

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

Volume 4 | Issue 46

11 November - 17 November 2024

POK
climate refugees
Gilgit-Baltistan
CPEC hydropower projects
sustainable development
local community
Ecotourism
Riali II



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES
मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

No. 1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg
New Delhi-110 010

Contents

Political Developments

- Iran envoy to Pakistan calls on chairman Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir
- Ecotourism in GB
- As the world melts around them, climate refugees in Hunza pin hopes on COP29
- Thirteen bodies recovered after a bus carrying 26 passengers crashes at Thalichi Bridge in Gilgit-Baltistan
- Hearing of public grievances against 'AJK' based federal entities
- Speakers highlight key perspectives on Kashmir dispute

Economic Developments

- Riali-II project security package approval: PD all set to place summary before ECC
- Blushing golden apples

Vernacular Urdu Media

- Pakistan Cricket Board in connection to the issue over ICC champion's trophy gave befitting reply to the Indian Cricket Board
- Pakistan Muslim League (N) will confront anti-Pakistan statements on all platforms: Shah Ghulam Qadir
- The Modi Government is perpetuating acts of atrocities against minority groups
- The importance of Convening an Urgent Assembly Session in 'Azad Kashmir'

Political Developments

Iran envoy to Pakistan calls on chairman Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir

The Nation, 12 November 2024

Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Kashmir, Rana Muhammad Qasim Noon yesterday called for a unified stance of Muslim Ummah against the atrocities in Gaza and Kashmir. ‘Pakistan’s Prime Minister had effectively raised the issues of Kashmir and Palestine in the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN),’ said Chairman Rana Qasim Noon condemning the demographic engineering and severe human rights violations in ‘Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir’ (IIOJK) and Palestine by India and Israel, respectively. He made these remarks in a meeting with Dr Reza Amiri Moghaddam, Ambassador of Iran. Members of the National Assembly Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhary and Wajiha Qamar were also present on the occasion. Mushaal Mullick, a prominent Kashmiri activist, expressed gratitude to Iranian government and Iranian people for supporting the Kashmiri cause.

She highlighted the plight of Hurriyat leader Yasin Malik, who is facing illegal detention at the hands of the State of India. She condemned the ‘oppressive policies’ of Israel and India, stressing that both countries were subjecting innocent people to inhumane conditions.

Ambassador Dr Reza Amiri Moghaddam expressed gratitude to the Chairman of the Kashmir Committee, reaffirming Iran’s unwavering stance against aggression and the oppression on Muslims in Kashmir and Palestine.

He emphasized that the cause of Kashmir has been close to the hearts of the Iranian people. He condemned Israel’s violations of basic human rights in Palestine and Lebanon.

Dr Reza Amiri Moghaddam expressed hope that the ongoing session of the OIC would issue a strong statement supporting the Palestinian and Kashmiri cause. He also thanked the Pakistani government and people for their steadfast advocacy for Palestine.

Director General Kashmir Committee Syed Nouman Shah along with Raja Irfan Kiani, Ms Zobia Khurshid and Coordinator Kashmir Committee Raja Kamran were also present in the meeting.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Nov-2024/iran-envoy-to-pakistan-calls-on-chairman-parliamentary-committee-on-kashmir>

Ecotourism in GB

The Nation, 11 November 2024

“Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all.”—Garrett Hardin, the Tragedy of the Commons

The tourism industry raises complex ethical, environmental, and cultural

issues, especially within a globalised world where the influx of tourists can profoundly impact local communities. While many profit from tourism, we must ask: who wins and who loses? Developing a broad and nuanced understanding of these impacts is critical, particularly in areas like Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), Pakistan, where ecotourism is becoming an increasingly popular and potentially transformative model for sustainable economic growth.

Ecotourism promotes sustainable development, which the Brundtland Report defines as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This principle aligns with ecotourism, which aims to balance environmental preservation with economic benefits for local communities. As GB evolves into a major tourist destination, expanding eco-tourism could provide alternative livelihoods, protect ecosystems, and foster a sustainable relationship between nature and tourism.

The global tourism industry, according to the World Economic Forum, contributes 10% of global GDP and 7% of international trade, supporting one in every ten jobs worldwide. While these statistics showcase tourism’s economic impact, they also indicate the pressures mass tourism places on natural landscapes and local populations. Eco-tourism serves as an essential counter-balance, enabling regions like GB to gain economic

benefits without compromising environmental and cultural integrity. The goals of ecotourism in GB include attracting foreign investment, creating local employment, preserving natural ecosystems, and addressing the socio-ecological challenges hindering sustainable development. GB is renowned for its breathtaking landscapes, from the towering peaks of Nanga Parbat, K2, and Rakaposhi to the lush valleys of Hunza and Skardu, all of which require careful management to avoid degradation.

Organisations such as the WWF-Pakistan have pioneered sustainable tourism initiatives in GB. Over the last two decades, WWF-Pakistan has trained eco-tourism guides and porters, organised Pakistan’s first sustainable tourism convention in 1999, and promoted controlled sport hunting, which provides economic benefits to local communities while conserving wildlife. These efforts lay a foundation upon which sustainable ecotourism in GB can be expanded.

