

GILGIT-BALTISTAN





- Climate-induced floods hit Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), resulting in 17 deaths and six injured, damaging 640 houses completely and 450 partially, and displacing thousands of people who await their complete rehabilitation.
- Elections for local bodies have not been held in GB for the past 14 years.
- Several protests took place across GB throughout 2022 against land grabbing, cuts in subsidised wheat and long load-shedding hours.
- Dozens of protestors were booked on anti-terrorism charges, including 11 persons booked in Minawar, Gilgit, for protesting against land grabbing.
- Three pro-human rights laws were passed by the GB assembly in 2022 including the GB Commission on the Status of Women Act, the GB Senior Citizens Welfare Act and the GB Food Act.
- The government introduced education reforms focusing on girls' education, such as introducing a separate pink bus service for women and establishing the first-ever women's sports complex in Gilgit.
- A shelter home for women has remained under construction in Gilgit for the past several years, and the bill against domestic violence has remained pending for the last year.
- Mental health services were found wanting in GB. Though they were shifted from Jotial to the provincial headquarter hospital in Gilgit, locals have demanded a full-fledged mental health facility. There is no forensic lab or medico-legal expert to deal with criminal cases such as suicides, honour crimes, murders or violence against women.
- The total number of crimes that took place in GB during 2022 is 2,185, and the total number of pending cases in the GB chief court is 1,796.
- Work on a model village for flood-affected IDPs is under process in the village Buber, Ghizer. This was approved by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif after his visit to Buber on 2 September, which was the worst affected village in GB.
- 29 cases of suicides were reported in GB in 2022, with 20 of these reported in Ghizer. After a police investigation in Ghizer, five of them were identified as cases of murder.

- The GB government banned the manufacture, import, use, and purchase of polythene bags in GB under its plastic-free GB project. Directives were issued to the Environmental Protection Agency for the implementation of the project on 14 December.
- Land disputes regarding the GB-KP boundaries in Shandur, Babuser and Basha remained unresolved in 2022.



GB remained affected by the year's devastating floods from June to September. According to the Gilgit-Baltistan Disaster Management Authority (GBDMA), 17 people died and six others were injured in these floods while PKR 7,406 million in losses occurred across GB. Moreover, 22 powerhouses, 49 roads, 78 drinking water supplies, 500 irrigation channels and 56 bridges were damaged.¹

Thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) await complete rehabilitation, except IDPs from the village of Buber where the prime minister approved the allocation of community land as a model village for IDPs—Buber was the worst flood-affected village in GB with 65 completely damaged houses and nine deaths.

Another significant rights violation that was noticeable in 2022 was land grabbing. While this has been a continuous issue in GB for several years, protests erupted across the region in December regarding land disputes between the government and local communities.² Protestors were especially concerned about *khalisa* land—a term used in GB for barren land that was part of the former Kashmir state—and natural resources.

Meanwhile, the GB government formed a committee under the supervision of the chief minister on 12 December and assured the public that land reforms would be introduced before the end of March 2023 after consulting with local communities across GB.³ However, the region's nationalist and progressive parties rejected this and instead demanded the restoration of state-subject rule (which was enacted in the former state of Kashmir and is still in place in AJK).



Laws and law-making

As per information collected from the GB Assembly secretariat, seven important acts were passed during the year by the GB Legislative Assembly (GBLA), out of which three pertained to human rights. These were the Gilgit-Baltistan Commission on the Status of Women Act, the Gilgit-Baltistan Senior Citizens Welfare Act, and the Gilgit-Baltistan Food Act.

Information from the Social Welfare Department GB indicates that the rules for key human rights legislation and policies were also approved by the GB cabinet on 18 November: the Gilgit-Baltistan Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, the Gilgit-Baltistan Child Protection and Response Act, the Gilgit-Baltistan Human Rights Policy, and the Gilgit-Baltistan Social Protection Policy.

Administration of justice

A judicial crisis emerged when GB Chief Minister Khalid Khursheed Khan challenged the appointment of the GB chief court's Judges before the Supreme Court of Pakistan on 28 September, contending that these had been made in violation of the GB Order 2018 and Rules of Business 2009.⁴

On 6 September, the Bar Council said that the Supreme Appellate Court of GB had been kept incomplete for many years, which was tantamount to depriving the region of recourse to justice and basic human rights. The Bar Council demanded that Justice Shakeel be appointed chief justice of the court and two lawyers should be appointed judges to complete the court. The Bar Council also demanded the permanent appointment of the current chief court Judges to avoid a future crisis.⁵ However, the Supreme Appellate Court remained vacant from May to November, with only a single judge, Justice Shakeel Ahmed, as acting chief judge.

In 2022, a number of initiatives were introduced to improve GB citizens' access to justice, such as the establishment of a circuit bench in Chilas on 14 May, which had been a longstanding demand of the local legal fraternity. A digital court was also installed at the principal seat of the GB chief court on 19 May, a first in the region's history. This digital court aims to help lawyers across the country and in different parts of GB to pursue their cases in the chief court.

