

In the news this past week (5-12 November 2020):

GEOPOLITICAL WRANGLING IN THE STRATEGIC KASHMIR REGION OF GILGIT-BALTISTAN



On 15 November, the two million people of Gilgit-Baltistan will go to the polls for their legislative assembly, which currently has minimal powers and is largely governed directly by Pakistan. However, on 1 November, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan announced a "Provisional Status of the Province" during a visit to the scenic northern region of Gilgit-Baltistan, which also serves as Pakistan's gateway to China. His announcement drew condemnation from India, which

has long objected to any such changes by Islamabad. Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan's only land link to China, is the northern part of the larger Kashmir region. There is currently a large Chinese presence in the region as part of China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) infrastructure development for the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China's search to overcome its strategic bottleneck in the Strait of Malacca continues to make Gilgit-Baltistan a vitally important region. Both Delhi and Islamabad have claimed all of Kashmir since gaining independence 73 years ago, and have fought two wars over the territory. Last year India angered Pakistan by announcing unilateral changes to the status of Kashmir, taking away some of the region's privileges. With the recent announcement, Pakistani officials made no link between India's prior move and Mr Khan's proposals, however, the Pakistani action is likely to be viewed in both countries as a partial tit-for-tat response. Full details of the proposal have not yet been revealed, but it will most likely bring the region closer to the status of Pakistan's other federating provinces. Such an action would require a constitutional amendment in Pakistan, which must be passed by two-thirds of Pakistan's parliament. Mr Khan gave no indication of a timeframe for the proposal's implementation.

From a Christian perspective, the strategic region is a crossroad of three major religious influences: Islam (Pakistan), Hinduism (India) and Atheism (Communist China). Although a recent discovery of a 'Nestorian cross' in June 2020 (that dates between 900-1200 years ago) indicates an ancient Christian presence, there is currently no remaining Christian communities from this era. The current Christian presence is small (an estimated 1,300 believers) and of recent origin. However, the Chinese Church has clearly indicated that they intend to utilise the Chinese infrastructure projects (OBOR) to share the Gospel in regions where many are yet to hear it for the first time. This would mean that if Pakistan pursues its partnership with China in Gilgit-Baltistan, there is a possibility for the Gospel to gain traction in this 'unreached' part of the world.

Pray with us for the following:

- For the Lord to utilise the 'plans of man' in the region for the advancement of His Kingdom

- For the Lord to send workers into this ‘harvest field’
- For the small group of believers in the region to be encouraged and strengthened

Image: <https://www.internationalaffairshouse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Featured-Image-editors-8.png>