

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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POK
Mangla Dam fiscal
Gilgit-Baltistan reforms
Public Sector Development Programme
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मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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Political Developments

GB court sentences ex-CM Khalid Khurshid to 34 years of jail for threatening security institutions

Dawn, 31 December 2024

A Gilgit-Baltistan anti-terrorism court (ATC) has sentenced former chief minister Khalid Khurshid Khan to 34 years in prison for threatening security institutions at a party rally in July.

In July 2023, Khurshid, who is also PTI's regional president, was disqualified by the GB Chief Court for allegedly obtaining a license from the GB Bar Council based on a fake degree.

A month later, police registered a case against him for allegedly possessing a fake law degree. In September this year, the Peshawar High Court granted him protective bail in cases registered across different parts of the country.

On Tuesday, Judge Rehmat Shah of the GB ATC sentenced Khurshid to 34 years in prison and fined him Rs 600,000 for threatening security institutions, including the chief secretary and chief election commissioner, during a party rally on July 26 at Ittehad Chowk, Gilgit.

The case against Khurshid was registered at the Gilgit City Police Station under various sections of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC).

The former chief minister had failed to appear in any hearing despite repeated court notices. Khurshid was also given a defence lawyer who argued his cases.

Judge Shah also ordered the GB inspector general of police to arrest Khurshid and ordered the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra) director general to block his national identity card.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1882240/gb-court-sentences-ex-cm-khalid-khurshid-to-34-years-of-jail-for-threatening-security-institutions>

'AJK' President asks diaspora to raise HR abuses in 'IIOJ&K'

The Nation, 31 December 2024

'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) President Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry has said that Kashmiris diaspora community settled in different parts of the world should redouble their efforts to highlight the Kashmir issue and human rights violations being committed by the 'Indian occupation' forces in Kashmir. He expressed these views during a meeting with Member of the British House of Lords Lord Qurban Hussain who called him at his office on Monday. Speaking on the occasion, the President said that the Kashmiri expatriate community settled in the UK must come forward in a big way to raise the issue of Kashmir at all available forums including the British Parliament. Referring to the worsening political and human rights situation in Kashmir, he said that since August 5, 2019 situation in the region has further deteriorated. He said that the India's settler colonialism policy that seeks to change the region's demography has led to disempowerment and dispossession of Kashmiris.

“India wants to change the Muslim majority of the region into a minority by settling non-state subjects in ‘occupied Jammu and Kashmir’”, Barrister Chaudhry said, adding that granting fake domicile certificates to millions of Hindus was part of this grand conspiracy.

While on the other hand, the president said that the ‘occupation forces’ were busy in killing innocent Kashmiris in fake encounters. Voicing his concern over the continued bloodshed and violence in the region Barrister Chaudhry said that it was high time that the international community should take effective notice of the matter and pressurize the Indian government to resolve the lingering dispute that has been main cause and consequence of human rights violations in the region. On this occasion, Lord Qurban Hussain assured the President that he would play his role in highlighting the Kashmir issue at the international level and especially in the British Parliament. Stressing the need for construction of an international airport in Mirpur, Lord Hussain said it has been a long-standing demand of the people of Mirpur.

He also urged the president to use his good office to fulfil this longstanding demand of the Kashmiri expatriate community.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/31-Dec-2024/ajk-president-asks-diaspora-to-raise-hr-'abuses-in-iioj-k>

‘AJK’ Supreme Court bar presents proposals to CJP

Dawn, 29 December 2024

‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’ Supreme Court Bar Association (AJK SCBA) called on the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Mr Justice Yahya Afridi in Islamabad and discussed cooperation between the superior judiciary of ‘AJK’ and Pakistan, besides other key legal and administrative matters.

According to a press release issued here on Saturday by AJKSCBA, the delegation apprised the CJP the following proposals highlighting their significance:

Effective implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Supreme Courts of ‘AJK’ and Pakistan. Ensuring representation of AJKs Chief Justice in the National Judicial Policy Committee.

Implementation of the 2pc quota allocated for ‘AJK’ citizens in federal judicial institutions and the organization of specialized training programs for lawyers and judicial officers.

Addressing compensation issues for the affected communities of the Mangla Dam by engaging the federal government.

Providing free access to Pakistan’s Supreme Court online resources for ‘AJK’ lawyers and judges.

