



ISLAMABAD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

5th Floor, Evacuee Trust Complex, Sir Aga Khan Road, F-5/1, Islamabad, Pakistan
Tel: + 92 51 9211346-49; Fax + 92 51 9211350
Email: ipripak@ipripak.org; Website: www.ipripak.org

PRESS RELEASE

‘Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) Concerns, Reservations and Aspirations: Mainstreaming GB’



- Provide internal autonomy to Gilgit-Baltistan instead of keeping its identity in perpetual limbo.
- Power-sharing may work in Gilgit-Baltistan since it relies on a parliamentary system made up of governing coalitions that function through cooperative mechanisms like negotiation and compromise.

These were the recommendations put forward by speakers during the second part of the IPRI National Dialogue Series roundtable on ‘Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) Concerns, Reservations and Aspirations: Mainstreaming GB’ moderated by former Federal Law Minister and President of Research Society of International Law (RSIL) **Mr Ahmer Bilal Soofi**. The Dialogue Series has been initiated by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI).

Speaking about ‘Mainstreaming Gilgit-Baltistan: Socio-Cultural Perceptions’ **Mr Aziz Ali Dad**, Gilgit-based social scientist and columnist, highlighted the liminal state of GB and argued that to remain meaningful and relevant, it is indispensable for any political arrangement to bring people towards the ‘zone of being’ by investing power in them. ‘By bringing people of GB within the ambit of the Constitution can create this zone of being.’ He said that the



disconnect between power and the people has generated anger, which can provide a fertile ground for upheavals. Mr Dad was also of the view that a genuine struggle for political rights has not formed because the ‘so-called thinkers of GB have failed to build a coherent narrative to create a new social contract.’ According to him, instead of providing a long-term solution, both existing and previously ruling parties in GB have tried to capitalise on popular sentiments for their political mileage. As a result, the long overdue question of the status of the region remains in perpetual limbo.



On the issue of ‘Constitutional Processes and GB Order 2018: Issues and Challenges’, **Mr Ahmer Bilal Soofi** was of the view that while there have been attempts in the past to govern the GB region with a sense of independence like other provinces of the country, none has so far worked. He outlined that ‘there can be a legal instrument crafted through which it can be given a provincial status, notwithstanding Pakistan’s international position on Kashmir.’

Dr Raja Qaiser from the Quaid-i-Azam University discussed the ‘Political, Social and Economic Rights of the People of Gilgit-Baltistan’ and how power can be shared in this territory from a theoretical lens. He discussed three academic perspectives – consociationalism, centripetalism and power-sharing. ‘In case of consociationalism democracies are developed on the basis of reconciling societal fragmentation along ethnic and religious lines, whereby no one group has clear majority, therefore, segmental autonomy is given to all. Mutual veto power is accorded in proportional representation to all of them under the Federation. However, it is not applicable to GB’, he stressed. Dr Qaiser also pointed that centripetalism cannot be recommended as a governance strategy in GB either since it has serious weaknesses such as promoting instability and exacerbating divisions. He recommended power-sharing mechanisms which call for ‘diverse groups having the right to executive-level input, that is, ones ability to impact outcomes is proportional to one’s electoral strength, may work in the region’ According to the speaker, power-sharing may work in Gilgit-Baltistan since it relies on governing coalitions that work through cooperative mechanisms like negotiation and compromise.



Earlier, welcoming the speakers and participants to the National Dialogue Series, Acting President of IPRI, **Brig (R) Mehboob Qadir** shared that owing to its geographical contiguity to South Asian as well as Central Asian states, Gilgit-Baltistan carries immense significance for the successful materialisation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). ‘However, question marks over the constitutional future of Gilgit-Baltistan remain a problem towards this end. To exacerbate the situation, reforms introduced so far have not been able to allay the genuine concerns of the people of GB. The most recent constitutional reform being the GB Order 2018, merely touches the demand of greater participation of the people’, he lamented. He hoped that the National Dialogue Series on this subject will provide answers to pertinent questions like an inclusive political framework that can extend constitutional cover to a special region like GB; and any legal impediment to its politico-constitutional integration with Pakistan.