilitation and implementation of power projects in Azad Kashmir.

<http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=251012>

International Developments

Shabbir Mir, “Business ties: G-B CM promises Chinese investors conducive environment”

The Express Tribune, August 6, 2014

GILGIT: Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Chief Minister Mehdi Shah promised fool proof security and a conducive environment for investment if Chinese businessmen turn to G-B. “I invite the business community of China to visit G-B, which has immense potential, and explore avenues for investment,” Mehdi Shah told an official Chinese delegation in Kashgar, China, according to a statement issued from the CM's Secretariat.

Shah, accompanied by several other members of his cabinet, is on an official visit to China to explore business opportunities for G-B. This is Shah's fourth visit to China since he assumed office in 2010. “The Pak-China friendship is exemplary but we need to further expand it,” stated Shah, referring to the proposed railway

track that will pass through G-B to connect China with Gwadar. The statement stated Shah also proposed revising the two-day weekend to a one-day weekend for customs and other government offices to further the interest of traders in Pakistan.

In response to Shah's propositions, a delegation of Chinese businessmen will visit G-B this year, it added. While the CM's visit attracted fierce criticism from opposition parties more so after clashes between two groups of Nurbakhshiyas led to dozens injured and arrested in Baltistan the trip was termed a success by Minister for Minerals Muhammad Naseer. “I am pretty sure the visit will prove successful and the people in China will take [the offers] seriously,” Naseer told journalists in Gilgit.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/744718/business-ties-g-b-cm-promises-chinese-investors-conducive-environment/?print=true>

Other Developments

Shabbir Mir, “Reviving tourism: 39 countries invited to Silk Route Festival”

The Express Tribune, August 8, 2014

GILGIT: The Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) government has invited 39 countries to participate in the Silk Route Festival starting in September in the region. The concept of the Silk Route Festival was conceived by former chief secretary Younus Dagha in 2013 when terrorists attacked and killed 10 foreign tourists at the foot of Nanga Parbat in 2013. At least 16 countries took part in the activities. “This will be a mega event; we have sent invitations to 39 countries,” Secretary Tourism Akhtar Rizvi informed participants of a meeting chaired by G-B Chief Secretary Sikandar Sultan Raja. The meeting which was attended by department heads and other relevant officials reviewed measures needed to make the event a success.

Raja urged law enforcement agencies to ensure foolproof security for the festival which will culminate on September 15. So far 16 countries have confirmed their participation. The five-day event will start from September 10—an inaugural ceremony has been scheduled for Islamabad where foreign dignitaries will be briefed.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/745690/reviving-tourism-39-countries-invited-to-silk-route-festival/>

“OEC Starts its Educational Expo Series 2014 in Gilgit-Baltistan”

The Dardistan Times, August 14, 2014

GILGIT: In continuation of the different educational activities, on August 9, 2014 the OEC team visited the Elysian Higher Secondary School Danyore to conduct the first session of Educational Expo of the year under the supervision of Javed Iqbal, the Director OEC Educational Expo and Kashif Ayaz, the Event Coordinator with the team members including Amjad Hussain (NUST),

Shakeela (Quaid-i-Azam University), Rehamt Karim Baig (FAST), Rouhani Barkat (Quaid-i-Azam University), Naeem Hayat (Comsats), Mustafa Hussain Shah (FAST), Nudrat Ehsan (International Islamic University), Wajid (UET), Mohsin (Comsat), Abid (AKHSS) and Haseeb Ul Haque (Comsat). The event started with the recitation of the verses of the Holy Quran, followed by a brief introduction of OEC and team members to the participants.

<http://www.dardistantimes.com/gilgit-baltistan/News/203623096/oec-starts-its-educational-expo-series-2014-gilgit-baltistan>

Shabbir Mir, “Scaling new heights: From the mountain of Italians to the mountain of Pakistanis”

The Express Tribune, August 9, 2014

GILGIT: Sixty years ago the world's second highest peak, located in Gilgit-Baltistan, was a “mountain of the Italians”, but K2 is now also “the mountain of Pakistanis,” says famous mountaineer Agostino Da Polenza. He was referring to 'K2, 60 years later', a recent expedition to the 'savage mountain' which marked the 60th anniversary of the first successful ascent.