The AJK SCBA on this occasion announced to host a judicial conference in ‘AJK’ inviting the Chief Justice of Pakistan as the chief guest in the

conference to be aimed at to deliberate on the legal dimensions of the Kashmir issue and related policy matters, according to the press release.

“The Chief Justice of Pakistan appreciated the points raised by the delegation and assured immediate action on matters within the judiciary’s purview. He committed to ensuring ‘AJK’ Supreme Courts representation in the national judicial policy committee as per the 2013 MoU and confirmed his participation in the judicial conference,” the press release said.

“Moreover, the Chief Justice emphasised the need for professional training for lawyers, directing the provision of modern training facilities and free access to online legal resources to enhance their skills. He also approved representation for ‘AJK’ lawyers under the Supreme Court Clerkship Programme and underscored the importance of involving lawyers in decision-making forums to ensure the effective implementation of policy decisions for improving the justice system”, the AJK SCBA PR concluded.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/31-Dec-2024/ajk-president-asks-diaspora-to-raise-hr-abuses-in-iioj-k>

UN should play its role to give Kashmiris their basic right, the right to self-determination: Yaqoob Khan

Daily Parliament Times, 31 December 2024

Former President and Prime Minister of ‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’, Parliamentary Leader of Pakistan People’s Party, Member of Legislative

Assembly, Sardar Muhammad Yaqoob Khan has said that the worst atrocities of history are being committed in ‘Occupied Kashmir’. Kashmiris have been deprived of basic human facilities. The resettlement of Hindus is being done under an organized conspiracy, which Kashmiris strongly condemn.

International human rights organizations, the United Nations, should take notice and take immediate action.

He expressed these views while talking to various public delegations that Kashmiris can be assured of basic rights. He further said that Kashmiris have made immense sacrifices for the Azad-e-Kashmir movement, including the blood of millions of martyrs in this movement. He added that Kashmiris have not retreated from their legitimate right, the right to self-determination, Kashmiris have responded to all the antics on behalf of Modi.

He said that Kashmiris are still making sacrifices for the freedom movement of Kashmir. Genocide of Kashmiris including Kashmiri youth is being done.

Kashmiris have never allowed any nefarious conspiracy to succeed. The United Nations should play its role to give Kashmiris their basic right, the right to self-determination. So that Kashmiris can also determine their future.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2024/12/31/un-should-play-its-role-to-give-kashmiris-their-basic-right-the-right-to-self-determination-yaqoob-khan/>

JI pledges to continue support for Kashmiri people

Business Recorder, 31 December 2024

Chief of Jamaat-e-Islami Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rehman has reaffirmed the party's unwavering support for the Kashmiri people, stating that Jamaat-e-Islami will stand shoulder to shoulder with them until their freedom is achieved.

Speaking during a meeting with the JI leadership of 'Azad Jammu & Kashmir' (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), he emphasized that practical steps for the liberation of 'Indian occupied Kashmir' and addressing the issues of the state's free regions are the responsibility of Islamabad's rulers.

Rehman stated that Jamaat-e-Islami has always been at the forefront of addressing the problems faced by 'AJK' and GB. Whether it is securing constitutional and political rights for the people of GB or resolving the issues of 'AJK' residents, the JI has consistently pushed central governments to take action, he said.

Rehman called for empowering the free regions of the state of Kashmir to transform them into a true base camp for the Kashmir freedom movement. He also urged federal and provincial governments to refrain from interfering in the upcoming general elections in 'AJK' and GB.

The meeting of Kashmiri leadership delegation led by Dr. Muhammad Mushtaq Khan, Emir of Jamaat-e-Islami 'AJK' and GB, with JI Pakistan Emir

included a detailed briefing on the latest situation in 'occupied Kashmir' and the political landscape of 'AJK' and GB. Dr. Mushtaq invited Rehman to visit the regions which he accepted.

Discussions also took place regarding preparations for February 5, Kashmir Solidarity Day, with Hafiz Naeem assuring robust participation in its observance.

Rehman asserted that if JI comes to power in 'AJK' and GB, it will take practical steps toward resolving the Kashmir issue while also addressing local issues in the regions. He criticized traditional political parties and their leadership for their failure to solve public problems. "The emboldening of India and Israel to spill Muslim blood is due to the cowardice of our rulers," he remarked.

He urged JI workers to effectively convey the party's message to the public, expressing confidence that the future belongs to Jamaat-e-Islami.

