

Weekly POK News Digest

(A weekly news digest on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir)

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POK
Relief Efforts
Gilgit-Baltistan
Federal Board of Revenue
Joint Awami Action Committee
Power Distribution System
Environmental Security
CPEC



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

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Political Developments

Political system restored, PPP enjoys full public trust: 'AJK' PM

Dawn, 19 January 2026

'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) Prime Minister Raja Faisal Mumtaz Rathore on Sunday said the political system in the state had been fully restored and the people had shown complete confidence in the leadership of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), particularly its chairman, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. Addressing a public gathering in Charhoi, in southern Kotli district, he said the PPP had taken over the government in challenging circumstances to prevent disorder and stabilize the state.

"In just two months, we have achieved what could not have been done in years," he said, highlighting initiatives including the final stages of converting 'AJK' Bank into a scheduled bank, the launch of health cards across the state, establishment of separate educational boards in all three divisions, and reductions in property tax rates.

Mr Rathore asserted that the government had taken every step in the interest of ordinary citizens, giving them direct access to the Prime Minister's House and Secretariat, which he described as proof that it is a government of the people. He reiterated that all demands of the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) had been addressed without delay,

reflecting the party's commitment to public service. "Our foundation is rooted in the people, and any delay in addressing public issues is contrary to our ethos," he said. "This system reflects public confidence, and the state cannot afford any disorder. Concrete steps are being taken to secure a bright future for our youth."

He described the current tenure as a "trial," saying the real beginning would come after the 2026 elections, when the PPP would again form the government. "The PPP is the only true representative of the public, which has guided the nation through every crisis. It's why the public wholeheartedly rewards our party with a mandate to serve them," he added. The 'AJK' premier also announced development packages for Charhoi aimed at benefiting local communities.

Addressing the gathering, former Pakistan Prime Minister Raja Pervez Ashraf praised the people of Charhoi for their support to PPP, which he said had always stood by the public during difficult times. He lauded PM Rathore for restoring confidence and maintaining peace in 'AJK', predicting that the party would secure a strong majority in future elections through its performance.

The event also featured speeches by PPP Central Secretary-General Humayun Khan, 'AJK' chapter President Chaudhry Muhammad Yasin, and cabinet members including

Chaudhry Rafique Nayyar, Chaudhry Qasim Majeed, Amir Yasin, and Chaudhry Muhammad Akhlaq.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1967703/political-system-restored-ppp-enjoys-full-public-trust-ajk-pm>

Pak-Turk Maarif announces MAGIS 2026-1 in 'AJK'

The Nation, 19 January 2026

Pak-Turk Maarif International Schools & Colleges have officially announced the launch of MAGIS 2026-1 (Maarif Entrance Exam), a merit-based admission and scholarship programme designed to identify talented and high-achieving students across Pakistan. In a significant development, MAGIS is being introduced in 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) for the first time, marking a historic milestone for students in the region.

The announcement also highlighted Pak-Turk Maarif's expansion with the establishment of its first-ever campus in 'AJK' the Pak-Turk Maarif International 'AJK' Muzaffarabad Campus aimed at providing quality international-standard education and new academic opportunities for local students. According to the details, students can apply for admission in Grades 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, as well as IGCSE-1, under the MAGIS 2026-1 programme.

The initiative seeks to promote academic excellence by offering deserving students access to Pak-Turk

Maarif's educational system through a transparent, merit-based assessment process.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/19-Jan-2026/pak-turk-maarif-announces-magis-2026-1-ajk>

One Killed, Three Injured as 5.8 Magnitude Earthquake Rocks Gilgit-Baltistan, Hitting Hunza and Ghizer Hardest

Pamir Times, 19 January 2025

A 5.8-magnitude earthquake struck parts of Gilgit-Baltistan late Monday morning, killing one person, injuring three others and triggering landslides that damaged homes and cut off road access in Hunza and Ghizer districts, officials said. Landslides were reported in multiple localities as the earth shook, sending clouds of dust into the sky.

The quake struck at around 11:30 AM, according to the Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority (GBDMA). While most districts escaped damage, Ishkoman Valley in Ghizer and Chipurson Valley in upper Hunza were among the worst affected areas.

In Ishkoman, a large boulder dislodged by the tremor struck two men riding a motorcycle near the Badswat area. Khush Baig, 60, a resident of Bilhanz, died on the spot, while Afzal Khan, 35, sustained serious injuries. He was given first aid at Imit Dispensary before being shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital in Gahkuch.

In Hunza, multiple landslides blocked the main access road to Chipurson Valley, cutting off several villages. Authorities also reported temporary blockages at different points along the Karakoram Highway between Nagar and Khunjerab, disrupting traffic.

Residents in Chipurson described scenes of fear as falling rocks and dust clouds forced families to rush out of their homes amid freezing temperatures. Severe damage was reported from Zoodkhon and Shitmerg villages, where a large number of houses were rendered uninhabitable. Damage was also reported from Shersabz, Reshit, and nearby settlements. Over 300 houses have reportedly been completely or partially damaged in Chipursan Valley, located close to the Wakhan region of Afghanistan

According to preliminary local estimates, more than 300 houses, along with cattle sheds, vehicles and other private property, were damaged across Chipurson Valley. Parts of the valley road were also badly affected, while cracks were reported in an under-construction powerhouse channel and water pipelines in the Yishkuk area. The GBDMA Hunza said two children were injured in Chipurson Valley. No fatalities were reported from the area. The injured were provided medical assistance and later shifted to Gilgit for further check-ups.

Talking to Pamir Times, local activist Haider Badakhsani said residents have demanded that Chipurson Valley be declared a disaster-hit area. He said the valley has experienced repeated tremors over the past several months, creating widespread fear, but the latest earthquake was the strongest and most destructive. He stressed the urgent need for immediate road clearance, improved medical facilities, heating arrangements for tents amid sub-zero temperatures reaching minus 25 degrees Celsius, and the evacuation of families from high-risk zones to safer locations. He also called for the restoration and expansion of cellular communication services, noting that mobile signals are currently available only in Reshit and Shersabz.

