

Know your Terrain Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK)

ROHIT SINGH

General

The state of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) consists of three major regions namely Ladakh, Kashmir Valley and Jammu. The Princely state of J&K acceded to India in October 1947. On 26 October 1947 the first batch of Indian troops landed at Badgam airfield in Srinagar to evict the Pakistani invaders from J&K. By August 1948, the invaders were evicted from most parts of the valley and Jammu region. However by the time the UN effected ceasefire came into being in 1948, Pakistan had held on to 78037 sq km of territory which is now called Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). In addition 5120 sq km of territory called the Shaksngam Valley was illegally ceded to China by Pakistan in 1963.

POK lies between longitude 730 – 750 and latitude 330 – 360 and comprises an area of 13,297 square kilometres). The topography of the area is mainly hilly and mountainous with valleys and stretches of plains. The area is full of natural beauty with thick forest, fast flowing rivers and winding streams. Main rivers are the Jehlum, Neelum and Poonch. The climate is sub-tropical highland type with an average yearly rainfall of 1300 mm. The elevation ranges from 360 meters in the South to 6325 meters in the North. The area under cultivation is around



166,432 hectares (almost 13% of the total area), out of which 92% of the cultivable area is rain-fed.

Administrative Divisions and Districts

Azad Kashmir (POK) is divided into three divisions (Muzaffarabad, Mirpur & Poonch) and ten administrative districts with Muzaffarabad as the capital of the state. The Muzaffarabad Division comprises of Muzaffarabad and Neelum, Rawalakot Division comprises of Bagh, Poonch & Sudhnuti districts whereas districts of Mirpur Division are Mirpur, Kotli & Bhimber. These ten districts are further divided into 29 subdivisions.

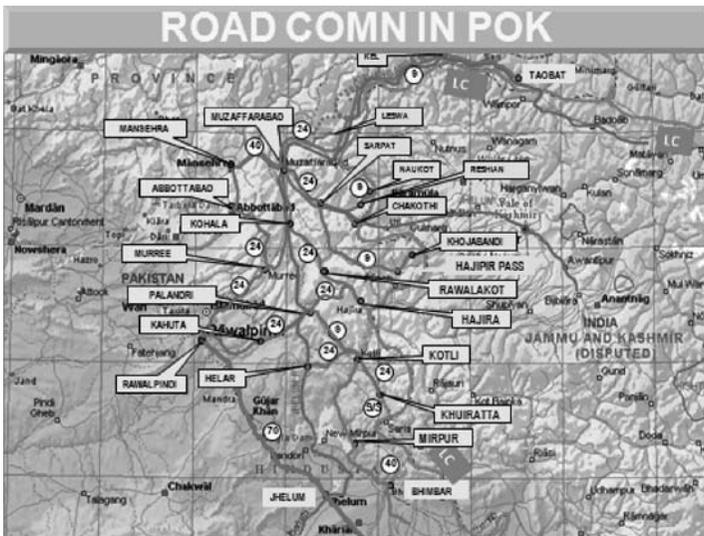
The people's participation in the political and socio economic development is ensured through the elected institutions of the AJ&K Legislative Assembly comprising 41 directly and 8 indirectly elected members and the AJ&K Council with six elected members.

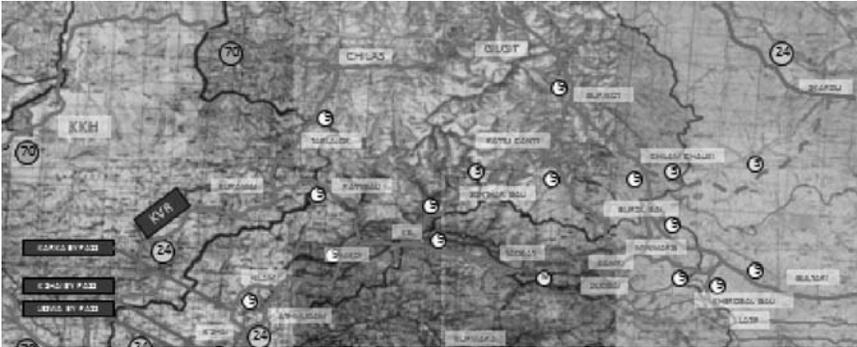
Population

The total population is 3.4 million (2004). The population density is 258 persons living per square km. The rural to urban population ratio is 88:12.

Road

The total road length is 12183.44 Km (as of year 2008) which includes 5983.49 Km of metalled road. The road density is 0.45 Km.





