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Political Developments

Chinese investors concerned over lack of sovereign guarantee for power projects in GB

The Nation, 14 January 2025

Chinese investors have expressed serious concern over lack of sovereign guarantee for power projects in Gilgit Baltistan, which remains a significant roadblock to expanding energy production in the region.

China is working on critical infrastructure projects in the region, especially in agriculture, trade, and special economic zones. Chinese investors have expressed concerns about the lack of sovereign guarantees for power projects, while the high tariffs in the region's energy sector have further deterred investment from Chinese companies, Additional Chief Secretary Gilgit-Baltistan said while briefing Senate Standing Committee on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Chief Secretary GB further said that the issue remains a significant roadblock to expanding energy production in the region, where the summer demand for power exceeds supply by over 100MW. The demand in the summer reaches 254MW, while local production can only generate 122MW, highlighting the pressing need for new energy projects.

On energy, Senator Zeeshan Khanzada pointed out that power remains one of the region's biggest challenges. While hydroelectric power holds promise, it requires significant investment and

time, with water availability proving inconsistent. "We must look into solar projects as a solution, especially for remote areas where hydroelectricity is not feasible," Khanzada suggested.

The Additional Chief Secretary urged the Finance Division to consider a one-time grant of Rs30 to 35 billion to address critical infrastructure needs, including energy and tourism projects. He emphasized that without such an injection of funds, many vital projects cannot be completed. The committee that met with Senator Prof. Sajid Mir in chair, focused on the immense tourism potential of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), with particular emphasis on ongoing infrastructure developments and strategic policies designed to enhance the region's tourism sector. The committee, while taking briefing on the development projects of Gilgit-Baltistan, focused on financial allocations for both the Annual Development Program (ADP) and the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) for fiscal year 2024-25, with particular emphasis on ongoing projects and the region's emerging economic opportunities.

It was briefed that for the fiscal year 2024-25, Gilgit-Baltistan has secured a significant funding boost for its development projects. The Annual Development Program (ADP) has a total allocation of Rs20 billion, with Rs7.15 billion already released. However, the committee also noted an outstanding throw-forward of Rs 138 billion for the ADP.

The Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) for the same period has been allocated Rs13.5 billion, which includes Rs4 billion dedicated to Prime Minister's initiatives. The outstanding throw-forward for the PSDP stands at Rs99 billion.

Among the most notable energy projects are the 54MW Attabad Hydropower Plant and the 34.5 MW Harpo Hydropower Plant in Skardu. These projects are poised to play a pivotal role in addressing the region's energy needs and providing clean power to local communities.

Additional Chief Secretary of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) provided a comprehensive briefing on the region's international collaboration. Highlighting key sectors where China is actively involved, the briefing underscored the complexities of energy and tourism development, as well as the need for greater financial support from Islamabad.

While briefing the committee on current state of tourism infrastructure in 'AJK', it was informed that there are 30 tourist lodges and motels, tourist information centers, welcome booths, and over 500 privately-operated hotels and guest houses.

According to the Chief Secretary GB, the region's tourism sector has also been a focal point for investment, particularly in Baltistan, which is seeing increasing numbers of tourists, primarily from the upper and middle classes. This influx has spurred growth, but challenges remain. "Climate

change and tourism sustainability are major considerations for us," said the Chief Secretary. The region has developed ten management plans to ensure that tourism growth aligns with environmental conservation, and feasibility studies are underway for ski resort projects, air safari initiatives, and a cable car service. However, the lack of coordination in the NFC formula has created significant barriers to completing these projects.

In addition to tourism, Gilgit-Baltistan is struggling with infrastructure limitations. The region's airports, particularly in Skardu and Gilgit, are unable to handle the volume of tourists. Skardu's airport, though larger, is still limited, with only ten flights arriving in the summer. Meanwhile, Gilgit faces even more difficulties, with fewer flight connections. A proposal for a new airport in Gilgit is currently under feasibility study, with hopes of improving connectivity for both tourists and local residents.