He further said that the Chipurson community had requested the Xinjiang government in China to provide prefabricated houses and coal for the affected communities. According to him, the Chinese authorities have sought an official request from the Government of Pakistan. He said the Deputy Commissioner Hunza has already written to the Home Secretary, who indicated that such requests can be processed through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The community has urged the federal and Gilgit-Baltistan governments to expedite the process so that around 600 prefabricated houses can be arranged before peak winter conditions worsen.

The GBDMA Hunza confirmed that the earthquake severely affected Chipurson Valley, damaging and, in some cases, collapsing houses and cattle sheds. Although no loss of life was reported from the valley, two children sustained injuries. Officials said the injured were provided immediate medical assistance, were in stable condition, and were later shifted to Gilgit for further medical check-ups.

In response to the situation, C&W Department machinery from Sost and Passu was mobilised for immediate road clearance in Chipurson Valley. Officials said a blade tractor had already reached the affected sites, while a wheel dozer was dispatched and was enroute to clear heavy debris. Rescue 1122 teams from Gojal were also deployed and assisted in evacuating the injured children and supporting local communities.

To strengthen medical preparedness, one ambulance was placed on standby at RHC Sost, while another ambulance was stationed at Kirmin in Chipurson. Authorities said detailed damage assessments and relief activities would begin once road access to Chipurson Valley is fully restored.

The Deputy Commissioner Hunza, along with Assistant Directors of GBDMA, remained in close coordination throughout the day, closely monitoring the evolving situation and directing field teams.

Officials emphasised that all relevant departments had been placed on high alert to respond swiftly in case of aftershocks or further emergencies.

Authorities confirmed that no damage or casualties were reported from other districts of Gilgit-Baltistan, including Gilgit, Nagar, Diamer, Astore, Skardu, Shigar, Ghanche and Kharmang. All major roads remained open, except for the Chilim–Deosai road in Astore, which was already closed due to seasonal conditions.

Residents in vulnerable areas have been advised to remain cautious, avoid travelling near steep slopes, and immediately report any signs of fresh landslides or structural cracks. The GBDMA said it would continue to issue updates as assessments are completed and access routes are restored.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2026/01/19/one-killed-three-injured-as-5-8-magnitude-earthquake-creates-havoc-in-hunza-and-ghizer-districts/>

Muslim Conference vows full-scale contest in 'AJK' polls

Daily Times, 20 January 2026

The Muslim Conference (MC), once a dominant political force in 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK), on Monday announced that it would field candidates in all 45 constituencies in the upcoming general elections. The announcement came during the party's 'Kashmir Banega Pakistan' convention in Muzaffarabad.

Addressing the gathering, MC president and former 'AJK' premier Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan said the party would contest elections with "full strength, preparation and commitment," aiming to restore its relevance in the region. He described the MC as a guarantor of the dignity of future generations and stressed its continued unconditional commitment to Pakistan.

The Muslim Conference had held power multiple times before 2011, but its influence waned with the rise of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in the region. In 2011, the party was reduced to three seats, and in the last two elections, it secured only one seat, won by Sardar Attique from Bagh district. Recent defections, including that of Saqib Majeed to the PML-N, were acknowledged but did not deter the party's resolve.

Sardar Attique also reaffirmed his support for Pakistan's military role in politics, citing Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos as evidence of the country's defensive capabilities. He described the slogan "Kashmir Banega Pakistan" not just as a political statement but as a guarantee of South Asia's secure future, emphasizing the sacrifices of martyrs in occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

He further warned that instability in 'AJK' is fueled by foreign conspiracies and that the idea of an independent Kashmir would jeopardize regional

stability. The convention was attended by senior MC leaders, including former president Mirza Muhammad Shafiq Jarra and Secretary General Mehrun Nisa, who also addressed party supporters.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/1438260/muslim-conference-vows-full-scale-contest-in-ajk-polls/>

'AJK' Supreme Court seeks inquiry against food secretary

Dawn, 22 January 2026

Terming food adulteration in Muzaffarabad "highly alarming", the Supreme Court of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' on Wednesday ordered a crackdown on the sale of substandard and hazardous food items and directed the government to initiate a formal inquiry against the secretary food and senior officials of the 'AJK' Food Authority over alleged mismanagement, collusion and failure to discharge statutory duties.

The observations were made in an order passed by a full court bench headed by Chief Justice Raja Saeed Akram on a petition filed by civil society activist Shahid Zaman, after the court examined a detailed report submitted by the municipal magistrate and questioned senior officials of the food and livestock departments who had been summoned in person. The court noted that influential traders dealing in frozen meat and other food items had managed to continue their businesses by filing multiple petitions

and securing interim relief from courts, thereby preventing municipal authorities from taking action.

It observed that under the cover of such interim orders, substandard, non-certified and hazardous frozen meat continued to be sold in markets, posing a serious threat to public health.

Referring specifically to Muzaffarabad, the court said traders had allegedly prepared fake packaging of well-known companies and sold low-quality and partially melted frozen meat sourced from outside 'AJK' through brokers, using unsuitable vehicles that failed to maintain required temperatures. It also took note of allegations that fake registrations were issued under the names of registered companies with the connivance of officials.

The bench found that the laboratory operating under the 'AJK' Food Authority was neither ISO-certified nor capable of detecting key forms of adulteration, including artificial milk prepared from powder. It pointed out contradictions in laboratory reports showing increased fat and solid-not-fat (SNF) levels while simultaneously recording water adulteration, terming such reports unreliable. The judges observed that despite these deficiencies, the Food Authority had misinformed the High Court by claiming that all food testing was being conducted at its laboratory.

Expressing concern over the existing enforcement mechanism, the court noted that Food Authority officials themselves collected samples, tested them at their own laboratory and imposed penalties, leading to complaints from traders regarding arbitrariness and lack of transparency. The bench further observed that despite earlier directions to establish a proper laboratory, the authority had instead spent around Rs120 million on mobile laboratories, which failed to achieve their stated purpose.

Concluding that the Food Authority had failed to fulfil the very objective for which it was established, the court directed the government to initiate a formal inquiry against the secretary food and other concerned officers, particularly with regard to the procurement of mobile laboratories. It also ordered the issuance of show-cause notices for contempt of court over non-compliance with previous directives.