Italians Achille Compagnoni and Lino Lacedelli became the first men to conquer the mighty K2 in 1954. They were the first to reach the mountain's 28,251-foot-high summit. In an email sent on August 7, Polenza, the president of Ev-K2CNR, a non-profit association which promotes scientific and technological research in mountain areas, wrote: “It is with huge pride that I wish to report that seven members of the 'K2, 60 years later' have climbed the summit.”

Polanza, who conquered the perilous peak in 1983 to join a list of other Italians who had achieved this feat, further wrote, “We are just returning from the expedition to K2 which has been a great success

from both scientific and mountaineering point of views.”

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/746125/scaling-new-heights-from-the-mountain-of-italians-to-the-mountain-of-pakistanis/>

“Brutal death: Boy kidnapped from mosque, killed”

The Express Tribune, August 6, 2014

GILGIT: A four-year-old boy was kidnapped and killed in Amphary in Gilgit Town late August 4 night. According to relatives, Mujeer Ahmed was offering Isha prayers when unidentified men entered the mosque and abducted his son. Ahmed is the vice principal at Public School and College Jutial, one of the most prestigious educational institutes in G-B. “As Ahmed ended his prayers, he found his son had gone missing,” stated Asif Raza, an uncle. Public announcements were made throughout the night about the missing child but to no avail. His body was then recovered from a nearby field August 5. According to the post-mortem report, the cause of death was asphyxiation by strangulation and he had died on August 4.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/744749/brutal-death-boy-kidnapped-from-mosque-killed/>

“A green problem: Trees not rockets or guns threaten air safety in Gilgit”

August 26, 2014

GILGIT: Tall trees near Gilgit Airport's runway have been a problem in the past and have cropped up again. And the solution is as simple as chopping or trimming them and as complicated as cutting through the red tape to get land owners compensation. According to a Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) official, who wished to remain anonymous, the issue first came up in 2010-11 when some trees near Gilgit airport were removed and some trimmed. The owners were paid up to Rs150,000 by the district administration and were asked to not grow the foliage again, but they paid no heed, stated the official.

More recently, Pakistan International Airlines Captain Sajjad Gul lodged a verbal complaint to the G-B chief minister (CM) who was on the flight Gul

piloted from Islamabad to Gilgit. Gul told CM Mehdi Shah the trees near the runway were a cause for concern and can hinder the safety of air operations. Passing the baton Shah then directed the Gilgit deputy commissioner (DC) to take up the matter and remove the trees without any delay.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/753458/a-green-problem-trees-not-rockets-or-guns-threaten-air-safety-in-gilgit/>

“President gives nod: AJK varsity gets mass communication department”

The Express Tribune, August 30, 2014

MUZAFFARABAD: Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) President Muhammad Yaqoob Khan has approved setting up of mass communication department in the AJK University Muzaffarabad. While presiding over a meeting in the President's secretariat in Muzarffarabad on August 28, Khan, who is chancellor of the university, stated that the department was the need of hour and urged the university administration to consult senior journalists to make it a role model and success story.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/755486/president-gives-nod-ajk-varsity-gets-mass-comm-department/>

“Modern mechanism: Looking to juice up AJK's agriculture sector”

The Tribune Express, August 3, 2014

A mechanism is being introduced for the promotion and cultivation of various precious agricultural products like olive oil and pomegranate in AJK. Elaborating the salient features of the proposed plan for agricultural development, funds have been placed in the 2014-15 budget to achieve the task. The sources continued that the government has planned to develop barren land for cultivation. They added that fair-price shops were also being set up for the supply of seed and other related agricultural items across AJK. The sources continued that the government has planned to develop barren land for cultivation. This plan will not only help to promote the agriculture sector but would also strengthen the economic progress and prosperity in the region.

