

India in flames over Gilgit-Baltistan

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The people of Gilgit-Baltistan opposed the accession of Kashmir to India and the appointment of Brigadier Ghansara Singh as the Governor of Gilgit. On October 31, 1947, the residence of the governor was surrendered by Gilgit Scouts and by November 1, he had surrendered himself to them. On the same day, the Dogra flag was pulled down and the Pakistani flag was raised. A special courier was sent to the government of Pakistan to inform them about the liberation of Gilgit.

On August 14, 1948, Lt Col Thapa, along with 250 Dogra soldiers, surrendered to liberation forces at Skardu. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan liberated the region without any external help and joined Pakistan voluntarily and unconditionally—a singular honor of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. States of Hunza and Nager acceded to Pakistan followed by Darel and Tangir. Through the UN resolution of number 80 of March 1950, both ‘Azad Kashmir’ and ‘Northern Areas’ were included with the term of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

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Successive governments introduced different reforms in the region. In 2009, it was named Gilgit-Baltistan and a province-like status was given. In 2015, the Sartaj Aziz committee was formed to recommend reforms for the region. The committee submitted its recommendation in 2018 and recommended a provisional provincial status by amending the constitution of Pakistan. It also recommended four national assembly seats, including a women and three senate seats. The Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly also adopted a unanimous resolution demanding the federal government to declare it a constitutional province of Pakistan. The Supreme Court of Pakistan also ruled in 2019 that the power of the court should be extended to Gilgit-Baltistan and directed the government to grant fundamental rights to the people of the region.

In May 2020, the Supreme Court also allowed the government to amend the Gilgit-Baltistan Order of 2018 to conduct general elections, which are now scheduled on November 15, 2020. Recently the government of Imran Khan decided to make Gilgit-Baltistan a full-fledged province

with constitutional rights and representation in both the houses of the parliament. The decision was taken after consultation with all stakeholders, even COAS met and briefed the parliamentary leaders on the sensitivity of the issue from a security point of view.

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The opposition parties agreed, in principle, to support the move to make Gilgit-Baltistan the fifth province of the country. India has consistently been opposed to changes made in Gilgit-Baltistan right from 1947. Much of the hype being raised by the Indian media is mainly due to CPEC and overall economic development in the region. India is obsessed with Gilgit-Baltistan which is evident from the statements made frequently by its political and military leaders. In 1994, the Indian parliament passed a resolution that the region is an integral part of India by virtue of Jammu and Kashmir's accession to it in 1947. The Indian national security advisor went on the record to say that, "We also have 106 kilometers long non-contiguous border with Afghanistan (Wakhan Corridor)."

In 2016, Modi made a reference to Gilgit during his speech from the Red Fort according to which the people of Gilgit thanked him for voicing their rights. The Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly condemned the speech and passed a unanimous resolution against it. In the past, a number of individuals, with the backing of RAW, were arrested from the region. Recently Abdul Hameed Khan, a nationalist leader of a banned organisation, returned to Pakistan and apologised to the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. He confirmed that he played in the hands of the enemy.

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India has started broadcasting the weather reports of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan showing these areas as its own territory. The Indian army has plans to take over Gilgit-Baltistan and according to the former army chief, General V.K Singh, "Gilgit-Baltistan belongs to India and will come to us at the right time".

In 1987, an operation (Ex-Trident) was planned by India to attack Skardu on February 8, 1987, and then Gilgit, with a view to occupy Gilgit-Baltistan. Through the help of the intelligence, Pakistan took measures to respond and India cancelled the operation. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan will not fall prey to Indian conspiracies and they are well aware of the fake news and strategy behind such attempts. They have been wanting a merger with Pakistan since its independence and have been demanding to adopt the identity as a Pakistani since November 1, 1947.

The people of Gilgit-Baltistan are serving as the armed forces of Pakistan and shed their blood in defence of the motherland, which is evident from the wars they fought in 1948, 1965, 1971, regarding Siachen, Kargil and the war on terror. Lalik Jan, recipient of Nishan-e-Haider, is the son of Gilgit-Baltistan. There are a couple of individuals who, on behest of RAW, appear on Indian media to propagate the theme given to them.

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The government and opposition are reportedly near consensus on elevating Gilgit-Baltistan as a full-fledged province of Pakistan. This step of the federal government will address the continued denial of rights of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. This will bring the region into the mainstream and put it under the jurisdiction of the constitution of Pakistan. The decision will have no bearing on IIOJK as it will be a provisional province and linked to the Kashmir solution. This step may force India to reconcile its earlier decision to revoke articles 370 and 35A. This will also ensure economic development, protection of CPEC and secure the identity of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan.

There are some schools of thought that express certain reservations regarding the future of Gilgit-Baltistan. Some believe that integration with Pakistan will damage Pakistan's Kashmir cause. The government needs to get them on board so that all concerns and doubts regarding this decision are eliminated since it has been well received across Gilgit-Baltistan and the people of the region say, we are Pakistani first, last and always.