The court also expressed serious concern over the performance of the Food Authority staff and directed the government to induct suitably qualified personnel in line with the standards of the Punjab Food Authority. It ordered immediate advertisement of relevant posts and framing of eligibility criteria in consultation with the Punjab Food Authority to ensure transparent and lawful appointments.

Vacating all interim relief granted by subordinate courts in cases relating to adulterated food and milk, the apex court directed the High Court and lower courts to decide all such cases within six months. It ordered the sealing and permanent closure of businesses involved in fake registrations, forged packaging and the sale of hazardous frozen meat, and imposed a ban on the sale and distribution of frozen food items of fake companies across 'AJK'.

The court further directed the livestock department to ensure daily inspections at slaughterhouses and conduct surprise checks of meat and frozen food during transportation, ordering the seizure and destruction of frozen meat found above prescribed temperature limits. It also mandated cross-testing of milk samples at both the 'AJK' Food Authority laboratory and PCSIR Lahore to assess laboratory performance.

While highlighting regulatory failures, the court noted a positive development that local dairy farms had increased following action against the milk mafia, with approximately 23,000 litres of milk now being supplied daily, and directed authorities to encourage such farms in accordance with the law. Adjourning the proceedings, the court ordered that the case be relisted at the Mirpur Circuit and directed the personal appearance of the secretary food, officers of the Food Authority, the

director general livestock and the magistrate, Municipal Corporation Muzaffarabad, on the next date of hearing.

The court order came a day after 'AJK' Prime Minister Faisal Mumtaz Rathore had himself inspected the mobile food testing labs and termed their establishment an essential step towards protecting public health. The premier had also categorically ordered a strict and effective crackdown against food adulteration across the state.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1968284/ajk-supreme-court-seeks-inquiry-against-food-secretary>

Caretaker GB minister rejects Indian propaganda

Dawn, 22 January 2026

Caretaker Minister for Information Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) Ghulam Abbas on Wednesday rejected what he termed Indian propaganda, saying the people of GB have always been loyal to Pakistan and have consistently struggled to become a formal part of the country.

Speaking at the 'Meet the Press' programme at the National Press Club, along with GB chief minister's spokesperson Shabbir Mir, it was highlighted that Gilgit-Baltistan separated from India without major violence, as the people of the region voluntarily chose to hoist the Pakistani flag. He was accompanied by NPC

President Azhar Jatoi, President GB Journalists Forum Abrar Hussain Astori, NPC Governing Body member Jafar Ali Balti, and former RIUJ president Abid Abbasi.

“The Indian propaganda and the statements of Narendra Modi claiming that the people of GB are protesting against Pakistan to join India have become a laughing stock in the region,” Mr Abbas said, adding that “this narrative is not even being accepted by the international community.”

Mr Mir said that while separatist movements exist in many parts of the world, there is a strong voice and movement in Gilgit-Baltistan demanding that the region be made part of Pakistan and declared the country’s fifth province. Highlighting the priorities of the interim government, Mr Abbas said its first priority was to hold the upcoming elections in a “free and transparent” manner. He added that he believed in media freedom and that the system would remain open to scrutiny by the press.

He said all political parties would be given a level playing field to participate in the upcoming general elections in Gilgit-Baltistan. Responding to a question, Mr Abbas said efforts would be made to resolve issues related to internet coverage and information technology in collaboration with the federal Ministry of Information Technology.

“The caretaker chief minister has given clear directives to identify the problems faced by the people, such as electricity, internet and other issues, and to make every possible effort to resolve them,” he said, adding that the government would also ensure health and welfare measures for journalists.

The caretaker information minister said the government’s term ended in November 2025, after which Justice (R) Yar Muhammad was appointed as caretaker chief minister of Gilgit-Baltistan. He added that the caretaker government was making full efforts to address key issues in the region, including maintaining public order and resolving electricity shortages. It was further stated that the chief minister of GB had formed committees to address these matters and was personally monitoring their progress.

Mr Abbas also said that work on an important solar project in Gilgit-Baltistan was progressing rapidly, with tendering and other processes being fast-tracked.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1968288/caretaker-gb-minister-rejects-indian-propaganda>

Relief efforts intensify in Chipurson Valley after GB quake

Dawn, 22 January 2026

Traffic on the Chipurson Valley road, located near the Pakistan-China border close to the Khunjerab Pass, has been restored while government

departments, non-governmental organisations, and community groups have dispatched relief items to people affected by the recent quake in the remote valley of Gojal in Upper Hunza.

Local residents and political leaders have urged the government to declare Chipurson a calamity-hit area and provide immediate assistance to the affected population. On the instructions of Gilgit-Baltistan caretaker chief minister retired Justice Yar Muhammad, the GB Disaster Management Authority sent tents, food packs, kerosene heaters, blankets, warm clothes, and shawls to the affected communities. The link road to Chipurson, which had been blocked at several points, was reopened on an emergency basis.

A 5.8-magnitude earthquake jolted Gilgit-Baltistan on Monday, killing one person, injuring four others, and damaging dozens of houses, cattle sheds, and public and private infrastructure. Rescue 1122 reported that Chipurson Valley was the worst-affected area.

Hunza Deputy Commissioner Nizamuddin told Dawn that road access had been blocked and large cracks had appeared in homes, roads, and water channels supplying power houses. NGOs and community organisations from Karimabad, Gulmit, and nearby areas have launched relief campaigns, collecting firewood, food, and tents.

Local residents said over 200 families were forced to live in tents amid sub-zero temperatures, making survival especially difficult for children, elderly people, women, and patients.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1968329/relief-efforts-intensify-in-chipurson-valley-after-gb-quake>

‘AJK’ warns of tariff review amid surge in electricity use

Dawn, 23 January 2026

The ‘Azad Jammu and Kashmir’ (AJK) government has warned that failure to ensure responsible use of electricity could force a review of the region’s existing highly subsidised power tariffs, which may then be determined strictly on demand-and-supply principles. In a public message addressed to electricity consumers, ‘AJK’s secretary for energy resources Chaudhry Muhammad Tayyab said the government had, in response to public demand, substantially reduced electricity rates for both domestic and commercial users.