On 16 June, the Legal Aid Society and GB chief court signed an MOU for the design of a training curriculum on alternative dispute resolution for at least 28 judges across GB. Moreover, a copy-scanning branch in the GB chief court was set up on 30 August. This branch aims to facilitate citizens by allowing them to access their case records remotely.⁶



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Data collected from the chief court GB indicates that 3,646 cases were instituted in 2022 and 3,499 were disposed of, with 1,707 pending from 2021, thus yielding a balance of 1,796 as of end-December.

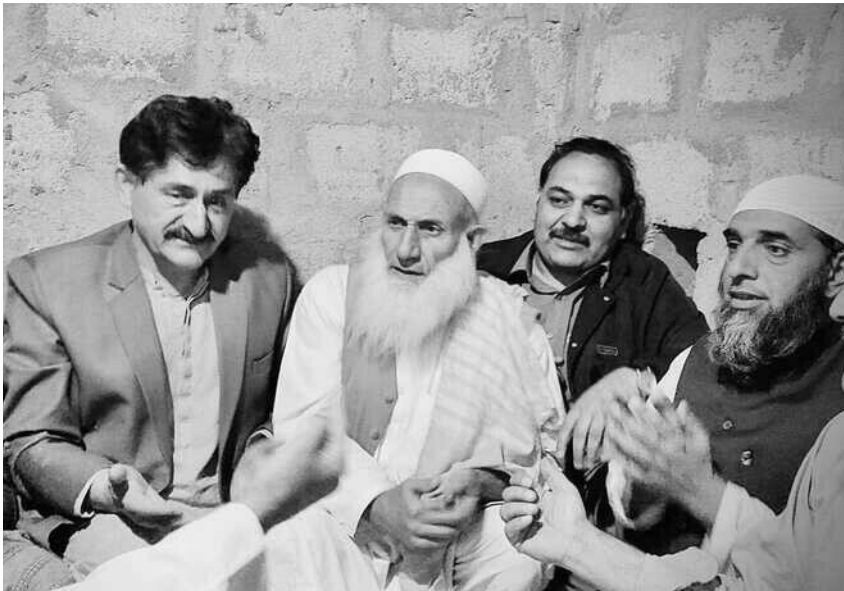
An anti-terrorism court in Gilgit sentenced a person to death on 31 August for abusing and murdering a 14-year-old girl in June 2021 in the Koshded Ishkoman village, Ghizer. According to news reports, no other death penalties were awarded during the year.

On 11 November, a two-member bench issued orders to the GB governor to call a session of the assembly for the promulgation and implementation of the Gilgit-Baltistan Service Tribunal Act (Amended) 2022; the appointment of the chairman and members of this tribunal was pending due to a delay in the promulgation of the said act.



Law and order

On 8 October, a group of militants led by militant commander Abdul Hameed took GB minister of social welfare, human rights and women’s development Ubaidullah Baig and dozens of other passengers in Babusar, Diامر, hostage while protesting and blocking the main road in Babusar which connects GB with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). They demanded that their 10 companions in different jails be released – these people had been arrested in high-profile cases, including the murder of nine foreigners in Nanga Parbat in Diامر in 2013. They also demanded instituting a ban on sports for GB’s women. The GB government acceded to these demands after negotiations, and the minister along with other hostages were released.⁷



A group of militants took GB minister Ubaidullah Baig hostage and demanded that their 10 companions in different jails be released.

Cases of excesses by law enforcement authorities were reported during the year. For instance, on 16 April, personnel from the Frontier Works Organisation allegedly manhandled GB’s minister for tourism, Raja Nasir, on the Skardu-Gilgit road. In another case, Frontier Corps personnel allegedly opened fire on a car at Raikot bridge, Chilas, on 18 April when the car did not stop at a check-post – the family in the car was unharmed.

Muhammad Qasim, a Chilas-based senior journalist, highlighted the case on social media. Both matters were resolved after a patch-up between the parties. A press conference on 23 January also highlighted the alleged harassment of local community elders by the SHO of Juglot.

The number of cases registered for total crimes recorded during the year have increased since 2021 by almost 17 percent. The breakdown of crime statistics is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Crime statistics for GB for 2022

<i>Offense</i>	<i>Number of cases</i>
Murder	62
Attempted murder	121
Hurt	145
Rioting	91
Assault on the public	43
Rape	5
Kidnapping or abduction	44
Suicide	29
Attempted suicide	11
Highway dacoity	2
Other dacoities	6
Other robberies	14
Burglary	141
Cattle theft	34
Motor vehicle theft and snatching	139
Other theft	174
Total PPC crimes	1,722
Violations of the Arms Act	270
Prohibition orders	162
Violations of local special laws	1

Source: Central Police Office GB.

