

# Weekly POK News Digest

*(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)*

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**POK**  
**Protest**  
**Gilgit-Baltistan**  
**load shedding**  
**hydropower stations**  
**fuel-based electricity**  
**Diamer Bhasha Dam**  
**Karakoram Highway**  
**water scarcity**  
**Neelum Jehlum**  
**Power**  
**Plant**  
**tourism**



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## Contents

### Political Developments

- Basha dam affected people vow to intensify protest as talks with minister end in deadlock
- Cultivating a Reading Culture in Gilgit-Baltistan
- 'AJK' President urges global role in Kashmir resolution
- Gilgit-Baltistan's Power Crisis: Darkness in a Land of Abundance
- Two more bodies formed for talks with dam protesters
- NA body endorses plan to promote mountaineering in GB
- Govt 'agrees to accept' Bhasha dam protesters' demands
- Multilingual Public Policy in Gilgit-Baltistan
- Pakistan will never compromise on its sovereignty and defense: PM 'AJK'
- Court suspends GB govt's move to hike mountaineering royalty, trekking fee

### Economic Developments

- Two-day event organized for tourism promotion in 'Azad Kashmir'
- Education ministry unveils proposed PSDP of Rs42.585bn

### Vernacular Urdu Media

- Closed for a year Neelum Jehlum Power Plant requires 23 Arab Rupees for Repair
- 'Azad Kashmir' government must immediately resolve the challenges faced by the common people
- Talks with Adhoc employees 'successful', protests all across 'Azad Kashmir' deferred

## Political Developments

### **Basha dam affected people vow to intensify protest as talks with minister end in deadlock**

*Dawn, 24 February 2025*

The first round of negotiations between the representatives of Diamer-Basha Dam affected people and Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Amir Muqam held in Chilas on Sunday ended in a deadlock.

On his request, the protesters refused to call off their sit-in and instead urged people of other areas to join their sit-in.

The minister is the chairman of a six-member committee constituted on the direction of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to address grievances of the dam-affected people, who have been staging the sit-in at Chilas for the last one week.

Amir Muqam arrived in Chilas, the district headquarters of Diamer, in a helicopter to negotiate with the protesters and convince them to end their sit-in. Talks were held between the minister and representatives of "Give Rights and Build Dam" protest movement at the Karakoram International University Diamer campus. GB Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan, ministers Engineer Mohammad Anwar, Rehmat Khaliq and Shah Baig were also presented.

Amir Muqam was told that Diamer-Basha Dam affected people had been protesting for acceptance of their 31 demands including implementation of

agreements made between the federal government, Wapda and the dam-affected people in 2010.

The chief minister said that in 2010 when the construction of the dam was started, an agreement was made between the then federal government and the land-affected people. He said only 10 per cent of that agreement had been implemented.

He said the land survey for the dam had been conducted by Wapda in 2007 without taking elected members into confidence. Many locals were not included in the list of the affected people.

"I am the chief minister of GB and also an elected member from Diamer and it is my responsibility to present the facts," he said.

"Diamer-Basha Dam land compensation award was given in 2015, but people have alleged discrimination in the distribution of the financial package among the affected people," he said.

He said during the previous government, many meetings were held with Wapda officials to resolve the issues. He said resettlement and rehabilitation of the affected people was their genuine right.

"I had requested Amir Muqam to negotiate with the affected people's representatives on the 31 points of character of demands. He requested the representatives of the protesters to postpone the sit-in and start negotiations on the charter of demands

in detail with the federal committee within a month,” said the chief minister.

Amir Muqam addressed the meeting and appreciated GB people for their sacrifices for the national interest and the annexation of the region with Pakistan. He said it was priority of the federal government to resolve GB people’s issues. He said the people of ‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’ and Gilgit-Baltistan were protectors of the country without salaries.

He said the federal government had increased the annual budget and development projects funds for GB. He said the government was serious to settle the dam-affected people’s issues.

“Despite public holidays on Saturday and Sunday, the committee members held meetings and today (Sunday) I arrived here despite other engagements,” he said.

He asked the protest movement committee members to call off the sit-in and constitute a committee to start negotiations in detail with the federal committee to reach a consensus to settle the issues.

He said he can’t announce resolution of the character of demands as other members of the committee were not presented.

After the negotiations, the committee members expressed dissatisfaction and announced to continue the protest and vowed to intensify their movement.

GB Minister for Agriculture Mohammad Anwar later announced

that he would resign if the issues of the affected people were not resolved.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1893967/basha-dam-affected-people-vow-to-intensify-protest-as-talks-with-minister-end-in-deadlock>

## **Cultivating a Reading Culture in Gilgit-Baltistan**

*Pamir Times, 24 February 2025*

Nestled among the towering peaks of the Karakoram and Himalayas, Gilgit-Baltistan is a land of breath-taking beauty and rich cultural heritage. Yet, amid its mesmerizing landscapes, a quieter revolution is brewing—a growing interest in book reading. While storytelling has long been a part of the region’s oral traditions, the habit of reading books is still developing, facing both challenges and opportunities in today’s fast-paced digital era.

