



The situation of AJK in 1947: Progress of the past 77 years

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Abstract

The paper illustrates the historical status and background of Jammu Kashmir in 1947 and the milestones achieved in Azad Jammu Kashmir development in the past 77 years. The partitioning of British India in 1947 made Jammu and Kashmir a troubled region. The territory of AJK has significantly changed in the past 77 years in terms of politics, economy, and social life. The AJK state is politically independent with its government and legislative house. Its administration has been changing a lot in the region to ensure that the administration is improved to enable the region to have local autonomy. Through the Pakistani investment and foreign aid, AJK has also come up in terms of development of infrastructure, health

care and education. Economic growth has been as a result of the construction of large-scale hydroelectric plants and the development of road transportation. However, the regions are yet to handle such challenges as poor industrialization, unemployment, minimal industrialization, and the impact of disasters such as the catastrophic earthquake in 2005. AJK has improved its literacy level and equality among sexes socially as more women have been involved in education and the labor market. Although such gains have been made, the paper indicates that the region still grapple with poverty, lack of access to quality health care, as well as legacies of the continuous war with India and the border India Kashmir problem.

Keywords: Political turmoil, cease-fire, conflict, unemployment, Governance.

Introduction

Azar Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is an intricate area of the larger great politics framework in South Asia. In order to create a historical and political acumen about the Kashmir conflict, a person must comprehend how AJK was situated in 1947 when the period of the partitioning of British India occurred. India and Pakistan are two nations formed as the British colonial rule was dismantled in 1947. Through this gap, significant territorial conflicts, massive migrations, and widespread group violence were present. One of the most controversial issues that appeared at this time was the situation of

princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Over the last 7 decades, India and Pakistan have engaged in an open struggle over Kashmir dispute. The physical combat during the initial Kashmir crisis which occurred between 1947 and 1949 was restricted to the contested region. But in the second major crisis, fought in August and September of 1965, of armed groups spreading out of Kashmir on to the borders of West Pakistan, and also occurred air operations in East Pakistan, had it not been that the United Nations had imposed a cease-fire (which may be with the assistance of a Chinese demand) it seemed no more a long and convoluted war between India and Pakistan over the larger Jammu and Kashmir area had begun with the establishment of AJK as a self-governing administrative unit within Pakistani sovereignty. The geopolitics of South Asia is still being shaped by the peculiarities of administrative division, strategic position of the region and initial circumstances created in 1947.¹ AJK refers to the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is a self-governing administrative unit that forms part of Pakistan and lies west of the Line of Control (LoC) that divides AJK and Indian -administered Jammu and Kashmir. AJK has its own elected Prime Minister, Legislative Assembly, High Court and President. It is the responsibility of Pakistan, however, to take care of its defense as well as foreign policy matters.² This region is a popular

¹ Alastair Lamb, *The Kashmir Problem, a historical survey* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger publishers, 1967, 1-9.

² Azad Jammu and Kashmir at A Glance -2022

<https://pndajk.gov.pk/uploadfiles/downloads/AJK%20At%20A%20Glance%202022.pdf> (accessed on 1.7.2024).

tourist attraction site due to its beautiful landscape, which comprises of mountains, valleys, rivers, and lakes. The paper makes comparison between the situation in AJK in 1947 and the current situation in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The government has also initiated various measures that have aimed at enhancing the living standards of its people, with the help of the foreign organizations, as well as the federal government of Pakistan. Another field of focus has been on infrastructure development where huge amounts of money have been spent on bridges, road networks and transit systems to further improve connection within AJK and to other parts of Pakistan. AJK is a multi-party-political system with frequent elections.³ The healthcare system of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has been enhanced due to the building of new hospitals and clinics and the renovation of the former ones. New programs encourage economic growth and small and medium-sized business (SME) development, tourism and agriculture.⁴ Compared to 1947, The people of AJK strive to achieve growth and stability; their economic, medical, educational, and infrastructure opportunities are better accessible.⁵

Status of AJK in 1947

In 1947, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) did not exist as independent state. It was part of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir that

³ Planning & Development Department AJ&K. <https://pndajk.gov.pk> .