Switzerland’s approach to ecotourism provides a useful model. Known for its Alpine landscapes and well-regulated tourism, Switzerland emphasises environmental preservation and community benefits. In places like Zermatt and St. Moritz, restrictions on vehicle use reduce pollution, preserving air quality and maintaining natural surroundings. Swiss tourism authorities also promote local culture and crafts, allowing tourists to experience authentic traditions while supporting artisans’ livelihoods. A

similar approach could benefit GB, where eco-friendly transportation options, restricted access to sensitive areas like Fairy Meadows, Naltar, and Deosai National Park, and promoting GB's crafts, music, and traditional cuisine could enrich visitors' experiences while creating sustainable economic opportunities.

Some key destinations in GB showcase the diversity and natural beauty of the region. Kachura Lake, Shangrila, and Manthoka Waterfall near Skardu are renowned for their clear waters and stunning landscapes. However, implementing sustainable tourism practices such as waste management, restrictions on plastics, and conservation of local flora and fauna is essential to preserve these sites. Fairy Meadows, with its views of Nanga Parbat, is increasingly popular but risks environmental damage from deforestation and pollution. Limiting visitor numbers and establishing eco-friendly accommodation could ensure the meadow remains un-spoiled for future generations.

Deosai National Park, known as the "Land of Giants," hosts unique species such as the Himalayan brown bear. Here, strict guidelines on camping and waste disposal, along with educational ecotourism programmes, could help visitors appreciate its ecological significance. Similarly, less-explored landscapes like Domail, Minimarg, Qamri Valley, and Shilla Valley offer untapped potential for ecotourism. Local home-stays and guided nature walks in these areas could yield both

economic and conservation benefits. Naltar Valley, with its colourful lakes and ski resort, presents year-round tourism potential, while Attabad Lake in Hunza has become a popular site for boating and sightseeing. Enforcing eco-friendly boating and waste management practices around the lake could make it a model for sustainable development.

Gilgit-Baltistan's natural hot springs, like Jarba Xho & Chu Torn' in Shigar, are other examples of resources that could benefit from ecotourism. Preserving the cultural and ecological integrity of these sites would prevent degradation from over-tourism, allowing future visitors to experience them in their natural states. Each of these locations represents an opportunity to develop ecotourism in ways that respect the environment, enhance the visitor experience, and support local communities.

Ecotourism in GB offers numerous advantages. It brings economic benefits, attracting investment and creating jobs, while promoting cultural preservation through support for traditional crafts, festivals, and practices that instil pride and generate income for artisans. Eco-tourism's emphasis on responsible practices protects GB's landscapes, reduces pollution, limits resource exploitation, and conserves biodiversity. It also fosters social cohesion as communities work together to manage tourism and share its benefits. Moreover, improved infrastructure, including roads, health-care, and education facilities, often accompanies tourism growth.

At the global level, ecotourism could enhance Pakistan's reputation as a sustainable destination. Recognising the importance of sustainable tourism, the United Nations declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) Secretary-General Taleb Rifai has emphasised that sustainable tourism supports economic, social, and environmental sustainability. For GB, this means promoting tourism that not only generates revenue but also preserves invaluable natural resources and cultural heritage for future generations. Switzerland's model provides a roadmap for GB to capitalise on its beauty without compromising environmental or social welfare.

As the Karakoram Highway, Skardu International Airport, and other infrastructure developments increase GB's accessibility, the region stands at a pivotal point. Strategic planning, investment, and a strong commitment to sustainable tourism practices could help GB establish itself as a leading ecotourism destination. Through ecotourism, Gilgit-Baltistan has the opportunity to protect its remarkable landscapes, empower its communities, and foster a tourism model in harmony with nature. By committing to sustainable development, GB can ensure that its natural and cultural heritage is preserved, allowing locals and visitors alike to appreciate its beauty for generations to come.

Gilgit-Baltistan is more than just a piece of land; it is an asset for Pakistan. By prioritising GB's sustainable

development, Pakistan can boost its economy during times of crisis, offering a glimpse of potential prosperity.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/11-Nov-2024/ecotourism-in-gb>

As the world melts around them, climate refugees in Hunza pin hopes on COP29

The Dawn, 12 November 2024

In the remote highlands of northern Pakistan, the Ismail family once lived in harmony with the towering glaciers that crowned their village. They had deep ties to the land — an enduring connection forged through generations of farming, herding, and living in the shadows of the majestic mountains.

In 2022, however, a catastrophic glacier outburst flood (GLOF) ravaged their home, and with it, their way of life. The flood swept through their village, leaving them with nothing but the painful memories of a once-thriving existence.

Ismail, the sole breadwinner of the family, recalls the fateful day as if it were yesterday. "I was in the fields when the earth began to shake. By the time I got back to the house, the water was already at our doorstep. My wife and children were trapped inside. I had no choice but to grab them and run," he said, his voice breaking with the weight of the loss. The family barely escaped with their lives, but their home, along with their crops, livestock, and belongings, were swept away by the torrent of water and debris.