“This extraordinary reduction in tariffs has resulted in an equally extraordinary increase in electricity consumption,” he said, adding that the resulting pressure on the system had pushed the power distribution network to its limits. He explained that electricity demand peaked during winter in Muzaffarabad and Poonch divisions and during summer in Mirpur division, mainly due to extensive use of electric heaters,

geysers and, most notably, electric cooking stoves in winter, and the unchecked use of air-conditioners in summer.

“As a result, the power distribution system comes under intense pressure, making transformer burnouts and breakdowns a routine occurrence, which ultimately causes hardship for consumers,” Mr Tayyab said, describing the situation as highly unpleasant for the electricity department.

He said engineers and technicians were working round the clock, repairing damaged transformers and striving to keep the power supply running or to restore it at the earliest. Despite limited resources, he added, the ‘AJK’ government was making every possible effort to stabilise the distribution network, with valuable assistance from the federal government.

However, Mr Tayyab stressed that meaningful improvement in the prevailing situation was impossible without public cooperation, urging consumers to avoid unnecessary and excessive use of electricity, pay their bills on time, and clear all outstanding dues.

He specifically appealed to people to refrain from using electric stoves for cooking, exercise restraint in the use of air-conditioners, and limit the use of inverter ACs for heating during winter,

particularly by switching them off before going to sleep. He also called on households to avoid installing unnecessary decorative outdoor lights and searchlights.

Highlighting the issue of electricity theft, Mr Tayyab urged citizens to identify and report those involved, assuring that the identity of informants would be kept confidential. He said a dedicated helpline for reporting power theft would be announced soon, and advised consumers to immediately contact the nearest electricity department office in case of missing or faulty meters. The continued “irresponsible use of low-cost electricity”, he warned, would further worsen the situation.

“In such a situation, the government will be compelled to review the current highly subsidised tariffs and determine electricity prices strictly in accordance with demand and supply principles,” he added.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1968529/ajk-warns-of-tariff-review-amid-surge-in-electricity-use>

Constitution, Gilgit-Baltistan and FBR: When Administration Replaces Citizenship

The Friday Times, 24 January 2026

Since the Customs Act stands extended to GB, all the duties under the said Act (customs duties, regulatory duties, additional customs duties, etc.) will be collected on all imports through the

Customs Station at Sost, regardless of intended use. FBR reiterates that these measures collectively provide a strong, technology-driven, and enforceable framework to prevent leakage or misuse of tax-exempt goods. The business community and traders across Pakistan are assured that the exemption regime is carefully designed, closely monitored, and will not harm fair competition or legitimate trade interests in the rest of the country—FBR’s press release of December 30, 2025.

What is unfolding in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) today is not a technical dispute over customs procedures or tax exemptions. It is a perpetual constitutional crisis disguised as fiscal administration. The Federal Board of Revenue’s insistence that the Customs Act “stands extended” to GB and that all duties will be collected at the Sost Customs Post “regardless of intended use” is emblematic of a deeper malaise: the exercise of sovereign power without constitutional validity, and governance without citizenship.

This is not how constitutional democracies function. It is how emperors or dictators behave, even when a country has a written constitution. The Supreme Court of Pakistan, in *Civil Aviation Authority v Supreme Appellate Court, Gilgit-Baltistan and others* [PLD 2019 Supreme Court 357], while referring to Article 257 of the Constitution of the

Islamic Republic of Pakistan (“the Constitution”), noted: Therefore there can be no prejudice to Pakistan’s position on the plebiscite issue if the men, women and children living in GB are guaranteed basic human rights and a role in their own governance within a framework of a constitutional nature. Indeed, full rights for the people of GB can only bolster Pakistan’s case for the right of self-determination for all the people of Kashmir. It is unfortunate that even after the lapse of 78 years and clear judgments of the superior courts, the residents of GB are deprived of their fundamental rights and, for decades, have been victims of the high-handedness of the FBR.

The constitutional position is clear. Article 1(2) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (“the Constitution”) defines the territory of Pakistan. Gilgit-Baltistan is not included in it. This omission is not accidental, nor has it been cured by any constitutional amendment comparable to the 25th Constitutional Amendment, which absorbed the former Federally and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (FATA/PATA) into the federation and extended federal laws passed by Parliament by omitting Article 247 of the Constitution.

GB’s governance continues to rest on executive orders and administrative arrangements, not constitutional incorporation. This single fact has far-reaching consequences. Federal laws

apply by default only within the territory defined by Article 1(2) of the Constitution; otherwise, the State must demonstrate a constitutionally valid mechanism for extension. Administrative assertions, circulars, or press releases cannot substitute for constitutional competence. Yet this is precisely what the FBR has attempted to do—assert extension by declaration.

GB Chief Court Order of July 2024

The constitutional fiction created by the FBR collapsed when, on July 20, 2024, the Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Court restrained Pakistan Customs from collecting income tax and sales tax on goods imported for local consumption through the Sost Dry Port and declared its very presence unlawful. The GB Chief Court recognised what the federal executive prefers to ignore: these federal tax laws were never validly extended to GB, and therefore their enforcement in the said territory lacks legal authority.

The order of the Chief Court of GB goes far beyond the immediate relief it has granted to traders. It confirms a constitutional principle: federal fiscal authority does not arise from administrative convenience. It arises from constitutional inclusion or lawful extension; in the absence of either, enforcement becomes *ultra vires*.

FBR's high-handedness and unconstitutional acts in GB can be exposed by a simple example: if an

investor in GB wishes to establish a manufacturing concern to export fruit juices and other products after value addition, why should the company pay customs and other duties and taxes even on capital goods alone worth Rs. 5 billion, ordered from China through Sost?

In its press release, the FBR has observed: "However, to ensure fiscal discipline and prevent misuse, a strict annual ceiling of Rs. 4 billion has been imposed on the goods imported for GB under this arrangement." This ceiling has neither any economic rationale nor any legal sanction. It nevertheless exposes the FBR's mindset—that it is not a revenue-collecting entity but a growth-slayer.

