

POK

News Digest

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A MONTHLY NEWS DIGEST ON PAKISTAN OCCUPIED KASHMIR

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• Political Developments

Pakistan Faces Internal, External Plots: AJK PM
Thousands of AJK PPP Workers Make Way to Parade Ground Rally in Islamabad
Prince Karim Agha Khan to Visit Gilgit Baltistan After 17 years
Challenges for CPEC in G-B
AJK Approves Prophethood Laws' Authentication
China, Pakistan in Contact Over Controversial Dam in Gilgit-Baltistan
Gilgit-Baltistan Traders Protest Imposition of Taxes
GB Govt Agrees to Withdraw Taxes as Protesters End Long March

• Economic Developments

AJKCCI Develops Integrated Industrial Development Plan
Pakistan Announces \$1.5b Hydropower Project in AJK

• International Developments

CPEC to Pass Through Disputed Territory of Gilgit Baltistan Between India and Pakistan. EFSAS
JKSDMI Will Hold Programmes on Kashmir in European Cities

• Other Developments

Speakers Highlight AJK Women's Plight

• Urdu Media

On the Name of Subsidy, We Are Being Provided Poison, Debate in GB's Legislative Assembly
CPEC and Gilgit-Baltistan



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Jammu & Kashmir

(Source: Based on the Survey of India Map, Govt of India 2000)

In this Edition

The Gilgit Baltistan region has been gripped by a spate of popular protests against the proposed imposition of taxes over the past few months. There have been widespread protests in the region against the imposition of direct taxes under the GB Tax Adaptation Act 2012. Of late, the issue has been linked with the undefined constitutional status of the region. In this regard, slogans such as 'no taxation without representation' have been circulating widely in the public domain and has become a rallying point for mass mobilization against the imposition of taxes in Gilgit Baltistan. Political groups as Awami Action Committee (AAC) have been at the forefront of the taxation protests. There is mounting angst in Gilgit Baltistan against the prolonged political deprivation of the people as indicated by a number of reports included in the current issue. It is believed that for decades the region has been deliberately kept under political suspension without being represented in the National Assembly of Pakistan. Besides, despite being under Pakistan's control since 1947, the region has remained unrepresented in important federal institutions such as National Finance Commission (NFC). Looking at the grim situation caused by continuing protests in the region, the government of Pakistan was forced to relent and decided to withhold the imposition of direct taxes on the region at least for the time being.

At the root of resistance against imposition of taxes by local people lies the long pending issue of lack of constitutional identity for the region. It has been ruled under interim political orders from time to time albeit without any formal representation at the federal level in Islamabad. The protesters against taxation have justified their cause by noting that why should they pay taxes to the government of Pakistan when it has been least sensitive to the growing sense of alienation and political unrest in the region.

As has been pointed out in the editorial of the previous issue, there are few reports included in this issue which highlight how Pakistan continues to unleash bitter propaganda against India on the Kashmir issue. Hollow and false as it may be, India must think in terms of evolving a calibrated strategy to counter and eventually eradicate Pakistan's vicious Kashmir propaganda especially at the international level.

Priyanka Singh

Political Developments

Syed Ali Naqvi, “Pakistan faces internal, external plots: AJK PM”

Pakistan Observer, December 1, 2017

Government is a core part of the State besides other stakeholders in the country and failure of government is interpreted as failure of State- this was stated by the Prime Minister Azad Jammu and Kashmir (PM AJK) Raja Farooq Haider Khan in a meeting with representatives of Print and Electronic Media in Central Press Club Muzaffarabad on November 29. While expressing his serious concern on the current situation of Pakistan, he noted, “Future of Kashmir is associated with Pakistan as Pakistan is fronting many internal and external conspiracies; some persons deliberately or intentionally enabling these intrigues against Pakistan.” Prime Minister maintained that constitution of Pakistan has indicated the routes for incumbency and one must follow these pathways. Political forces should not become a spectator after jeopardizing the situation. “Transfer of governance should be held peacefully and we should accept the results of selection by masses” PM AJK opined. Talking on the hydel projects in AJK, Prime Minister mentioned that AJK will get equal water usage charges like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).

<https://pakobserver.net/pakistan-faces-internal-external-plots-ajk-pm/>

“Sustainable welfare projects to be introduced throughout AJK: President Masood Khan”

Kashmir Watch, December 1, 2017

Sardar Masood Khan, President Azad Jammu and Kashmir stated that the Pakistan Red Crescent Society AJK Branch has played a pivotal role in strengthening community based self-sufficiency in the backward

areas of AJK. The President made these comments while addressing the handing over ceremony of Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) Program by the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) AJK Branch to the Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The ceremony was also attended by the Prime Minister AJK Raja Farooq Haider, AJK Minister for Social Welfare Ms. Noreen Arifa, Chairman PRCS National HQ, Chairman PRCS AJK Branch and Country Head Danish Red Cross Mr. Asif Aman. President AJK who is also the President of PRCS AJK Branch stated that the Sarli Sacha CBDRR is a model for all upcoming programs by the PRCS. He further stated that the people of Sarli Sacha have displayed exemplary unity by helping make this 5 year project a reality.

<http://kashmirwatch.com/sustainable-welfare-projects-to-be-introduced-throughout-ajk-president-masood-khan/>

“AJK prime minister talks on benefits of expressway under CPEC”

The Express Tribune, December 1, 2017

The Mansehra-Muzaffarabad-Mangla Expressway under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will bring economic revolution in the state, stated Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan on November 30. He noted that this is a four-lane expressway with interchanges at Kohala, Rarra and Lohar Galli near the capital city that would be completed at an estimated cost of Rs400 million. He believed that the road will prove a milestone in the promotion of tourism, trade and economic activities in the state. Khan revealed that about Rs24 billion development budget has been spent on people’s welfare projects with special focus on communication sector to boost tourism and provide better travelling facilities. The government provided about Rs2 billion for construction of

community bunkers at the Line of Control, noted the minister. The compensation to the victims of Indian firing has also been enhanced by the federal government, he added.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1573403/2-ajk-prime-minister-talks-benefits-expressway-cpec/>

“Vajpayee offered Pakistan to keep Azad Kashmir, says Farooq Abdullah”

The News, December 4, 2017

National Conference (NC) president Farooq Abdullah stated that former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee offered Pakistan to keep Azad Kashmir during his visit to Lahore. He stated he did not accompany the former Indian prime minister on his visit to Lahore in 1999 because Pakistan considers him a “red herring”. “When Vajpayee went to Lahore, he proposed to Pakistan that they can keep Kashmir on their side (Azad Kashmir) side of Line of Control and India would keep the territory on its side of Line of Control. But, that proposal could not be implemented,” Abdullah stated at a media event in New Delhi on December 1. He noted that India cannot get Kashmir through war, imploring the US to play the role of mediator between India and Pakistan to resolve the dispute. “Before going to Lahore, Vajpayee sought my advice. I did not go to Pakistan because I am a red herring for them. Pakistan will skin me if they get me,” he stated at the ‘Agenda Aaj Tak 2017’. Referring to the peace established after the Kargil war after the US intervention, Abdullah stressed the need to establish peace along the LoC today. He disapproved Vajpayee government’s decision to release “terrorists”, including Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar in exchange for 200 passengers in 1999 IC-814 plane hijacking. He also expressed his displeasure over the release of JKLF militants to secure the release of then Indian home minister Mufti Saeed’s daughter Rubiya Saeed before that.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/251810-vajpayee-offered-pakistan-to-keep-azad-kashmir-says-farooq-abdullah>

Abdullah Niazi, “Gilgit up in arms over ‘Indian secessionist propaganda’”

Pakistan Today, December 4, 2017

Fresh protests have been sparked in the Gilgit-Baltistan region after the Awami Action Committee (ACC) held a rally to deny allegations made by the Indian media that their shutter down strike against new taxes was an ‘anti-state move.’ Earlier, the ACC had been holding strikes against new taxes levied in the region. These strikes were apparently being portrayed as anti-state protests by the Indian media. According to details, leaders of the ACC delivered a number of fiery speeches to a charged crowd in which they stated that their organisation and their strike was nowhere near to what the Indian media was portraying it as. The protest was staged on the call of the ACC and was attended by leaders of political parties and members of the civil society. The protesters stated they were inflamed over reports that Gilgit-Baltistan was demanding independence from Pakistan. In reality, the ACC along with regional trade unions had simply been conducting a shutter down strike against the imposition of government taxes ordered from the centre. As reported in October 2017, opposition parties including the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Islami Tehreek Pakistan (ITP), Majlis-e-Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) have all joined hands with the GB’s main traders association to take on the GB government over taxation issues.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/12/04/gilgit-up-in-arms-over-indian-secessionist-propaganda/>

“NA body concerned over increase of Muzaffarabad-Chockothi project’s cost”

News Online, December 4, 2017

National Assembly Standing Committee on Communications met on December 4 expressed serious concern over increase of Muzaffarabad-Chakothi project’s cost after revision of the project.

