[**Against all odds**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1713899/against-all-odds)

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IT is an inconvenient truth that Gilgit-Baltistan has continued to survive in a political and legal limbo for the past 75 years despite its unconditional accession to the state of Pakistan at partition. Over the years, it has been administered by the Pakistani government through interim presidential decrees devoid of constitutional validity. In 2009, under the impetus of one of these orders, an elected GB legislative assembly was established and equipped with limited powers, giving the region the appearance of a democratic federating unit. Blindly following mainstream Pakistani political parties, the GB Assembly members are content with this limited empowerment; even this was diluted by the PML-N government through another opaque decree in 2018. Although the Supreme Court directed that this decree be replaced with a new draft order of 2019, the area continues to be governed under the 2018 order in violation of the court’s ruling.

The toxic brew of these decrees infused with random regulations have rendered the administrative arrangements in GB chaotic. To appease the local factions and contain the simmering discontent amongst the now highly educated and aware GB youth, unsustainable administrative units have been launched. For a total population of 1.8 million, 10 revenue districts have been created and four more are notified. This defies all principles of administration and economic management of an area beset by acute developmental and resource challenges. The budget in the form of cascading grants from the federal government is thus consumed in propping up this flawed and expensive administrative machinery. Most civil servants are under-employed and their jobs are es­­sentially paid holidays. They tend to be largely occupied with protocol duties during VIPs’ visits to the region in summer for holidays disguised as official tours. The resources that could transform the lives of GB residents are thus expended in wasteful administrative structure. This crowd of civil servants leaves no space for an elected local government which is a vital tier for nurturing democratic traditions.

Despite these political and administrative constraints, there is a ray of hope from a most unlikely source, namely the new GB Chief Secretary Mohyuddin Ahmed Wani, a gentleman who defies the odds and finds innovative solutions despite excessive regulations imposed by the bureaucracy. The role of a bureaucrat is to execute the policies framed by the government within the stipulated rules/regulations. They must exercise their judgment and skills, but their duty is to place these at the service of a higher authority.

Mr Mohyuddin is confronted with the challenge of working in an unpredictable constituency prone to political turbulence in an environment subservient to Pakistan’s mainstream political parties. This is exacerbated by unjustifiable administrative expenditure that redirects resources from where they ought to be spent. But he has lived up to his reputation and, within the constraints of regulatory and legal provisions, has focused on the two essential sectors of governance, namely education and health. In a very short span of time, his initiatives for upliftment have borne results and will give much-needed direction to GB and harness the talents of the educated youth, thus generating prosperity in the region.

Despite political & administrative constraints in GB, some recent initiatives can harness the talents of educated youth and generate prosperity in the region.

Under his guidance, the government has embarked on improving education and dovetailing it with employable skills. He has leveraged the existing IT knowledge to achieve quick results. After identifying the needs of the youth, he has pushed his agenda for GB’s transformation by establishing collaborations with various platforms and organisations. Some of these steps include:

— Establishment of 144 IT labs and libraries in government schools, enabling on-site e-learning environment across GB.

— IT professionals have been hired and STEM-based education initiated in some of the selected government schools at district headquarters.

— Training funded by Federal Board of Education of master trainers for teachers. Missing facilities and appointments against teachers’ vacancies from the pending merit list within the available budget.

— Holding of motivational seminars and gatherings by professionals from across the country to engage the youth.

— Student loans on easy instalments by the local cooperative bank to eligible applicants.

— Free-of-cost co-working spaces to IT companies at two divisional headquarters.

In the health sector, the following initiatives have been taken:

— There is an acute deficiency of doctors in GB. So, specialists are hired by a third party on competitive salaries. The retirement age for medical experts has been increased to 65 to retain talent and fill the existing specialisation gap.

— MRI machines for Diamer and Baltistan divisions.

— Medical camps in all districts. Special mental health awareness, especially in Ghizer to curtail alarming rate of suicides in the valley.

— To counter stunting in children, the first government funded ‘meals and health improvement for students in schools’ programme has been started.

In the fast-growing tourism sector, the following actions have been initiated:

— Launch of Pakistan’s first tourism application to boost tourism in the region.

— Cleanliness and beautification campaigns.

— Upgradation and enhancement of tourism police.

— Installation of prefabricated toilets at tourist sites under the administrative control of the forest department.

The chief secretary has converted the weaknesses of the flawed bureaucratic structure into an opportunity to undertake regional development. Senior civil servants have been engaged to monitor and improve the education, health and tourism sectors. Steering clear of the fundamental issues of the constitutional status of the area and ownership of land rights, Mr Mohyuddin has instead decided to address matters impacting the quality of life of the GB residents. If allowed to continue doing so, he will leave a lasting impact on this region.

These actions will ensure the induction of large numbers of educated youth in the fast-changing digital world where voices for human rights cannot be ignored indefinitely. Consequently, this will compel the federation to undertake a key decision on the constitutional status of the federation for unconditional integration of GB as a province.

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