FBR's Exemptions, Without Authority

On January 1, 2026, the FBR notified through SRO 01(I)/2026 the 'clearance of goods from Customs Dry Port at Sost' rules, introducing "special procedures" at the Sost Dry Port and exempting over 2,400 Chinese-origin items from sales tax, income tax, and federal excise duty. When these laws do not apply to GB, what is the authority to grant an exemption? Customs control, with the presence of a Collector of Customs stationed in GB by the FBR, is a fatal contradiction, as highlighted in the order of the Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Court. Unfortunately, this order, like many others of even Pakistani courts, is violated with impunity by the FBR.

If federal tax laws do not lawfully apply to GB, on what basis does the FBR grant exemptions from those very laws? This was the question before the Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Court.

If GB lies outside the constitutional command of Pakistan, what is the legal status of Pakistani customs officers operating there at all? An exemption presupposes jurisdiction. One cannot exempt what one has no authority to impose.

When the Customs Office Itself is Illegitimate

The Collectors of Customs are not advisory figures. They are statutory officers exercising coercive powers under the Customs Act, 1969, within a defined territory. Their authority is territorially bounded. Where the Constitution does not extend, neither can the office.

If Gilgit-Baltistan is not part of Pakistan under Article 1(2) of the Constitution, then the presence of a “Collector Customs, Sost” is constitutionally indefensible unless the State first demonstrates a valid legal bridge extending the Customs Act and the office it creates to GB.

No Statutory Regulatory Order (SRO) can perform that miracle. Delegated legislation cannot cure constitutional absence. By continuing to post Collectors of Customs in GB, the State is not administering law; it is normalising illegality through

repetition. It is a well-established legal rule that what cannot be done directly cannot be done indirectly.

The above legal tangle clearly establishes that all the actions of the FBR and customs authorities are coram non iudice. The superstructure built on an unlawful foundation cannot be sustained.

Customs Control is Sovereign Power, Not Technical Service

There is a dangerous tendency to trivialise customs as a technical border function. It is not. Customs control is an assertion of sovereignty. Declaring customs stations, appointing officers, prescribing clearance procedures, and imposing conditions are all exercises of State power over territory and people. To exercise that power without constitutional inclusion is to govern without consent.

Post-colonial ‘Recolonisation’

This brings us to the uncomfortable but unavoidable frame: post-colonial recolonisation. Colonial governance was marked by a familiar triad—rule without representation, taxation without citizenship, and administration without constitutional obligation.

Gilgit-Baltistan today fits this description with unsettling precision. GB’s people are expected to: (a) comply with federal regulatory regimes; (b) submit to customs controls and

conditional clearances; and (c) accept the authority of federal officers. GB residents are compelled to do all these acts while being denied: (i) representation in Parliament; (ii) inclusion under Article 1(2) of the Constitution; and (iii) equal constitutional citizenship.

This is not federalism. It is administrative colonialism—governance by notification rather than by consent.

The ‘Indian-Occupied Kashmir’ Contrast

The contrast with India’s approach to ‘Occupied Jammu and Kashmir’ after August 2019 is instructive, even if politically uncomfortable. India revoked the region’s special status and declared it a Union Territory—an act all freedom-lovers and advocates of self-rule rightly criticise. Yet from a constitutional standpoint, India claimed to have opted for clarity over ambiguity. It redefined the territory’s status within its constitutional framework and extended federal laws accordingly.

Pakistan, by contrast, has opted for permanent limbo: control without ownership, authority without responsibility. This ambiguity weakens our legal position internationally and erodes legitimacy domestically. The so-called experts advising those who matter in the Land of the Pure should study in detail the illegal acts of Modi

and file a case in the International Court of Justice, rather than forcing the people of GB not to import goods worth more than Rs. 4 billion.

Economic Costs and Strategic Damage

The consequences of constitutional inaction are not abstract but concrete. It is forcing economic uncertainty for GB businesses subjected to arbitrary conditions, creating legal instability as courts intervene sporadically against executive overreach, causing political alienation of a population that has repeatedly demanded integration, not exception, and producing strategic incoherence in a region central to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and regional connectivity. A State cannot indefinitely demand compliance while denying belonging and ownership.

FBR Cannot Impose “Conditions” on GB Businesses

FBR’s claim that it may impose conditions on GB traders—even where taxes are exempted—is constitutionally untenable for three reasons: (1) no territorial competence, as GB is not part of Pakistan yet; (2) no valid extension, as federal tax laws and the Customs Act, 1969 lack a constitutionally valid extension to GB; and (3) no lawful office, as Collectors of Customs in GB lack jurisdiction *ab initio*. Conditions imposed by the FBR without constitutional footing are void, not merely irregular.

The Only Sustainable Solution: Citizenship First

There is only one principled way forward. Pakistan must accept the legitimate, long-standing demand of the people of GB to be declared full citizens of Pakistan. This requires making GB a province after a resolution by the GB Assembly and through a constitutional amendment, and thereafter granting full representation in the National Assembly and the Senate. This alone will justify the application of federal laws. Anything less perpetuates a colonial relationship incompatible with Pakistan's constitutional ethos.

Conclusion

SROs cannot substitute for constitutional command. Exemptions cannot replace equality. Administration cannot stand in for citizenship. Gilgit-Baltistan does not need more "special procedures". It needs recognition. The era of ruling without inclusion must end.

Recolonisation through administration is not governance; it is abdication of constitutional responsibility. If Pakistan wishes to exercise authority in Gilgit-Baltistan, it must first extend citizenship, representation, and constitutional dignity. Until that day, every notification issued, every condition imposed, and every tax collector posted in GB will remain a reminder not of State capacity—but of

constitutional failure and extreme fiscal high-handedness.

<https://www.thefridaytimes.com/24-Jan-2026/constitution-gilgit-baltistan-fbr-administration-replaces-citizenship>

What the mountains can teach us

Dawn, 24 January 2026

The heated debate in the National Assembly over the cutting of a few thousand paper mulberry trees in Islamabad was a pleasant surprise. The concern expressed by members across the political divide, if genuine, indicated that parliament may finally be turning its attention to substantive public interest issues. This approach should be broadened into a national conversation on the environmental degradation being witnessed in the ecological chain across the country.