It was presided over by Chairman Muhammad Muzammil Qureshi. During the meeting, the cost of Kohala-Muzaffarabad section of the road was also revised and was told that revised PC-I was much higher than the original PC-I. The committee showed its serious concerns and directed that NHA should give detailed reasons of each project separately of increase of its cost. Similarly, it was noticed that both the projects were not completed timely. It is observed that it was not acceptable that each project was delayed and then the cost was increased two folds. The Committee directed to furnish an investigative report explaining the reasons of delay. The committee was appraised that presently both Muree-Kohala roads are in provincial control. It was told that the Prime Minister has directed NHA to prepare feasibility of new road from lower topa to Muzaffarabad via Patriata. The Committee directed that after the study PC-I may also be prepared and furnished to the Committee. It considered the projects of Athumqam-ShardaKel- Taobut road and Neelum Valley Shonter-Astore (Gilgit-Baltistan) Road. The NHA informed the committee that there is thirty five kilometer road including a tunnel at Shonter Valley and after its completion the distance of Gilgit-Baltistan will be reduced and the travel time will be reduced by five hour.

http://www.onlinenews.com.pk/index.php?page=newsdetail&news_id=10545

Shoab Ur Rehman, “NHA directed for timely completion of development projects of highways”

Business Recorder, December 5, 2017

Standing Committee for Communications in the National Assembly on December 4 directed the National Highway Authority (NHA) to complete all ongoing developmental projects in Azad Jammu and Kashmir in time without compromising on quality of work. NHA briefed the Committee on the Kohala-Muzaffarabad road, Islamabad-Kohala road, Muzaffarabad I-Chakothei road, Athmuqam-Sharda-Kel-Taobat road, Neelum Valley Shonter-Astore(Gilgit- Baltistan) road, Athmuqam-Sharda-Kel-Taobat road onto Neelum Valley, Proposed Neelum Valley Shonter-Astore (Gilgit- Baltistan)

road projects adding that with completion of ongoing roads development projects tourism would flourish in the area. “Azad Jammu and Kashmir has huge potential in tourism and newly constructed roads would play immense role in boosting tourism in the region and maximum tourists would head to the area, NHA briefed the committee which met in the State’s metropolis on December 4. The committee was further told that new techniques were also introduced in construction of roads in AJK as in the past conventional methods were being used in the construction and this innovation would give more life and standards to the roads. Speaking on occasion, Chairman Committee Muhammad Muzamal Qureshi directed NHA to provide good means of communications to the people of AJK.

<https://www.brecorder.com/2017/12/05/384593/nha-directed-for-timely-completion-of-development-projects-of-highways/>

“AJK can generate over 9000MW hydro-power: AJK Chief Secretary”

The Nation, December 5, 2017

Azad Jammu and Kashmir Chief Secretary Ijaz Munir noted that AJK has potential of more than nine thousand megawatt hydro-power generation. Talking to a delegation of National Management College from Lahore in Mirpur, he noted the AJK government is endeavouring to make a comprehensive plan to this effect. The AJK Chief Secretary stated two hydro-power projects will be initiated soon under CPEC besides Mansehra, Muzaffarabad to Mirpur Expressway and establishment of industrial zone in Mirpur.

<https://nation.com.pk/05-Dec-2017/ajk-can-generate-over-9000mw-hydro-power-ajk-chief-secretary>

MA Mir, “Thousands of AJK PPP workers make way to Parade Ground rally in Islamabad”

The Express Tribune, December 5, 2017

Thousands of Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) workers across Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) made their way to Islamabad’s Parade Ground, on December 5, where a rally is being held to mark the party’s 50th

foundation day. Hundreds of vehicles joined the rally, led by AJK PP President Latif Akbar. Opposition leader in the AJK Legislative Assembly Chaudhry Muhammad Yaseen also led over five thousand party members from Mirpur to Islamabad to join the Parade Ground rally. According to Yaseen, “The party workers are eager to listen their young leader Bilawal who will address the first ever gathering in Islamabad to observe the foundation day of PPP.” Thousands of Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) workers across Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) made their way to Islamabad’s Parade Ground, on December 5, where a rally is being held to mark the party’s 50th foundation day. Hundreds of vehicles joined the rally, led by AJK PP President Latif Akbar. Opposition leader in the AJK Legislative Assembly Chaudhry Muhammad Yaseen also led over five thousand party members from Mirpur to Islamabad to join the Parade Ground rally.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1576474/1-thousands-ajk-ppp-workers-make-way-parade-ground-rally-islamabad/>

“Corruption scandal unearthed in Azad Kashmir construction projects”

Dunya News, December 6, 2017

Corruption scandal in Azad Kashmir construction projects has been unearthed as it is found out that building of middle school for girls in Hattian district was ineffective even before use. The students and teachers are forced to conduct the classes in open air in intense weather conditions because substandard material was used in manufacturing. According to details, one crore and five lac rupees were spent in 2007 on the construction of the school after earthquake. The institution is situated in Prime Minister Azad Jammu and Kashmir (PM AJK) Raja Farooq Haider Khan’s constituency. No action against the responsible persons has been taken even after so many years. Furthermore, the education department and the project controllers have also not given any clear statement as yet.

<http://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/417743-Corruption-scandal-unearthed-in-Azad-Kashmir-construction-projects>

Amir Hussain, “Taxing Gilgit-Baltistan: Part – I”

The News, December 8, 2017

“The ongoing political movement in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) must be geared towards institutional reforms to ensure better governance and inclusive economic growth. The real issue is not about levying direct taxes, but it is more about reducing the dependence on the federal government and creating a competitive and investment-friendly business environment in the region. “The poor people of GB have been paying indirect taxes like other citizens of this country and, therefore, the argument to link direct taxes with political representation at this juncture does not carry much weight. The direct taxes, if imposed, will be only a small portion of the overall ratio of tax collection in GB. “If the protesters have any genuine issues to raise, it should not be confined to direct taxes, which are to be paid by the relatively better-off segments of the population. For the poor whose income is below the minimum tax threshold – less than Rs400,000 per annum – the ongoing anti-taxation protest promises nothing substantial. “Political movements for freedom of expression and improving governance and downward accountability are the hallmarks of democracy and must, therefore, be allowed to flourish.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/253476-taxing-gilgit-baltistan-part-i>

Ghulam Abbas, “Prince Karim Agha Khan to visit Gilgit Baltistan after 17 years”

Pakistan Today, December 9, 2017

Prince Karim Agha Khan, the spiritual leader of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, will visit Gilgit-Baltistan on December 9. He is on a 13-day visit to Pakistan on the invitation of the Government of Pakistan. He will meet his followers on December 9 in Chitral and on December 10 in Gilgit-Baltistan, after which he will visit Karachi from December 14 to 19. Prince Karim Agha Khan will reach Gilgit from where he will fly to Chitral to meet thousands of his followers. To see a glimpse of their Imam, thousands of Ismailis will gather in Chitral, Ghizer and Aliabad, Hunza. All the main roads and public places in Hunza and Ghizer

have been decorated with welcoming messages. Besides, the volunteers of the community are working day and night to make the necessary arrangements prior to the arrival of the Imam. A true picture of interfaith harmony can be witnessed in Gilgit-Baltistan as the residents belonging to various sects are not only ready to give warm welcome to Prince Karim Agha Khan but are also extending every support to make security and other arrangements in Hunza and Ghizer.