The committee discussed several major tourism-related projects that are currently in progress, including the renovation and preservation of the historic Red Fort in Muzaffarabad, the establishment of a Museum in Mirpur, and the creation of a Simulacrum of Junjaal Hill. Additionally, the Skardu Airport, upgraded to international status in December 2021, is now poised to welcome international flights, further boosting the region's accessibility to global tourists. The airport currently operates 16 weekly flights connecting key cities such as

Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi. It was informed that the number of tourists in AJK and GB saw 20 percent decline in 2023 (down by 3,990 visitors to a total of approximately 16,130).

<https://www.nation.com.pk/14-Jan-2025/chinese-investors-concerned-over-lack-of-sovereign-guarantee-for-power-projects-in-gb>

Grand jirga vows to work for peace in GB

Dawn, 16 January 2025

The participants of a grand jirga on Wednesday discussed issues related to law and order, development, health and education in Gilgit-Baltistan and vowed to work for peace in the region.

The jirga held in Chilas was attended by Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan, GB Force Commander Maj Gen Imtiaz Hussain Gillani, members of the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly, secretaries, district officers, religious scholars, and a large number of local community elders and students.

The participants agreed to work towards maintaining law and order, fostering development in the area and actively contributing to these goals.

Speaking on the occasion, Maj Gen Gillani highlighted that the attendance of senior civil and military officials at the jirga demonstrated their accountability to the public. He assured that Pakistan Army would play its full role in addressing the region's issues and continue to support relevant institutions to ensure their resolution.

He emphasised the importance of local community involvement in the region's development, encouraging collaboration between the community and institutions.

To achieve this, he suggested introducing community-based systems to empower people to contribute actively to development initiatives. Religious scholars and community leaders expressed their full support for Pakistan Army in maintaining peace and promoting development in the region.

Later, Maj Gen Gillani visited the Vocational Training Centre in Chilas and met the youth hailing from different areas of Diamer.

He encouraged them to play an active role in fostering peace and development in Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan, urging them to use modern technology and social media positively.

The students appreciated Pakistan Army's efforts in ensuring peace and development in the region.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1885516/grand-jirga-vows-to-work-for-peace-in-gb>

Mass anti-India rally demands immediate ban on unlawful visits of Indian leaders to 'disputed IIOJK'

Daily Parliament Times, 13 January 2025

The lake-side city of Mirpur 'AJK' was banged with full-throated anti India slogans to mark black day on the occasion of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to 'Indian

Illegally Occupied Jammu Kashmir’ on Monday.

A mammoth anti India rally followed by severe street agitation at this divisional headquarters of Mirpur was the hallmark of the black day.

The protest rally was organized by social and political parties, lawyers, traders association, civil society, employees and people belonging to all other schools of thought from the district court mega compound. The participants of the rally carried black flags and tied black bands on their arms.

The participants of the rally were shouting slogans against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

When the protest rally reached Chowk Shaheedan, it turned into a big public congregation, addressing to which speakers strongly condemned Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to ‘Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu Kashmir’.

President District Bar Association Chaudhry Shakeel-Uzzaman Advocate presented various resolutions in the protest demonstration reiterating Kashmiris earnest long standing demand for early peaceful solution of Kashmir issue under the spirit of United Nations Resolutions on Kashmir.

In these resolutions, the United Nations was demanded to implement its resolutions to pave the way for grant of right to self-determination to Kashmiris to decide about their destiny

through a free and fair plebiscite under the spirit of the UN resolutions for onward liberation of ‘occupied state of Jammu and Kashmir’ from the illegal rule of India, the resolutions added.

Addressing the rally key speakers including Chairman National Events Organizing Committee MIRPUR-AJK Deputy Commissioner Yasir Riaz strongly condemned Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to ‘Occupied Kashmir’ and demanded that the international forces should take immediate notice of such unlawful and forced visit of the Indian leaders to the internationally recognised disputed territory of the ‘Indian Illegally occupied Jammu Kashmir’ state.