Gilgit-Baltistan has a deep-rooted culture of storytelling, which has played a major role in preserving local folklore and historical events. However, the habit of book reading is still struggling to gain a central place in people’s daily activities. Mainly, reading is limited to course books, and reading beyond this boundary is still a developing practice.

Several factors contribute to the slow growth of book-reading habits in Gilgit-Baltistan. The major factor in this regard is the lack of well-stocked libraries. We can gauge this from the fact that in the entire region of Gilgit-Baltistan, which has a population of around 2.3 million, there are only a few

well-stocked libraries. Unfortunately, the situation is even worse in the Baltistan division, where the only notable library is the Municipal Library Skardu. Likewise, the high cost of books, digital distractions due to the rise of social media and digital entertainment, and language barriers are major concerns in the way of developing a habit of book reading.

To foster a stronger reading culture in Gilgit-Baltistan, several steps can be taken. The government and NGOs should invest in building new libraries in different districts or improve the standard of existing ones. For instance, the first library of the Baltistan division was built in 1954 in Tehsil Mehdiabad of District Kharmang, but its current condition is deplorable.

Additionally, promoting book clubs and reading circles, encouraging digital reading, and supporting local writers by publishing books in local languages can make reading more accessible and culturally relevant. By embracing the power of books, the people of this mountainous paradise can bridge the gap between tradition and modern knowledge and move towards becoming a triumphant nation.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2025/02/23/cultivating-a-reading-culture-in-gilgit-baltistan/>

### **‘AJK’ President urges global role in Kashmir resolution**

*The Nation, 24 February 2025*

‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’ (AJK) President Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry has called on the

international community to actively contribute to resolving the Kashmir dispute.

During a meeting with U.S. Congressman Tom Souzzi in New York, Chaudhry emphasized that lasting peace in the subcontinent is impossible without addressing the long-standing issue.

He stressed that Kashmir is central to regional stability, warning that tensions between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan pose a global threat.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/24-Feb-2025/ajk-president-urges-global-role-in-kashmir-resolution>

### **Gilgit-Baltistan's Power Crisis: Darkness in a Land of Abundance**

*Friday Times, 24 February 2025*

Gilgit-Baltistan, often referred to as Pakistan’s crown jewel, is renowned for its breathtaking landscapes and strategic significance. The region is abundant in minerals, water reserves, and tourism potential. Despite this immense significance, Gilgit-Baltistan remains underdeveloped and grapples with serious issues related to fundamental rights, such as energy crises, water scarcity, and inadequate education and healthcare facilities. The unfulfilled promises of development contrast sharply with these hardships, forcing people to protest for basic needs, which is a reflection of leadership failure.

Due to its high altitude and mountainous terrain, the region is considered one of the coldest areas in

Pakistan, experiencing extreme cold during the winter season. The harsh weather makes life miserable, and the public remains deprived of fundamental necessities. As a citizen of Pakistan, I have personally realised how far behind the region is in terms of convenience and opportunities compared to other cities. These issues prompt many of us to leave our homes in search of necessities, enduring significant suffering in the process. Unfortunately, our government lacks the will to address this injustice and fails to properly utilise the budget allocated by the federal government. Upon reviewing the budget for 2024-25, we found that the Annual Development Programme (ADP) has been allocated Rs. 20 billion, while the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) allocation for the same period stands at Rs. 13.5 billion. Despite these allocations, there is little to no visible improvement in the energy sector, infrastructure, healthcare sector, and education system. The funds for development often remain underutilised or mismanaged, leaving the people to struggle with inadequate resources and harsh living conditions. Everyone is aware of these issues, yet no one is willing to take a step toward positive change.

In this modern era, energy, one of the most critical necessities, plays a vital role in daily life. From offices and businesses to education and households, almost every task depends on electricity. As noted by Ahmad

Naeem, Pakistan continues to face a severe energy crisis, a longstanding issue that has persisted for years, causing significant economic losses. To address this, Independent Power Producers (IPPs) were introduced under various energy policies, aiming to boost electricity production. However, despite their presence, Pakistan's energy sector remains inefficient and unable to meet its growing demand. This raises an important question: does Pakistan truly need IPPs, or do they worsen the crisis? Moreover, are IPPs genuine foreign direct investors, or are they a case of round-tripping FDI? These concerns pose serious challenges for the government of Pakistan. However, my primary focus here is to highlight how this crisis affects the people of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), who suffer from severe energy shortages. When the issue was raised in the Parliament House in Islamabad, Senator Zeeshan Khanzada, a member of the committee, proposed solar energy as a viable solution, particularly for areas where hydroelectricity is not feasible.

The total installed capacity is nearly 70 MW, but in winter, only 33 MW is supplied, while 59 MW is available in summer. Nowadays, news circulating in GB media highlights that Gilgit is struggling with severe electricity issues. In winter, the region faces 19-20 hours of severe load shedding, which forces the public to take to the streets to protest and block roads. Yet, there is no sign of relief from the government or leadership, who remain silent despite



the existence of numerous power stations in the region.