Pakistan stands at the front lines of the global climate crisis. Glaciers are retreating, floods are becoming deadlier, water is growing scarcer, and weather patterns are losing their reliability for the Indus basin. Governments respond with reports, task forces and foreign-funded projects, yet disasters persist — with ever-increasing intensity. We ignore that the land that is now Pakistan once possessed a functioning climate civilisation of its own.

For instance, for over 2,000 years, societies in Gilgit-Baltistan, particularly Baltistan, Gilgit and Chilas, survived in

one of the world's harshest environments with remarkable stability. Long before the arrival of Buddhism and later Islam, the region was shaped by an indigenous belief system known as Bön. It was more than a religion; it was a comprehensive environmental philosophy. Nature was not treated as dead matter but as morally alive. Mountains, glaciers, rivers, forests and wildlife were all understood as participants in a shared living world that deserved to be treated with respect. Thus they were protected as a collective community responsibility.

This worldview created what modern policy now calls 'environmental governance'. Upper watersheds were sacred and protected. Glacier zones were restricted. Forests were regulated. Grazing followed strict seasonal rules. Hunting was controlled. These standards were enforced collectively. Violating nature meant violating community norms.

The heart of this system lay in seasonal festivals that structured life in the mountains. Even today, Baltistan celebrates May Fang on Dec 21, marking the winter peak and the return of light, and Nauroz, the spring festival of renewal. But these went beyond celebrations. They were regulatory events. May Fang reinforced survival discipline during the dangerous winter period. Nauroz reset agricultural schedules, irrigation systems, social

contracts and land use. Other seasonal rituals controlled the opening of pastures, the protection of glaciers during peak melt, the storage of harvests and preparation for famine.

The cultural ethos was so strong that locals who migrated to other parts of the world have continued to celebrate these events. When I was a child, Nauroz was celebrated with special dishes and there were boiled, coloured eggs alongside greenery on a plate. We continue this ritual even today. In effect, society moved in rhythm with climate and ecology.

When Buddhism arrived and later Islam, this environmental civilisation was not destroyed. It was ethically transformed. Sacred mountains became signs of divine creation. Conservation became a moral duty. Festivals became moments of gratitude and prayer. Islam, in particular, reinforced environmental discipline with extraordinary clarity. The Quran warns humanity not to "transgress the balance" of nature and declares human beings as stewards of creation. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) forbade waste of water even in the presence of a flowing river and declared that planting a tree was an act of charity. In the mountains, these principles merged naturally with existing ecological customs.

This fusion produced centuries of environmental stability in a region where survival itself is a constant

struggle. Then, in the past 60 years, modern development dismantled this system. Roads, dams, concrete, mining and unregulated construction erased sacred geography. Seasonal rules collapsed under market pressures. Community authority weakened as centralised administration took over. Nature lost its moral meaning and became raw material. Towns are turning into sprawling *katchi abadis* spewing toxic gutter water that pollutes the clean sparkling streams.

The results are before us. Glaciers are melting faster. Floods are more violent. Springs are drying up. Food security is fragile. Conflicts over water and land are rising — not in this region alone; the entire country is suffering due to the criminal neglect of Pakistan's mountainous north. The tragedy is that Pakistan is now searching for climate solutions in foreign policy templates while ignoring a climate model that already existed within its own borders.

GB offers more than cultural nostalgia. It offers a framework of governance that modern policy desperately needs. The first lesson is that climate resilience cannot survive on technical planning alone. It requires cultural obedience. People protect what they believe in. Environmental law becomes powerful only when it is anchored in social values and moral conviction enforced by the community — not by green civil servants from other parts of the region in unplanned new district

administrative units who, blind to local conditions, have only added more confusion to the chaotic administrative nightmare of small wasteful new revenue districts.

Second, ecological management must be seasonal, not continuous. Ancient societies understood that nature functions in cycles. Modern policy treats resources as permanently available. That illusion is collapsing.

Third, community institutions are not obstacles to development; they are its foundation. No climate policy will succeed if it bypasses the cultural intelligence of the people who live with the land.

Pakistan's future climate policy must, therefore, undergo a fundamental shift. Environmental governance should be localised, culturally grounded and ethically reinforced. Protected climate zones must replace unregulated construction in watersheds and glacier buffers. Valley-level councils should regulate grazing, forestry and water according to seasonal cycles. Indigenous festivals should be formally integrated into disaster planning, water management and food security strategies. Education must restore the moral relationship between society and nature.

The mountains of Gilgit-Baltistan are not backward remnants of a forgotten past. They are a library of climate knowledge written over centuries of

living with glaciers, avalanches, droughts and floods. Pakistan can either continue importing climate policy from abroad or learn from its own civilisation. The current policies are a recipe for disaster and portend an alarming future for our rivers, our farms, cities and Pakistan itself.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1968761/what-the-mountains-can-teach-us>

Chupurson Earthquake: Urgent Need for Cash-Based Humanitarian Aid

Pamir Times, 25 January 2026

The recent earthquake in Chupurson Valley, Gojal Hunza, Gilgit Baltistan has left the remote mountain communities in a state of profound hardship. Entire villages were shaken by tremors and subsequent damage of houses, schools, community centres, irrigation infrastructures, animal sheds and land degradation by landslides, forcing families to abandon their ancestral homes and relocate to safer areas in the lower parts of the Gojal valley. This disaster struck on January 19, 2026 during the peak of winter, when temperatures plummet to as low as -25°C , compounding the suffering of those already vulnerable. The aftershocks and jolts are continuing till date. In such extreme conditions, survival without adequate shelter, heating, and food becomes nearly impossible, and the displaced population now faces the dual challenge of coping with the trauma of

loss while struggling to meet their most basic needs.