The NEOC Chief further urged that Kashmiris be given their right to self-determination, otherwise Kashmiris will not hesitate from any sacrifice to secure their birth right to self-determination, he added.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2025/01/13/mass-anti-india-rally-demands-immediate-ban-on-unlawful-visits-of-indian-leaders-to-disputed-iiojk/>

Energy crisis in Gilgit-Baltistan dominates Senate body meeting

The Dawn, 14 January 2025

A parliamentary committee on Monday discussed power, development and tourism projects in Gilgit-Baltistan, focusing primarily on addressing the region’s electricity crisis.

A meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Kashmir Affairs and

Gilgit-Baltistan, chaired by its chairman Senator Sajid Mir at the Parliament House in Islamabad, was informed that GB faced a significant power deficit, with summer demand reaching 254MW against a production capacity of just 122MW. This gap underscores the urgent need for new energy projects.

Senator Zeeshan Khanzada, a member of the committee, highlighted power as one of the region's biggest challenges. "We must explore solar projects as a solution, particularly for remote areas where hydroelectricity is not feasible," he suggested.

The meeting also discussed financial allocations for both the Annual Development Programme (ADP) and Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for the fiscal year 2024-25 for GB.

The ADP has been allocated Rs20 billion, with Rs7.15bn already disbursed. However, the committee noted an outstanding throw-forward of Rs138bn for the ADP, underscoring the long-term nature of these investments.

The PSDP allocation for the same period stands at Rs13.5bn, including Rs4bn earmarked for prime minister's initiatives. The PSDP has an outstanding throw-forward of Rs99bn, reflecting the scale and ambition of the federal government's development commitments to the region.

Among the key energy projects under development are the 54MW hydropower plant in Attabad and

34.5MW hydropower plant in Skardu, which are expected to significantly address the region's energy needs and provide clean power to local communities.

The GB additional chief secretary briefed the committee on international collaboration in the region, highlighting China's active involvement in critical sectors such as energy, tourism, agriculture, trade and special economic zones.

However, he pointed out that Chinese investors have raised concerns over the lack of sovereign guarantees for power projects and the high tariffs in GB's energy sector, which have deterred investment.

During the meeting, GB Chief Secretary Abrar Ahmed Mirza highlighted the rising number of tourists in the region, but said that despite this growth, the region faced challenges related to climate change, sustainability and inadequate infrastructure.

To address these issues, GB has developed 10 management plans focused on environmental conservation, with feasibility studies underway for ski resorts, air safaris, and a cable car service. However, the lack of coordination in the National Finance Commission formula has posed barriers to completing these projects.

The region's airports also face constraints. Skardu airport, though larger, accommodates only 10 flights during the summer, while Gilgit

airport struggles with even fewer connections, the meeting was told.

Senator Mir emphasised the significant incentives available for tourism investment in GB, including its status as a tax-free zone, low royalties, affordable electricity, investor facilitation, and a visa-on-arrival policy for citizens of 65 countries.

The committee also recommended granting observer representation to GB and 'Azad Kashmir' in national constitutional discussions to better address their unique needs.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1885041/energy-crisis-in-gilgit-baltistan-dominates-senate-body-meeting>

Karakoram Winterlude festival kicks off

Dawn, 13 January 2025

The much-anticipated Karakoram Winterlude Season 7 began on Saturday in Hunza's Altit village, bringing together winter sports, cultural events and community festivities.

Organised annually by SCARF, a local organisation promoting winter sports and cultural heritage, the 10-day festival has been a hallmark of Gilgit-Baltistan for the past decade.

The event's inaugural ceremony, held at the Frozen Altit Pool amid freezing temperatures, featured breathtaking fireworks that illuminated the majestic Karakoram mountains, leaving attendees in awe.