They added that fair-price shops were also being set up for the supply of seed and other related

agricultural items across AJK. Vegetable markets at district and tehsil level were also being established for the facility of the farmers with aims to make them more prosperous and to ensure that they play their active role for the speedy progress of the sector.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/743598/modern-mechanism-looking-to-juice-up-ajks-agriculture-sector/>

“Direct link: Earthquake Memorial Bridge opens in AJK”

The Express Tribune, August 21, 2014

The much awaited Earthquake Memorial Bridge connecting Naluchi and Chattar on the banks of River Jhelum was opened for traffic on August 19. The project, funded by the Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC), was completed in just over four year at a cost of Rs1.5billion. The cable-stayed extradosed bridge was designed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Work on the project was started in May 2009 and was supposed to be completed in 2012, but it hit many snags including paucity of funds, delaying completion.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/751320/direct-link-earthquake-memorial-bridge-opens-in-ajk/>

“Skardu hospital short of doctors, facilities”

Dawn, August 3, 2014

The Skardu district headquarters hospital is a picture of neglect as it lacks the required facilities and is short of doctors and paramedics to meet the health needs of the people of Baltistan region. Dr Haider stated that the hospital was established in 1970 with a capacity of 50 beds, which was later increased to 130 and then to 250, but number of doctors and paramedics wasn't increased accordingly thus, severely affecting the health delivery. “Due to patients' rush the existing doctors have to perform duty round the clock,” he maintained.

Dr Haider stated the hospital handled over 1,000 patients daily in the outdoor patients department, adding that there was only one table in the minor operation theatre, making it difficult to operate properly in emergencies. He demanded that a latest operation theatre having several operation tables

equipped with all operating facilities should be established in the hospital.

<http://www.dawn.com/news/1122987>

“Better hygiene: Drinking water schemes to benefit 7,500 people”

The Express Tribune, August 17, 2014

GILGIT: At least 7,500 people in Gilgit-Baltistan's (G-B) Ghizer and Hunza valleys will benefit from drinking water and sanitation schemes being launched by the German government in collaboration with a local NGO. Earlier this week, the projects were inaugurated in Faizabad and Dal Sandhi in Ghizer district and Aliabad in Hunza-Nagar district to meet the longstanding demands of locals. “We have been saved from the curse of diarrhoeal diseases,” Hunza resident Tasleem Bano stated on 16.

The facilities were inaugurated by German Ambassador to Pakistan Dr Cyrill Nunn. He was accompanied by German First Secretary Barbara Voss and officials of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). “The German government and the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) have inaugurated the schemes as part of a €9.4 million grant (Rs1.25 billion) announced in 2010,” read a press release issued by AKDN. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Nunn applauded the role of AKDN and its affiliated agencies, saying that over 300 villages in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral now have access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/749671/better-hygiene-drinking-water-schemes-to-benefit-7500-people/>

Shabbir Mir, “Slow and steady: 220 turtles return from their Chinese Holiday”

The Express Tribune, August 20, 2014

GILGIT: Over 200 turtles smuggled into China finally found their way back home to Pakistan on August 19, thanks to the collaborative efforts of Chinese authorities as well as the Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) and Sindh wildlife departments. The consignment was seized in the neighbouring country during the last week of June after authorities received information on “unusual luggage” coming from Pakistan. When intercepted,

experts determined the consignment contained 220 hard-shell turtles. Earlier reports had put the number at 180. “The freshwater turtles were smuggled to China from Karachi via G-B,” Chief Conservator Wildlife Javed Ahmed told the media in Gilgit.

The animals had been packed inside boxes, each containing 10 turtles. “They had been collected from Karachi and Sukkur by smugglers, two of whom belong to G-B.” Ahmed, who recently reached Gilgit from China, along with 10 Sindh wildlife officials, successfully negotiated the release of the turtles. The animals are listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), thus their exchange is banned.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/750842/slow-and-steady-220-turtles-return-from-their-chinese-holiday/>

“Life in the mountains: Skill polishing to revive stonemasonry in G-B”

The Express Tribune, August 30, 2014

GILGIT: Efforts have begun in Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) to revive the craft of stone-masonry, a trend which has gradually been replaced by the introduction of cemented bricks over the past decades, posing a threat to the environment. A stakeholders meeting was organised in this regard on August 29 under the Pakistan Technical and Vocational Education and Training Reform Support Programme's initiative, Fund for Innovative Trainings (FIT).