In Gilgit-Baltistan, there are 148 power stations built across 10 districts, with each district having more than 10 hydropower stations. Although the number of power stations is increasing, the power crisis still persists. A few of the main reasons for this are that power stations are constructed without proper R&D studies, without cost and benefit analysis, and without assessing project feasibility. Additionally, in winter, the streams freeze, causing the water flow to stop. As a result, power generation drops significantly because there isn't enough running water to produce electricity, leading to a wastage of money.

There are 24 power stations allocated exclusively for Gilgit city, yet political elites and bureaucrats enjoy uninterrupted electricity with special privileges 24/7. Meanwhile, the general public continues to suffer from power shortages due to poor management and inefficiencies.

The total installed capacity is nearly 70 MW, but in winter, only 33 MW is supplied, while 59 MW is available in summer. This stark disparity further reflects the mismanagement and incompetence of the Water and Power Department (PWD), which is responsible for project selection and implementation. Despite having the necessary infrastructure, the absence of an effective check-and-balance system has led to widespread inefficiencies, leaving the common people in distress.

One of the key reasons for this power crisis is the seasonal fluctuation in electricity production. The Nalter Power House (Ph-IV) and (Ph-V) generate the highest electricity output throughout the year, with 16 MW and 12 MW in summer, while 7 MW and 5 MW in winter, as their production declines due to reduced water flow. In contrast, some smaller power stations experience only a slight difference in production between seasons. This imbalance in generation capacity exacerbates the crisis, plunging the city into darkness.

To address this crisis, the government could provide thermal generators as a temporary solution, but they come with a high cost, as fuel-based electricity is both expensive and unsustainable. Instead of relying on short-term fixes, the government must prioritise long-term alternatives to ensure a stable energy supply and put an end to public grievances. The world is advancing toward modernisation, and yet we are still protesting for basic necessities. Such issues paralyze daily life activities, such as online business operations, and create contradictions for students, threatening livelihoods. Even through these ongoing challenges, the administration claims that 10 MW of power has been added to the Gilgit grid in 18 months under the present government. However, these increases remain insufficient given the region's growing energy demand and persistent shortages.

To effectively address the electricity challenges in Gilgit-Baltistan in the

near future, the government should adopt liberalised energy policies that incentivise foreign investors to bring in advanced technologies for electricity production, creating competition in the energy market and encouraging multiple players to invest, ultimately improving efficiency. Furthermore, before initiating any project, conducting a cost-benefit analysis is essential to ensure the economic feasibility of that project.

Additionally, ensuring that rules and regulations are applied uniformly across all sectors of society is crucial. This would eliminate privileged access to electricity and promote fairness and transparency in the distribution system, ensuring that electricity is available to all citizens on equal terms. Lastly, beyond policy reforms, the government should focus on diversifying energy sources by expanding solar and wind projects in remote areas where traditional electricity feasibility is impossible.

<https://thefridaytimes.com/24-Feb-2025/gilgit-baltistan-s-power-crisis-darkness-in-a-land-of-abundance?version=amp>

### **Two more bodies formed for talks with dam protesters**

*Dawn, 26 February 2025*

The Gilgit-Baltistan Apex Committee which met on Tuesday decided to form two high-powered committees to hold talks with the affectees of the Diamer-Bhasha Dam who were staging a sit-in and make recommendations for the federal committee.

The protesters have been staging a sit-in in Chilas, district headquarters of Diamer, in freezing temperatures and biting cold for the last 10 days for the acceptance of their 31 demands.

The federal committee was constituted by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to address grievances of Diamer-Bhasha Dam affected people.

Some of the demands of the protesters included 80 per cent royalty of Diamer-Bhasha Dam and 30pc royalty of Dassu Dam for Gilgit-Baltistan; free electricity to Diamer district and on discounted rate to the people of GB from the dam, compensation for 18,000 acres acquired for the dam, financial package for the remaining 3,000 families of affected by the dam, commercial and residential plots, education, health, sewerage projects, appointments of local people on the dam project from grade 1 to grade 16 and regularisation of contingent and daily wage employees.

Chilas sit-in enters day 10; demonstrators warn of March towards Bhasha Dam site if negotiations are delayed. A Gilgit-Baltistan government press release issued on Tuesday said the apex committee meeting was presided over by GB Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan. Senior civil, military officials attended the meeting.

The apex committee discussed law and order, regional security, public safety, educational reforms, tourism and sports events, police reforms, the safety of the Karakoram Highway and Jaglot-Skardu Road, and measures to curb smuggling of illegal arms and drugs.



The two high-powered committees will hold talks with the protesters and draft their recommendations for the federal committee. After submitting the recommendations, members of the federal committee will meet the protesters to determine the next course of action through mutual consultation. The apex committee urged the dam affectees to form their own representative body to facilitate negotiations.