Traditional dancers in colourful attire showcased the region's rich culture, while renowned artists Kashif and Islam, alongside soulful local talent, brought the stage to life with electrifying beats and heartwarming melodies.

The opening ice hockey match saw Allied Bank Limited triumph over Habib Bank Limited with an 8-0 victory. A large number of local people, players, fans and tourists participated in the colourful event and enjoyed the colourful activities despite the harsh weather. Among the highlights was an 80-year-old elder performing a traditional dance to local music, captivating the audience.

According to the organisers, 12 ice hockey teams — seven male and five female — are participating in the tournament from across the country.

In addition to ice hockey, the festival features competitions in ice climbing, mountain cycling and glacier walking. A climate action campaign, food stalls and musical concerts are also integral parts of the event.

The festival will continue until Jan 19, with ice hockey matches and other competitions held in Gojal, Upper Hunza. Young ice hockey players from the Passu Youth and Sports Organisation have also joined the event, showcasing their talent and passion for the sport.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1884848/karakoram-winterlude-festival-kicks-off#:~:text=GILGIT%3A%20The%20much%20Dan>

[ticipated%20Karakoram,cultural%20events%20and%20community%20festivities.](#)

13 ibexes, one blue sheep hunted in GB trophy hunting season

Dawn, 13 January 2025

Local and foreign hunters have hunted 13 ibexes and one blue sheep during the current trophy hunting season in the mountains of Gilgit-Baltistan, according to the GB Wildlife and Parks Department.

The latest trophy was a 25-inch blue sheep hunted by a Belarus citizen, Vasili Achapoukaski, in Sokhterabad, Gojal, in the Khunjerab National Park Community Control Area.

He had paid \$25,100 to the GB government for a license to hunt the species native to the Himalayas.

The hunting season for markhors, ibexes, and blue sheep continues from November 1 to April 31, with December and January being the most suitable months for hunting markhors and ibexes in the mountains of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Belarusian citizen pays \$25,100 for 25-inch blue sheep; business of tour operators 'impacted' by cancellation of auction

The wildlife department introduced the trophy hunting programme with the local community's involvement in Bar Valley, Nagar, in 1990. Around 80 per cent of the money earned from licenses goes to the community for wildlife protection and conservation.

However, local tour operators said this year's earnings were impacted due to the GB Parks and Wildlife Department's decision to redo the auction for hunting licenses.

In November 2024, the GB Parks and Wildlife Department auctioned permits for 118 rare animals, including four Astor markhors, 100 Himalayan ibexes, and 14 blue sheep for the hunting season 2024-2025. Later, the bidding process was cancelled due to low bids.

During the initial process, the highest bid for an Astor markhor license was \$107,000. The bid for the exportable trophy of Himalayan ibex was \$6,700 and Rs1.8 million for the non-exportable trophy. Locals secured licenses for Rs760,000, while bids of \$1,200 were placed for licenses to hunt blue sheep (exportable) and Rs1.65 million (non-exportable).

An official of the Wildlife Department told Dawn that during the initial process, the fees for exportable licenses were significantly lower than the previous season.

According to official data, the trophy hunting season of 2023-24 generated a revenue of around Rs 309 million.

Due to lower bids for this season, the GB Wildlife Department cancelled the bidding process and re-auctioned with a higher base price for Astor markhor and exportable blue sheep and ibexes.

The official said that only the auction for exportable categories of animals was affected by the cancellation, while the non-exportable and national permits remained valid.

According to outfitters and local tour operators, the decision affected their business.

Ikram Beg, a local tour operator and an outfitter, said the trophy hunting programme faced a significant setback following the cancellation of the first bidding.

He said the first auction, held on October 30, 2024, was unexpectedly annulled by the Wildlife Department “without clear reasons”.

Subsequently, the reserve prices for permits were increased for the second bidding on November 25, leading to a lack of participation from outfitters.