Speaking at the meeting, a senior official of the Rupani Foundation, Jalaluddin, stated: “The main reason people abandoned stonemasonry is its cost.” The Rupani Foundation is an organisation which works to create economic opportunities for people living in the mountainous areas of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Jalal, however, insisted ways have to be found to make building with stone economical so as to create job opportunities and protect the environment. Given the harsh weather conditions in winter across the hilly region of G-B, cement, a poor insulator, does not help houses seal the heat in. The cement brick

wall is too thin to keep the cold out, leading to an increased reliance on forest wood for heating, which depletes forest reserves.

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/755473/life-in-the-mountains-skill-polishing-to-revive-stonemasonry-in-g-b/>

“Glacial melting: Data-sharing needed to mitigate disasters”

The Express Tribune, August 16, 2014

NAGAR: Our elders used to say this glacier was very high, so high there was no one living here. This was a giant glacial lake, Sajjad Ali stated. Standing on a cliff, he pointed down at the Hopar Glacier, more than a thousand metres below, its surface covered by massive boulders it had swept out of its way as it carved a valley through the Karakoram Mountains. In the distance rises Mt Spantik, the snow-covered, 7,027 metre-high confluence of five major glaciers, including two of the largest five bodies of ice outside the Polar Regions. One of the tallest peaks of the Karakoram Mountains, Spantik is part of the Upper Indus Basin, the source for most of the rivers in South Asia, making it a vitally important environmental resource for the lives of people across the region.

Down below, lines of vegetation cut across otherwise barren valley walls. Trees and shrubs grow along artificial irrigation canals- some of them centuries old - built by locals to carry water from lakes formed by melting glaciers to their homes. If the glaciers melt too rapidly, those villages are at risk of flooding. “Not just here, but all over Gilgit-Baltistan [region], most [glaciers] are downsizing, retreating in their positions,” stated Ali, a researcher at the Karakoram International University. “It could be due to carbon emissions, or shifting monsoon precipitation, or to a natural cycle, maybe an inter-glacial age, or some combination but it needs to be studied.”

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/749258/glacial-melting-data-sharing-needed-to-mitigate-disasters/>

Fact sheet on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir

Total area of Jammu and Kashmir	222,236 sq kms
Area of under illegal Pakistani occupation (PoK = AJK + Gilgit Baltistan)	78114 sq kilometres
Area of J&K under Chinese occupation <i>Area ceded to China by Pakistan</i>	42,685 sq kms 5,180 sq kms
Together Pak-China	120,799 sq kms
Area with India	101437 sq kms

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: 2.973 million (1998 population census), Male, 1.850 million; Female, 1.832 million

Capital: Muzaffarabad

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 Yaqoob Khan

Prime Minister: Chaudhry Abdul Majeed

AJK Council: Total 12 members

AJK Legislative Assembly: Total seats are 49

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: Azad Jammu & Kashmir Government website at <http://www. www.ajk.gov.pk/>, accessed on November 14, 2010)

Gilgit-Baltistan

Area: 72,496 sq. kilometers

Population: 870,347 (1998 population census)

Capital: Gilgit

Districts: Nine

Baltistan Region (part of Ladakh) is divided into Ghanche, Skardu, Kharmang and Shigar districts

Gilgit Region is divided into Astore, Diamer, Ghizer, Hunza-Nagar and Gilgit districts

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: Total 33 members (24 members directly elected)

Governor of G-B: Pir Karam Ali Shah

Chief Minister G-B: Syed Mehdi Shah

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: Jammu & Kashmir Government website at <http://www.gilgitbaltistan.gov.pk>, & website of the Balwaristan National Front, <http://www.balawaristan.net>, accessed on November 14, 2010)

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 as 'Azad Kashmir' and 'Gilgit Baltistan' by the government of Pakistan. The news reports have been abridged to provide clarity. IDSA is not responsible for the accuracy and authenticity of the news items.

POK NEWS DIGEST



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