Road Conn In Neelum Valley and Gilgit (above)

Major roads in Neelum Valley & Gilgit-Baltistan (Northern Areas)

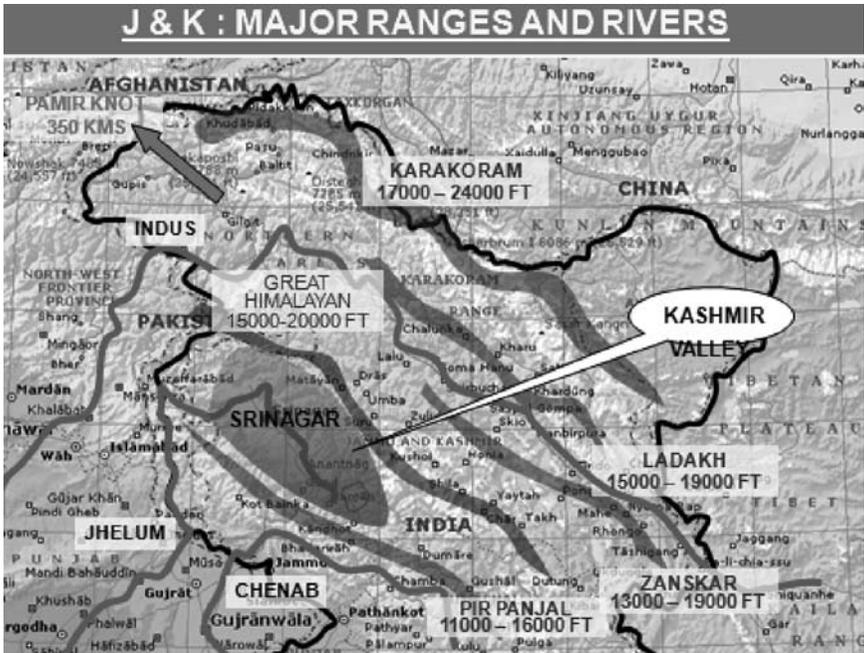
Road	CL
Garhi-Burawai (KVR)	24
Barawai-Tarlajor-Chilas	9
Garhi-Athmuqam (Karka By Pass K'Shai By Pass Leswa By Pass)	24 (9)
Muzzafarabad-K'Shai-Nilam-Shardi-Kel-Taobat	9
Rattu Cantt-Kamri-Dudgai	9
Kamri-Minimarg-Kheobal Gali-Gultari	9
Abottabad-Chilas-Gilgit-Khunjerab Pass (Karakoram Highway)	70
Gilgit-Skardu	24
Gilgit-Gurikot-Rattu Cantt	9
Gilgit-Chilam-Chauki	9
Skardu-Olingthang-Beilargo	9
Skardu-Khapalu	9
Skardu-Dansam	9

Airports

The Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (POK) in collaboration with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) of Pakistan has constructed two small airports at Muzaffarabad and Rawalakot cities. The facility is also expected to be extended to the cities of Mirpur and Kotli.

Gilgit-Baltistan (Northern Areas)

Gilgit-Baltistan formerly known as the Northern Areas is the northernmost political entity within Pakistan. It borders Pakistan's Khyber Pukhtunkhwa



province to the west, Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor to the north, China to the northeast, Azad Kashmir to the south, and Jammu & Kashmir State of India to the southeast. Gilgit-Baltistan covers an area of 72,971 sq km and has an estimated population approaching 1,000,000. Its administrative center is the city of Gilgit (population 216,760).

The territory became a single administrative unit in 1970 under the name Northern Areas and was formed by the amalgamation of the Gilgit Agency, the Baltistan District of the Ladakh Wazarat, and the states of Hunza and Nagar.

Terrain

The terrain brief is divided into three major parts:

- Gilgit-Baltistan (opposite own Siachen and Kargil Sectors).
- POK West of Kaobal Gali (opposite Kashmir Valley).
- POK South of the Pir Panjal Range (opposite Jammu region).

Gilgit-Baltistan

The region is straddled between the Karakoram and the Great Himalayan Range running North West to South East from the Pamir Knot (approx 350 km away in

Central Asia). The terrain is mostly glaciated and mountainous with elevation between 15000-24000 ft.