He said this resulted in a “devastating loss” for communities whose livelihoods depend on these funds, with an estimated revenue shortfall of approximately Rs360 million.

He said the business of outfitters was also severely impacted, and the disruption was likely to have long-term consequences on trophy hunting in the region.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1884853/13-ibexes-one-blue-sheep-hunted-in-gb-trophy-hunting-season#:~:text=GILGIT%3A%20Local%20and%20Oforeign%20hunters,GB%20Wildlife%20and%20Parks%20Department.>

GB CM stresses on achieving revenue targets

The Nation, 15 January 2025

Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan Haji Gulbar Khan emphasized the need to achieve the revenue targets set for various departments during the fiscal year 2024-25. Speaking at a meeting on this matter, he highlighted that increasing provincial resources is essential for public welfare and regional development.

He said that transparency, merit, and austerity have been the government’s priorities from the outset and instructed all departments to ensure their implementation. To make the revenue collection system more transparent and efficient, the province will soon introduce the “Revenue Online (One Link)” system.

The Chief Minister directed the Provincial Secretary of Finance to ensure that all departments meet their assigned revenue targets. He also stressed the importance of holding underperforming departments accountable, urging them to meet their goals. Furthermore, he instructed that, in line with financial regulations, revenue collected in various categories should be deposited into a consolidated account instead of separate accounts.

CM Gulbar Khan announced plans to convene a high-level meeting soon to review the performance of various departments regarding their revenue targets. During the session, the

Provincial Secretary of Finance provided a detailed briefing on the set revenue targets and the progress made so far.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/15-Jan-2025/gb-cm-stresses-on-achieving-revenue-targets>

GB leaders announce rights struggle

Dawn, 17 January 2025

Religious and political parties in Gilgit-Baltistan have launched a movement to grant constitutional status to the region. The parties, both government and opposition, called upon the federal government to settle the matter without further delay.

These demands were made during a discussion titled 'Important Political Issues of Gilgit-Baltistan and Their Solutions' held at Islamabad's National Press Club on Thursday.

The event, organised by Fikar, a GB-based NGO, was attended by former GB chief minister and PML-N regional president Hafiz Hafeezur Rehman, PPP regional president Amjad Hussain Advocate, PTI's Muhammad Saleem, JUI-F leader and GB Minister for Excise and Taxation Haji Rehmat Khaliq, GB Opposition Leader and Majlis-i-Wahdat Muslimeen leader Kazim Mesum, GB government spokesperson Faizullah Faraq, Islami Tehreek-i-Pakistan (ITP) spokesperson Munir Hussain, and a large number of political and religious leaders and civil society members.

A joint statement issued at the end of the event stated that all political and

religious parties were in consensus that the biggest issue of GB people was its constitutional status and identity. The declaration said there had been a lack of collective efforts by local parties for GB's constitutional rights. All political and religious parties will work jointly for the political rights of the region, it added. The speakers expressed that the financial issues of the region required urgent attention for which stakeholders needed to make "sincere efforts beyond political differences".

The declaration demanded the implementation of proposals made by federal ministers late Sartaj Aziz and Farogh Naseem regarding the provisional constitutional province status of GB. The two former ministers headed committees formed by the PML-N and PTI governments, respectively, to grant GB the provisional status of a province. Other speakers also urged the federal government to settle the constitutional status of the region.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1885783/gb-leaders-announce-rights-struggle>

Indian Statements Against Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan Rejected: Interior Minister Shams Lone and Faizullah Faraq's Strong Response

Pamir Times, 17 January 2025

Gilgit-Baltistan's Interior Minister Shams Lone and government spokesperson Faizullah Faraq have strongly rejected the recent statements by Indian Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi and Indian Home

Minister Rajnath Singh regarding Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan, calling them propaganda.

During a press conference at the National Press Club in Islamabad, they asserted that Gilgit-Baltistan became an integral part of Pakistan 77 years ago, based on ideological grounds, after its people rejected Indian rule and secured their freedom.