Meanwhile, JI Hafiz Naeem, along with senior party leaders including Naib Emirs Liaqat Baloch and Dr. Osama Razi, Secretary General Ameerul Azeem, and Secretary Information Qaisar Sharif, extended their congratulations to Arshad Ansari on his election as the new president of the Lahore Press Club. The JI leaders conveyed their best wishes for his tenure and success.

In a statement issued from Mansoorah, the party leadership also congratulated other newly elected office-bearers,

including Senior Vice President Afzal Talib, Vice President Saima Nawaz, Secretary Zahid Abid, Joint Secretary Imran Sheikh, Finance Secretary Salik Nawaz, and the governing body members. They expressed confidence that the new leadership of Lahore's journalist community would continue to champion the rights of journalists with dedication.

The JI leaders reaffirmed their commitment to freedom of expression, media independence, and the protection of journalists' rights. They praised the journalist community for successfully conducting elections in line with democratic traditions and maintaining the continuity of these values.

"Jamaat-e-Islami stands in solidarity with the journalist community in their struggle for press freedom and professional rights," the statement read.

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40340245/ji-pledges-to-continue-support-for-kashmiri-people>

Baltistan Witnesses Record 119% Increase in Tourist Influx in 2024

Pamir Times, 31 December 2024

Baltistan, a jewel of Gilgit-Baltistan and one of Pakistan's most sought-after tourist destinations, witnessed an extraordinary surge in visitors in 2024. According to the Tourist Police of Gilgit-Baltistan, a total of 486,571 domestic tourists and 21,862 international travellers explored the region. This marks a significant increase compared to 2023, when

223,983 domestic and 9,897 international tourists visited Baltistan.

The data shows a 117% increase in domestic tourists and a 121% increase in international tourists visiting Baltistan in 2024 compared to 2023. This year, Baltistan received 50,448 domestic and 11,262 international tourists by air, while 366,091 domestic and 6,600 international visitors travelled via the Baltistan Highway. Furthermore, 70,000 domestic and 4,000 international tourists visited Deosai National Park, highlighting its appeal as a key attraction in the region

Shigar district emerged as a hub for adventure tourism in 2024, attracting 186,960 domestic tourists and 15,646 international visitors. The district's allure lies in its breathtaking views of four of the world's fourteen 8,000-metre peaks — Gasherbrum I, Gasherbrum II, Broad Peak, and the iconic K2 — along with the spectacular Baltoro Glacier. Kharmang district hosted 177,895 domestic tourists and 3,077 foreigners, while Ghangche district welcomed 63,438 Pakistani visitors and 6,566 international tourists.

The sharp rise in tourist numbers can be attributed to improved infrastructure, including the elevation of Skardu Airport, which has enhanced accessibility by providing more reliable flight operations. Popular attractions such as Shangrila Resort, Shigar Fort, and Manthokha Waterfall also continued to captivate visitors.

Tourist Police officials anticipate further growth in 2025, reinforcing

Baltistan's reputation as a premier destination for both domestic and international travellers seeking natural beauty, adventure, and cultural richness.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2024/12/30/baltistan-witnesses-record-119-increase-in-tourist-influx-in-2024/>

Kashmir: A Battlefield Where Might Crushes Right

Daily Parliament Times, 1 January 2025

For decades, the world has watched the tragedy of 'Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir' (IIOJK) unfold. This has been such a long-standing debate that many people are negative about it. Governments, leaders and ordinary people now see it as a far-reaching issue that is very difficult to resolve. But while the world has changed, the people of Kashmir, especially the youth, are still suffering in silence. For Kashmir to achieve self-determination, the world needs to confront the following questions: Will the current issue be resolved if Kashmir is in close proximity to powerful countries like the US, France or Israel? If Kashmir is in the backyard of a NATO country, is the issue still unresolved, or will it be decided with or without the cooperation of international organisations? This bitter truth exposes the system that seems to be the centre of justice, keeping millions of people in Kashmir in a perpetual state of conflict. The important state of Kashmir has become the hub of territorial disputes. The United Nations intervened in 1948 and