Ismail's family consists of seven members: himself, his wife Zahra, and their three children— Sana, Bilal, and Rashid — and his elderly parents, Zulfiqar and Shahida. Before the flood, their lives revolved around farming and raising livestock.

"We lost more than just our home; we lost a part of ourselves," said Zahra, looking out across the barren landscape where their once-flourishing farm stood. "My children don't play the way they used to. They look at the mountains with fear now, not with wonder."

Ismail's elderly parents, Zulfiqar and Shahida, are still in shock. "We never thought something like this could happen to us," Zulfiqar says, his frail voice trembling. "We've lived here all our lives. These glaciers were our protection, our lifeblood. Now, they have turned against us."

Climate refugees

The May 2022 flood displaced over 1,000 families across Hunza and Nagar districts in Gilgit-Baltistan. In Hunza alone, around 500 families were forced to leave their homes, particularly in Hassanabad and nearby villages, as floodwaters swept away homes, infrastructure, and agricultural land, leaving hundreds stranded and in urgent need of assistance.

In Hassanabad, the idea of leaving their ancestral land fills many residents with disbelief. These families have lived on the lush orchard fields, nestled among towering mountains, for over 400 years,

cultivating crops and grazing livestock in the high plains. For many, the village is not just home — it's where their ancestors are buried, and the thought of relocating feels unimaginable. With limited resources and deep emotional ties to the land, most say they simply cannot afford to leave the place that has been their life for generations.

The Ismail family, like many others in the region, has become climate refugees — forced to flee their ancestral land as rising temperatures and melting glaciers increasingly threaten their way of life. With no permanent shelter, they have sought refuge in nearby towns and villages, living in temporary shelters and struggling to find work and rebuild their shattered lives. But even in displacement, they face the ongoing fear of future climate events, as the threat of floods, landslides, and extreme weather events continues to loom large.

Hope melting fast

Pakistan is one of the world's most vulnerable countries to GLOFs, with an estimated 800,000 people living within 15 km (9.3 miles) of a glacier. Many residents in the Karakoram Range have built their homes on fertile land along rivers fed by glaciers, unaware of the growing risks posed by the melting ice. These glaciers, once stable, are rapidly retreating due to rising temperatures, increasing the likelihood of catastrophic floods that can sweep away entire communities and their livelihoods.

Amna Batool, a schoolgirl from Hassanabad, vividly recalls the harrowing day in 2022 when part of her town, along with a crucial highway bridge, was swept away by the torrents of meltwater cascading down the Hunza River, a tributary of the Indus.

“The flood didn’t just destroy my home and belongings; it took away all my childhood memories,” she said, her eyes fixed on the pile of rubble where her house once stood. The flooding was triggered by unusually high temperatures that caused a lake to form behind the Shisper Glacier. As the glacier’s meltwater accumulated, the lake grew larger and more unstable. Eventually, the pressure became too great, and the lake breached, unleashing a devastating wave of water and debris down into the steep-sided valley below.

For Batool, the destruction was deeply personal. That fateful day, she was at home with her parents and younger brother when the floodwaters arrived. “We had just finished breakfast when we heard a loud rumbling sound, like a thunderstorm, but it was much closer,” she recalled. “Before we could even understand what was happening, the water came rushing in, tearing through everything in its path.”

Batool’s father, Amjad Ali, who worked as a carpenter, tried desperately to secure the family’s belongings, but the force of the water was too powerful. Her mother, frantic with worry, grabbed her younger

brother and led them to higher ground. “We ran as fast as we could, but the water was already swallowing our house,” she said.

The flood took everything. “Not only did we lose our home, but our memories, too. The walls that held my childhood, my father’s tools, my mother’s kitchen — everything was gone,” she said, her eyes lingering on the debris that was once their life. The family, now displaced and struggling, holds on to the hope that one day they can rebuild their lives.

All eyes on COP

According to the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), glaciers in South Asia are on track to lose up to 75pc of their ice by the century’s end due to global warming. As a result of this melting, Pakistan experienced 14 glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) between 2018 and 2021, but that number surged to 75 in 2022, according to data gathered by the UNDP.

Dr Miriam Jackson, senior Cryosphere Specialist at ICIMOD, has discussed at length the alarming shift in the Karakoram region, where glaciers that were once stable or growing are now melting at an accelerated rate. A 2023 ICIMOD report revealed that glacier melt has increased by 65pc over the past decade (2010-2019) compared to the previous one. This is particularly concerning for agriculture, which relies on glacier meltwater, as shrinking

glaciers will eventually lead to reduced runoff.

Dr Jackson emphasised that reducing greenhouse gas emissions is crucial to slowing glacier melt, urging countries, including Pakistan, to cut emissions and prioritise public transport. She also called for more research on the cryosphere, as the current knowledge of glaciers and snow is limited. She stressed that COP must focus on urgent climate action to meet the Paris Agreement's target of limiting global warming to 1.5°C, warning that millions of people, especially in downstream regions, will be affected by changes in water resources, hydropower, and climate-induced migration.