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/12/08/prince-karim-gha-khan-to-visit-gilgit-baltistan-after-17-years/>

Fawad Maqsood, “AJK PM appreciates police for maintaining law and order”

Business Recorder, December 9, 2017

The Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Raja Farooq Haider Khan appreciated the role of AJK police for the maintenance of law and order and stated all possible resources would be provided to police for enhancing their overall performance for the maintenance of peace. He was addressing a police reformation meeting held on December 8. Senior Minister Chaudhry Tariq Farooq, AJK Chief Secretary Dr. Ejaz Munir, Inspector General Police Shoaib Dastgir, Senior Member Board of Revenue Fayaz Ali Abbassi, Secretary Finance Fareed Tarar and DIGs also attended the meeting. The AJK PM was briefed on the occasion about the performance of police and reformation within the department and overall law and order situation of Azad Kashmir. Raja Farooq stated that AJK was a peaceful region and all-out efforts would be made for maintaining its peaceful environment and the decision of establishing counter terrorism department was taken in this regard.

<https://www.brecorder.com/2017/12/09/385594/ajk-pm-appreciates-police-for-maintaining-law-and-order/>

Abhinandan Mishra & Areeba Falak, “Gilgit-Baltistan boils in anger against Pakistan”

Sunday Guardian, December 10, 2017

The educated youth and the pro-active civil society of Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B)—a region claimed by

Pakistan as its own—along with the political class there are protesting the levying of “illegal” taxes on them by the Pakistani authorities, apart from demanding constitutional rights at par with the rest of Pakistan. The region has been witnessing large-scale protests, with complete shutter-down in market places for the past one month. Dr Muhammad Zaman, who is a prominent voice of the Awami Action Committee (AAC), an alliance of 23 religious, progressive and nationalistic political groups with considerable influence in all of Gilgit-Baltistan’s 10 districts, “We are simply saying ‘no taxation without representation’. Why should we pay tax when we are not getting any facilities from the government? Pakistan is acting like a parasite, exploiting our region but not extending any facilities. Those who protest are put in prison. Pakistan has neither accepted us, nor rejected us, unlike India, which has given Jammu and Kashmir special status under Article 370.

<http://www.sundayguardianlive.com/news/11936-gilgit-baltistan-boils-anger-against-pakistan>

“Aga Khan asks followers to maintain interfaith harmony”

Dawn, December 11, 2017

Prince Karim Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Ismaili community, reached Gilgit-Baltistan on December 10, where he addressed huge congregations of followers in Yasin valley of Ghizer district and Hunza Aliabad. Floral gates had been erected to the Didargahs (the glimpsing places), which were well-carpeted. About 100,000 followers were estimated to be in attendance in the Yasin valley congregation. After performing the ritual of Didar in Yasin valley, Aga Khan arrived in Hunza Alibad at noon for performance of second Didar, where he delivered the sermon to a large congregation. It was compulsory for each participant to have an invitation card in order to be able to attend the Didar. The community is celebrating the diamond jubilee of the imamat of Prince Karim Aga Khan. During his sermons, Aga Khan, also known as Shah Karim al-Hussani, suggested his followers to remain loyal to Pakistan and play their role for religious harmony. He stated morality, education and peace were tools

for success. He also assured to play his role for development of remote areas of the country.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1375896/aga-khan-asks-followers-to-maintain-interfaith-harmony>

Masud Ahmed Khan, “Challenges for CPEC in G-B”

The Express Tribune, December 12, 2017

Gilgit-Baltistan is bounded in the north by the Wakhan strip in Afghanistan and the Xinjiang province of China and on the south and southeast by Jammu and Kashmir and on the west by Chitral in K-P. The location makes G-B strategically important for Pakistan, China, the US and India. G-B is as important as it was in 1880s when the Russians occupied Central Asian states and a Russian officer, Colonel Gromchevsky, visited Hunza and his presence there was taken as the start of the great game. The Silk Route is now replaced by the Karakoram highway. It is a dual carriage all-weather road where border trade with China started in 1967. Since then, people of G-B are in continuous touch with the Chinese region of Xinjiang for business activities and today G-B markets are flooded with Chinese goods. The importance of G-B increased initially with the construction of Karakoram Highway and now with the start of CPEC would be manifold. CPEC passes through the highway and covers 600kms in G-B. The project is likely to bring a lot of changes in G-B in the areas of infrastructure development, construction of roads and hydropower projects. It would open business development opportunities for the people of G-B and certainly will be a game changer for the whole country. But there are several threats and challenges to CPEC in G-B which cannot be ignored.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1581816/6-challenges-cpec-g-b/>

“AJK lauds Turkey for supporting Kashmiris”

The Nation, December 13, 2017

Ambassador of Turkey in Pakistan Mustafa Baber Girgin called on AJK President Sardar Masood Khan and discussed various matters including the

promotion of friendly relations between Pakistan and Turkey and the settlement of Kashmir issue. The farewell meeting of the Turkish Ambassador to the AJK President was held at the end of his tour to Islamabad. Girgin stated that his assignment in Pakistan was the most productive during which he saw Pakistan making great strides while Pakistan-Turkey relations are reaching new heights. Masood paid tribute to Ambassador Girgin for his effective and successful diplomacy in Pak-Turkey relations during the past four years. He thanked Turkey for its strong, consistent and steadfast support to the right to self-determination of the people of Jammu and Kashmir at the international forums especially in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Turkey, he stated, was the founding member of the OIC Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir and has always called for a just solution of the issue. The AJK president conveyed to the Turkish envoy deep appreciation of the people of Azad Kashmir for Turkey’s generous support to the reconstruction of Muzaffarabad after the 2005 earthquake.

<https://nation.com.pk/13-Dec-2017/ajk-lauds-turkey-for-supporting-kashmiris>

“AJK CJ terms India biggest hurdle in peace”

The Nation, December 13, 2017

Azad Jammu & Kashmir High Court Chief Justice M Tabassum Aftab Alvi stated that the only solution to Kashmir issue is to hold a plebiscite as prescribed under the resolutions of the United Nations. Speaking at a reception in Kashmir hosted in his honour, Justice Alvi strongly condemned the aggressive attitude of India and demanded the world community to play a positive role in resolving the Kashmir issue accordance with the wishes of the people of Kashmir. He thanked the Pakistani nation for continued political, moral and diplomatic support of Kashmiri people. He further stated that the dispute between Pakistan and India is the issue of Jammu and Kashmir which is an unfinished agenda of partition of the subcontinent.

<https://nation.com.pk/13-Dec-2017/ajk-cj-terms-india-biggest-hurdle-in-peace>

“AJK approves Prophethood laws’ authentication”

The Nation, December 14, 2017

The Azad Jammu and Kashmir cabinet approved the authentication of the laws applicable in Pakistan regarding the finality of prophet hood, and constituted a 5-member committee for the implementation of the laws in AJK .The cabinet met in the State’s metropolis late on December 12 with AJK Prime Minister Farooq Haider in the chair. The meeting was attended among others by Senior Minister Ch. Tariq Farooq, Ministers Raja Nisar Ahmed Khan, Ch. Muhammad Aziz, Dr. Najeeb Naqi, Sardar Mir Akbar, Mrs. Noreen Arif, Barrister Iftikhar Gillani, Sardar Farooq Sikander, Syed Shaukat Ali Shah, Ch. Muhammad Saeed, Nasir Hussain Dar, Advisor K.B Khan, Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretary development, Senior Member Board of Revenue (SMBR), Secretaries and other concerned senior officials of the AJK Govt.

