**Strengthening the federation**

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Balanced development is a prerequisite for equitable growth and societal stability. Quite obviously, it requires the utilisation of development potential of all areas by pursuing a balanced distribution of public resources among different regions to attain equitable economic growth and eliminate regional disparities prevailing in the country. Based on the incidence of poverty and existing socio-economic disparities in different regions, the federal government has identified as many as 67 districts in four provinces as less developed areas. Out of these, seven such districts are located in Punjab, 19 in Sindh, 12 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and the highest number of 29 less-developed districts are located in Balochistan. Furthermore, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and the newly-merged districts of KP are also included in this list.

Deprivation in the form of poverty and unequal distribution of resources in Pakistan is evident from the bitter fact that about 50 million people are living below the national poverty line as per available estimates, but the numbers increase significantly when disaggregated at provincial levels. The latest Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement (PSLM) Survey 2019-20 has also indicated a poor situation of health and education indicators in Balochistan as compared to other provinces, according to the information available from the official sources. The Council of Common Interests (CCI) has already approved the establishment of a dedicated Secretariat in April 2021, which will backstop its functioning and monitor implementation. The institutional development will further strengthen federal-provincial collaboration on matters pertaining to Federal Legislative List Part-11. Following the 18th Amendment, the provincial governments have to shoulder a greater responsibility to implement Sustainment Development Goals (SDGs).

[China acknowledges Pakistan on declining US democracy summit](https://nation.com.pk/09-Dec-2021/china-acknowledges-pakistan-on-declining-us-democracy-summit)

The lack of effective communication has been identified as one of the weaknesses of the SDGs programme and thus implementation of the National SDGs Communication Strategy was a major activity during the current financial year. This includes the development of digital contents and targeted social media campaigns for enhanced SDG awareness. The federal government has already announced three broad initiatives focusing on improving the regional economy, enhancing skilled manpower and employability, and reducing income inequality in the targeted areas of Southern Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Karachi namely (i) the Accelerated Development Plan for Southern Balochistan; (ii) the Gilgit-Baltistan Development Package, and (iii) the Karachi Transformation Plan. Moreover, a comprehensive ten-year plan was also being implemented for the uplift of newly merged districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in three phases.

Southern Balochistan, needless to mention, is the most under-developed area of the country which requires immediate intervention through formulation of a robust development plan. Accordingly, nine districts of Southern Balochistan i.e. Washuk, Lasberla, Gwadar, Panjgur, Turbat/Kech, Khuzdar Awaran, Kharan and Chagai have since been identified and declared as the most deprived zones in dire need of targeted interventions to upscale the economic activity for the betterment of the local people under express direction of the Prime Minister. As many as thirty major and minor development projects involving an estimated total cost of Rs 135.5 billion in transport, water, power and fuel, agriculture, industries and the commerce and education sectors are being implemented by the federal government under its Public Sector Development Programme for the current financial year in Southern Balochistan. Gilgit-Baltistan, encompassing an area of 72496 square kilometres with a population of 1.5 million, has the potential for developmental investment in hydel energy, mineral and tourism sectors. However development in Gilgit-Baltistan faced four main challenges including a mountainous terrain, making development activities difficult; containing a geographically dispersed population causing high cost of service delivery; public and private sector investments lagging behind with minimal development infrastructure and also lacked institutional capacity due to its nominally autonomous constitutional status.

[US president kicks off first 'Summit for Democracy'](https://nation.com.pk/09-Dec-2021/us-president-kicks-off-first-summit-for-democracy)

Besides improving hydro-power generation and infrastructure facilities, more than 500 students have availed scholarships during the financial year 2020-21 and female education was also given top priority with a special focus on districts with low indicators. The Gilgit-Baltistan government has also initiated an economic transformation project costing Rs17 billion for bringing 50000 acres of additional land under the command and construction of 400 km farm to market roads. In seven Newly Merged Districts (NMDs) of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the federal government had allocated Rs 24 billion for the 828 ongoing schemes during 2020-21. One of the transformative development activities currently under implementation was the Khyber Pass Economic Corridor project which is a new four lane Peshawar–Torkham Expressway that will enable safe, high-speed travel by multi-axle commercial vehicles. And, Karachi being a lead metropolitan city of the country, faces major challenges due to urbanisation and urban sprawl. Keeping in view the rising population in the city, both the federal and provincial government were working jointly for improving the civic amenities of the cosmopolitan city under the Karachi Transformation Plan. The federal government was investing as much as 614 billion in three years through the PSDP, the Public Private Partnership and donor funding for Karachi infrastructure improvements.