The meeting expressed firm commitment to ensure law and order in Gilgit-Baltistan through coordinated efforts. Meanwhile, the sit-in being held by those displaced during the construction of the dam continued on 10th day on Tuesday.

Speaking to protesters, the head of Protest Movement Committee (PMC), Hazratullah, announced that the committee would launch Plan B of the protest if their demands are not met till Wednesday.

Under Plan B, the protesters will march towards the Diamer-Bhasha Dam site to halt all construction activities. Earlier, the PMC had announced that it will march towards the dam site on Tuesday, but postponed the march till Wednesday after a request of the federal government officials.

“The federal government authorities have requested us to wait until Wednesday, promising us that the federal committee members will reach Chilas and, therefore, it has been decided to wait until Wednesday to

start the Plan B,” Mr Hazratullah told protesters.

“If the federal committee members fail to reach Chilas by noon Wednesday, the protesters will implement Plan B and they will march towards the dam site and shut down all activities until their all demands are met,” he added. At the site, the protestors “will storm Wapda offices, dismantle their premises, and throw their machinery into the river”. He warned that the responsibility for any consequences will be with the government.

He said a directive has been issued for all ongoing construction work at the dam site to be halted after 10am on Wednesday. Earlier, the PPP GB chapter president, Advocate Amjad Hussain, addressed the protesters and assured them of his full support.

He said the dam is a “Rs10,000 billion” project, but locals have been deprived of all the economic benefits from the dam. He said that if the protesters demands were not accepted, PPP ministers will resign from the GB government and join the protesters.

Advocate Hussain said that he will request PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari and President Asif Ali Zardari to implement the 31 point demands of the protesters.

He said that Wapda top officials were responsible for creating the issue as they should have backed down from their stubbornness and ensured implementation of the demands of the local people.

According to Mr Hussain, the sit-in is still peaceful and it is a sign of an awakened nation. He said that those in power should not put these oppressed people to further test and accept their legitimate demands.

Meanwhile, GB Awami Action Committee also announced that it will start its march from Gilgit to Chilas in solidarity with the protesters.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1894384>

### **NA body endorses plan to promote mountaineering in GB**

*The Nation, 26 February 2025*

The National Assembly's Standing Committee on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan on Tuesday endorsed a proposal for the establishment of a mountaineering institute in Shigar to train national and international climbers and tourism industry personnel as part of efforts to promote adventure tourism in Gilgit-Baltistan.

A meeting of the Standing Committee on Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan was held at the Parliament House under the chairmanship of member of the National Assembly (MNA) Haji Imtiaz Ahmed Chaudhry. Besides taking up several other matters, the committee members reviewed a proposal for the establishment of a mountaineering institute in Shigar at a cost of Rs. 970.51 million and recommended its inclusion in the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for 2025-26.

The Secretary of the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan briefed the committee that the National Economic Council (NEC) had transferred the PSDP portfolio of the ministry to the Finance Division in June 2022, with monitoring responsibilities assigned to the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives.

The committee was informed that the project aimed to enhance the skills of national and international mountaineers while promoting adventure tourism in Gilgit-Baltistan. The initiative is expected to strengthen the local tourism industry and provide professional training opportunities to those associated with mountaineering and rock climbing.

During the meeting, the ministry also briefed the panel on the observance of important Kashmir-related days, including Kashmir Solidarity Day on 5th February, Youm-e-Istehsal on 5th August, and Black Day on 27th October. It was highlighted that these events are commemorated nationally and internationally through solidarity walks, media campaigns and engagement on digital platforms.

The panel was informed that leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference are regularly invited to participate in related events across Pakistan. The standing committee also decided to invite officials from 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan to its next meeting for a detailed review of their ongoing projects. The Director

General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs briefed the panel on diplomatic efforts concerning the Kashmir issue, including discussions during the recent visit of the President of Turkiye to Pakistan.

The meeting, presided over by Haji Imtiaz Ahmed Chaudhry, saw the participation of Engineer Amir Muqam, Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan, MNAs Tahir Iqbal, Junaid Anwar Chaudhry, Abdul Qadir Khan, Dr Nikhat Shakeel Khan, Ms Farukh Khan, and Riaz Ul Haq, as well as respective secretaries of ministries.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Feb-2025/na-body-endorses-plan-to-promote-mountaineering-in-gb>

### **Govt 'agrees to accept' Bhasha dam protesters' demands**

*Dawn, 27 February 2025*

As the Chilas protest sit-in entered its 11th day, the federal committee formed by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif agreed on Wednesday to accept the demands of those affected by the construction of Diamer-Bhasha Dam to address their grievances.

According to a press release, the committee held a meeting in Islamabad under the chairmanship of Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Amir Muqam, who also leads the committee, to discuss the demands.

Federal Minister for Water Resources Musaddiq Malik, GB Chief Minister Haji Gulbar Khan, Wapda Chairman retired Lt Gen Sajjad Ghani, Kashmir Affairs Secretary Zafar Hassan, GB

Chief Secretary Abrar Ahmed Mirza and other relevant officials attended the meeting.