As world leaders gather for the 29th Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP29) – and many others skip it altogether – the Ismail family is among the millions whose plight serves as a stark reminder of the human cost of climate change. Their story is one of resilience but also one of profound loss – loss not just of material possessions, but of a way of life that has been passed down through generations.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is a key international summit where countries discuss and negotiate actions to combat climate change, focusing on goals such as limiting global warming to 1.5°C, reducing emissions, and funding climate adaptation. COP29 is crucial for

strengthening global climate commitments, particularly for vulnerable countries like Pakistan, which face severe climate impacts such as floods, melting glaciers, droughts and food insecurity.

Since the Paris Agreement (COP21) in 2015, global climate pledges have aimed to limit warming to 1.5°C and provide \$100 billion annually for climate finance. However, progress has been slow. Despite pledges at COP26 (held in 2021) to phase out coal and reduce methane emissions, many countries are still not meeting their targets. A year on, COP27 (2022) established a loss and damage fund for vulnerable nations, but funding gaps remain.

At COP28 (2023), the focus was on emissions reductions and climate justice, but the lack of binding commitments and slow implementation continues to hinder progress. Overall, while awareness and some actions have increased, global emissions are still rising, and the world remains off track to meet the 1.5°C target.

This year, Pakistan is presenting its case to the international community at COP29 being held in Baku, Azerbaijan, from November 11-22. This is a critical opportunity to amplify its voice and underscore that the climate crisis is not a distant threat, but a present-day reality jeopardising the lives and livelihoods of millions. The Ismail family's suffering, like that of many

others displaced by climate disasters, is not just a matter of physical loss but a profound socio-economic upheaval.

Expectations from 2029

Pakistan has high expectations for COP29, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif attending the conference today (Nov 12). The country's delegation includes key representatives from the Ministry of Climate Change and the National Disaster Management Authority.

Romina Khurshid Alam, the Prime Minister's Coordinator on Climate Change and Environmental Coordination (MoCC&EC), stressed the crucial role of COP29 as a platform for Pakistan to showcase its climate actions, challenges, and potential solutions. She stressed the importance of global collaboration to achieve climate diplomacy goals, promote gender equality, and advance smart agriculture initiatives through greater private sector involvement.

Alam also highlighted the urgent need to address climate change in Pakistan, one of the world's most vulnerable nations. Despite contributing less than 1pc of global carbon emissions, she pointed out, Pakistan is bearing the brunt of severe climate disasters — such as floods and droughts— that have devastated infrastructure and livelihoods.

According to Alam, Pakistan, alongside other vulnerable nations, will strongly urge wealthy, high-emission countries

to fulfill their climate finance commitments. This funding is crucial to help developing countries cope with the worsening impacts of climate change and support their transition to a low-carbon future through adaptation and mitigation strategies. More importantly, it will decide whether Ismail's family — and millions like them — get the assistance they so desperately need to restart their lives.

Thus, finance has taken centre stage at COP29, with the Baku summit already being dubbed the "Finance COP." This focus is largely due to the spotlight on the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance (NCQG).

An evolution of the 2015 Paris Agreement, the NCQG is designed to replace the previous target of USD100 billion in annual climate finance from developed to developing countries. This target, established in 2009, was meant to be met by 2020. However, most analyses indicate that the actual funding provided has fallen short, despite contrary claims.

For the Ismail family — and millions of others like them — COP29 isn't just about seeking aid; they are calling for comprehensive policies and long-term solutions that address the root causes of forced migration and provide displaced families like theirs with the tools they need to rebuild their lives and secure a sustainable future. The socio-economic challenges they face are emblematic of the broader crises affecting millions of climate refugees

around the world, making urgent action at the global stage more critical than ever.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1871694/as-the-world-melts-around-them-climate-refugees-in-hunza-pin-hopes-on-cop29>

Thirteen bodies recovered after a bus carrying 26 passengers crashes at Thalichi Bridge in Gilgit-Baltistan

Pamir Times, 12 November 2024

A devastating accident on the Thalichi Bridge in the Diamer district has claimed the lives of over 24 people. Thirteen bodies, including six women, six men and 1 child, have so far been recovered from the Indus River, with the ongoing search for the remaining victims hindered by the night's darkness.

The coaster, a minibus carrying at least 27 passengers, including crew members, was traveling from Astore district in Gilgit-Baltistan to Rawalpindi in Punjab. Tragically, most passengers were Astore residents attending a wedding. Among those who lost their lives were the groom and four of his close family members. The bride is the sole survivor and is currently receiving treatment at a hospital in Gilgit city. Her condition is reported to be stable.

According to police official Sher Khan, the accident was allegedly caused by over speeding. The driver reportedly lost control, causing the vehicle to fall from the bridge on the Karakoram Highway. Accidents on the Karakoram

Highway are distressingly frequent, often due to factors like mechanical failures, over speeding, and driver negligence. Although the road traverses vulnerable mountainous terrain, accidents caused by natural disasters remain relatively rare compared to these other factors.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2024/11/12/bride-and-groom-among-17-dead-9-missing-in-tragic-coaster-accident-at-thalichi-bridge/>

Hearing of public grievances against 'AJK' based federal entities

Daily Parliament Times, 11 November 2024

In order to hear public grievances against the services of the 'AJK'- based federal govt. institutions, a team of Federal Ombudsman will hold an open court in Kotli city of 'Azad Jammu Kashmir' on November 15 and issue necessary instructions to the concerned functionaries on the occasion, it was officially said.