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

experienced a lot of political turmoil when the British India was partitioned. Consequently, the Line of Control was constituted and the initial Indo-Pakistani war erupted. The western parts of Jammu and Kashmir including AJK became a self-governing province after taking over Pakistani rule by the Karachi Agreement of 1949. Consequently, AJK was no longer an independent state, but another administrative unit within Pakistan.⁶ The Azad Kashmir was furious with India following the conversion of Maharaja Hari Singh into an Indian citizen. On October 27, 1947, the soldiers of India invaded the state of Kashmir and ever since it has remained there. Pakistan was especially on the side of the Kashmiris, especially when the Pakistani army officially occupied Jammu and Kashmir(J&K) in May 1948, and the pro-Pakistan forces were involved in the conflict with the Indians until the ceasefire brokered by the United Nations was announced on January 1, 1949.⁷ Significant Maharajas such as Pratap Singh, Hari Singh, Gulab Singh and Ranbir Singh had absolute power over the legislature, executive and judiciary arms of government. Their rule was based on strong military force to enforce law and order, feudal form of government with local nobility and landlords and heavy taxes to finance the royal court. Political freedom was minimal and suppression of opposition extreme. The social and economic reforms were aimed at enhancing the wealth and leverage of the

⁶Christopher Snedden, *The untold story of the people of Azad Kashmir*, (oxford university press), 2012.85

⁷ Ibid.

Maharajas. Gulab Singh, the founder of the dynasty instituted power. With the transition, dictatorial rule came to pass and democratic leadership began in the region.⁸ Maharaja Hari Singh enacted a law that guaranteed him the higher status and his religious society. He tended to put Hindus in his administration, police and army at the top ranks. He employed most non-Muslims in the police department, 37 of them were of the ranks of the inspectors and even higher indicating that only two were Muslims.⁹

Political Rights

The political instability and war which prevailed in the region in 1947 had an enormous effect on the political right of the individuals residing in the present-day Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The region was governed by the tyrannical Maharaja Hari Singh of the state of Jammu and Kashmir who had tremendous control over the locals as well as provided them with minimal democratic freedom. During Maharaja Hari Singh, the freedom of politics was limited, and autocratic rule dominated. The government of the Maharaja did not allow much local representation of population or even political participation. An adult universal voting system did not exist. Ordinary people lacked the actual political rights to vote and engage in the

⁸ Professor Muhammad SarwarAbbasi, *Kashmiri Musalmano Ki Jodo Jahad e Azadi, 1892-1947*(Muzaffarabad: institute of Kashmir studies, 1992), 33-34.

⁹Christopher Snedden, *The untold story of the people of Azad Kashmir*, (oxford university press), 2012. 14

process of legislation. There was a legislative body that was established in 1934 and was called the Praja Sabha; it existed within the princely realm. However, the Maharaja had the final word and the power of this body was limited. Proper democracy was not demonstrated in the representation of the Praja Sabha and most of the population felt underrepresented especially Muslims.¹⁰ The Muslim majority in regions like what is today AJK was growing increasingly unhappy with the perceived injustices and the lack of political rights in 1947. This displeasure was the cause of a rebellion against the reign of the Maharaja when he was unwilling to either join Pakistan or India. These militias and the local army that assumed control of the areas that followed the uprising and the ensuing invasion by the Pashtun tribal militias of Pakistan called themselves Azad (Free) Jammu and Kashmir.¹¹

Education

The 1947 educational environment in AJK was characterized by low literacy rates, restricted access to educational opportunities, and poor infrastructure placed a low value on education, and the majority of people, particularly in rural areas, had very little access to formal education. Prejudice, poverty forbade parents from getting their girls

¹⁰ Alastair Lamb, *The Kashmir Problem, a historical survey*, (New York: Frederick A. Prager 1966), 71-73.