Shams Lone stated, “The people of Gilgit-Baltistan reluctantly tolerate the word ‘disputed.’ In the context of the Kashmir conflict, it is a technical issue, but calling us ‘disputed’ is tantamount to insulting our sacrifices.”

Faizullah Faraq described the Indian leadership’s remarks as “childish and shameful,” adding that India relies on baseless statements to cover its internal failures and atrocities against Kashmiris. He further said, “India’s vile face has been exposed to the world. In ‘occupied Kashmir’, millions of Kashmiris live under the shadow of Indian oppression, where every day brings new atrocities and bloodshed.”

He referred to Gilgit-Baltistan as the “land of martyrs” and said that thousands of graves in the region bear the Pakistani flag. “Figures like Major Wahab and Shaheed Lalak Jan are symbols of the region’s pride and loyalty to Pakistan. The people here consider even mentioning India as offensive.”

During the press conference, they emphasized that the freedom movement in ‘occupied Kashmir’ is at

its peak, and the Kashmiri people refuse to accept Indian domination. The Indian leadership’s panicked reactions are no less than a joke, reflecting the hollowness of their stance.

“India must remember that even 800,000 soldiers cannot suppress the Kashmiris’ struggle for freedom, and the people of Gilgit-Baltistan will always stand with Pakistan,” Shams Lone declared firmly.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2025/01/16/indian-statements-against-pakistan-and-gilgit-baltistan-rejected-interior-minister-shams-lone-and-faizullah-faraqs-strong-response/>

Economic Developments

GB’s export potential of dry fruits vital for economic growth

The Nation, 13 January 2025

Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) is blessed with a unique climate and fertile soil that enable the production of an impressive variety of dry fruits, ranging from apricots and almonds to walnuts and cherries. The region’s produce stands out for its taste, quality, and nutritional value.

However, despite its huge potential, GB’s fruit industry remains an underutilized asset in Pakistan’s economic portfolio, primarily due to inadequate infrastructure, limited marketing strategies, and a lack of global exposure.

GB’s geography and climate provide the ideal conditions for producing high-quality fruits such as apricots, almonds, walnuts, and cherries. Recent

reports reveal that the region produces over 3,000 metric tons of dry apricots, an equal quantity of almonds, and a staggering 100,000 metric tons of walnuts annually. Additionally, the region's cherries have gained recognition for their distinct flavor and quality, recently making headlines for their successful export to China. In 2024, a significant milestone was achieved when Gilgit-Baltistan's cherry growers exported a large consignment to China, earning both praise and financial returns. The cherries, known for their superior sweetness and organic cultivation, were well-received in Chinese markets. This successful venture highlights the immense potential of expanding fruit exports from the region to international markets.

One of the standout features of Gilgit-Baltistan's fruits is their exceptional nutritional value. Packed with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, they serve as a healthy snack option for consumers worldwide. "Dry fruits from this region are nutritional powerhouses," says Dr Sara Khan, a nutritionist based in Gilgit. "They are rich in vitamins essential for immune support, skin health, and heart health. For instance, apricots are loaded with vitamins A and C, while almonds and walnuts provide protein and healthy fats essential for overall well-being. Including these in the daily diet can significantly improve health."

Beyond their economic significance, the fruits of Gilgit-Baltistan hold cultural and traditional value. "We take great pride in our dry fruits, especially

apricots, cherries, and walnuts," says Karim Shah, a dry fruit farmer from Hunza. "These fruits are not just a source of income; they are deeply rooted in our culture and heritage."

The organic nature of these fruits adds to their appeal. Grown without pesticides and nurtured using traditional irrigation methods, they align with the increasing global demand for eco-friendly and organic products. This presents an opportunity to market these fruits as premium-quality items in international markets.

