



Press Release

In contrast to developments in Pakistan and India Pakistan relations, Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) receives relatively lesser attention. In the case of both its units - 'Gilgit Baltistan' and 'Azad Kashmir' India has however vital interests. Recent developments in India Pakistan relations, tensions on the LOC and finally, domestic developments in Pakistan itself have impacted this constituent part of Jammu and Kashmir in different ways further highlighting the anomalies of its juridical and constitutional status. The strategic dimensions of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) as a whole are also changing with the qualitatively new interface that has developed between Pakistan and China in recent years.

New Delhi, September 26th, 2017:

Ananta Aspen Centre organized an interactive session on "**Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and Cross Border Linkages**" with **Ambassador S K Lambah**, Chairman, Ananta Aspen Centre and Former Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of India, **Ambassador TCA Raghavan**, Adviser, Ananta Centre and Former High Commissioner of India to Pakistan and **Dr. Ashok Behuria**, Senior Fellow and Coordinator of the South Asia Centre, The Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA).

Ambassador Lambah in his remarks took us back to the history and establishment of PoK. What is PoK? Why is it such a sensitive subject to both Pakistan and India? He shared that PoK is divided into 3 major parts: Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Northern Kashmir and Pakistan. He mentioned that Azad Jammu and Kashmir council heads PoK which is governed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan. According to him the biggest failure of the Indian Foreign Services has been its inability to project the condition of PoK to the world.

A vital part of the session was the discussion about Gilgit Baltistan. **Ambassador Raghavan** pointed out that Gilgit Baltistan was only the Shia majority of Pakistan. This has reduced from 85% to 65% in recent years. Gilgit Baltistan was formed in 1993 due to judicial process and not due to popular protests. Ambassador Raghavan quoted "Gilgit Baltistan was a sacrificial goat for AJK". We should remember that the people of Gilgit Baltistan do not like to be absorbed into AJK. They consider themselves a different entity. Protests have been taking place in Baltistan on "No Taxation without representation".

Dr Ashok Behuria provided detailed remarks on the governance of different regions of PoK and mentioned that China is now reluctant to invest in Pakistan. It was observed that the Sino-Pakistan relations are now dominated by economic and not political ties. The Karakoram Highway was built by the governments of Pakistan and China. It was started in 1959 and was opened to the public in 1979. This highway connected the Gilgit Baltistan region to the ancient Silk Road

from Kashgar to Abbottabad. 80% of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) route will pass through Gilgit Baltistan. The implications of this scenario were discussed in the session. It is speculated that people are demanding inclusion of Gilgit Baltistan in Pakistan because of Chinese influence.

About Ananta Aspen Centre:

Engaging India, Nurturing Change Ananta Aspen Centre is an educational and policy studies organisation based in New Delhi. It focusses on values based leadership and open dialogue on challenges facing Indian society to help foster its transformation. The Centre engages civil society, business, governments and other key stakeholders to share ideas and bring a wide range of perspectives on issues important to India’s development, foreign policy, strategic affairs and national security. Ananta Aspen Centre is an independent non-profit organization registered under the Indian Trusts Act and under 12A and 80G of the Income Tax Act.

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