<https://nation.com.pk/14-Dec-2017/ajk-approves-prophethood-laws-authentication>

Sutirtho Patranobis, “China, Pakistan in contact over controversial dam in Gilgit-Baltistan”

The Hindustan Times, December 14, 2017

China has denied it demanded “full ownership” and the right to operate the Diامر-Bhasha dam in the disputed Gilgit-Baltistan region, the country’s top planning body has stated, adding Beijing and Islamabad continue to be in contact over the project. The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) dismissed reports that China had not only claimed ownership of the dam but also wanted collateral security for the project in the form of another operational dam. India has raised objections to the construction of the dam as its site is in Gilgit-Baltistan, which is claimed by New Delhi as part of the undivided Jammu and Kashmir state. In November 2017, Pakistan withdrew its bid to include the dam in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), with a senior official saying Chinese conditions for financing the dam were unacceptable. At the time, the Chinese foreign ministry had denied any

information on the development. The CPEC is the flagship project under China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a multi-billion dollar connectivity project that spans Asia. NDRC Deputy Director Wang Xiaotao told Pakistani counterparts that the question of China demanding ownership of the dam does not arise.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/china-pakistan-in-contact-over-controversial-dam-in-gilgit-baltistan/story-7lmfELkxyC8UvN57OttggN.html>

Amir Hussain, “Taxing Gilgit-Baltistan: Part – II”

The News, December 15, 2017

At the outset, we must consider the statement made by a member of the action committee of the ongoing anti-taxation movement in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB): “Why [we] are opposing the imposition of direct taxes is more [a matter that stems from] the accumulated anger of being left out for 70 years in critical decisions about the political future of Gilgit-Baltistan. We are not anti-taxation thugs as [the] government would like people to believe... [We] want development, investment and [a] share in the benefits of CPEC [just] like [the] other provinces of Pakistan. “Gilgit-Baltistan is a ‘disputed territory’, which is the biggest hindrance in bringing international investment to the area. Before we are asked to pay additional taxes, we must be granted [the] political status of a province under the constitutional ambit of Pakistan. [The] government is trying to create [the] impression that [the] people of GB are regressive and anti-development while we [urge] the government to adopt a realistic and inclusive strategy. We want the government to address the root cause of all problems first. [These] include, but are not limited to, providing a well-defined legal status to GB. No one in their right mind would oppose the development but it must be well-grounded as a democratic process, not as a cosmetic political stunt. It seems as though the geostrategic importance of GB is the most determining factor of the plight of its people.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/256177-taxing-gilgit-baltistan-part-ii>

“Pak PM inaugurates 147 Megawatt Power Project in AJK”

Kashmir Watch, December 15, 2017

The 147 Megawatt Patrind Power Project is a milestone in hydro power generation in Azad Kashmir, Sardar Masood Khan, President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, stated while welcoming Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi who inaugurated the electricity plant. After inaugurating the project, Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi addressed a large gathering attended by Prime Minister AJK Raja Farooq Haider Khan, Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs Chaudhry Barjees Tahir, AJK Cabinet Ministers, members of the AJK Legislative Assembly, CEO Star Hydro Waqar Ahmad Khan, Korean experts and senior members of the bureaucracy. President Masood Khan complimented Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on his principled and courageous stance on Kashmir and Palestine in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Summit and earlier at the United Nations General Assembly. President Masood Khan noted that the Patrind Power Project is a bridge between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and AJK as it is built on the Kunhar River flowing from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is, he stated, similar to the Karot Hydro Power Project which is a bridge between Azad Kashmir and Punjab.

<http://kashmirwatch.com/42371-2/>

Fawad Yousafzai, “Oil tankers threaten to stop fuel supply to hilly areas”

The Nation, December 16, 2017

Oil tankers Association on December 15 threatened to stop supply of fuel to Kashmir, Gilgit Baltistan and Chitral after the government delayed the increase in oil tankers fares for those areas. “From Monday (December 18), our oil tankers will stop supply to Northern areas, Kashmir and Chitral as the government is delaying the execution of its promise regarding enhancement of freight charges for those areas,” All Pakistan oil tankers and Contractors Association General Secretary Nauman Ali Butt

noted. He also stated that the representatives of All Pakistan Oil Tanker Owners Association (APOTA) and oil tankers Contractor Association (OTCA) met with chairperson Ogra for the enhancement of freight charges for the oil tankers carrying oil to GB, AJK and Chitral but response was not very positive. He further stated that fares for those areas have not been revised during the past six years.

<https://nation.com.pk/16-Dec-2017/oil-tankers-threaten-to-stop-fuel-supply-to-hilly-areas>

“Masood lauds Pakistan-AJK co-op in energy, other sectors”

The Nation, December 17, 2017

President Sardar Masood Khan noted the 147 Megawatt Patrind Power Project was a milestone in hydropower generation in Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The project had been inaugurated by Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi. He stated at the moment Azad Kashmir is producing 1,500 MW of energy out of which its requirement is 400 MW, while the remaining 1,100 MW is being contributed directly to Pakistan’s National Grid. The AJK President stated that in the next 10 years, in collaboration with Pakistan, Azad Kashmir is planning to generate 8,000 MW of electricity out of which 3000 MW projects are under different phases of implementation and planning. In the next decade even if Azad Kashmir’s own energy needs would grow to 2,000 MW, it would still have surplus of 6,000 MW for contribution to Pakistan. He noted that in the short term Neelum-Jhelum (969 MW), Karot (720 MW), Gulpur (100MW) and Kohala (1124 MW) power projects will be completed, and this will be followed by a cascade of projects, including Azad Pattan, Mahl and Dudnial.

<https://nation.com.pk/17-Dec-2017/masood-lauds-pakistan-ajk-co-op-in-energy-other-sectors>

“Youth skill development programme in AJK”

The Nation, December 17, 2017

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister

Farooq Haider Khan on December 16 inaugurated the youth skill development Programme. Speaking on the occasion, the AJK prime minister stated technical education was much essential in modern era of technology. He urged the youth to participate in such skill development programmes to enhance their professional skills. Under the programme, 1,000 people will be imparted training in 19 fields of trade, official sources noted.

<https://nation.com.pk/17-Dec-2017/youth-skill-development-programme-in-ajk>

“Masood eyes historic uplift in AJK”

The Nation, December 19, 2017

President Sardar Masood Khan stressed a need for making collective efforts to foster innovation and entrepreneurship through higher education and industrial growth. He expressed these views while addressing the inauguration ceremony of the Distinguished Innovations, Collaboration and Entrepreneurship (DICE) - 2017 Mega Event held at the state-run Mirpur University of Science and Technology (MUST) on December 18. The president praised DICE, MUST, Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the British Council for their efforts in bringing together a large number of faculty members and students making innovation and entrepreneurship a part of the national DNA, helping generate wealth, self-sufficiency, and effectively making digital technologies available to the masses of Azad Kashmir. Azad Kashmir has a vast network of educational institutions, highest overall educational score, universities focusing on cutting edge disciplines such as science, technology, business management, information technology, and women graduates entering into the market thereby making its landscape ripe for transition and a welcome sight for entrepreneurs, he noted. The President stated that Azad Kashmir was the land of transformation and opportunities.

<https://nation.com.pk/19-Dec-2017/masood-eyes-historic-uplift-in-ajk>

Call for introducing RTI law in AJK”

The Nation, December 20, 2017

While most provinces and regions of Pakistan have enacted right to information laws, Azad Jammu and Kashmir is among the few regions which have yet to introduce such a law. In this regard, the Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) conducted the first-ever introductory session on the need and significance of the right to information (RTI) laws for government officials and media of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). While presiding over the session, Secretary Information Mansoor Qadir Dar appreciated the initiative to enhance the capacity of officials and journalists. He added that there was no standard operating procedure in AJK for a citizen to get information from government departments. However, he urged all to work together to devise a legislation on RTI in AJK. AJK Law Department Section officer Muhammad Nawaz noted that their department has drafted a bill on RTI which has been pending before the Parliament for years but has not received any attention from lawmakers. During the session, participants were briefed about their constitutional right to know what the government was doing while the importance of enacting an RTI law in AJK was crucial for ensuring the transparent working of government departments.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1588154/1-call-introducing-rti-law-ajk/>

Salim Ahmed, “Hafeez seeks private sector coop for flight operation in GB”

Pakistan Observer, December 20, 2017

Chief Minister Gilgit-Baltistan Hafiz Hafeez-ur-Rehman invited the private sector to join hands with the government of Gilgit-Baltistan and start flight operation for this area. While talking to the LCCI President Malik Tahir Javaid, Senior Vice President Khawaja Kharar Rashid and Vice President Zeshan Khalil, the Chief Minister noted that Gilgit-Baltistan is abundant with huge opportunities in tourism,

energy and infrastructure sectors. He stated that PIA operation for Gilgit-Baltistan is not enough to cater to the needs, therefore, private sector should come forward and avail this opportunity. Former LCCI President Mian Shafqat Ali also spoke on the occasion. He noted that China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has generated lucrative investment opportunities that must be availed by the local investors. Under this project industrial and economic zones are being established which will create ample employment opportunities for the people of this area. On the energy sector, CM GB stated that Gilgit-Baltistan is not linked with the national grid which is the major hurdle in tapping the power generation potential. He also stated that GIZ and WAPDA have identified the potential of 40,900 MW through feasibility reports. He further stated that the establishment of first grid in Gilgit-Baltistan is at a tender stage. He also stated that no serious work had been done in past for Diamer Bhasha Dam but now the situation is quite different. He also stated that land acquisition for Diamer Bhasha has been completed through transparent way.