West of Chorbat La (16700 ft), the terrain is full of snow fields, couloirs of stones and rocky pinnacles, range behind range of great mountains with glaciers glittering in the hollows of them. Towards the North is the Shyok valley formed by the Shyok river which after flowing in a west to East direction enters POK near Turtuk. The Karakoram watershed is some 50 miles to the North of the Shyok valley and consists of some of the worlds stupendous peaks above 25000 ft. The Siachen-Saltoro glaciers lie further North and North East of the Shyok valley. These are three of the world's longest glaciers outside the polar regions are found in Gilgit-Baltistan — the Biafo Glacier, the Baltoro Glacier, and the Batura Glacier. There are no practicable passes between this range and the head of the Hunza river.

Baltistan lying between the Western Himalayas and the Hindu Kush and Karakoram is hemmed in with the highest mountains in the world. The Shyok river flows further south towards Khapalu and joins the Indus before Skardu. Here the mountains on either side of the Indus retreat, and leave a sandy basin five miles or more in breadth, the bed of an ancient lake, across which the river winds. This plain is 7250 ft above sea level. The Skardu plateau standing on an alluvial plain of 150 ft is well irrigated and extensively cultivated. The Indus Valley affords the most direct route between Skardu and Gilgit. Another route from Katsurah descends near Astor via the Bannok La.

The Nanga Parbat (26629 ft) is visible further west from Astor. After traversing miles of boulders and patches of hard snow, the descend into Gilgit Valley begins. Pine-woods and flowery pastures cover the hillsides and there is more water here than in the arid landscape of Ladakh and Baltistan. Further north lies the districts of Hunza and Nagar.

Gilgit-Baltistan is home to five of the “eight-thousanders” and to more than fifty peaks above 7000 meters. Gilgit and Skardu are the two main hubs for expeditions to those mountains. The region is home to some of the world's highest mountain ranges—the main ranges are the Karakoram and the western Himalayas. The Pamir mountains are to the north, and the Hindu Kush lies to the west. Amongst the highest mountains are K2 (Mount Godwin-Austen/ 28265 ft) and Nanga Parbat.

There are several high-altitude lakes in Gilgit-Baltistan.

The Deosai Plains, are located above the tree line, and constitute the second-highest plateau in the world at 4,115 meters (14,500 feet) after Tibet. The plateau

lies east of Astore, south of Skardu and west of Ladakh. The area was declared as a national park in 1993. The Deosai Plains cover an area of almost 5,000 square kilometres. For over half the year (between September and May), Deosai is snow-bound and cut off from rest of Astore & Baltistan in winters. The village of Deosai lies close to Chilum Chokki and is connected with the Kargil district of Ladakh through an all-weather road.

POK West of Kaobal Gali

The Great Himalayan Range running North West to South East bifurcates Gilgit-Baltistan and the Neelum valley of POK. The Himalayas form the Eastern flank of own 15 Corps. Major passes on this range are the Zoji La (11150 ft) and Kaobal Gali (13600 ft) on own side. From West to East the major passes on the Western Himalayas are Ganai Gali (13310 ft), Barai (14190), Chichai Gali (16311 ft), Ratti Gali (14090 ft) and Kamri Bal Pass (13368 ft). The terrain in this zone straddled between the Himalayas and the Shamshabari Range (SSBR) is rugged and mountainous. Altitudes range from 3900 to 17,500 ft.

Areas above 8000 ft receive heavy snowfall and remain snow bound from December to May. Large areas are avalanche prone. Forest cover ends at approx 10000 ft with moderate to heavy undergrowth.

Shamshabari Range (SSBR)

SSBR emanates from Kala Pahar in the West and joins the Great Himalayas near Kaobal Gali in the East. The important passes on the SSBR from West to East are Tut Mari Gali (TMG) (11758 ft), Nastachun Pass (10200 ft), Pharkian Gali (9840 ft), Zamindar Khan Gali (10472 ft) and Razdan Pass (11942 ft). From SSBR several minor ridges run towards the Kishanganga (Neelum) river into POK. From East to West some of these ridges are Hajibal, Naushera, Tand, Mungerkala, Gugaldhar, Gujardur, Singer, Guthur and Kalsuri. In own Tangdhar sector, the Sari Ridge emerging from the SSBR runs in a North-South direction from Teethwal to Gabdori Nar and forms the LC opposite Lipa Valley. Lipa Valley is straddled between Kafir Khan Ridge running West from Kala Pahar and the Sari Ridge. The Muzaffarabad, Domel and Chakothi valleys lie between the Kafir Khan Range in the North and the Pir Panjal to the South.

Important valleys and communication centres in the Neelum and Muzaffarabad valleys include Muzaffarabad, Mandal, Lipa valley, Bugina enclave, Dudhnial enclave, Kel, Nekrun, Dudgai, Kamri and Minimarg.