Relocation itself has proven to be a daunting process. Families uprooted from their homes must contend with unfamiliar locations, limited resources, and the logistical difficulties of transporting people, livestock, and essential goods through snowbound terrain. The sudden displacement has traumatised community to leave their homes and the uncertainty of returning back has created psychological distress. Children pregnant women, lactating mothers, elderly and the persons with special needs are particularly at risk, facing heightened exposure to illness, malnutrition, and the emotional toll of instability.

In this context, a cash-based humanitarian response emerges as the most effective and dignified solution. Unlike traditional in-kind aid, which often struggles to reach remote areas in time, monthly cash transfers empower families to prioritize their own survival strategies. Through secure digital platforms such as mobile banking and digital wallets, assistance can be delivered quickly and transparently, ensuring that funds reach those who need them most. Cash assistance provides families with the freedom to choose whether to spend on food, medicine, heating fuel, or other needs, while simultaneously protecting their dignity by allowing them to make decisions for themselves. Moreover,

digital transfers reduce the risk of corruption, enhance accountability, and streamline the distribution process in ways that bulky relief goods cannot.

The long-term benefits of this approach are equally significant. By combining transparency, efficiency, and respect for human dignity, cash-based assistance strengthens trust between communities and aid providers. It creates a foundation for recovery, enabling families to rebuild their lives with autonomy and hope. Moreover, digital transfers foster financial inclusion, equipping communities with tools that can help them withstand future shocks. Ultimately, this method ensures that life-saving needs are met while empowering families to move beyond survival toward resilience and self-reliance.

<https://pamirtimes.net/2026/01/25/chupurson-earthquake-urgent-need-for-cash-based-humanitarian-aid/>

Economic Developments

Pakistan, China set to ink MoUs in 10 agri-sectors

Dawn, 20 January 2026

Pakistan and China are set to sign multiple memorandums of understanding (MoUs) for private-sector joint venture investments worth millions of dollars across 10 key sectors of agriculture, it emerged from the Pakistan-China Agricultural

Investment Conference held in Islamabad on Monday.

The sectors in which agreements are expected to be signed include agriculture, food processing, livestock, fisheries, agri-inputs, farm machinery, renewable energy, logistics, technology and value-added exports. The conference drew strong participation from the private sectors of both countries, with 119 companies from China and 191 companies from Pakistan in attendance, reflecting growing bilateral commercial interest.

Agriculture has been officially elevated as a priority area of cooperation under the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The 10 priority sub-sectors identified for investment include agro-chemicals and inputs, agricultural machinery and solutions, food processing and value addition, meat and poultry, dairy inputs and processed products, fruits and vegetables, animal feed and related value chains, fisheries and aquaculture, cold chain systems and agricultural produce logistics, and food-grade packaging materials and equipment.

Making a comprehensive presentation on Pakistan's agriculture sector, the Ministry of National Food Security and Research stated that it plans to sign more than 25 sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and export protocols with key trading partners, including China, in 2026.

Pakistan's agricultural landscape reflects a challenging paradox: despite fertile land, low labour costs and a large domestic market, the country faces an estimated productivity gap of \$95 billion due to low technology penetration and inadequate infrastructure.

Addressing the conference, Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain said the ministry was fully committed to supporting Chinese investors, from facilitating regulatory processes to ensuring seamless coordination with all relevant government departments and institutions.

He said the government's objective was not merely to attract investment, but to make Pakistan a destination where Chinese enterprises could grow, innovate and succeed alongside Pakistani partners.

Addressing the conference, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Pakistan, being an agrarian economy, held immense and largely untapped potential in agriculture and could transform the sector not in years, but in months, by adopting modern technologies, improving productivity and strengthening cooperation with China.

He underlined the importance of deciding what to grow and export, developing value chains, cold storage and warehousing, and promoting

value addition to make Pakistani produce globally competitive. The PM praised China's achievements in agriculture, information technology, artificial intelligence, manufacturing efficiency and export competitiveness. He said Pakistan must aim to generate an agricultural trade surplus through higher yields, competitive costs and superior quality, with support from Chinese experts.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1967994/pakistan-china-set-to-ink-mous-in-10-agri-sectors>

Strong public-private partnership essential to unlock 'AJK's tourism, investment potential

The Nation, 25 January 2026

Prime Minister of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' (AJK) Faisal Mumtaz Rathore has highlighted the immense and untapped tourism potential of 'AJK', inviting the business community to play an active role in developing the sector as a key driver of economic growth, investment, and employment in the region.

He expressed these views while talking to a delegation of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), led by its President Sardar Tahir Mehmood, which called on him on Saturday to felicitate him on assuming the office of Prime Minister of 'AJK'. The ICCI delegation included Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub, Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, former President Mohammad Ejaz Abbasi,

Executive Members Zulqurnain Abbasi, Ishaq Sial, Najeeb Ellahi Malik, former SVP Naveed Malik, and senior members Israr ul Haq, Sardar Amjad and Azher Abbasi. Welcoming the delegation, the 'AJK' Prime Minister said that 'AJK's natural beauty, scenic landscapes, and favorable climate position it as one of the most promising tourism destinations in the region. He emphasized that tourism has the potential to stimulate economic activity, support small and medium enterprises, and create large-scale employment opportunities, particularly for the youth. He further highlighted that the 'AJK' government has planned an International Tourism Investment Conference in the month of February 2026. He added that he would visit ICCI at the earliest possible time to engage with Islamabad's business community and highlight the trade and investment potential of Azad Kashmir, with a special focus on tourism.

Speaking on the occasion, ICCI President Sardar Tahir Mehmood stressed the need for close coordination between the government and the business community to convert 'AJK's natural advantages into tangible economic outcomes. He noted that the development of tourism infrastructure would not only enhance visitor inflows but also strengthen allied sectors such as hospitality, transport, and services. The ICCI president reaffirmed the

chamber's willingness to collaborate with the 'AJK' government on tourism-related projects and other priority areas, and assured ICCI's support in facilitating linkages between investors and relevant authorities.

Both sides agreed that a strong public-private partnership is essential to unlock 'AJK's tourism and investment potential and resolved to maintain close coordination to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the region.