1949 by passing resolutions promising the Kashmiri people the right to determine their future through a plebiscite (United Nations Digital Library, Resolutions 47 and 91). But 75 years later, this promise has yet to be fulfilled. Over time, the urgency surrounding the Kashmir issue has faded, with governments and international institutions treating it as a manageable conflict rather than a humanitarian crisis. Even in Kashmir, many people have learned to live by toil. But the normalisation of oppression does not mean the end of suffering. For young children and adolescents born into conflict, the suffering is new, and the future remains uncertain. Children born after 1990 have grown up amidst restrictions, protests and violence. Their education is frequently disrupted, their mobility is limited, and their mental health is affected by the trauma of growing up in a harsh military environment. More than 700,000 Indian soldiers live in the region, making it one of the most militarised regions in the world (Human Rights Watch, "India: Abuses Persist in Jammu and Kashmir," World Report 2022). Many have physical and emotional scars. Some family members have been lost to the violence. In contrast, others have been injured by pellet guns, which are often criticized for causing permanent blindness. The stress of living with a standing army can overwhelm even the most ambitious. How can children dream of a better tomorrow when today is filled with fear and uncertainty? These

young people are not the only victims; they are the victims of world apathy. International responses to Kashmir vary greatly depending on how they resolve the strategic regional conflicts of powerful nations. History shows that the urgency to resolve the situation is even greater when a crisis occurs near a NATO power or a country with international influence. For example, in the Kosovo, East Timor and Libya conflict Rapid International Response, interests rather than principles often drive Emphasis on Global action. In the Israel-Palestine conflict, Israel has received the same support, not because it speaks for justice, but because of its military power, economic influence and, especially, its strong cooperation with the US. India's status as a global economic hub and army power gives it ample international support and enables it to prove that the Kashmiri law is wrong. Meanwhile, Pakistan, despite its modesty, does not have the same power to counter India's rhetoric. This illustrates the absurdity: Power and capability are often not seen as fair and just in international politics. Does international law apply only to the powerful? If not, why has the world left the people of Kashmir alone for so long? The suffering in Kashmir is not only the result of India's oppressive policies. It reflects the failures of multiple actors. India has taken harsh measures to suppress the Kashmiri people, including the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 and the stripping of the region of its independence (Government of India, "The Constitution of India: Article 370,"

Ministry of Law and Justice). Civil reform is being implemented through new family registration laws to marginalise Kashmir's Muslim majority (Al Jazeera, "Kashmir: Domicile Certificates Issued to 25,000 Indians," June 27, 2020). The intense militancy in the region and the implementation of draconian laws such as the Public Safety Act (PSA) have made daily life impossible for ordinary Kashmiris, who have long defended Kashmir's right to self-determination but have struggled to maintain strong and consistent leadership. Meanwhile, Pakistan, which has long supported Kashmir's right to self-determination, has struggled to maintain a strong and cohesive presence. Political divisions, the rule of law, and inconsistent policies have undermined Pakistan's ability to function effectively. Domestically, the lack of unity among the political parties, military and other institutions has created tensions for India, which has often used it as an excuse to avoid the benefits of negotiations. Kashmir has been neglected. Trade and relations with India have often been fraught with concerns about human rights violations in 'IIOJK'. The failure of international organisations such as the United Nations to implement their own solutions has left millions of people in Kashmir feeling abandoned. How can the United Nations maintain its credibility as an international organisation for justice and peace when its resolution on the Kashmir issue has not yet been implemented? The world must also reflect on its broader

priorities. Do human rights and justice principles matter only when strategic interests are involved? Or are they universal values that apply to all, including the people of Kashmir? By continuing to ignore their plight, the global community risks reinforcing the idea that justice is reserved for the powerful while the weak are left to suffer. The Kashmir conflict is not just a territorial dispute but a moral crisis and a test of the world's conscience. While the global community has grown used to the status quo, the younger generations in Kashmir continue to bear the weight of its failure. They live in a world where promises mean nothing, justice is reserved for the powerful, and their dreams are stolen before they can take root. 'Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir' is not just a regional dispute but a test of the world's conscience. If global powers continue to prioritise alliances and strategic interests over justice, millions will remain trapped in oppression. The question is simple yet profound: Does might define right in today's world?

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2025/01/01/kashmir-a-battlefield-where-might-crushes-right/>

Pakistan reaffirms resolve to continue extending full support to Kashmiri people: PM Shehbaz

Dawn, 5 January 2025

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday reaffirmed the country's resolve to continue extending its full moral, political, and diplomatic support to the Kashmiri people for

their realisation of their right to self-determination.