<https://pakobserver.net/hafeez-seeks-private-sector-coop-flight-operation-gb/>

“Masood seeks knowledge-based economy”

The Nation, December 22, 2017

AJK President Sardar Masood Khan stressed the need for utilising all the resources for establishing a knowledge-based economy to ensure prosperity in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir. The President made these remarks while addressing the students and faculty members at the 15th Convocation of the state-run Azad Jammu & Kashmir University on December 20. He congratulated the students, faculty and proud parents of the successful graduates on the completion of their studies. He also stated, “We have made considerable efforts in this regard and soon tertiary education facilities will be available in every district of Azad Kashmir.” The President told the participants that an economic revolution is unfolding in Azad Kashmir, especially with the formal inclusion of the region in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Under CPEC, he noted, four major projects have been earmarked for AJK; which include Kohala, Korat Hydropower projects, Mansehra to Mirpur Expressway and a Special Economic Zone in Mirpur.

<https://nation.com.pk/22-Dec-2017/masood-seeks-knowledge-based-economy>

Jamil Nagri, “Gilgit-Baltistan traders protest imposition of taxes”

Dawn, December 22, 2017

Traders observed yet another strike in Gilgit-Baltistan on December 21 against the imposition of taxes on residents by the government without determining the constitutional statues of the region. “The government’s attempt to divide trade bodies, bazaar committees, transporters and political parties has further strengthened the protesters who have now announced a series of strikes, long marches and sit-ins across GB against the imposition of taxes,” the demonstrators stated. Surprisingly, while life in the region came to a standstill following the strike, GB Chief Minister Hafeezur Rehman and his key ministers went to Lahore on December 21 to attend a wedding ceremony. The strike call was given by GB Central Traders Association, Awami Action Committee, GB Chamber of Commerce and Industry, transporters’ association and opposition parties — Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, Pakistan Peoples Party, Islami Tehreek Pakistan, Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen and Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl. The imposition of taxes in GB was also opposed by the Supreme Court Bar Association, High Court Bar Association, Hotels Association, Petroleum Dealers Association, Transport Association, Timber Association and Minerals and Gems Association. Markets, shops and business centres remained closed throughout the day in almost all 10 districts of the region, while public transport remained off the main roads, including the Karakoram Highway. The protesters also threatened the government to face a Faizabad-like sit-in in every district.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1378118/gilgit-baltistan-traders-protest-imposition-of-taxes>

“Widespread protests in PoK, Gilgit Baltistan against ill treatment of locals by Pakistan”

ANI, December 23, 2017

Widespread protests have erupted across Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Gilgit Baltistan against Pakistan's ill treatment of the region and its people. In Gilgit-Baltistan, people have come out onto the streets shouting anti-Pakistan slogans and rejecting the Pakistan Government's enforced taxation. Markets and business establishments remained shut and traders in large numbers gathered in major cities, including Gilgit and Skardu to express their anger against the imposition of 'illegal' taxes by Islamabad under the GB Tax Adaptation Act 2012. The protest call was given by the Anjiman-i-Tajran and the Awami Action Committee (AAC), and backed by all political and religious parties in Baltistan. Addressing a gathering in Skardu, Basharat, an advocate and member of Baltistan civil society, blamed Islamabad for its autocratic behaviour and for abusing the powers of the Gilgit Baltistan Council which is headed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

<https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/widespread-protests-in-pok-gilgit-baltistan-against-ill-treatment-of-locals-by-pakistan201712230910100001/>

“Punjab opens kitty for Kashmiri refugees' uplift”

The Nation, December 23, 2017

The Punjab government on December 22 announced a grant of Rs10 million for each member of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly to ensure the uplift of Kashmiri refugees settled in Punjab province. The AJK government officially disclosed that Chief Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced the grant during a meeting held to discuss the issues of refugees of Jammu and Kashmir settled in different areas of Punjab province. The meeting was held under the CM's chairmanship. Prime Minister Azad Jammu and Kashmir Raja Farooq Haider Khan and his cabinet colleagues including ministers Syed Shaukat Shah, Nasir Hussain Dar, Chairman Public Accounts Committee (PAC) AJK Chaudhry Muhammad Ishaq, including MLAs from refugee constituencies Raja

Siddique, Mian Yasir Rasheed and other pertinent officers were present. The Punjab chief minister on the occasion directed his administration to submit a report by setting up a plan for migrants settled in Punjab and address their problems on an immediate basis. He also directed Azad Kashmir and Punjab authorities to submit a report on the measures taken to address the migrants in the next meeting. During the meeting, Shahbaz Sharif stated that he would soon visit Azad Kashmir on the invitation of Prime Minister Azad Muhammad Raja Farooq Haider Khan.

<https://nation.com.pk/23-Dec-2017/punjab-opens-kitty-for-kashmiri-refugees-uplift>

“CM and AJK PM vow to fight for Kashmir”

The Express Tribune, December 23, 2017

India must realise that Kashmiri people cannot be deprived of their right to independence through continued brutalities. This was stated by Punjab Chief Minister Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif during a meeting with AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan. A high-level parliamentarian delegation of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, comprising ministers and members of the legislative assembly called on Punjab Chief Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif on December 22. The delegation was led by the AJK Prime Minister Raja Farooq Haider Khan. He also stated that the PML-N government was providing sufficient funds for different programmes which aimed to provide basic necessities of life to the people of Azad Kashmir. He also added that steps had been taken for the development and prosperity of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1590722/1-cm-ajk-pm-vow-fight-kashmir/>

“There is ample investment opportunities for local, foreign investors: Masood”

Business Recorder, December 25, 2017

President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Sardar Masood Khan on December 24 stated there was a huge construction boom taking place in Pakistan and

AJK which would provide ample opportunities for local and foreign investment. He made these remarks in a meeting with Chinese delegation that called on him in the federal capital. The delegation was comprising Vice President China Nantong Sanjian Construction Group (CNTC) Jiang Bing, Business Manager CNTC Ding Nan and other CNTC officials. President Masood Khan warmly welcomed the delegation and invited them to visit Azad Kashmir and explore new avenues of investment. He informed that the AJK amid its political stability, peace and strengthening economy would provide a conducive environment for foreign investors along with opportunities of forming public-private partnerships. He noted the AJK owing its huge youth bulge, an 85% literacy rate, growing middle class, trained workforce, availability of raw materials had a huge potential for investment, especially in the construction sector. He informed the delegation that the Chinese government had been actively investing in the AJK for the past three decades. He also stated with the formal inclusion of Azad Kashmir in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor; 4 projects had exclusively been earmarked for this region which include Karot (720 MW), Kohala (1124 MW) Hydro-power projects, Special Industrial Zone in Mirpur and the Mansehra-Mirpur expressway. Masood Khan stated that after the 2005 earthquake, China had assisted in the reconstruction of Muzaffarabad, Rawalakot and Bagh in the AJK which was an affirmation of the brotherly relationship enjoyed by the people of the two countries. Azad Kashmir, he noted, enjoyed the lowest crime rate in the region and had always attracted foreign investors. In recent years, South Korea, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait had been actively involved in reconstruction and development projects all over the AJK.