¹¹ Christopher Snedden, *the untold story of the people of Azad Kashmir*, (oxford university press: 2015), 83.

educated especially Muslims were reluctant to co-education. The ratio of boys and girls in school was 12:1¹². Old Data of educational of 1947 shows, that the total number of primary schools was only 250, 33 middle and lower middle schools, 1 girls high school, 8 high schools, and 1 intercollege only. There were no kindergarten (KG) schools, degree and oriental colleges.¹³

Health

After British India was divided, the struggle left Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) with a badly underdeveloped health system in 1947. There was a severe scarcity of medical professionals and very few hospitals and clinics with little emphasis on public health and preventive care, health services were mostly concerned with providing emergency care. All in all, the health system was primitive and found it difficult to meet the population's urgent requirements amid the continuous unrest.¹⁴

Infrastructure

The infrastructure in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) was underdeveloped in 1947 due to the crisis that ensued after the partitioning of British India. The transport system had a sparse gravel road and limited train connection, which made traveling difficult.

¹²PremNathBazaz, *Kashmir in crucible*, (Lahore: Printing press 1991),46.

¹³ Planning & Development Department. <https://pndajk.gov.pk/statyearbook.php> .

¹⁴ Ibid.

Communication infrastructure was very minimal, telecommunications infrastructure was limited and the mail service was not constant. In the countryside, more specifically, there were lacking facilities; there was a lack of solid educational infrastructure, disease outbreaks were abetted by the fact that there was no access to sanitary facilities and clean water. Overall, there was a great deal of unrest in the area, making it difficult for the infrastructure to serve the requirements of the people.¹⁵ What is now Pakistan was a stop on all states' import and export trade routes with British India. The railway line that connected Jammu and Sialkot was the sole one. Apart from this one Railway line, there were four more major highways.

1. Sialkot, Jammu Srinagar by Banihal.
2. Rawalpindi Kohaladomeil Sirinagar road.
3. Rawalpindi Peshawar Abbottabad Muzaffarabad domain Srinagar Road.
4. Jehlum Mirpur Kotli Poonch Ori Siri Nagar Road.¹⁶

Economic condition

In Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), the state of the economy was not very promising in 1947, firstly, due to the agrarian character of the economy, the presence of poor industrialization and infrastructure. It was very much subsistence-based and fertile valleys supported the growth of crops like rice, wheat, and maize. The British Indian

¹⁵ Interview of an old age refugee from Manakpaiyan Mahajar camp.

¹⁶ Professor Muhammad Sarwar Abbasi, *Kashmiri Musalmano Ki Jodo Jahad e Azadi, 1892-1947* (Muzaffarabad: institute of Kashmir studies, 1992), 5.

partition led to migration of the people and economic shocks as well, which had a major part in the economy of AJK.¹⁷

Development of AJK in the last 77 years

Over the last 77 years, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) have experienced tremendous economic and societal shifts in various aspects. Within the economic sphere, AJK has focused on such spheres as small-scale industry, tourism, and agriculture. With the use of natural resources, in general, AJK has made the infrastructure and living standards better and surmounted numerous challenges.¹⁸

Self-Governance

The Prime Minister is the Chief Executive, assisted by a council of ministers, the elected membership of which is forty members directly elected and eight elected indirectly, with five women members, one technocrat, and one Mashaikh¹⁹. The fifty-five women, the single technocrat and Mashaikh, and the eight indirectly elected members comprise the forty-eight members of the Legislative Assembly. The ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Affairs is a linking body between the Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan governments. Since the Pakistani government assumed power over an old and

¹⁷ *ibid*, 1992, 4.

¹⁸ Interview of an old age refugee from camp.