In a statement released by the Prime Minister Office (PMO), the prime minister recounted that January 5th was annually observed as the Right to Self-Determination Day since the United Nations (UN) in 1949 "adopted the historic resolution that guarantees a free and fair plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir, to enable the Kashmiri people to realise their inalienable right to self-determination".

On Jan 5 in 1949, the UN had made a commitment to the realisation of the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people through a free and impartial plebiscite under the auspices of the UN. Jan 5 is observed as the Right to Self-determination of Kashmiris Day by Pakistanis and Kashmiris across the world every year.

In the statement, PM Shehbaz stressed that the right to self-determination was a core principle in the UN Charter, with the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopting a resolution to advocate for the legal right to self-determination every year.

"Regrettably, the Kashmiri people have not been able to exercise this inalienable right for over seven decades," the statement read. "It is time for the international community, including the United Nations, to live up to their promises and take meaningful measures, enabling the people of Jammu and Kashmir to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination," he said.

The prime minister also stressed a collective call by the global community for “immediate cessation of human rights violations, release of political prisoners, and restoration of fundamental rights and freedoms of the Kashmiri people”.

Furthermore, the statement underscored India’s violations of the internationally disputed territory, highlighting that the country “continues to take multiple steps to consolidate its occupation of the ‘Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir’ (IIOJK)”.

On August 5, 2019, India’s Narendra Modi-led government stripped the Muslim-majority territory of its special status by repealing Article 370 of the constitution, splitting the former state into two territories directly ruled by New Delhi. The move allowed people from the rest of India to acquire property in ‘India-occupied Kashmir’ (IoK) and settle there permanently. Kashmiris, as well as critics of India’s Hindu nationalist-led government, saw the move as an attempt to dilute the demographics of Muslim-majority Kashmir with Hindu settlers.

“Through a series of illegal and unilateral actions taken since 5 August 2019, India is trying to alter the demographic and political structure of the disputed territory, aimed at transforming the majority Kashmiri people into a disempowered minority community, in their own homeland,” it said, adding that it was also “subjecting the Kashmiri people to wide-ranging

gross, systematic human rights violations”.

“Pakistan reaffirms its strong resolve to continue extending its full moral, political and diplomatic support to the Kashmiri people, in their just struggle for realisation of their right to self-determination, as enshrined in the Charter and relevant resolutions of the UN, as well as in international law,” the statement added.

Meanwhile, President Asif Ali Zardari also reiterated that “Pakistan will continue to extend political, diplomatic and moral support to the valiant Kashmiri people in their just struggle for inalienable right to self-determination”, state-owned Radio Pakistan reported.

The president, in his message, said India had been “denying right to self-determination to the people of the ‘Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir’ for over seven decades and subjecting them to oppression, violence, and systemic brutalities”.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1883246/pakistan-reaffirms-resolve-to-continue-extending-full-support-to-kashmiri-people-pm-shehbaz>

Economic Developments

Govt making efforts to bring economy back on track: Muqam

Business Recorder, 30 December 2024

Federal Minister for Gilgit-Baltistan & Kashmir Affairs and States & Frontier Regions (SAFRON), Engr Amir Muqam on Sunday said that federal government was making untiring

efforts for revival of the economy and promotion of trade and investment in the country.

Addressing the concluding session of the two days Swat Trade Show 2024 as Chief Guest in Mingora Swat district, he said that the trickled down effects of the Govt prudent economic and fiscal reforms have started viable and the price hike was slashed down to a single digit which is a great triumph indeed.

He termed the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP)'s efforts for empowerment and promotion of local businesses as positive besides economic development of the region was important.

Engr Amir Muqam said that Swat trade show would help provide opportunities to local traders in expansion of their businesses and attract investment besides enhancing the country's economy significantly.

The Federal Government under the leadership of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif was making solid efforts to resolve the economic issues in the country, he said, adding the Prime Minister and his team was making untiring efforts to put the country back on road to economic prosperity.

Reiterating the sacrifices rendered by the people of Khyber Pakthunkwa especially of Malakand Division and Swat for peace and stability of Pakistan, Amir Muqam said that agitation politics of PTI was no solution to the

KP's problems and expressed the hope that focus would be made on the law and order situation besides resolution of the masses problems in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He claimed that huge amount was being spent on carrying out of malicious propaganda on social media against state institutions which was highly deplorable.