Addressing the meeting, Mr Muqam assured that the legitimate demands of the protesters would be met and that the federal committee would work towards finding a permanent solution to the issue.

The meeting focused on addressing the long-standing grievances of those affected by the Diamer-Bhasha Dam, including land compensation, water supply, sanitation, and the household resettlement package.

The GB chief minister informed the meeting that his government has formed a committee to resolve technical issues. It was agreed that senior officials from Wapda and the GB committee would work together to resolve issues related to land acquisition and resettlement for the dam-affected people.

The federal committee decided to continue efforts to resolve the matter amicably. Sources said the committee members eventually agreed to accept the protesters' demands. As per the protesters' demands, the committee members will visit Chilas, meet a representative body of the protesters and announce a strategy to address their concerns.

According to the sources, the 31-point charter of demands could not be resolved at once, as some points require approval from relevant departments. However, some demands, including

development schemes and jobs, fall within the authority of the committee members and will be announced in Chilas.

For the remaining points, representatives of the protesters and the federal committee will establish a timeline to address them through mutual understanding and consensus.

Despite the rain, protesters continued their sit-in in Chilas for the 11th consecutive day on Wednesday. The head of the protest movement, Hazratullah, said negotiations with the federal committee members were ongoing. He congratulated the protesters on their struggle, which had finally yielded results.

He announced that the federal committee members would arrive in Chilas once the weather improves and flights resume from Islamabad. He claimed that the committee members would announce the acceptance of the protesters' demands. Hazratullah said that until the federal committee's arrival, the sit-in would continue.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1894553/govt-agrees-to-accept-bhasha-dam-protesters-demands>

### **Multilingual Public Policy in Gilgit-Baltistan**

*Pamir Times, 26 February 2025*

Language is a fundamental human right and an essential tool for shaping public policy, creating social capital, and identifying patterns of thought and ideas. Language exists in multiple

forms, including verbal, nonverbal, and sign language.

More than 7,100 languages exist around the globe, and around 40% of them are endangered—playing a critical role in policy effectiveness. Language and public policy are deeply interconnected. Language is the lifeline of any public policy. Primarily, public policy serves as a reaction to human problems, depicting laws, regulations, programs, and decisions to address societal challenges effectively. Language is a key factor in making public policy successful.

In Pakistan, public policy is elitist-oriented rather than citizen-centric. It has failed to ensure effective service delivery and address the enormity of societal challenges. One of the major factors behind this failure is language.

Gilgit-Baltistan is a multilingual and multicultural society, with at least six languages spoken across the region. A critical question arises: why does linguistic diversity play a crucial role in the public policy process? Public policy in Pakistan is predominantly crafted in English, a symbol of linguistic imperialism, spoken by only 5% to 7% of the population and understood by up to 40 to 50 million people, out of the 240 million. This shows the disconnect between the policymakers and the governed. This despite of the fact that in remote areas of Gilgit-Baltistan, including Keris Valley, Hushe Valley, Dumsum, Darkut, Hundur, and Ghorsay, people neither understand

nor speak English, relying solely on their native languages. This linguistic gap results in the exclusion of large populations, especially laborers, farmers, and small business owners leading to poor policy implementation, dependence on bureaucracy for interpretation, and reduced policy effectiveness.

The policymaking process begins with problem identification, often carried out by Pseudo intellect legislative members, citizens, and civil society. However, civil society's influence is minimal. A stark example from Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly, Mushtaq Hussain, who cannot even speak the national language, Urdu, let alone English. Similarly, the Chief Minister of Gilgit-Baltistan, Haji Gulbar Khan, also cannot speak or understand English. If decision-makers themselves cannot comprehend policies in English, how can they effectively identify and address public concerns, ensuring good governance under such conditions becomes nearly impossible.

The next phase of the public policy process is agenda setting becomes another major challenge. While local stakeholders, including political activists, academicians, entrepreneurs, and industrial experts, do engage in discussions, the language barrier prevents them from fully understanding and contributing to policy debates. As a result, local citizens feel more confident communicating in their native languages, such as Balti, Shina and forth on.

Formulating public policy in English is not inherently problematic, but shifting towards multilingual governance can significantly enhance understanding, encourage citizen engagement, foster trust, build consensus, promote inclusivity, and drive sustainable socio-economic development.

India provides a valuable model for multilingual policy. Each Indian state recognizes its native language in governance. Tamil Nadu formulates policies in Tamil, while Karnataka does so in Kannada. Schedule 8 of the Indian Constitution recognizes 22 official languages, ensuring linguistic inclusivity in policymaking. In contrast, Pakistan's official language policy remains centered on English. Notably, Gilgit-Baltistan lacks official language. The government must take the initiative to recognize indigenous languages as official languages in the region, similar to India. Otherwise, without linguistic inclusiveness in public policy, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan will remain marginalized and dependent on the government executive.