The Kishanganga (Neelum) river is 50-100 m wide and runs almost parallel to the LC from Kanzalwan to Teethwal. It is 270 km in length from its source at Vishensar to Domel near Muzaffarabad. The river has steep banks.

The Jhelum originating at Verinag spring in South Kashmir enters POK at Chakothe. The river is 50-100 m wide and has gradual banks. The total length from Verinag to Mangla Dam is 430 Km.

POK South of PPR

Pir Panjal Range

The terrain is Mountainous and rugged. The average elevation is 4000 ft in South-West to 16000 ft in the North-East. Interspersed with fast flowing nalas, gorges and valleys the range has thick forests on its slopes.

The Pir Panjal runs from North West to South East. Several spurs descend towards the LC from own side. The important passes are Haji Pir Pass (8650 ft) and Banihal (9330 ft). In the Poonch (Hill) sector some of the minor ridges/spurs descending into POK from East to West are Badrian Ki Dhar which tapers down to the Betar Nullah near Poonch, Hathi Nar, Kiran, Ghoremarr, Dumgala- Pritam and Taulpir-Satwal. Important valleys opposite Hill sector are Kailar – Bakhni, Kahuta – Tungeripiran – Palangi and Bandi – Gopalpur.

Punch river flows east to west and turns south and enters POK. It is 600 m to 800 m wide. The Nullahs originating in POK and running South-East are Dorungli, Betar and Rangar.

Krishna Ghati Sector

The terrain is mountainous with hts varying from 800m to 1800m. Krishna Ghati bowl separates Punch from Mendhar on own side of the LC. Important towns of Hajira and Palandri lie on the enemy side. Ridges emanate from Shasitar ridge.

Satwal, Rokar and Pir Barmouch are the important ridges running North West to South East towards the LC from POK. The Mendhar River Joins the Punch river at Daruchian. The length of the river is 20 KM and width 70 –400 M.

Rajouri Sector

The terrain is mountainous with hts varying from 800m in valley to 1600m on the ridges. Ridges and valleys are devoid of cover. Fwd slopes of mother ridge are thickly wooded.

Area across are cultivated right up to the LC. Nikial is a major communication centre on en side. No of spurs emanate from mother ridge (on own side) towards Nikial. The Nikial Bulge is straddled between the Mother Ridge and Tain Dhar.

Some of the forward ridge lines emanating from the Mother Ridge are the Pir Barmoch, Kanait, Goga, Lanjot. Pir Kalanjar, Kallar, Barbad, Jabran and Gura Gujran are the fwd ridge lines south of Bhimbar Gali. The depth ridges west of Nikial and between Nikial and Kotli-Gulpur are the Janjora, Kalanjar, Mata Ranjoti and Devigarh.

The Mendhar Ridge on own side dominates the Hot Spring (Tattapani) and Dhanun valley on the enemy side which is straddled between the Mendhar and Pir Barmouch Ridge. Nanderi and Rad Nars form two narrow valleys dominated by the Pir Barmouch ridge. Panjani, Damui Khas, Nail, Ban, Khorban and Bhaban are several nallas flowing East-West between the Poonch river and the Mother Ridge on own side.

Kotli, Nikial and Khoiratta are important valleys and communication centres opposite Rajouri Sector.

Naushera Sector

Semi mountainous trn with hts ranging from 900m to 1200 m, large no of ridge lines and valleys exist in area. The Mean dist between ridge lines is approx 3-4 km. Valleys are fertile and densely populated. The important ridges are Tain Dhar, Baroh Lambipatti, Kuchumb Dhar, Kothi Dhar, Chawadhar and Kalidhar.

2/3rd of Lam-Khuiratta valley lies on en side and 1/3rd on own side. Jhangar-Kalhor valley lies between Kotidhar and Chawadhar ridges. Chauki-Samani valley is situated between Chawadhar and Kalidhar ridges.

Dewakas nallah runs across Lam and Khuiratta valleys. It is approx 135 km long and 25 – 50 m wide joined by Khorban Kas and Khadora Kas nala after entering POK known as Bhaban after entering POK. Suketar Kas and Uchhili Nala originates from Kothi dhar ridge and cuts across Chauki-Samani valley. It joins the jhelum river. The Mirpur-Mangla Complex which houses Pakistan's Strike Corps and the Mangla Dam are located opposite own Naushera Sector.

Rohit Singh is an Associate Fellow at CLAWS.