He said that politics of hooliganism and propaganda against state institutions was not in the country's interest, hoping that PTI would use the Govt resources on welfare of masses rather than aimless sit ins and staging agitation marches in Islamabad.

He said that then PTI Govt has put the country into the verge of bankruptcy while the Shehbaz Sharif Govt in its past 14 months tenure had saved the country's from an economic default.

The Minister said that the economic situation has started improving in the country and foreign investments are coming to Pakistan. The measures taken by the Shahbaz Sharif Govt are being praised in world and Pakistan economic outlook improved significantly.

Engr Amir Muqam said that Federal Government was ready to cooperate with KP Govt in all sectors including law and order and health.

He said that people of Khyber Pakthunkhwa has given mandate to PTI for resolution of their problems rather carrying out an uncalled for

agitation politics for the release of PTI founder.

Engr Amir Muqam said that PTI has disappointed people of Khyber Pakthunkhwa as it failed to deliver on all fronts.

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/amp/40340086>

Gilgit-Baltistan named among top 25 destinations to visit in 2025 by CNN

The Express Tribune, 3 January 2025

CNN has included Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) region in its curated list of the top 25 destinations to visit in 2025. The region is known for its rugged landscapes, towering peaks, and stunning natural beauty, making it a prime location for adventurous tourists and mountaineers alike.

G-B, which is administered as an autonomous territory of Pakistan, is home to some of the world's highest and most challenging peaks, including K2, the second-highest mountain on Earth. The region's remote location, however, can pose logistical challenges.

As CNN Travel notes, "Flight schedules can be unreliable, and roads can be blocked off seasonally," but the region's allure remains undeniable. With five of the 14 "eight-thousanders"—the world's tallest mountains—G-B attracts thousands of climbers, trekkers, and adventurers each year.

Describing the region as being "home to more tantalising peaks than a lemon meringue pie," CNN Travel

highlighted the extreme difficulty and danger of summiting peaks like K2, often regarded as the most dangerous mountain in the world.

For tourists, the hiking terrain in G-B is challenging, with trails in the Karakoram Mountains considered more difficult than even those in the Himalayas. Despite its beauty, the region is not a place to visit alone, with CNN Travel stressing that guided expeditions are essential for safety.

While the region has experienced a surge in mountaineering expeditions, 2024 saw a tragic loss of life, with nine mountaineers dying during their attempts to summit various peaks in Pakistan. Among the casualties were climbers from Japan, Russia, Brazil, and Pakistan, as reported by the Alpine Club of Pakistan.

Nevertheless, G-B remains accessible through reputable tour operators, such as G Adventures and Wild Frontiers. CNN Travel also mentioned that Intrepid offers a 10-day, fully supported hiking tour through the region, known as "Little Tibet," priced from around \$3,000.

Other destinations making CNN's 2025 list include Almaty in Kazakhstan, India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Bolivia, Germany's Chemnitz, Morocco's Rabat, Vancouver Island in Canada, and Turkiye's Kaçkar Mountains.

For travellers seeking unparalleled natural beauty and adventure, G-B promises to be one of the most

remarkable destinations in the coming year.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2519858/gilgit-baltistan-named-among-top-25-destinations-to-visit-in-2025-by-cnn>

Govt plans to set up 100MW solar project in GB

Business Recorder, 4 January 2025

The government has announced plans to establish a 100 MW solar power project in Gilgit-Baltistan as part of the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), official sources informed Business Recorder. The decision was made during a recent meeting chaired by the minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan. The solar project will be implemented in GB after a feasibility study and needs assessment to ensure maximum benefits for region's development.

A third-party arrangement will be established to guarantee quality assurance, and an operations and maintenance (O&M) contract will span three years. PM Shehbaz announces immediate supply of 100MW electricity to Gilgit-Baltistan

The Chief Secretary of GB reported that the GB Cabinet had approved the hiring of NESPAK as the government-to-government (G2G) consultant to carry out the feasibility study for the 100 MW solar project. In response to a question from the chair, the Chief Secretary clarified that the 100 MW capacity would be distributed as follows: 40 MW for Gilgit, and 20 MW

each for Skardu, Chilas, and Ghanche. He also highlighted that the existing distribution system in GB will be utilized to transport the generated electricity.

