

Neighbourhood Watch Opinion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Human Security Threat Gilgit-Baltistan South Asia

Big Yack bigyack.com/neighbourhood-watch-opinion-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-human-security-threat-gilgit-baltistan-south-asia

June 16, 2023



A recent report by the International Forum for Rights and Security (IFFRAS) highlighted the socio-economic impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project on the residents of Gilgit Baltistan. The report claims that the economic and political rights of the local people have been snatched and they are being deprived of their basic human rights like employment, electricity, and education etc, particularly affecting the vulnerable population. The group of individuals that are most at risk are the pregnant women and unaccompanied minor children. All this has been attributed to the increasing involvement of China that has increased its penetration under the guise of developmental work, which constitutes a violation of the municipal law. Under municipal law, the lands can only be used for the construction of military infrastructure in Gilgit Baltistan. These incidents are ringing a bell in South Asia during arguably a major collapse of Pakistan's economy. There are several questions regarding the history of the region of Gilgit Baltistan, impacts

of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and what possible steps should be taken to prompt changes on the ground to protect the socio-economic and political rights of the residents.

Historically, the Gilgit Baltistan region has been vulnerable to sectarian conflict and violent extremism. One of the reasons that is often discussed is that it is territorially, historically, and culturally connected to Ladakh, which has not been seen in a positive light by the government in Pakistan. In 1949, the Pakistan government established the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Northern Areas that included the Gilgit Baltistan region with an aim to treat them as a direct extension of Pakistan territories.

ALSO READ | China Has Converted Rather Peaceful Border Into A Live Border: Ex-Envoy Ashok Kantha

Violation Of Municipal Law

Coming to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project, which focuses on industrial development, building energy and communication infrastructure and is a key artery of China's Belt and Road Initiative connecting western Chinese regions with Pakistan and its ports of Gwadar and Karachi for creating an enduring connection between China, Pakistan, Arabian Sea, the Gulf, and the Middle East. This project fits within the Chinese notion of the Silk Road and Economic Belt, and the 21st century Maritime Silk Road has had long-term financial implications for Pakistan. The reason being Pakistan's primary thrust has been on agriculture, and the land of the locals has been taken away under the garb of energy and industrial cooperation without providing them with alternative employment and a source of income.

Given the significance of the Gilgit Baltistan region, the impact of China Pakistan Economic Corridor on human security in a region that acts as a nexus between South Asia and Central Asia is assumed to be of great significance. In simple terms, human security recognises that the most pressing threats to individuals do not come from interstate war, but from the emergencies that affect people every day, such as famine, disease, displacement, civil conflict, and environmental degradation that ensure that people live their lives with dignity and being free from fear and want. It encompasses policy, planning, and strategy, and relates to all kinds of issues such as the distribution of wealth and resources, shaping the economy, international relations, global warming, natural disasters, and well-being in general.

At a larger level, efforts need to be made to counter violent extremist programmes, enhancing the rule of law and access to essential public goods given the grim economic condition of Pakistan, and creating mechanisms to address legitimate grievances and governance issues in Gilgit Baltistan, which requires focusing on the need for poverty alleviation through employment, education, and healthcare provisions. To achieve the abovesaid aims, the emphasis must be on a human needs perspective to conflict resolution. Such an approach focuses on the needs for identity, security, recognition, participation, dignity, and justice.

The need of the hour of ensuring peace and justice was best explained by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. He wrote: “Justice and peace are not contradictory forces. Rather, properly pursued, they promote and sustain one another. The question, then, can never be whether to pursue justice and accountability...”. So, there is a need to ensure accountability of individuals and state institutions involved in the human rights violations as per the municipal law while ensuring the livelihood and basic human rights of the residents of Gilgit Baltistan to provide human security to all individuals.

Abhinav Mehrotra is an Assistant Professor and Amit Upadhyay an Associate Professor at Jindal Global Law School.

[Disclaimer: The opinions, beliefs, and views expressed by the various authors and forum participants on this website are personal and do not reflect the opinions, beliefs, and views of ABP News Network Pvt Ltd.]