<https://www.brecorder.com/2017/12/25/389013/there-is-ample-investment-opportunities-for-local-foreign-investors-masood/>

“AJK no longer a liability”

The Express Tribune, December 25, 2017

Devastated by a massive earthquake over a decade ago, Azad Jammu and Kashmir is no longer a

‘liability’ and in wake of the massive new economic corridor — the region was an asset for Pakistan. This was stated by Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) President Sardar Masood Khan at a ceremony to bid adieu to Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) Acting Deputy Chairman Brigadier Abu Bakr Bajwa. Masood paid rich tribute to ERRA and the State Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (SERRA) in rebuilding the quake-affected areas of AJK. He added that the two organisations had helped complete over 191 projects in Kashmir with priority on reconstructing health, municipal and education facilities. Now, he stated, AJK Kashmir was well-equipped with education and health facilities along with a modern water supply network. The King Abdullah Campus of AJK University is expected to be completed within the next 18 months thanks to the technical and financial assistance of ERRA. Similarly, a campus of Poonch University in Rawlakot will also be built. Reiterating that AJK was an asset for Pakistan, Masood stated that the Himalayan territory was a defensive bastion for the country and enjoys a low crime rate and high literacy rate.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1592039/ajk-no-longer-liability/>

Tariq Naqash, “Protesting traders suspend intra-Kashmir trade”

Dawn, December 26, 2017

Intra-Kashmir trade from the Chakothe-Uri crossing point did not take place on December 26 due to a boycott by traders who claim that police and Pakistan Customs treat them with hostility. They made it clear that from this point onward, trade would remain suspended until their issues were settled. For a while now, the traders have been complaining about being subjected to raids while their trucks and mercantile goods were being confiscated by the customs officials as soon they enter Pakistani territory from Azad Jammu and Kashmir. “As soon as our trucks cross the Kohala bridge, we have to give ‘sweeteners’ to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police first, and then the Punjab police also want their palms greased,” claimed

Ajaz Ahmed Meer, a representative of the intra-Kashmir traders. “As if these two extortionists are not enough, the trucks are then ambushed by officials from Pakistan customs because they maintain that the goods brought under intra-Kashmir trade can only be sold in the AJK territory alone,” he noted. On November 30, Mr Meer recalled, the traders moved their vehicles in a caravan to escape this situation, but when they reached Faizabad (Rawalpindi) they were intercepted by customs officials who wanted to confiscate the trucks.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1379118/protesting-traders-suspend-intra-kashmir-trade>

Jamil Nagri, “GB govt agrees to withdraw taxes as protesters end long march”

Dawn, December 28, 2017

Protesters agreed on December 27 to end their march on Gilgit after reaching an agreement with the Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) government. After a seven-day-long shutter-down and wheel-jam strike across GB against imposition of taxes, the GB government bowed down before the protesters and agreed to withdraw all taxes being imposed in the region. The regional government that was reluctant to withdraw taxes — like income tax, withholding tax and banking transaction tax — despite a complete strike in all 10 districts of the region in the last seven days has accepted almost all demands of the protesters. As a result of the agreement with the government, the protesters will end the march on Gilgit, the provincial capital of Gilgit-Baltistan. However, their protest would continue till issuance of a notification regarding withdrawal of taxes. The representatives of traders, GB Awami Action Committee, and government representatives, after holding talks for two days, signed the agreement on December 27. As per the copy of agreement, under which the provincial government has announced it will withdraw the GB Adaptation Act, 2012, the major demand of people in the area. Income tax, withholding tax and other taxes had been imposed through the act. Bowing down to the demands of thousands of people, the regional government agreed to completely withdraw

the act through a notification from the Gilgit-Baltistan Council, which is the implementing body of taxes in GB.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1379304/gb-govt-agrees-to-withdraw-taxes-as-protesters-end-long-march>

“Situation in held Kashmir highly alarming: AJK president”

The News, December 29, 2017

President Azad Kashmir Sardar Masood Khan invited the people of Karachi to invest in Azad, Jammu and Kashmir as it has emerged as the centre of China Pakistan Economic Corridor. The AJK President stated this as he addressed and later talked to newsmen on December 28 on the occasion of 54th passing out parade of Pakistan Marine Academy. Addressing the passing out parade ceremony, AJK President stated the doors of Azad Kashmir are open to everyone for investment and business. He stated Azad Kashmir has an important role to play in the Pakistani economy. The AJK President noted it is his desire that Pakistan should be counted amongst the stronger economies of the world. He further stated the marine academy has to play an important role in the CPEC. He stated the PMA had to be strengthened for fortifying maritime security of Pakistan as it is one of the central and important institutions of the nation.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/261989-situation-in-held-kashmir-highly-alarming-ajk-president>

“Taxing GB”

The News, December 30, 2017

Gilgit-Baltistan has been simmering with political discontent for almost a decade. Little attention has been paid to the demands of the people of a region that is crucial to Pakistan’s economic future, and also remains precariously positioned constitutionally. At the start of this week, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan entered the sixth day of protests against the imposition of taxes. Thousands of people marched from Gilgit

to Skardu, demanding the federal government withdraw taxes until the region gets constitutional status. Despite the harsh winter, thousands attended sit-ins in Skardu and Gilgit. The day after the march, the strike was called off amidst reports of successful negotiations with the GB government. The people have, however, committed to protest till the government issues the relevant notification of agreement regarding the withdrawal of taxes.

The trouble is that the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly is not autonomous, and major decisions continue to be imposed from the centre. The region cannot decide whether to tax itself. In fact, it is rather unclear what real powers the GBLA really has. While provinces have a seat at the negotiating table for the pool of resources and autonomy over how to spend them, this is not the case for GB. The situation is also complicated by geopolitics. Often, the fate of Kashmir and the fate of GB are seen as tied together even when in day-to-day life, they are not connected.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/262401-taxing-gb>

“State of Pakistan incomplete without Kashmir: Sardar Masood Khan”

Daily Times, December 30, 2017

Azad Jammu Kashmir President Sardar Masood Khan stated on December 29 that Pakistan was incomplete without Kashmir and the only solution to Kashmir issue was negotiations. He was addressing a seminar titled: ‘Kashmir -Perspectives and Reality’, organised by Students’ Advisor Office, University of Karachi (KU) at Arts Auditorium, KU. Addressing the seminar, he stated: “India is constantly violating the ceasefire agreement at Line of Control by unprovoked firing. Pakistani citizens are martyred and getting injured on regular basis.” He added that Pakistan had always adopted the policy of extending political and moral support to the Kashmiris and would continue to do so.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/170229/state-pakistan-incomplete-without-kashmir-sardar-masood-khan/>

Tariq Naqash, “AJK jurist declared persona non grata by India”

Dawn, December 30, 2017

Indian authorities have declared a renowned jurist of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) “persona non grata”, cancelling his permit for intra-Kashmir travel through Chakothe-Uri crossing point along the Line of Control (LoC). The decision about Syed Manzoor Hussain Gillani, a former acting chief justice of the AJK Supreme Court, was conveyed by an unnamed official dealing with intra-Kashmir travel in Srinagar to his counterpart in Muzaffarabad by an email. “... It is to inform you that Syed Manzoor Hussain Gillani, bearing permit number 65900 had arrived in Jammu and Kashmir on 21/08/2017 via crossing point Kaman who has violated the norms at cross LoC travel during [his] stay at J&K. His permit is cancelled. In view of the above, it is requested not to issue further LoC permit to the individual,” read the email. In accordance with the message, Mr Gillani was informed in writing by an official of the AJK Cross LoC Travel and Trade Authority (Tata) that his [multiple entry] permit had been cancelled. Manzoor Gillani fears banning a bona fide visitor might be beginning of frustrating travel protocol. Mr Gillani was born in India-held Kashmir, where he did his graduation from Baramullah and earned a law degree from Aligarh Muslim University in 1970. Shortly after starting legal practice in Srinagar, he migrated to AJK in 1976.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1379719/ajk-jurist-declared-persona-non-grata-by-india>

“Working group formed to resolve GB taxation issue”

Dawn, December 30, 2017

Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan Barjees Tahir on December 29 constituted a seven-member working group of GB Council headed by MNA Malik Ibrar Ahmed to examine the recommendations of a parliamentary committee of

the region's Legislative Assembly to help address the taxation issue in GB. The body has also been tasked with preparing further recommendations for discussion in the upcoming session of the Gilgit-Baltistan Council in order to resolve the taxation issue that has triggered widespread protests in Gilgit-Baltistan. According a notification issued by the GB Council in Islamabad, the working group includes local members of GB Council — Saeed Afzal and Ashraf Sada — joint secretary Gilgit-Baltistan secretariat Dr Aftab Akbar Durani, Commissioner IRGB Qaiser Iqbal and a representative of FBR. It is to mention here that after widespread protests in the region, a parliamentary committee of GB Legislative Assembly was formed on December 27, which held talks with the representatives of Anjuman-i-Tajran and Awami Action Committee, and prepared

recommendations to the federal government to resolve the matter of taxes. The parliamentary committee will hold meetings with the working group in order to resolve the issue. The GB parliamentary committee and representatives of protesters had agreed to continue peaceful and symbolic sit-ins till the issue was resolved. The government had also agreed to withdraw all cases registered against the protesters. The parliamentary body recommended repeal of the GB Tax Adaptation Act, 2012, under which income, bank transaction and withholding taxes have been imposed on GB people.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1379660/working-group-formed-to-resolve-gb-taxation-issue>