The financing for the feasibility study is being provided by the GB government, with completion expected by January 31, 2025. Once completed, the updated PC-1 (project document) will be submitted through the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs & Gilgit-Baltistan (M/o KA&GB) to the Public Development Sector Implementation (PDSI) for approval, with tenders to be issued by April 2025.

Secretary of the Kashmir Affairs & Gilgit-Baltistan Division noted that an international firm with expertise in solar energy should be selected for a potential joint venture with NESPAK. A representative of the Private Power and Infrastructure Board (PPIB) assured full support to the GB government.

The Minister for Kashmir Affairs suggested that the funding for the 100 MW solar project should come from the Prime Minister's Special Package due to potential fiscal constraints on mainstream PSDP funding. The Minister emphasized that the project would proceed at full capacity but could be completed in phases, with yearly allocations from the PM's Special Package.

The meeting concluded with the decision that the GB government would hire a consultant to complete the

feasibility study by February 15, 2025. The updated PC-1, along with the study, will be submitted to PDSI through M/o KA&GB by the end of February 2025. The GB government will then initiate the tendering process through a reputable international firm with experience in solar projects by April 2025.

Discussions also covered the construction of the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) Coaching Centre in Skardu. The Chief of Planning & Monitoring (P&M) in the Ministry of KA&GB shared that the Ministry had requested the PM Office to allocate Rs 200 million from the PM Special Package for GB in the current financial year. Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (M/o IPC) informed the chair that the project's PC-1, valued at Rs. 764 million, and had already been approved by the Departmental Development Working Party (DDWP).

The project will feature a gymnasium, a multipurpose hall, indoor game facilities, and a football ground. The original master plan also includes various indoor and outdoor games, with an estimated cost of Rs. 3.7 billion. However, the current PC-1 is focused primarily on indoor games, with the expansion into all game formats to be completed in phases.

The Chief Secretary of GB informed the meeting that land for the coaching center had already been provided by the GB government. A proposal was also discussed to transfer project

execution to the GB government for faster execution and better post-completion operations and maintenance. The Chief Secretary and Additional Secretary of M/o IPC agreed with this suggestion in principle.

The meeting decided that M/o IPC would initiate the tendering process within two months, consulting with the GB government about the possibility of transferring project execution to GB authorities. The M/o KA&GB would also be included in the steering committee to ensure the project's swift execution.

The meeting also discussed a proposal for the allocation of Rs. 300 million from the Export Development Fund (EDF) to upgrade the Lapidary Centers in Gilgit and Skardu.

The Ministry of Commerce was urged to expedite the case submitted by the GB government. The GB government had addressed initial concerns raised by the EDF, including its contribution in land, land acquisition for a center of excellence, and consultation with stakeholders.

The Chief Secretary of GB is expected to speak with EDF Board members before the meeting. The Executive Director of the EDF suggested that the GB government bring a reputable firm from the gemstone industry to present its case more effectively. Additionally, the GB government should initiate the process of renewing licenses for the Institute of Fashion Design's affiliated associations.

The meeting agreed that M/o KA&GB should be invited to future meetings of the EDF to ensure smooth processing of the GB government's case. The GB government (Mines & Minerals Department) is to consider the suggestions from EDF for securing approval from the EDF Board.

The forum was also briefed on the ongoing development projects in GB. The Additional Chief Secretary (Development) of GB informed that 477 schemes were under execution in the region, all of which had been prioritized for timely completion. The government of GB will provide written responses regarding these prioritized schemes, and a consultative session will be held at MPD&SI to discuss the future of these projects and the issue of the ADP's "throw forward."

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40341035/govt-plans-to-set-up-100mw-solar-project-in-gb>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

Gilgit Baltistan Government via Khunjerab Pass for China has started latest services of NATCO

Urdu Point, 31 December 2024

For China, involving of the latest coasters of NATCO will be included and doing so will immensely benefit the two countries, and especially to the trader's community, who will find great deal of ease by it. By upgrading order of the NATCO, people will experience great deal of ease, Gilgit-Baltistan government will do every cooperation with the NATCO. By

including latest coasters of NATCO on the Pakistan-China route will bring the two countries even further closer, chief minister Gilgit-Baltistan Haji Gulbar Khan on the inauguration spoke to the media. These coasters are run only after a consensus was reached with the China and as long as China government permits us till then they will run them. Prior to this, small vehicles were running. For making NATCO independent, tangible measures are being taken up. In precise time, efforts will be made to transform NATCO into a business mode.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/gilgit/national-news/live-news-4282506.html>

On the eve of Right to Self-determination Day, a rally will be held in Muzaffarabad on 5 January

Urdu Point, 2 January 2025

All Jamaat-e Hurriyat Conference, under the branch of 'Azad Kashmir', a rally on the eve of Right to Self-determination Day will be held on 5 January. All countries of the Security Council shall implement the resolutions passed by the Security Council related to Kashmir. On the eve of self-determination day, a plan for holding a rally in the capital city, Muzaffarabad is scheduled.