<https://www.nation.com.pk/25-Jan-2026/strong-public-private-partnership-essential-unlock-ajk-s-tourism-investment-potential>

From Vernacular Urdu Media

Pakistan Army's sacrifices cannot be forgotten by the nation: Chaudhry Yasin

Jammu and Kashmir Times, 23 January 2026

President of the Pakistan People's Party 'Azad Kashmir' chapter and senior Parliamentarian, Chaudhry Muhammad Yasin, while praising the Pakistan Army's action against the Fitna-al-Hindustan, has said that the country's security forces have broken the back of the ill designs of enemy forces. In such actions, not only has the Pakistan Army proven resolute but also reinforced the belief that the security of the country lies with safe hands. In a professional and expert manner, the Pakistan army neutralized the enemies.

The sacrifices offered by Pakistani Army in the country's long history cannot be forgotten by the nation, added Yasin.

<https://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Resize-of-ffffffffffff-1.jpg>

Protests will be held on January 26 against India: Chairman Pasban-e-Hurriyat

Urdu Point, 23 January 2026

January 26 will be observed as Black Day and a Day of Protest in 'Azad Kashmir', according to Pasban-e-Hurriyat. While speaking to the media in Muzaffarabad, Chairman Pasban-e-Hurriyat Azeer Ahmed Ghazali said that India is not a democratic country but a 'terrorist state'. It is subjecting Kashmiri citizens who demand freedom, justice, and the right to self-determination to the worst forms of oppression. A massive protest will be held in the capital at Burhan Wani Shaheed Chowk on January 26 against India's actions in 'occupied Kashmir' and its duplicity on democratic norms. Azeer Ahmed Ghazali stated that the month of January is remembered in Kashmir as the month of death, when the brutal Indian Government carried out mass killings of civilians in 'occupied Kashmir' on five occasions, in which hundreds of unarmed civilians were martyred.

The Chairman of Pasban-e-Hurriyat said that despite Indian atrocities, the

Kashmiri people continue their resistance for freedom, and international human rights organizations should immediately take notice of Indian terrorism. He appealed to the people of 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' to expose India's fake democracy on January 26, and to organize protest demonstrations in every district headquarters through waving black flags.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/muzaffarabad/kashmir/live-news-4692070.html>

There is no aristocratic landlord system in 'Azad Kashmir': 'AJK' Prime Minister

Jammu and Kashmir Times, 20 January 2026

Prime Minister 'Azad Kashmir', Raja Faisal Mumtaz Rathore, has said that access to justice becomes possible through lawyers, and a durable judiciary is what ensures balance and order in society. The government believes in taking forward all the sections of the society, and only a strong system could help resolve the problems stemming from the society, he added. In his speech, the Prime Minister of 'AJK' said that in his society, the principles of morality and good ethics are still alive, though in the recent past, some changes are visible here, too. He said that there is no landlord system in place, and for any MLA to reach the assembly of 'AJK',

people's votes are the only route. We built this system together, and by its very virtue, we have managed to provide facilities of better roads and electricity even to the end of mountains, added Prime Minister Rathore.

<https://jammukashmirtimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Resize-of-fp.jpg>

Gilgit-Baltistan leadership expresses solidarity with Yasin Malik

Urdu Point, 21 January 2026

The leadership of Gilgit-Baltistan has come forward in solidarity with Kashmiri freedom fighter Yasin Malik. Allama Qazi Nisar, head of Ahl-e-Sunnat Wal Jamaat; MPA Nawaz Khan Naji; Chairman of the Gilgit-Baltistan National Alliance Inayatullah Shumali; Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Tanveer Haideri; former Ameer Abdul Sami; Chairman of the Action Committee and Member of the Bar Council Hassan Advocate; Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front leaders Zia-ul-Haq, Imran Mirza Khan, and Engineer Nasir Kapoot; Nationalist Representatives Shabbir Mayar, Shafqat Inqalabi, and Javed Hussain; and other leaders have expressed deep concern over reports that after Shaheed Maqbool Bhat, India is now engaged in efforts to hang Yasin Malik.

In separate statements, the leaders maintained that demanding freedom in accordance with United Nations resolutions and the UN Charter is the

right of Yasin Malik as well as all freedom fighters, and no power in the world can stop it. The people of the Northern Areas view this struggle with respect also because, at the time of the partition of the subcontinent, our forefathers—national heroes such as Colonel (Retd.) Hassan Mirza, Captain (Retd.) Babar and others—fought against the personal rule of Maharaja Hari Singh and his forces, ultimately bringing it to a disgraceful end.

It is a separate matter that under the Karachi Agreement, the people of the Northern Areas were deprived of the benefits, but we stand like a rock with the people of Kashmir in their struggle for legitimate rights. Our clear and categorical demand is that Yasin Malik and all other Indian prisoners be released immediately and unconditionally. We also consider it necessary to make India understand that if Yasin Malik is hanged, a severe reaction will come from Gilgit-Baltistan against India.

<https://www.urdupoint.com/pakistan/news/gilgit/national-news/live-news-4690102.html>

From Social Media

TARIQ NAQASH @TariqNaqash

20 January 2026

#Muslim Conference seeks political resurgence in #AJK polls

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/TariqNaqash/status/2013489038594883926>

WAJAHAT ALI @wajahatgilgiti*23 January 2025*

Due to landslide, KKH Kohistan has been closed for all types of traffic

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/wajahatgilgiti/status/2014413277439377848>

JAMIL NAGRI @jamilnagri*22 January 2026*

Local residents of Chipurson valley said over 200 families were forced to live in tents amid sub-zero temperatures, making survival especially difficult for children, elderly people, women, and patients.

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/jamilnagri/status/2014210051267797103>

PAMIR TIMES @pamirtimes*19 January 2026*

One killed, three injured as 5.8-Magnitude Earthquake rocks Gilgit-Baltistan, hitting Hunza and Ghizer hardest

Link to the tweet:

<https://x.com/pamirtimes/status/2013315293121011829>

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Compiled by

Mohd. Usman Bhatti and Muneeb Yousuf

Edited By

Sumita Kumar, Coordinator, POK News Digest

Disclaimer

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MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

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

Telephone: 91-11-26717983; Fax: 91-11-26154191

Website: www.idsa.in; Email: pokdigest@gmail.com