Economic Developments

“Gilgit to get sewerage plant by 2019”

The Express Tribune, December 16, 2017

Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Minister Hafeezur Rehman stated on December 15 the government will complete Gilgit Sewerage Plant project before 2019 for which full resources will be provided. He stated that the tender of sewerage treatment project has been assigned to NLC after completion of all formalities strictly on merit. The CM was addressing a function in connection of the signing of MoU between G-B Development Authority and NLC regarding construction of sewerage plant in Gilgit. NLC and a Turkish company having vast international experiences in establishment of sewerage plants are going to start work on this project that would be completed in one year. “The completion time of this project is two years. However, NLC has assured to complete it within one year that was praiseworthy,” he noted. “All the mega projects are being completed ahead of the schedule time that was possible due to positive policies of the G-B government,” he stated, adding that participation of NLC in mega projects was a good omen for G-B. The CM directed the G-B Development Authority to complete the paper works of Zone-2 so that it could be submitted to the concerned forum for approval. He also stated that the G-B government would provide all necessary resources for completion of work on Zone-2. The provincial government recommended inclusion of this mega project in Public Sector Development Programme. After Gilgit, work on sewerage system at Chalas and Skardu would also be started, he informed. There was no shortage of resources and all the projects would be completed ahead of stipulated time. Reforms were introduced in departments to ensure speedy development of G-B and resultantly service delivery for people was improved.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1585254/1-gilgit-get-sewerage-plant-2019/>

“AJKCCI develops integrated industrial development plan”

The Nation, December 17, 2017

An integrated industrial plan has been developed by the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and industry (AJKCCI) with the coordination of AJK government to encourage and promote local and foreign investment in trade and industrial sector especially by the UK-based Kashmiri expatriates. AJKCCI Secretary Chaudhry Shafique stated on December 16 that the chamber had already moved recommendations to the government by devising a strategy for early revival of over 70 sick industrial units located in Mirpur and Bhimber districts. He stated various proposals of AJK government had assured to encourage and boost the foreign investment in the trade and industrial sector in AJK and colossal funds had already been placed in the ongoing financial year 2017-18 budget. Shafique noted the government was taking all possible steps for the early revival of sick industrial units in Mirpur and Bhimber. The government focused to promote the industrial activities in Mirpur and Bhimber districts under the spirit to provide more job opportunities to the unemployed skilled and unskilled persons, he added.

<https://nation.com.pk/17-Dec-2017/ajkcci-develops-integrated-industrial-development-plan>

“GB Chief Secretary sanctioned Rs100mn for Gilgit Ghizer Road”

Radio Pakistan, December 23, 2017

Chief Secretary Gilgit Baltistan Dr Kazim Niaz sanctioned one hundred million rupees for carrying maintenance work of Gilgit Ghizer Road. This was stated by Deputy Commissioner Ghizer Suja Alam on December 23. He has also approved metaling Gakhuch to Asheer road project and other link roads

in the area to provide better communication facilities to for flung areas of the region.

<https://radio.gov.pk/23-12-2017/gb-chief-secretary-sanctioned-rs100mn-for-gilgit-ghizer-road>

Salman Siddiqui, “Pakistan announces \$1.5b hydropower project in AJK”

The Express Tribune, December 30, 2017

Pakistan is set to increase the share of hydropower production in the total energy mix by adding a new project of over 700 megawatts in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) through foreign financing at an estimated cost of \$1.51 billion by 2022. Authorities have sought an import tariff at Rs8.05 per kilowatts (US cents 8.1032/kWh) for the project. “The project

(Azad Pattan Hydropower Project) is an initiative of the government of Pakistan being developed in the private sector under the Policy for Power Generation 2002,” according to the project documents available at National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra). The Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA-G) proposed a reference levelised tariff of Rs8.50 per unit (kWh) for import of the electricity from the project under NEPRA Import of Power Regulations, 2017. Nepra announced on December 29 to admit CPPA-G application for consideration. It would conduct a hearing on the matter on January 11, 2018 at Islamabad.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1596352/2-pakistan-announces-1-5b-hydropower-project-ajk/>

International Developments

“Kashmiris reject interlocutors: Farooq”

Pakistan Observer, December 2, 2017

Prime Minister Azad Jammu and Kashmir (PM AJK) Raja Farooq Haider Khan stated that masses in Kashmir are struggling for their freedom according to United Nations Resolutions. The Indian interlocutors have already been rejected by Kashmiri leadership and they seek solution for Kashmir dispute according to UN resolutions. The Prime Minister expressed his views while addressing to a delegation of think tank, Conciliation Resources England lead by Sardar Tahir Aziz and Mrs. Alex Sokfield.

<https://pakobserver.net/kashmiris-reject-interlocutors-farooq/>

MA Mir, “Overseas Kashmiris ‘willing to invest in country’”

The Express Tribune, December 13, 2017

The British citizens of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) are ready to invest in the tourism and energy sectors of the country, claimed overseas businessman Raja Manawar Khan while addressing a group of senior journalists on December 12. Khan had migrated to the United Kingdom (UK) in the 1970s at the age of 10 with his family. After completing his studies Khan got into the hoteling business and then later shifted into real estate. “Whatever we have earned is for our country and we want to invest in our home. Now it is up to the government to provide a conducive atmosphere to the overseas business community,” Khan added. When asked how the government of Pakistan and AJK will help in bringing overseas Kashmiris to invest in the country, Khan noted that peace and security are vital to motivate them. “In any investment fiscal security is mandatory which is really good in Pakistan as its banking system is at par with international standards,” Khan added.

He also stated that in any development sector, pay back in the first ten years is a good return. He added that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will lay the solid foundation of a strong economical Pakistan which would be the real game changer in the region.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1582537/1-overseas-kashmiris-willing-invest-country/>

“CPEC to pass through disputed territory of Gilgit Baltistan between India and Pakistan. EFSAS”

Pakistan Christian Post, December 18, 2017

A well-attended, successful panel discussion, held at the Royal Asiatic Society in London, consisting of reputable scholars affiliated with various academic institutions including Oxford University, Birmingham University and SOAS University of London, deliberated upon the legal, economic, environmental and geo-political impacts of the construction of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. The event was organised by the European Foundation for South Asian Studies (EFSAS), a global leading independent, EU accredited think tank, based in Amsterdam and moderated by Dr. Sweta Raghavan, Managing Director of Scientists & Co. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a crucial component of China’s much-hyped One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, remains a hot topic internationally since its announcement in 2015. The collection of infrastructure projects that are currently under construction throughout Pakistan, is an undertaking that has been advertised as a tale of success and the ultimate example of how two countries could prosperously collaborate. However, after the initial euphoria, clear evidences provide for the reality that such a politically charged economic project is also a ground for brewing trouble. In addition, a significant portion of the corridor will pass through Gilgit

Baltistan, part of the disputed territory of Jammu & Kashmir between India and Pakistan, which further raises questions on its legality.

<http://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/detail.php?communityid=923>

Sabah, “JKSDMI will hold programmes on Kashmir in European cities”

The News, December 26, 2017

Jammu and Kashmir Self Determination Movement International (JKSDMI) in collaboration with members of UK and European Parliament will organise programmes in more than 10 cities of the United Kingdom and other European countries on Kashmir from January 22 to February 11. This was disclosed during a meeting organised by Jammu and Kashmir Self Determination Movement International in Bradford to commemorate the birth anniversary of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and

Christmas. The meeting was chaired by JKSDMI Patron Sardar Abdur Rehman Khan and was moderated by its Chairman Raja Nijabat Hussain. Those who attended the meeting included Chaudhry Fazl Hussain, Amjad Hussain, Sameena Khan, Raja Ghazanfar, Khaliq Rafiq, Muhammad Shafiq, Haji Muhammad Najib, Dr Tasnim Tariq, Naila Sharif, Imran Ali, Asif Khan, Arshad Khatana, Fazlur Rehman, Chaudhry Javed Tarar, Basharat Ali, Tariq Butt Chaudhry, Akram, Professor Razzaq and Muhammad Latif. Besides members from UK and European Parliament including Amjad Bashir, Barrister Yasmin Qureshi, Wajid Khan and Muhammad Yasin, Members of Parliament from Pakistan and Azad Kashmir will also participate in the scheduled programmes.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/260698-jksdmi-will-hold-programmes-on-kashmir-in-european-cities>

Other Developments

“Speakers highlight AJK women’s plight”

The Nation, December 30, 2017

Non-profit organisation Kashmir Institute of International Relations (KIIR) celebrated completion of five-years of women empowerment initiatives, KIIR spokesperson noted on December 28. Speaker of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly Shah Ghulam Qadir presided over the event. A research study titled ‘Voices Unheard - Stories Untold - The Plight of Women in Neelum Valley’ was also launched at the occasion. Speaking to female elected representatives, social and political activists, academics and young leaders from AJK, Shah Ghulam Qadir highlighted the need for urgent measures to bring peace and stability, particularly along the Line of Control (LoC). He also stated that it was difficult to complete infrastructure and

development schemes due to continuous firing and shelling from Indian security forces in Neelum. Women, children and the elderly are paying heavy price for the cruel behaviour from the other side of the border. He further noted that despite challenges, the government has completed several development schemes and been committed to provide all necessities of life for local communities. KIIR Executive Director, Sardar Amjad Yusuf Khan, welcomed the participants and shared history of the organization.