Despite its potential, the fruit industry in Gilgit-Baltistan faces several challenges. According to Nisar Ahmed, a local marketing expert, a lack of infrastructure, limited cold storage facilities, and insufficient marketing strategies are major hurdles.

"To tap into the global market, we need to invest in packaging and labeling to highlight our products' unique qualities," Ahmed suggests. "Participation in international food expos, the use of social media for e-marketing, and forging partnerships with global distributors can help expand market reach. Additionally, emphasizing sustainable farming practices can attract eco-conscious consumers."

He added, "The government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have a crucial role in unlocking the export potential of Gilgit-Baltistan's fruit industry. Establishing cold storage facilities, providing financial support, and imparting training to farmers to meet international quality standards

are essential steps,” he explained. “Furthermore, aligning production cycles with global demand and introducing certification programs can ensure the region’s fruits find a place on the shelves of global markets,” Nisar said.

The retired Director of Agriculture and Livestock Gilgit-Baltistan highlighted the potential economic benefits: “If properly marketed, the region’s farmers could earn over \$20 million annually from dry fruit exports, compared to the current earnings of just Rs50 million.”

The region is a treasure trove of high-quality fruits, waiting to be discovered by the world. With strategic interventions, robust marketing efforts, and government support, the region can transform into a global hub for premium fruits.

Success stories like the cherry exports to China demonstrate the untapped potential of this industry. By investing in infrastructure, embracing modern marketing tools, and prioritizing eco-friendly practices, Gilgit-Baltistan’s fruit sector can become a significant contributor to Pakistan’s economy while uplifting the livelihoods of local communities.

As the world seeks healthier and organic food options, the fruits of Gilgit-Baltistan are poised to shine on the global stage, turning this hidden gem into a celebrated treasure.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Jan-2025/gb-s-export-potential-of-dry-fruits-vital-for-economic-growth>

CPEC 2.0

The Nation, 13 January 2025

The renewed commitment between Pakistan and China to advance the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into its second phase marks a significant step forward in bolstering Pakistan’s economic trajectory. With both nations pledging to enhance infrastructure, energy projects, and industrial cooperation, the promise of CPEC 2.0 stands as a beacon of economic revitalisation for Pakistan. This phase not only aims to address critical development gaps but also seeks to expand special economic zones, foster industrial growth, and create employment opportunities, all of which are essential for stabilising Pakistan’s fragile economy.

Pakistan stands to gain substantially from this continued collaboration. Improved infrastructure will facilitate better connectivity, reduce logistics costs, and attract foreign direct investment. Moreover, the focus on renewable energy projects will alleviate Pakistan’s chronic energy shortages, paving the way for sustainable industrialisation. The creation of thousands of jobs across various sectors promises socio-economic upliftment, particularly in underdeveloped regions.

Main points of anticipated Gaza cease-fire, prisoner exchange deal with Israel, Hamas

China, on the other hand, secures strategic access to the Arabian Sea

through the Gwadar Port, enhancing its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and facilitating trade routes that bypass traditional maritime chokepoints. Additionally, by investing in Pakistan's industrial sector, China diversifies its economic partnerships and strengthens geopolitical alliances in South Asia. The Pakistani government deserves commendation for proactively exploring and securing avenues to strengthen the nation's economic foundations. In the face of daunting economic challenges, it is encouraging to witness leadership that seeks long-term solutions rather than short-term fixes. However, effective execution, transparent governance, and equitable distribution of benefits will be critical to ensuring that CPEC 2.0 realises its full potential.

We hope this revitalised partnership not only propels Pakistan towards economic resilience but also fosters a mutually beneficial relationship rooted in sustainable development and regional stability.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Jan-2025/cpec-2-0>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

Mohammad Tahir Khokhar stated that the administration seems incapable of standing up to the dominance of the land mafia

Urdu Point, 15 January 2025

Former Minister of Tourism and Transport, Mohammad Tahir Khokhar, has criticized the administration for its failure to address the pressing issues of migrant rehabilitation and the illegal

occupation of government land by land mafias.