¹⁹ Government of the State of Azad Jammu & Kashmir – Official Portal.
<https://ajk.gov.pk/>. (Accessed date 11-07-2024)

undeveloped economy, the key mission has been to advance the economic growth of the country.²⁰

Infrastructures Development

The development of the infrastructure in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has been oriented towards the economic and societal development of the state. Large expenditures and progress have been experienced in many industries, such as telecommunications, energy, and transportation. The second notable player has been the Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is meant to boost trade and movement by building new roads and highways. Since the year 1947, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has achieved a lot as far as infrastructural development is concerned. Initially the road network in the area was minimal and primitive, but it has expanded to include in excess of 18,187 kilometers of paved and unpaved roads, which includes 10,365 metaled roads, 7,822 fair-weather roads, and 0.78 per square kilometer of land.²¹

Transportation

Kotli-Rawalakot Road: Some of the key towns are connected here, and it allows movement within the area. Whereas taxis and auto-

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Azad Jammu and Kashmir at A Glance - 2022<https://pndajk.gov.pk/uploadfiles/downloads/AJK%20At%20A%20Glance%202022.Pdf>(accessed on 11.7.2024)

rickshaws are common in large cities, more people now use buses and vans to commute across regions, and this has enhanced the public transit. Lack of accessibility to some places has also been enhanced through the building of many bridges and tunnels that have been used to navigate through the perilous terrain. Even though it is currently small and not functional for receiving regular flights by people, Muzaffarabad Airport has played an essential role in receiving official and emergency flights in the past. There are also helicopter services to evacuate and provide disaster relief. In the interest of the local ladies, a specifically designed bus service was recently launched in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) government, with Sardar Tanveer Ilyas Khan, the Prime Minister of AJK, conducting the official opening of the bus.²² Among the 156,207 total registered vehicles in AJK, there are 1,910 buses and minibuses, 3,373 trucks and micro trucks, 13,343 motor cars, 121,500 motorcycles, 8,840 rickshaws, 648 wagons/ vans/ambulances, 4,527 jeeps, and 2066 tractors.²³

²²Specialized 'Pink Bus Service' launched by AJK PM

<https://www.app.com.pk/domestic/specialized-pink-bus-service-launched-by-ajk-pm/>(accessed on 14.7.2024).

²³ Azad Jammu and Kashmir at A Glance -2022

<https://pndajk.gov.pk/uploadfiles/downloads/AJK%20At%20A%20Glance%202022.pdf>(accessed on 11.7.2024)

Development of Electricity and Hydropower

The electrical infrastructure in AJK was partially weak after 1947. Power could only be depended on in urban areas and even there, it was not sufficient to meet the needs of everybody. Over the years, there have been attempts to expand the power grid and supply remote locations with electricity. Electrification projects have begun to access remote and underserved regions and this has significantly increased the radius of service provided by electricity delivery within AJK.²⁴In AJK, there are 723,121 power connections overall, and 723,121 of the localities have electricity. Up until now, 95.43% of the population has access to electricity.²⁵

Water Pipe Supply

To enhance the availability of clean and safe water, Azar Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is planning its water supply with a number of programs and projects. These initiatives include construction and upgrading of infrastructure, including reservoirs, water treatment plants and pipelines. Projects to improve water quality and increase water supply networks are funded by the government and foreign

²⁴ Interview of an old age refugee from camp.

²⁵ Azad Jammu and Kashmir at A Glance -2022

<https://pndajk.gov.pk/uploadfiles/downloads/AJK%20At%20A%20Glance%202022.pdf>(accessed on 11.7.2024)

organizations. Overall, 5,698 (45.35%) houses have been provided with this facility.²⁶

Education

Following partition, AJK had few schools and even fewer higher education establishments when it came to educational facilities. Particularly in rural and isolated places, access to education was restricted. A deliberate attempt has been made over the years to increase the number of schools in AJK. To accommodate the expanding population, the government has opened a large number of elementary, middle, and high schools in collaboration with other non-governmental organizations. Great progress has been made in expanding the number of elementary and secondary schools, which has increased enrolment rates and given more kids access to a basic education. The current administration has implemented NTS-based testing services to guarantee transparency in the appointment of teachers.²⁷

²⁶ Azad Government Of The State Of Jammu & Kashmir, statistical book 2022 online

<https://pndajk.gov.pk/uploadfiles/downloads/AJK%20Statistical%20Year%20Book%20202220pdf> (accessed on 12.7.2024)