<https://nation.com.pk/30-Dec-2017/speakers-highlight-ajk-women-s-plight>

Extracts From The Urdu Media

“Those spreading hate would be dealt with force: CM”

Daily K2, December 3, 2017

Chief Minister Hafeezur Rehman stated that those who are spreading hate by exploiting sectarian difference would be dealt with force. He also stated that his government will not spare those who are spreading chaos based on ethnic and regional differences. He also announced that Daryal and Tangair would be established as districts. On taxation, chief minister stated that tax cannot be completely terminated and his government is working to amend the taxation bill. 50 percent tax would be imposed on Citizen Corporate sector. The Chief Minister made these comments while talking to the delegation of traders.

<http://paper.dailyk2.com/index.php?eid=1&nid=1&date=1512259200>

“On the name of subsidy, we are being provided poison, debate in GB’s Legislative Assembly”

Daily K2, December 16, 2017

In Gilgit-Baltistan’s Legislative Assembly, Javid Hussian stated that in other provinces six month old wheat is termed as injurious to health but in Gilgit-Baltistan we are being provided five year old on the name of subside, It is nothing but poison. The subsidy quota is also decreasing so is the quality of wheat. Rain and lack of storage also affects the quality of wheat. Another member, Haji Rizwan asked how long would GB rely on subsidy. It is embarrassing to beg for the subsidy. There is need to find an alternative, noted Rizwan. Minister for Food and Supplies stated that we are being supplied wheat that has been produced in 2014-15. The Legislative

Assembly Speaker asked to form a committee that will check the quality wheat.

<http://paper.dailyk2.com/index.php?eid=1&nid=1&date=1513382400>

“GB is a part of Pakistan: there should be no delay in constitutional status”

Daily Baad-e-Shimal, December 14, 2017

Shaheed Bhutto Foundation held a conference at National Press Club in Islamabad to highlight the political, social, legal and historical aspects of Gilgit-Baltistan’s constitutional identity. It was attended by ruling party, opposition, lawyers, journalists and the civil society members. The conference highlighted that depriving Gilgit-Baltistan of constitutional identity by linking it with the Kashmir issue is violation of rights of the people of the region. By depriving people from this basic right is having a negative impact in the region. Addressing a conference, ANP’s leader and former Senator, Afrasaib Khuttak observed that GB must be made a constitutional province without delay. It is a political issue which should be resolved. Addressing the conference, an active member of GB’s constitutional committee, ex-IG Afzal Shukre, stated that more than a year has passed after Sartaj Aziz-led committee made recommendations the on GB’s constitutional status. But nothing has happened yet. According to Afzal, GB should be given rights in line with the committee’s recommendations. Today’s generation ask questions as to where we belong to but we do not have answers for them. Senior minister, Akbar Tawan, was of the opinion that we are being deprived of constitutional rights for last 70 years.

<http://www.dailybaadeshimal.com/?page=cGFnZS00&dt=MDItMTQtMjAxOA>

Umar Habib, “India, CPEC and Gilgit-Baltistan’

Daily Salam, December 15, 2017

India is not letting any stone unturned in creating trouble for CPEC. It is targeting Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan. At first place, India is spreading propaganda with the help of its agents that Gilgit-Baltistan is not getting any share in CPEC. Instead, this project will take away resources of Gilgit-Baltistan and also diminish their identity. Their agents

are spreading a rumour that GB is disputed and CPEC cannot pass through GB. Somebody should tell these agents that Kashmir is disputed too, so why then India is making dams in Kashmir.

<https://www.dailysalam.com/index.php>

Fact Sheet on Pakistan Occupied Kashmir

Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK)

Administrative Divisions: Two, namely Mirpur-Muzaffarabad (referred to as Azad Jammu & Kashmir or AJK by Pakistan) and Federally Administered Gilgit-Baltistan (FAGB).

Area ceded to China by Pakistan: 5180 sq. kilometres (Area of Shaksgam Valley)

(Source: Jammu & Kashmir Government website at <http://www.jammukashmir.nic.in/>, accessed on November 14, 2010)

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)

Area: 13,297 square km

Population: 2.973 million (1998 population census), Male, 1.850 million; Female, 1.832 million

Capital: Muzaffarabad

Kashmir (Muzaffarabad Division) comprises of 3 districts: Bagh, Muzaffarabad and Neelum, Hattian

Jammu (Mirpur Division) comprising of 5 districts: Bhimber, Kotli, Mirpur, Sudhnati/Pallandari and Rawalakot/Poonch, Haveli

President: Sardar Muhammad Masood Khan

Prime Minister: Raja Muhammad Farooq Haider Khan

AJK Council: Total 17 members

AJK Legislative Assembly: Total seats are 49

Ethnic Groups: Gujjars, Jats, Mughal, Rajputs, Sudhan, Awan, Qureshi, Pashtuns, Shins, Ladakhi, Baltis etc.

Religious Groups: Sunni, Ahlehadith, Shia, Nurbakhshi, Christians, Qadianis, Hindus

Languages: Punjabi, Hindko, Pahari, Kashmiri, Balti, Puriki, Shina

Political Parties and Groups: United Jammu and Kashmir Peoples' National Party, AJK Muslim Conference, International Kashmir Alliance, JK National Party, Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (Amanullah), Peoples United Action Committee, All Parties National Alliance (APNA)

(Source: Azad Jammu & Kashmir Government website at <http://www.ajk.gov.pk/>, accessed on November 14, 2010)

Gilgit-Baltistan

Area: 72,496 sq. kilometers

Population: 870,347 (1998 population census)

Capital: Gilgit

Districts: Nine

Baltistan Region (part of Ladakh) is divided into Ghanche, Skardu, Kharmang and Shigar districts

Gilgit Region is divided into Astore, Diamer, Ghizer, Hunza-Nagar and Gilgit districts

Ethnic Groups: Shin, Balti, Puriki, Ladakhi, Wakhi, Yashkun, Tibetan, Mongol, Tatar, Mon, Pashtun, Khowar, Dom, Gujjar, Rajput and Kashmiri

Religious Groups: Shia (Twelvers), Nurbakhshi (Twelvers), Ismaili, Sunni, and Ahlehadith

Languages: Shina, Balti, Wakhi, Khowar, Gujjari, Burushaski, Puriki, Kashmiri, Pashto

Gilgit-Baltistan Council: Total 15 members

Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly: Total 33 members (24 members directly elected)

Governor of G-B: Mir Ghazanfar Ali Khan

Chief Minister G-B: Hafiz Hafiz-ur-Rehman

Political Parties and Groups: Balwaristan National Front (BNF), Gilgit-Baltistan Thinkers Forum, Gilgit-Baltistan, United Movement (GBUM), Baltistan

National Movement, Karakoram National Movement, Gilgit Baltistan Democratic Alliance (GBDA), Gilgit Baltistan

National Alliance (GBNA), All Parties National Alliance (APNA)

(Sources: Jammu & Kashmir Government website at <http://www.gilgitbaltistan.gov.pk>, & website of the Balwaristan National Front, <http://www.balawaristan.net>, accessed on November 14, 2010)

Disclaimer

PoK 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 abridged to provide clarity. IDSA is not responsible for the accuracy and authenticity of the news items.

POK NEWS DIGEST



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