"Federal Ombudsman Ejaz Ahmed Qureshi has formed a team headed by Director General Muhammad Ashfaq Ahmed after taking notice of a large number of complaints against federal government institutions in 'Azad Jammu Kashmir'" Federal Ombudsman Secretariat Media Consultant Khalid Sial told this Correspondent.

The team will hold an open court at PWD Rest House in Kotli of 'Azad Jammu Kashmir' at 10 am on November 15, he said adding that the

team consisting of Director General Muhammad Ashfaq Ahmed and the Consultant will issue instructions on the occasion after listening the complaints against the mismanagement of the federal institutions offices in 'AJK' during the open court.

The federal ombudsman has investigated federal heads including Electricity, Gas, NADRA, PA Support Office, Pakistan Post Office, Benazir Income Support Program, Qoumi Bachat, (National Savings), EOBI, OPF and Postal Life Insurance.

The local heads of the federal institutions have been directed to be present in the open court so that the legal process could be initiated in response to the public complaints. General public has been invited to lodge their grievances against federal entities in the scheduled open court.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/11/11/hearing-of-public-grievances-against-ajk-based-federal-entities/>

Speakers highlight key perspectives on Kashmir dispute

The Nation, 12 November 2024

Speakers highlighted key perspectives on the legal, historical, and humanitarian aspects of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. The India Study Centre (ISC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), in collaboration with the National University of Modern Languages

(NUML), hosted a seminar titled "Understanding Complexities of Jammu and Kashmir Dispute."

The seminar was attended by academicians, practitioners, researchers and students. Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, Director General ISSI, in his keynote address, emphasised Pakistan's steadfast solidarity with the people of Kashmir and reaffirmed the nation's commitment to a just and lasting solution.

In his remarks, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood reiterated that Kashmir remains an unfinished part of the partition, a legally and morally valid cause recognised by the international community. He outlined three essential factors to guide Pakistan's approach: a realistic assessment of objective conditions, Pakistan's firm national resolve, and enhanced outreach to the international community.

He further noted that Kashmir is the oldest unresolved dispute on the UN Security Council agenda, underpinned by numerous resolutions that call for self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir through a free and impartial plebiscite.

Ambassador Sohail Mahmood deplored India's attempts to alter the demographic structure and internationally recognised disputed status of Jammu and Kashmir, characterising these actions as violations of UN resolutions and the 4th Geneva Convention.

He highlighted that Pakistan is within its rights to address the issue both bilaterally and internationally. He further added that the UN's continued engagement indicates that Kashmir is not an 'internal matter' for India. Pakistan's diplomatic efforts, supported by the OIC, have successfully kept the issue on the global agenda, reinforcing the Kashmiri struggle, refuting India's false narratives, and countering India's repressive measures.

He proposed a multifaceted strategy for Pakistan that includes internal consolidation, a whole-of-the-nation approach, strategic patience, and proactive diplomacy.

Ambassador Mahmood underscored that Pakistan's anticipated role as a non-permanent UN Security Council member will allow it to further advocate for a peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. He particularly emphasised the role of civil society, academia, and the youth in promoting this just cause.

Dr Khurram Abbas, Director of ISC, presented a critical analysis of India's historical claims to Kashmir. He challenged the legitimacy of India's accession narrative, citing discrepancies and gaps in records, including the views of historians like Alastair Lamb and British records, which raise doubts about the authenticity of India's claims. Dr Khurram stressed upon the significance of Pakistan's dealing with

international partners in resolving the Jammu and Kashmir dispute.

Ms Naila Kiyani spoke on the severe repression faced by Kashmiris under new laws that strip their rights and special status. She described the widespread human rights abuses, including mass detentions, forced resettlements, and freedom of speech restrictions under laws like UAPA, PSA, and AFSPA. Ms Kiyani called for stronger resistance through research, advocacy, and an emphasis on youth involvement in advancing the Kashmiri struggle.

Shiraz Hassan, Lecturer at NUML, presented an analysis of the Modi government's strategy, characterising it as an attempt to suppress Kashmiris' voices under the guise of economic development. He urged active engagement with US policymakers and diaspora communities to counteract India's narrative and garner international support.

Tabinda Asghar, Lecturer at NUML, focused on the UN's role in the Kashmir issue, questioning the organization's effectiveness in addressing human rights violations. She pointed to the precedent set by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Namibia case, where the right to self-determination was upheld. Ms Asghar argued that UN resolutions on Kashmir hold legal, political, and moral significance, even as major powers may attempt to leverage the platform for their agendas.

Dr Sajid Iqbal Khattak, Assistant Professor at NUML, highlighted possible future scenarios for the Kashmir dispute. He noted that India might seek to claim 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' based on developmental disparities, while also suggesting that Pakistan's nuclear deterrence and diplomatic initiatives have helped preserve the issue's relevance.