²⁷ Azad Jammu and Kashmir official portal online at <https://ajk.gov.pk/education> . (accessed on 13.7.2024)

Educational institutes

In Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), many educational institutions offer programs in the diverse academic and professional fields. The University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (UAJK) is the best university in AJK located in Muzaffarabad and it provides courses in humanities, sciences and professional development. The university has a reputation of conducting researches in the fields of environmental management, meteorology and geotechnical engineering. Focusing on the education of females, the Women University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir in Bagh offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in various fields as a more effective way of empowering and educating women. Business administration, computer science, engineering, and Islamic studies have been taught in the Mohi-ud-din Islamic University, Nerian Sharif. In Mirpur, Mirpur University of Science and Technology (MUST) offers engineering, computer science and business administration in order to support the technical and professional education in AJK.²⁸ There are 4, 126 elementary and mosque schools, 1023 middle schools, 785 high schools and 1,17 higher secondary schools in AJK according to current estimates of schools.²⁹ The up to date data of colleges indicate There are 93 inter-colleges, 74 degree college, and 13 postgraduate college in AJK, 1 in Muzaffarabad (AJK Medical College

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Muzaffarabad),¹ in Mirpur Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Medical College,¹ in Rawalakot (Poonch Medical college Rawalakot). Muzaffarabad has 1 cadet college which provides students with an opportunity to prepare for higher education and military careers by providing them with quality education with the focus on leadership and discipline.³⁰

Literacy Rate

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has one of the highest literacy rates in Pakistan of over 76%. The high level of literacy in the area could be explained by the considerable numbers of investment and efforts into the education. It is also interesting that the female population of ten years and older literacy stands at 67 and male at 86 in the state.³¹

Health care

The healthcare in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has undergone tremendous changes since 1947. The initial system was basic and had limited facilities and served mainly the simple medical needs. The 90s and 80s were the years of slow yet gradual rise in maternal and child health and illness prevention through opening new hospitals and health centers and by being involved in various health programs. Further growth and modernization continued to be experienced in

³⁰ ibid

³¹ Ibid.

AJK during the 2000s following spending incurred in constructing new facilities, renovating hospitals, and supplying them with modern medical equipment. Besides the policies that aim to enhance the training and capabilities of the medical staff, the health programs that deal with issues like disease management and vaccination have been introduced into practice.³²

Hospitals and Clinics

On our independence in 1947, AJK had 11 Civil Dispensaries and only 30 beds. It has since developed an amazing healthcare system among the people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir.³³ The first Thalassemia Center was established in Muzaffarabad recently, and free emergency services are now available throughout the area.³⁴ With the commencement of the Sehat Sahulat Program, every person in AJK would have access to health insurance. This program seeks to provide access to high-quality healthcare services and provide financial security against medical expenses.³⁵ Through the use of telemedicine services, AJK has connected Pakistan's largest hospitals with nearby health institutions. This is beneficial for offering specialist care and consultations remotely, particularly in isolated and

³² Health Department Ajk online <https://health.ajk.gov.pk/> accessed on 14.7.2024)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Prime Minister launches health insurance scheme for Azad Kashmir. *Dawn*, 19 December, 2020 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1596591> .

economically challenged areas.³⁶ Every district in AJK, including Muzaffarabad, Mirpur, Kotli, Bagh, Poonch, and Neelum, has a district health hospital (DHQ). There are 08 teaching and specialty hospitals for the delivery of high-quality healthcare and advanced medical education in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). 7 district hospitals are there in total. Every tehsil in AJK has a hospital called Tehsil Headquarters (THQ). In addition to offering primary and secondary healthcare, these hospitals are essential to the tehsil healthcare delivery system. There are 13 (THQs) in AJK. AJK's rural and urban areas are home to basic health units (BHUs) approximately 228 (BHUs) are there in AJK. The region is also providing 81 dispensaries and 160 malaria centers.³⁷

Health indicators

The healthcare system in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has been transformed over the last 77 years. Since its humble beginnings in 1947, the region has attained great milestones in the improvement of health indicators and increased medical care services to its citizens. There are 4,231,311 OPD visits in the area.³⁸

³⁶ Health Department Ajk online <https://health.ajk.gov.pk/> . (accessed on 17.07.2024)

³⁷ Azad Jammu and Kashmir at A Glance -2022.
<https://pndajk.gov.pk/uploadfiles/downloads/AJK%20At%20A%20Glance%202022> .