He highlighted the significant amount of government-owned land in the state that could be utilized to settle migrants. However, instead of taking concrete action, the administration has only made false promises, showing a lack of seriousness in resolving the problem. Migrants are often relocated to unsafe areas prone to landslides or near riverbanks, which are unsuitable for human settlement.

Meanwhile, in Muzaffarabad and surrounding areas, land mafias are actively seizing government land and constructing illegal structures, with the administration appearing powerless to intervene. Khokhar pointed out that whenever the issue of migrant rehabilitation is raised, authorities cite law and order concerns but fail to take meaningful action against these land grabbers.

He further emphasized that despite the availability of vast tracts of government land in Muzaffarabad, the administration seems reluctant to use it for migrant rehabilitation due to the influence of land mafias.

Khokhar has urged the government to take immediate and effective steps to address the rehabilitation of Kashmiri migrants. He warned that if serious measures are not taken, the challenges faced by migrants will continue to escalate.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-4299708.html>

The Government is taking every effort for resolving issues related to the Neelum: Information Minister

Jammu and Kashmir Times, 13 January 2025

Information minister 'Azad Kashmir', Peer Mazhar Sayeed Shah met with political and social leader Abdul Qayoom Shah, where they discussed different issues faced by the Neelum Valley and other things. The information minister assured that all issues faced by the people belonging to the Neelum valley will be addressed. Mazhar Sayeed said that he is familiar to the issues faced by the people and the government is taking every step to address issues faced by the residents of the Neelum valley. He further mentioned that Prime Minister 'Azad Kashmir', Chaudhary Anwar ul Haq himself has a special interest in the Neelum valley and God willing we will stop breathing only after finishing all issues of the Neelum valley. From the standpoint of tourism, Neelum valley is one among the most beautiful places. Its forests add beauty to the valley and each year lakhs of tourists come to pay visit to the Neelum. Apart from increasing the tourist flow and the benefits of the tourism industry, steps are being taken to address the issues of the people of Neelum.

<https://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Resize-of-FRONT-PAGE-13.jpg>

Chaudhary Anwar ul Haq met Barrister Sultan, disapproved India's oppression in 'Occupied Kashmir'

Urdu Point, 15 January 2025

President 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' Barrister Sultan had a detailed meeting with Prime Minister Azad 'Jammu and Kashmir', Chaudhary Anwar ul Haq. Both leaders disapproved India's actions in 'Occupied Kashmir, and said that India is engaged in high degree of human rights violations in the 'occupied territory', and there people of Kashmir are facing difficult circumstances.

Given this, around 20 camps of freedom within and outside the country are emphasizing upon resolution of the Kashmir issue and bringing attention towards the atrocities committed by India, and through these camps, in a more resolute form voices will be raised. India and Modi's real face will be shown to the world.

The two leaders also spoke of implementing good governances feature so that Azad Kashmir attains another level in the ladder of peace and development. Such implementation is bound to upgrade life of an ordinary person living in the region. The two leaders spoke about other issues too.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-4299964.html>

From Social Media

WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti

16 January 2025

30 minutes of electricity for 70 crores, information advisors exploded

#gilgitbaltistan #loadshedding #crises #government

Link to the video:

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/1879904826269819137>

PAMIR Times @pamirtimes

16 January 2025

Indian Statements against Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan Rejected: Interior Minister Shams Lone and Faizullah Faraq's Strong Response

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/pamirtimes/status/1879927599369170967>

Jamil Nagri @jamilnagri

12 January 2025

Winter tourism declined in #GilgitBaltistan the last two years, no foreign expedition visited the region to attempt any single peak.

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/jamilnagri/status/1878192677872668971>

WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti

16 January 2025

The service of employees working in PSDP projects affiliated with the Gilgit-

Baltistan Health Department has been terminated.

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/1879610888006869408>

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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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