Dr Khattak recommended a strategic shift towards action-oriented advocacy, regional partnerships, and prioritizing stability at home. Drawing from the Azerbaijan model, he advocated for readiness and strategic initiatives that could support Kashmir's cause effectively.

Following an extensive Q/A session, the seminar concluded with remarks from Dr Sarwat Rauf, HoD of the Department of International Relations, and Chairman of the ISSI Board of Governors, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, who reiterated Pakistan's unwavering support for the people of Jammu and Kashmir until a just solution is achieved.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Nov-2024/speakers-highlight-key-perspectives-on-kashmir-dispute>

Economic Developments

Riali-II project security package approval: PD all set to place summary before ECC

Business Recorder, 12 November 2024

Power Division is all set to place a summary before the Economic

Coordination Committee (ECC) of the Cabinet for approval of security package documents of 7.08 MW Riali-II Hydropower project under Power Generation Policy, 2015, sources told Business Recorder.

However, Finance Division is of the view that Power Division may ensure that proposed documents are consistent with the Power Generation Policy 2015 in respect of contractual matters i.e. no further obligations and guarantees are created over and above what have been offered under the policy.

According to Finance Division, GoP will not be assumed any obligation for payment of Water Use Charges (WUC) to the AJ&K, with the stance that same to be paid by the IPPs from its tariff.

Hydropower project: Riali-II to be processed on 'must run & take-and-pay' basis

Recently, PPIB Board had accorded approval for extension in the Financial Closing Date under the Tripartite Letter of Support (TLOS) of 7.08 MW Riali Hydropower Project for a period 18 months i.e. from April 13, 2024 to October 12, 2025.

During the meeting MD PPIB apprised that 7.08 MW Riali-II Hydropower Project is run of river project located on Ghor Nullah, in AJK.

Due to the no availability of ECC approved Security Documents (Implementation Agreement GoPIA – 'AJ&K' Implementation Agreement-

AJ&KIA, Energy Purchase Agreement-EPA and Water Use Agreement - WUA) for small hydro power projects, three extensions of 12 months each on Sept 7, 2021, December 29, 2022 and November 10, 2023, respectively, were granted in the Tripartite Letter of Support.

As per the Amendment#3 (3rd Extension) of TLOS, the Project Company was required to sign the Project Agreements before Financial Close of the project for which they approached SIFC for early processing of approval of Project Agreements from CCoE/ECC.

Accordingly, summary was considered by the CCoE on July 5, 2024 and it concurred with the proposal. Now, the standard documents are under process for ECC approval through Ministry of Energy (Power Division).

As per the commitment of the Project Company and present progress status of project, the Project Company will require 14 to 18 months to achieve its Commercial Operation after being provided with drafts of approved Security Agreements.

The Project Company has already started civil construction work of the Project from its equity and 60-65% of overall work has been completed at the Project site.

The Board was apprised that the Project Company has requested exemption from the payment of TLoS extension fee stating the reason that the delays in the

provision of project agreements were not in the Company's purview. Although there is no such provision in PPIB Fee and Charges Amendment Rules 2022 which allow waiver of fee to this project.

MD PPIB further explained that the matter was submitted for perusal of Projects' Committee of PPIB Board in its '11th meeting, which recommended an extension of 18 months on single performance guarantee.

The Board approved extension in the Financial Closing date under the Tripartite Letter of Support of 7.08 MW Riali Hydropower Project for a period of 18 months, ie, from April 13, 2024 to October 12, 2025 subject to the followings:

- (i) extension will be granted on the basis of a Single Performance Guarantee, in line with Clause 8.4
- (ii) (c) of the Power Policy 2015, as the reasons for delay in the achievement of Financial Closing were beyond the reasonable control of the Project Company; and
- (iii) the Project Company shall extend the validity of the Bank Guarantee three months beyond the allowed period of extension, and applicable extension fee shall be paid in accordance with PPIB Fee and Charges Amendment Rules 2022.

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40331972/pm-saudi-investment-minister-follow-up-on-economic-cooperation>

Blushing golden apples

Business Recorder, 12 November 2024

Gilgit-Baltistan is a region where over 70 percent of the land is covered by high mountains and glaciers, leaving only about 1 percent available for agriculture. Despite this minimal area for agricultural activities, the region has significant potential for fruit production.

Its high altitude, cool climate, and fertile soil make it ideal for cultivating apricots, cherries, walnuts, and apples. The annual production of these fruits is 61,188 MT of apricots, 4,500 MT of cherries, 4,177 MT of walnuts, and 6,606 MT of apples. These fruits are renowned for their unique taste, smell, high nutritional content, and juicy texture.

Fourteen varieties of apples are cultivated in GB, with the “Saspolo apples” standing out as the most prominent. Though there are various Saspolo apples, the most renowned variety is grown exclusively in the small village of Pari, located in the Kharmang district. Three additional apple varieties are grown in Pari, Samarqand, Naskhusho, and Wardgaff.