A multilingual public policy approach would help preserve endangered languages, reduce ethnic and linguistic tensions, improve governance, enhance service delivery, promote socio-cultural inclusion, prevent conflicts, and foster consensus-building.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2025/02/26/multilingual-public-policy-in-gilgit-baltistan/>



## **Pakistan will never compromise on its sovereignty and defense: PM 'AJK'**

*Daily Parliament Times, 27 February 2025*

Prime Minister 'Azad Kashmir' Ch. Anwarul Haq has paid great tributes to the Armed Forces of Pakistan on the occasion of sixth anniversary of the Pakistan Air Force's (PAF) "Operation Swift Retort" that culminated successfully after shooting down an Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter jet that violated the airspace near Bhimber area of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) on February 27, 2019.

Terming the shooting down of the IAF jet as one of the brightest chapters in the PAF's history, he said that it was on this day when the PAF launched a successful surprise attack, taking down Indian fighter aircraft in an aerial dogfight.

"Abhinandan the pilot of the downed jets was captured by the brave residents of Bhimber and handed over to the Pakistani forces", the PM said, adding that the incident would be remembered in history as a symbol of courage and professional brilliance.

The Operation Swift Retort not only dashed the enemy's ambitions to the ground but also proved the PAF's brilliant capabilities, professionalism and integrity. "It also conveyed a message clear to the world that Pakistan will never compromise on its sovereignty and defense", the PM said. This day, he said, reminds us of the national unity and military superiority that are the hallmark of Pakistan.

Prime Minister Chaudhry Anwarul Haq said that the entire Pakistani nation was proud of its armed forces. "The Kashmiri people can never forget the supreme sacrifices made by the soldiers of the Pakistan army while guarding the Line of Control", he added.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2025/02/27/pakistan-will-never-compromise-on-its-sovereignty-and-defense-pm-ajk/>

## **Court suspends GB gov't's move to hike mountaineering royalty, trekking fee**

*Dawn, 1 March 2025*

The Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Court on Friday suspended the decision of GB government to increase mountaineering royalty and trekking fee in the region. The court also suspended increase in Central Karakoram National Park (CKNP) environmental management fee. The GB Chief Court also sent notices to respondents of the case. Pakistan Association of Tour Operators (Pato) President retired Captain Niaz Ahmed, through his counsel advocate Sanan Ahmed, had submitted a petition in the GB Chief Court challenging the decision of GB government to increase royalty fee of issuance of mountaineering and trekking expeditions and hike in the CKNP fee.

Respondents of the case were GB government, GB chief secretary, GB secretary for tourism, secretary finance, GB council chairman and director of CKNP. The petitioners pleaded that the



abrupt decision of the GB government to increase the royalty fee of mountaineering and trekking expeditions as well CKNP fee by 300 per cent under the GB Finance Act, 2024, has badly affected adventure tourism in Pakistan.

The petitioners alleged that the GB government's decision of massive hike is detrimental to the region's growing adventure tourism sector. Pato President retired Captain Niaz Ahmed told Dawn that Pato had approached the GB government, the federal government and top officials requesting them to withdraw the decision and explained its impacts on adventure tourism in the country, but no-one considered the issue and finally Pato had to approach the court to seek justice.

He said the GB government's decision badly impacted the adventure tourism in the country.

"Because of the government's this decision, not a single expedition team attempted to climb peaks in the country this winter and 70 per cent foreign mountaineers and trekkers cancelled their plans to visit Pakistan for climbing and trekking purpose, the Pato president said. Captain Ahmed said that Pakistan earned direct foreign exchange through foreign tourists.

"A foreign adventure tourists spend thousands of dollars during his or her stay in Pakistan, which benefits locals and bring badly-needed foreign exchange to the country, he said. A large number of GB people, hotel

owners, transporters, shops owners and porters depend on adventure tourism for their means of living in the area.

He said the CKNP fee which charges from mountaineers and trekkers for environmental management has been increased up to 300 dollars, while performance of CKNP to environmental management at GB peaks remained zero.

He said that foreign adventure tourists prefer Nepal for mountaineering and trekking as permits fees for climbing peaks including eight thousanders, except Mount Everest, and trekking fees are less than Pakistan.

The mountainous region of the country is home to the world's highest peaks.. Foreign and national adventure-seekers, including climbers and trekkers, visit Gilgit-Baltistan in large numbers every year.

Pato members said that the GB government has significantly jacked up the royalty and mountaineering fees, including trekking permits fee, making them the most expensive in the region.

They explained that one foreign expedition on K-2 fetched about \$60,000 to GB, benefiting the government, tour operators, the hospitality sector, transporters, the aviation sector, high-altitude porters and rescue service providers.

"However, the increase in the royalty and permit fees has made it hard for the tour operators to sell mountain expeditions and treks to foreign and

domestic clients,” they pointed out. Tour operators expressed reservations that they were not considered a stakeholder by the government while it was formulating the policy.