³⁸ Azad Jammu and Kashmir at A Glance -2022.
<https://pndajk.gov.pk/uploadfiles/downloads/AJK%20At%20A%20Glance%202022> .

Economic development

Since 1947, Azad Jammu economic development has increased as the economy has shifted its subsistence to a more diverse economy. AJK has registered growth in some of its businesses in past few decades such as small-scale industry, tourism and mining. Even though the 2005 earthquake was a blow back yet services and infrastructure have since been strengthened thanks to restoration and outside funding of Reliance.³⁹ Recent efforts, however, have been working to maximize the region's economic potential by fostering community activities, creating the required infrastructure, making plans, and aiming to progressively encourage more investment and economic growth in the region.⁴⁰

Agriculture

The historical background of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has seen a tremendous improvement in the growth of the agricultural sector since it was founded in 1952 as the Department of Agriculture (DOA). The DOA promoted the use of better seeds, fertilizers and pesticide use whereas giving more emphasis on demonstration of better farming practices. The department has established facilities

³⁹ Government of the State of Azad Jammu & Kashmir – Official Portal. <https://ajk.gov.pk> .

⁴⁰ Daily Times. Pk, 2020. “The Key to Economic Development of Azad Kashmir.” Daily Times. January 25. <https://dailytimes.com.pk/545790/the-key-to-economic-development-of-azad-kashmir/>

during the Since the Department of years including nursery of fruit plants, soil science labs and entomological labs. In the 1995 reorganization of the department a Directorate of Agriculture Research and Technical Support Services and a Directorate of Extension, Training and Adaptive Research were also added. Such efforts have assisted the region in becoming more productive and modernizing agricultural practices.⁴¹In AJK, overall 640,481 hectares are used for agricultural purposes.⁴²

Industries

Since 1947, the industrial development of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has been through several phases, with the initial efforts of industrialization focusing on such industries as cement and textiles and discovering the prospects of hydropower. It was diversified further in the 1990s and 2000s when a large number of industries emerged, but due to political unrest and inadequacy in infrastructure, it has limited its growth. AJK has continued to diversify its industry base in recent times through infrastructural improvements and an incentive to investment. Hydropower projects have also been another key agenda whereby the water resources available in the region are utilized in sustaining industrial activity. AJK is continuing its

⁴¹AgricultureAJK – Agriculture AJK. <https://agricultureajk.org/> .

⁴² Azad Jammu and Kashmir at A Glance -2022.

<https://pndajk.gov.pk/uploadfiles/downloads/AJK%20At%20A%20Glance%202022> .

industrial development; the existing statistics indicate that there are only 2 industries in the area.⁴³

Trade and Commerce

The trade and commerce in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) have been developing over the years. Firstly, during the early post-1947 times, the trade and commercial activities were very low, and the region mainly centered on agriculture. The gradual growth of the field of market infrastructure and business activities happened in the 1980s and 1990s. This was the time when the enhancement of trade and access to markets started. The Line of Control (LoC) had been shut down in the war between India and Pakistan in 1947-48 but later opened to travel in 2005. The first bus service between Muzaffarabad and Srinagar was launched in April 2005, even though the terrorist attack on the Tourist Reception Center in Srinagar occurred on the day the service was launched.⁴⁴ Due to the unique geographic location and historical background, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is a diverse trading and commerce environment. It also produces a variety of fruits such as pears, apples, and apricots, and these are exported and also used domestically.⁴⁵ In order to enhance trade and attract investment, the AJK government has put in place a number of