However, Saspolo variety stands out due to its superior taste and fragrance. In Pari, around 90 percent of households are directly involved in Saspolo apple cultivation, earning it the nickname “Saspolo Village”. These apples are famous not only for their

exceptionally juicy texture and delicious taste but also for their distinctive aroma, which fills the air with a delightful fragrance.

The unique scent of Saspolo apples is their real forte and defining feature, helping them capture a large market share and serving as a significant driver of the local economy. These apples are also dried, and the paste is used by locals for medicinal purposes, in addition to serving as a valuable cash crop.

To further expand the market for Saspolo apples, the GB government invests millions of rupees in various fruit festivals organized by district administrations in collaboration with the agriculture department and NGOs. The district administration organizes the Saspolo Festival each year in mid-October, traditionally held in Pari village. Four annual festivals have already been hosted.

This year marked a shift as the fifth Saspolo festival took place at the renowned tourist destination, Manthokha Waterfall, in Kharmang district. While this move is beneficial for diversifying the market, local farmers have raised concerns about being excluded from the planning process for the 2024 festival.

Such responses can erode the trust of growers and hinder the market potential for this valuable product. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that events are organized in consultation

with and with the involvement of the true growers of Saspolo.

This year the Pari village community independently organized the Saspolo Festival, funding it themselves. The two-day event at Pari Bridge, where despite most attendees being local, farmers managed to sell thousands of kilograms of Saspolo apples for over PKR 10 million.

Although the record sales highlight the strong market demand for Saspolo apples, this is merely the icing on the cake. The significant price fluctuations between different regions further reflect their high demand and market value. In Pari village, prices vary from Rs 350 to 400 per kg, rising to Rs 500-600 per kg in Skardu city, and reaching as high as Rs 800-1000 per kg in Islamabad. This underscores the economic potential of Saspolo apples.

The total apple production in GB is approximately 24,000 tonnes. Approximately 25 percent of apples are lost due to supply chain disruptions. Of the remaining apples, 50 percent are consumed locally, while the other 50 percent are marketed outside Gilgit-Baltistan.

Accurate and current statistics are not available, but assuming that Saspolo apples account for about 10 percent of GB's total apple production with an average price of Rs. 650 per kg, this variety alone generates an estimated economic value of approximately Rs 1.6 billion for the local community.

Despite the high prices of Saspolo apples in major urban cities of Pakistan, proper marketing channels or markets for these apples are almost non-existent. In large cities like Karachi, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Lahore, Saspolo apples are primarily available through online platforms, requiring consumers to place orders online.

After payment, the apples are delivered to buyers. In reality, the absence of marketing channels and the challenges associated with the delivery of online orders is due to several hurdles.

The Karakoram Highway and Baltistan Highway connect GB to the rest of Pakistan, but both routes are highly susceptible to landslides and earthquakes. Additionally, air traffic is heavily dependent on clear weather conditions. During October and November, many flights are often suspended due to unfavourable weather. Therefore, establishing an efficient supply chain is the prerequisite to unlocking significant economic benefits for local growers.

Farmers in Pari village face significant challenges due to poor road infrastructure, making it difficult to transport their Saspolo apples, which are grown at high altitudes.

As a result, a large portion of the harvest is lost because of the fruit's short shelf life. In the Kharmang district, the absence of cold storage facilities further exacerbates the problem, leading to even more

wastage. Further, farmers continue to rely on traditional farming and marketing practices, lacking proper training in modern agricultural and marketing techniques.

While various international and national NGOs, such as IFAD and AKRSP, are actively engaged in agricultural interventions in the Kharmand district, their efforts have been largely restricted to constructing water channels and distributing wooden apricot dryers. These interventions need to be expanded to focus on enhancing human capacity through technical knowledge about marketing, and packaging skills.

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40331928/blushin-g-golden-apples>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

Pakistan Cricket Board in connection to the issue over ICC champion's trophy gave befitting reply to the Indian Cricket Board

Nawa-i-Waqt, 16 November 2024

In connection to the ICC Champions trophy's tour to 'Azad Kashmir', Pakistan rejected the objections raised by India. The Pakistan Cricket Board has decided to take the ICC Champions Trophy to regions of Iskardu, Hunza and Muzaffarabad, and has already issued a schedule related to it. However, according to the Indian media, Indian Cricket Board has raised objections with the International Cricket Council that the trophy not be

taken to the cities of Iskardu, Hunza and Muzaffarabad. According to the Indian media, ICC in relation to the Champions trophy 2025 has scrapped the trophy's tour to above mentioned cities. Here, Pakistan has clearly told the ICC that how can India after deciding not to play Champions Trophy still have objections on it? According to the sources, it is being told that the inclusion of the 'Azad Kashmir' in the trophy's tour and India's objection to it is unjustly. Then why did India during 2023 world cup took the trophy to the disputed territory of Ladakh. According to the sources, the ICC champion's trophy's schedule and route of the trophy tour is an approval of the ICC. Both schedule and trophy's tour after approval from the ICC didn't underwent any modification. The route of trophy tour and schedule was finalized in a consensus and wishes of the ICC. In Pakistan, the trophy's schedule is set from 16 to 24 November.