The organizing members for the rally include Advocate Parvez Ahmad Shah, Zahid Ashraf, Sayeed Gulshan Shah, Abdul Majeed Mir Aziz Ahmad Gazali, Mushtaq Ahmad Bhat, Abdul Hameed Lone, Mohamad Ashraf Bhat, Mushtaq ul Islam, Chaudhary Mohammad

Shahee, and other names were circulated in the media. In a joint press release, it was mentioned that for the plebiscite as per passed United National Security Council resolutions are the only way out for the freedom of Kashmir.

It was said that on 5 January on the eve of right to self-determination day, the all joint Hurriyat Conference, 'Azad Kashmir' branch will organize a big people's rally in "Burhan Wani martyr chowk". The organizers mentioned that Kashmiri people want to free themselves from the oppression of India and for this they are doing untiring struggle.

The changes brought out in Kashmir post August 5, 2019 were called as both barbaric and unacceptable by the organizers. The organizing committee has requested religious, political, lawyers, civil society and the general public to take part in the rally scheduled on 5 January. Chairman Pasbaan Hurriyat Aziz Ahmad Gazali said that for making this rally successful, support from all spheres of the society will be sought.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-4284715.html>

Domestic airport could emerge as game changer plan: Prime Minister

Jammu and Kashmir Times, 1 January 2025

Prime Minister, 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir', Chaudhary Anwar ul Haq said that with Pakistan exists a relation

of love and Pakistan is our destination. With plebiscite, India's propaganda has come to surface. In my 20 months of job at hand, I have started working on developmental projects and with support from the federal government, cheap flour and electricity has been made available. In the assembly of Kashmir Committee, an agreement was made for a domestic airport for 'Azad Kashmir'. Domestic airport could emerge as a game-changer. Pakistani minds are considered finest in the world. Not individual but national interests should be prioritized. I still stand by accession to Pakistan. No matter what tough conditions I have faced, I always delivered. For ending problems, I have conducted surgical intervention. Such thoughts were shared by Prime Minister Chaudhary Anwar ul Haq in a TV program.

<http://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Resize-of-FRONT-PAGE-01.jpg>

From Social Media

Roshan Din Diameri @Roshan_Din

2 January 2025

Welcoming the new MOFA Spokesperson, Shafqat Ali Khan – a proud son of the soil GB. Ready to represent Pakistan on the global stage!

#gilgitbaltistan

@shafqatAmbPak

Link to the tweet:

https://x.com/Rohshan_Din/status/1874757906891260024

WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti

1 January 2025

Former Chief Minister and PTI leader
Khalid Khurshid sentenced to 34 years
in prison

#gilgitbaltistan #exchiefminister #pti
#ImranKhan #anti #terrorist #court
#decision

Link to the video:

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/1874448080252391869>

PAMIR Times @pamirtimes

30 December 2024

Baltistan Witnesses Record 119%
Increase in Tourist Influx in 2024

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/pamirtimes/status/1873769172142039102>

Roshan Din Diameri @Roshan_Din

31 December 2024

Gilgit: Faisal Ehsan Pirzada has been
appointed as Secretary to the Chief
Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan, while
Usman Ahmed Khan has been
appointed as Secretary Services of
Gilgit-Baltistan.

Notification issued.

#Gilgitbaltistan

Link to the tweet:

https://x.com/Rohshan_Din/status/1874000252317147628

Weekly POK News Digest

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Disclaimer

PoK weekly News Digest is a collection of news reports and press releases published in various newspapers and local media related to Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK), referred to as 'Azad Kashmir' and 'Gilgit Baltistan' by the government of Pakistan. The news reports have been edited and abridged to provide clarity. MP-IDSA is not responsible for the accuracy and authenticity of the news items.



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