GB Chief Court judge Raja Shakeel Ahmed conducted the hearing of the case on Friday. After arguments from the Pato counsel, the judge admitted the case for regular hearing and ordered suspension of 300 per cent increase in the royalty fee for mountaineering and trekking and CKNP fees till the next hearing of the case. Notices were also issued to respondents of the case.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1895044/court-suspends-gb-govts-move-to-hike-mountaineering-royalty-trekking-fee>

## **Economic Developments**

### **Two-day event organized for tourism promotion in ‘Azad Kashmir’**

*Daily Parliament Times, 24 February 2025*

Two-day event on 22nd and 23rd February was organized for tourism promotion in the picturesque snowy regions of ‘Azad Kashmir’, Jhelum Valley, Limnian, Dukhan and Panjoti.

Which included an exciting bike ride championship and a spectacular trekking competition, organized by RHTT AJK in collaboration with Tourism Department Azad Kashmir, Pak Army, District Administration.

The event was attended by two famous bikers, TRD (The Rider Creed), and (Biker Bikers), and female biker Javeria

Zeb also showed off her charms. Also 25 trekkers have joined, and united to promote tourism in this beautiful valley. The participants and people of the region thanked the organizer and tourism department of ‘Azad Kashmir’ for organizing the event.

The trekking competition featured two outstanding women trekkers, Zoya Alvi and Iman Gilani from Hazara University Mansehra, Department of Tourism who fearlessly traversed the challenging snowy mountain pass.

Event organizer Sania Khan, who herself became the first female athlete to reach the panjoti top while participating in snow trekking, also played an important role in organizing the event. She set an example of teamwork and enthusiasm along with stalwarts like Hamid Gilani Rabia Ghafoor, Raja Adeel, and Ghansfar Raees.

The guests and stakeholders of the event congratulated the organization for organizing this event for the development of the region and said that they will continue to cooperate in such events in the future. At the regional level, Khawaja Ahsan Shaukat and Ch. Javed Siraju Din contributed greatly to the success of the event.

At the end of the event, the organizers also distributed shields and certificates to the trekking winners and bikers. The event participants thanked and said that these types of events and competitions are very important. Kashmir is paradise and Kashmiri

people are very hospitable. They will participate in such events with full enthusiasm in the future as well.

The event head was deeply thanked all the participants, bikers and stakeholders, and said that the event was not just a competition, it was a celebration of the spirit of the community, determination, and the icy beauty of power. The echo of laughter, the enthusiasm of the competition, and the combined experiences made bonds that will remain after the event.

When the sun rose over the snowy mountains, it not only illuminated the scene but also gave new hope to those who came out for the Tourism Promotion event.

<https://www.dailyparliamenttimes.com/2025/02/24/two-day-event-organized-for-tourism-promotion-in-azad-kashmir/>

### **Education ministry unveils proposed PSDP of Rs42.585bn**

*Business Recorder, 27 February 2025*

The Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training unveiled its Public Sector Development Program (PSDP) for the fiscal year 2025-26, with a proposed allocation of Rs42,585.29 million.

This includes Rs36,410 million earmarked for 13 ongoing projects and an additional Rs6,175.29 million allocated for nine new initiatives, reflecting the government's commitment to advancing education, professional training, and digital transformation across the country.

Among the key proposals is the establishment of a Degree College in Nilore Sector (ICT), with a budgetary demand of Rs600 million, addressing public need and committee recommendations.

Additionally, Rs978 million has been proposed for digital transformation initiatives in 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' and Gilgit-Baltistan to enhance employability, while Rs500 million will fund the creation of 30 rural and 20 urban STEAM Robotics Labs to foster innovation and technological skills.

A meeting of National Assembly Standing Committee on Federal Education, Professional Training, National Heritage and Culture was held under the chairmanship of Dr Azimuddin Zahid Lakhvi at National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) Islamabad, to scrutinise the budgetary proposals of Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training relating to PSDP 2025-26.

Regarding strengthening foundational education, the committee proposed setting up learning centres in 50 schools, with 40 in rural and 10 in urban areas. Furthermore, Rs300 million has been allocated for establishing Skill Labs in 80 institutions, equipping students with practical, job-ready skills. The committee also recommended expanding access to quality education by establishing sub-campuses of institutions like the Pakistan Institute of Fashion Design

(PIFD), National Textile University (NTU), and National College of Arts (NCA) in rural areas of Karachi. In an effort to address the issue of out-of-school children, the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) will establish community schools and Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) centres in Karachi slums, with a total allocation of Rs997 million, including Rs347 million proposed for 2025-26.

During the meeting, the committee recommended and passed, “The Reservation of Special Seats for Deserving Persons in Universities Bill, 2024.” The committee recommended that private universities and institutions allocate 15 per cent of their seats to deserving students, providing them with free education. This initiative, to be fully funded by the private universities and institutions themselves, aims to support students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds and marginalised communities.

The National Curriculum Council has approved new curricula for entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and climate change, with school support specialists set to be introduced in 100 schools to enhance educational outcomes.