<https://www.nawairwaqt.com.pk/16-Nov-2024/1842809>

Pakistan Muslim League (N) will confront anti-Pakistan statements on all platforms: Shah Ghulam Qadir

Jammu and Kashmir Times, 15 November 2024

The President Muslim League (N) 'Azad Kashmir', Shah Ghulam Qadir said that in the disguise of demands in 'Azad Kashmir', efforts are being made to create an environment for anti-

Pakistan, for which the Muslim League will confront on all platforms. We support every genuine demand of people. Those who are alleging the PML-N of being the complicit and corrupt are themselves unfit to rule. Such ideas were shared during past day in a conversation with members of the press club, in which former senior minister Malik Mohammad Nawaz Khan, member Kashmir Council Hanief Malik, President Muslim League Noon Idrees Hayat Raja General, Secretary Nasir Kamal Yousuf, advocate former minister Sardar Farooq Sikander, and among others were present on the occasion. In 'occupied Kashmir', people remain in jail over small matters but here people have freedom. In the wake of the movement which ran during May 2024, the Pakistan government under the Prime Ministership of Shahbaz Sharif gave significant relief for the flour and electricity. He said that those talking against the Pakistani army should look at themselves. Even now people from 'Azad Kashmir' are recruited in significant numbers in Pakistan army and are also placed at superior positions. Kashmiris have given countless sacrifices and they should fight for their demands but the question becomes why efforts are being made to target their own country? And who is getting benefited from this? We are not raising questions over someone's loyalty or giving certificates over who is a traitor but only criticizing the wrong steps. The Prime minister

may be from any party and we have to respect that decision and Pakistan has always stood by us in thick and thins. The situation in 'occupied Kashmir' is known to everyone and how much injustice is happening over there. We will stick to our political structural and the news that upgradation to province is a fake news. We will wait until independence and then after deliberation with the people, things will be decided.

<https://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Resize-of-FRONT-PAGE-15.jpg>

The Modi Government is perpetuating acts of atrocities against minority groups

Jammu and Kashmir Times, 16 November 2024

The Government of India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, is implementing Hindu-centric policies that have resulted in severe hardships for the people of 'occupied Kashmir'. The violation of human rights by India in 'occupied Kashmir' is a matter of significant concern, and it is imperative that the global community pays attention to this issue. Moreover, the mistreatment of minorities is not limited to 'occupied Kashmir' as it is occurring in other parts of India as well.

During a welcoming ceremony for advocate Saba Shamshad, President 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir', Barrister Sultan Mohammad Choudhary,

expressed his belief that India's integration is at risk due to the government's discriminatory policies and actions against minorities. He commended Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for highlighting India's true nature in the Canadian parliament and exposing evidence of Indian terrorism in Canada. Additionally, Choudhary warned Prime Minister Modi that he would continue to reveal his true nature wherever he goes in the world. He further emphasized the urgent need for the international community to take notice of the escalating human rights violations in India following the events of August 5, 2019.

<https://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Resize-of-FRONT-PAGE-16.jpg>

The importance of Convening an Urgent Assembly Session in 'Azad Kashmir'

Jammu and Kashmir Times, 17 November 2024

The opposition leader of 'Azad Kashmir', Khwaja Farooq Ahmed, has formally requested that an assembly session be convened. He expressed concern that the last assembly session, which lasted only one day on 5th August, and a subsequent session in September did not result in any significant action. As the year draws to a close, it is crucial for the lawmakers to prioritize their primary duty of addressing the issues faced by the

public and devising solutions for the same. Therefore, it is imperative that the Prime Minister of 'Azad Kashmir', who also leads the Assembly, call for an urgent assembly session to address crucial matters such as adhoc employees and pensioners.

<https://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/1-5.jpg>

From Social Media

WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti

13 November 2024

The Chief Minister was furious with the hospital administration for not getting medicine and treatment at Hunza Hospital.

#Chiefminister #gilgitbaltistan #hunza #hospital

Link to the video:

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/1856750527343989163>

Roshan Din Diameri @Roshan_Din

13 November 2024

PTA's claim that 20 million people visit fake website every day seems like an illogical statement. To link all users using VPN to fake websites is counter to reality.

#PTA #VPN #CyberAwariness

Link to the tweet:

https://x.com/Rohshan_Din/status/1856689195646878082

WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti

13 November 2024

According to the statement of the bride who survived the Astore Coaster accident, the company is guilty. Who will take the action?

#Astore #accident #girl #statement

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/1856724702070493371>

PAMIR Times @pamirtimes

12 November 2024

Thirteen bodies recovered after a bus carrying 26 passengers crashes at Thalichi bridge in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/pamirtimes/status/1856394343961039164>

Weekly POK News Digest

Volume 4 | Issue 46

11 November - 17 November 2024

Compiled by

Mohd. Usman Bhatti and Muneeb Yousuf

Edited By

Dr. Smruti S Pattanaik

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.



MANOHAR PARRIKAR 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: pokdigest@gmail.com