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ D. Suba Chandran, Cross-LoC Trade Challenges and Opportunities in J&K. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep09049.pdf>

⁴⁵ Planning & Development Department AJ&K. <https://pndajk.gov.pk/>.

incentives, such as tax breaks and subsidies. There are also policies that have been implemented to improve the business climate and infrastructure. In spite of such developments, there is still a negative effect on the efficiency of trade and investor confidence due to problems such as political instability and inadequate infrastructure. Although AJ&K is a politically complex state, its populace is hospitable and strong, which can be used as the spirit of freedom and strength in times of trouble.⁴⁶ The main objective of Azad Kashmir Small Enterprises Corporation (AKSIC) is to support small and cottage businesses through market-driven financial and industrial assistance, and therefore, contribute to establishment of employment opportunities and socioeconomic development of the State. The proposed initiative would build and market indigenous handicrafts to provide small entrepreneurs and artisans with improved business opportunities, as well as to increase their income and make the latter financially independent. The program is a compulsory component of the development program aimed to revive crafts on the basis of modern technology and tendencies of the market. Export, product quality and productivity will be increased with technical and financial aid.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Government of the State of Azad Jammu & Kashmir – Official Portal. <https://ajk.gov.pk/> (accessed on 18.7.2024)

⁴⁷ Small Industries Corporation. <https://sic.ajk.gov.pk/>.

Social developments

Since 1947, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, (AJK) has progressed at a tremendous pace in regards to social development. The unique political position of AJK, an elected state, has enabled the tailor-made social and economic policies. The reforms have been taking steps to achieve governance and transparency through legal and administrative reforms.

Human rights

Over the recent few years, the human rights situation in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has slightly improved. Some of the strategies currently being used include the one that highlights the right to justice, political freedom, and freedom of speech. It has also experienced overall enhancement of the freedom of media and civil society and increased civil society voice. Minorities and women have also been subjected to more efforts, enabling more individuals of either group to be active participants. It is evident that both local and international actors in AJK desire change even when they have more to accomplish.⁴⁸ With a president-style of government, a parliamentary form of government that reminds more of a prime-ministerial government and certain levels of self-governing legislation, Azad

⁴⁸ OHCHR. n.d. "First-Ever UN Human Rights Report on Kashmir Calls for International Inquiry into Multiple Violations." *OHCHR*.
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/2018/06/first-ever-un-human-rights-report-kashmir-calls-international-inquiry-multiple-violations>

Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has a unique form of government. The legal framework employed in the region consists of both local and Pakistani laws, which are used in harmonizing the particular needs of the region and their compatibility with the general principles of legal systems. The attempts to empower the AJK judicial system are proposals that the values of justice and governance are being advanced. Nevertheless, there are some restrictions that are still present to date that may not allow the territory to become independent, including the power of the AJK Council and the actual role of the federal government of Pakistan.⁴⁹ Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) enjoy political and civil freedoms because of having a parliamentary form of government, representatives, and an administration that is established through the constitution. Nonetheless, the action of these rights can be curtailed by the interference of Pakistani officials and the Council of AJK which seems to have quite a lot of power over the local government. However, the region continues to experience the process of democratization and human rights protection.⁵⁰ Such programs to encourage interfaith peace and protect the rights of every community are highly important in AJK. Being the four pillars of the state-

⁴⁹kashmirwelfare.org.uk. 2024. "Health and Welfare in Azad Kashmir: A Closer Look at Hospitals and Medical Infrastructure - Kashmir Welfare Foundation." *Kashmir Welfare Foundation - Empowering Lives, Enriching Kashmir*. July 15. <https://kashmirwelfare.org.uk/health-and-welfare-in-azad-kashmir-a-closer-look-at-hospitals-and-medical-infrastructure/>

