**Gilgit Baltistan: An interim province**

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The location of Gilgit-Baltistan is strategically important as it shares a border the Wakhan Corridor, the Xingjian region of China, IIOJK and Chitral. The region covers an area of 72,000 square kilometers and its population is over 1.5 million. On March 16, 1846, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was created by the British with Gulab Singh installed as the Maharaja. The region of Gilgit-Baltistan at that time was not a part of the newly created state and was divided into several small independent states. Gilgit was annexed by the Dogra forces after several attacks and the death of Yasin Gohar Aman.  
In 1889, Gilgit was established as an agency under British control. On March, 20, 1935, the British decided to take Gilgit on a lease from the Maharaja for 60 years and on August 1, 1947, Brigadier Ghansara Singh assumed the responsibilities of the governor of Gilgit. The decision of appointing Ghansara Singh was not well received. On the night of October 31, 1947, his residence was surrounded by Gilgit Scouts and in the morning of November 1, he surrendered.  
Immediately, the government of Pakistan was contacted and asked to take control of the region. On August 14, 1948, Lt. Col. Thapa, who was the commanding officer of the sixth Jammu and Kashmir battalion at Skardu surrendered to the azad forces. On April 6, 1948, Gilgit was placed under the political resident of NWFP for administration. The administration of Northern Areas (GB) was transferred to the government of Pakistan by the AJK government and a separate ministry of Kashmir affairs and Northern Areas was created. On November 18, 1970, an Advisory Council was created known as Northern Areas Advisory Council (NAAC) and elections were held. In 1972, the institutions of Rajas and Mirs were abolished and in 1975, the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR) was also abolished.  
In 1982, three representatives from Gilgit-Baltistan were taken to Majlis-e-Shura with the status of observers. The Northern Area Council elections were later held in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1991. On June 12, 1994, Northern Areas Legal Frame Work Order 1994 was issued which provided additional seats for women and the post of Deputy Chief Executive was created. Five advisors were also taken. In 1999, the Supreme Court of Pakistan declared that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan are citizens of Pakistan and directed the federal government to take proper administrative and legislative steps. By 1999, the Northern Areas Council was renamed as the Northern Area Legislative Council and elections were held in 1999 and 2004.  
In 2009, some major steps were taken when the ‘Empowerment and Self Governance Order 2009’ was introduced. A province like status was given to GB which created the appointments of chief minister and governor. The ‘Northern Areas’ were renamed as ‘Gilgit-Baltistan’ thereby giving an identity to the region. A 16-member Council was created. These packages and reforms have not come up to the expectations of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan.  
In 2015, a Committee under Sartaj Aziz was formed to recommend reforms for the region. It recommended a provisional province-like status by amending the constitution of Pakistan. The committee also recommended representation in the parliament of Pakistan and other national level organisations. However, no steps were taken and the ‘Government of Gilgit-Baltistan Order of 2018’ was introduced.  
In September 2020, the government announced to make Gilgit-Baltistan an interim province with representation in the parliament. On November 1, 2020, Prime Minister Imran Khan confirmed while addressing the people of Gilgit that his government would give a provisional provincial status to the region. He constituted a committee to the finalise the modalities and procedures for granting such a status. The draft of the constitutional amendment has been prepared and very soon it will be presented in National Assembly.  
The government is all set to announce the region as fifth province (interim) of Pakistan for which final touches are being given by federal government while taking the GB government onboard. All the political parties at a national level and political and religious parties of Gilgit-Baltistan have agreed to this landmark decision. This step will have no negative effect on the Jammu and Kashmir issue as it will be an interim province and linked to the final settlement of the issue. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan were, are and will remain part of Pakistan.