A significant allocation of Rs1,633 million has been proposed to upgrade special education centres and institutions in Islamabad under the Directorate General of Special Education (DGSE). The committee also

emphasised the need to increase the budget for upgrading schools and colleges, particularly, in rural areas, to bridge the urban-rural education divide.

Additionally, the committee urged the ministry to expedite the regularisation process for all daily wage teachers serving in Islamabad colleges, prioritising those who have been imparting education for over a decade on meager wages, and called for immediate issuance of posting orders to teachers who have already been regularised, particularly those waiting for over a year.

The meeting was attended by Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Dr Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, secretary and other senior officials of the Education Ministry.

<https://www.brecorder.com/news/40350309/education-ministry-unveils-proposed-psdp-of-rs42585bn>

## **From Vernacular Urdu Media**

### **Closed for a year Neelum Jehlum Power Plant requires 23 Arab Rupees for Repair**

*Jammu and Kashmir Times, 24 February 2025*

The Neelum Jhelum power plant is closed for a year and for maintenance it requires an amount of 23 Arab. From last year May, it remains closed and given this it is causing a loss of more than 55 Arab. For repair purposes, the project administration has demanded an amount of 21-23 Arab. According to the media reports, the Neelum-Jhelum

power project which was built at a cost of 508 Arab rupees remains closed since May 2024. For repairing Neelum Jhelum project, it is being assumed a Chinese company will be given its contract. However for that, there is a need of approval from the federal government. According to the sources, it will take one year for the repairment of the power project. Each year, Neelum Jhelum would produce an electricity worth 4 Arab and 50 Crore and with its service remaining suspended, it is causing a damage of more than 55 Arab for an annual year.

<https://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Resize-of-FRONT-PAGE-24.jpg>

### **‘Azad Kashmir’ government must immediately resolve the challenges faced by the common people**

*Jammu and Kashmir Times, 24 February 2025*

‘Azad Kashmir’ government must take immediate initiatives to resolve the challenges faced by the residents of the region and land grabbing under the garb of development must be stopped. Liberation League Saudi Arabia branch chief Mohamamd Ramzan Bhat said that local bodies are established to furnish facilities to the locals and not to add troubles to them. The government has failed to deliver. The officer instead of delivering on housing schemes have themselves occupied several plots, which they have registered on the names of their close relatives and acquaintances. This institution has

failed to live on the aims and principles of its establishment.

<https://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Resize-of-PAGE-03-2-11.jpg>

### **Talks with Adhoc employees ‘successful’, protests all across ‘Azad Kashmir’ deferred**

*Jammu and Kashmir Times, 24 February 2025*

Employees of the Adhoc teacher waiting list 2024 have demanded their regularization from the government. If the government doesn’t make their regularization until 15 Ramadan, an indefinite protest call will be issued. Such thoughts were shared by member core committee waiting restoration list Ali Raza Kazmi, former president teacher’s organization Qashif Shaheen, candidate for the post of President Teacher’s organization Sayeed Tahir Hussain Shah, and Sayeeda Kausar during a press conference. It was told that the ‘Azad Kashmir’ teacher’s organization stands with the decision of the adhoc employees, and in the past too, the government while making the merit list did the injustice.

<https://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Resize-of-FRONT-PAGE-24.jpg>

### **From Social Media**

**JAMIL NAGRI @jamilnagri**

*28 February 2025*

Snow normally falls in the months of December and January in GB, but this



year the area has received snowfall in the end of February.

The climate change impacts are visible here, difficulties and joy of the locals.

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/jamilnagri/status/1895040042814341570>

**WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti**

27 February 2025

Baba Jan, along with nationalists, is trying to exploit the Diamer sit-in, says Chief Minister

#chiefminister #gilgitbaltistan #diamer #DiamerBashaDam #protest #strike #Nationalists #Antipakistani #hunza #BabaJan

Link to the video:

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/1895014492150301176>

**JAMIL NAGRI @jamilnagri**

27 February 2025

Federal government finally agreed to settle Diamer Basha Dam affected people issues, despite rain, protesters continued sit-in at Chilas, read the developments in detail.

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/jamilnagri/status/1895039398128861648>

**WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti**

25 February 2025

The Provincial Apex Committee has formed a committee under the

leadership of Additional Chief Secretary Gilgit-Baltistan Mushtaq Ahmad to review the Charter of Demands of the Haq Do Dam Banao Tehreek.

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/1894451499406696649>

**PAMIR TIMES @pamirtimes**

24 February 2025

The “Haqooq Do, Dam Banao” protest has entered its ninth day, with demonstrators demanding their due rights as affectees of the under-construction Diamer-Bhasha Dam. Gathered in the heart of Chilas, the protesters have presented a 31-point charter of demands, urging authorities to address their concerns regarding compensation, resettlement, and livelihood security. While they do not oppose the dam’s construction, their slogan—“Give us our rights, build the dam”—reflects their call for justice before progress. The sit-in continues despite several rounds of negotiations, between the federal and regional governments, and the protesters. #gilgitbaltistan #diamer #Pakistan

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/pamirtimes/status/1893896904809046138>



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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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