⁵⁰ Freedom House. n.d. "Pakistani Kashmir." Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/pakistani-kashmir/freedom-world/2022>

minority relations, the citizens of AJK focus on modernization, brotherhood, and tolerance. Such organizations as All Neighbors International Organization (ANIO) are important in fostering the understanding and respect for each other among the religions of the world.⁵¹ The freedom of the press in Azad Kashmir has been suppressed in the past with high intensity, and the freedom of information is in danger because of stringent laws and external forces. The newspapers of the day are already in the region, and many of the publications are being monitored by the Pakistani government, and this has led to a controlled media. The launching of the private FM radio and the expansion of media freedom followed the 2005 earthquake.⁵²

Cultural preservation

The preservation activities of desecrated and cultural activities in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) have transformed significantly since the year 1947. These innovations involve computerization of archives, recording of oral traditions, popularizing local arts and crafts, and restoration of historic places.⁵³ It is not only a historical

⁵¹ Gardezi, Syed Abbas. 2022. "Minorities in AJK Enjoying Equal Rights: Barrister Sultan." *The News International*, December 29 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1024947-minorities-in-ajk-enjoying-equal-rights-barrister-sultan>

⁵² "With Friends like These..." 2023. *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/09/20/friends-these/human-rights-violations-azad-kashmir>

⁵³ Government of the State of Azad Jammu & Kashmir – Official Portal. <https://ajk.gov.pk>.

landmark, but it is presently a cultural and tourism center in Muzaffarabad. It attracts visitors throughout the region and even farther due to its serene nature in the presence of breathtaking scenery in the form of hills and flowing rivers. The history and architecture of the fort are so rich and beautiful that it is a very interesting study for history lovers, scholars, and tourists also.⁵⁴ The mosque architecture in Kashmir is evidence of the continuation of the architectural tradition that has evolved over the thousand years of time in the region. The Islamic cultural influence was in Central Asia and it was shifted to Gilgit Baltistan and Neelum Valley. The conservation of the architectural traditions in the region is done in one way through the wooden mosques spotted in Neelum Valley.⁵⁵ In order to preserve and enhance traditional crafts, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has designed a number of policies and programs that focus on cultural preservation of the handicrafts. Among other things, one such initiative is the promotion and marketing of handicrafts using e-commerce and other platforms, accessible not only to a regional or national audience, but also to a global one. The integration of handicrafts and tourism also helps in the promotion of tourist destinations by the use of cultural activities.⁵⁶

⁵⁴Wasif Hussain. 2024. Red Fort Muzaffarabad: a historical gem of Azad Kashmir. *The Pakistan Traveler*. 18. May. <https://www.pakistantraveler.com/red-fort-muzaffarabad/>.

⁵⁵ Architecture of Kashmir: A Case Study of Wooden - ProQuest. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2679346799?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>.

⁵⁶ Small Industries Corporation. <https://sic.ajk.gov.pk/>.

Conclusion

In British India, following the partitioning of the country, political instability and violence were high in the present-day Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) in 1947. The years following independence were volatile, the political system was developing, and the economy was emerging. Having become an autonomous administrative unit, AJK embarked on delivering social services, infrastructure, and some minimum standard of governance to its population. During the last 77 years, AJK has grown substantially in a number of spheres. There has been a lot of development in the area in regard to infrastructure, economic development, health, and education. The outcomes of educational institution expansion are higher literacy rates and extended educational opportunities among the youth. Healthcare services have been improved because there is increased accessibility to medical care and improved facilities for the population. Due to the development of communication, transportation, and road systems, infrastructure development has emerged as a major issue of concern. This has improved connectivity of the area with the rest of Pakistan, which has facilitated trade and economic activity. Hydropower projects and other activities in the energy sector have also contributed to the economic growth and stability of the region. Small-scale industry investments, tourism investments, and agricultural investments have contributed to the economic development of AJK. Tourism has also been encouraged through the exploitation of natural

beauty and the cultural heritage that the area has to offer, and it is earning money. The productivity and income of the farmers in the surrounding neighborhoods have grown due to the move to modernize agriculture besides promoting sustainable farming. Despite these advantages, AJK continues to grapple with such problems as socioeconomic inequality, natural disasters, and political disturbances. However, the patience and will of the people and the development plans and projects that were formulated have prepared the way for progress in the future.