Twenty-nine cases of suicide were reported in GB, with the highest incidence (20) taking place in Ghizer. Five of these were declared cases of murder after a

police investigation was conducted in Ghizer. HRCP's Gilgit office conducted a dialogue with stakeholders on 30 July in Ghizer, including the district administration, to prepare a pilot suicide prevention plan in Ghizer. This plan was submitted to GB's ministry of social welfare and human rights; however, the GB government has yet to implement it. A committee has been formed on the subject, but civil society groups are not part of the said committee.

Cybercrime continues to be a serious problem in GB. However, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA)'s cyber response wing in Gilgit has been unable to address these cases properly due to the lack of human and financial resources. Table 2 shows the top ten most reported cybercrime cases received by the FIA wing in GB during 2022.

Table 2: Data on cybercrime in GB in 2022

<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Type of cybercrime</i>	<i>Number of reported cases</i>
1	Electronic fraud	225
2	Unauthorised use of identity information	202
3	Offences against the dignity of a person	201
4	Cases pending before 2022	36
5	Cyberstalking	21
6	Hate speech	11
7	Unauthorised access to information system or data	10
8	Unauthorised access to critical infrastructure information system data	9
9	Offences against the modesty of a person or minor	8
10	Unauthorised interception	8
	Total	731

Source: FIA cyber response wing, Gilgit.

Jails and prisoners

Prisoners in GB continue to suffer from a lack of adequate nutrition, recreational activities and access to medical facilities for physical and mental health. There are six jails in GB – a central jail, four district jails and one sub-jail – with a total sanctioned capacity of 697 prisoners. Table 3 provides information on the type of prisoners currently incarcerated in GB for 2022.

Table 3: Prison statistics for GB for 2022

Under-trial prisoners	241
Convicted prisoners	129
Prisoners on death row	2
Total number of prisoners	370
Male inmates	360
Female inmates	1
Juveniles	9

Source: Inspector general of prisons GB.

Two prisoners from Indian-occupied Kashmir, Noor Muhammad Wani and Feroz Ahmed, have been incarcerated in Gilgit Jail since 2021 as they allegedly crossed the Line of Control. In spite of orders for their release issued by the local court, they remained in jail in 2022, as per a report from HRCF's Complaints Cell.

On 19 May, an inmate of Central Jail Minawar Gilgit, Afraz Hussain, who had been jailed in April 2018 on murder charges, allegedly jumped off the roof of the prison and died.⁸ A police report has claimed that the inmate was not of sound mental health. Later, Hussain's relatives staged a sit-in outside the chief minister's office, alleging that the jail officials had not allowed him treatment in spite of repeated requests. Eventually, the GB chief court ordered an inquiry into the matter.



Freedom of movement

Freedom of movement was barred for a number of political and social workers after they were placed on the schedule four list of the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) 1997. Although the number of persons on this list has decreased to 36, some political workers and nationalists have not been removed, including GBLA member Aga Shezad and political activists Manzoor Parvana, Yawar, Shabir Mayar and Syed Ali Rizvi. These people allege (in a speech in the GB assembly by Aga Shezad) that the act has been misused since religious extremists have not been placed on the list as per the aim of this list when it was first introduced. In one notable instance, Mubashir Hussain, a social media activist from Diamer who was released on 20 January 2022, was again arrested on 19 December 2022 under the ATA section 11EE and PPC section 124A, as highlighted on social media.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion

2022 was a tumultuous year for freedom of religion or belief in GB. When Muharram started in August, a clash between two religious groups erupted when a prominent local Shia leader, Agha Rahat Hussain Al-Hussaini, attempted to hoist a religious flag at Khomar Chowk in Gilgit. Two people were killed and 17 others were injured during clashes at the nearby Yadgar Chowk in Gilgit.⁹

Blasphemy cases were also registered during the year. For instance, on 20 January, Qasimo, a 30-year-old resident of Sherqilla Punial District Ghizer, was arrested in Ghizer on blasphemy and anti-terrorism charges for allegedly disrespecting a mosque in the Sherqilla village of Ghizer. A village committee (Sherqilla awami committee) had unanimously agreed to charge Qasimo despite the fact that he was afflicted with mental health issues. In another instance on 8 October, an FIR application was submitted against Fida Ali Shah, a journalist with the *Phander Times*, by a local religious group in Ghizer for allegedly violating the sanctity of a worship place. This issue, brought to the notice of HRCP's Complaints Cell, was later resolved through the intervention of local political leaders and administration officials.

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression continued to be repressed in GB during 2022 with several instances of arbitrary arrests and harassment of journalists and activists. As per the FIR, social activist Ahmed Shigri was booked for raising his voice against Shiger's superintendent of police when the latter stopped an ambulance conveying a dead body in Baltistan on 20 January. On 5 April, senior journalists Shabbir Mir and Abdul Rehman

Bukhari alleged that the chief minister had lied about his academic credentials, following which they were allegedly subjected to threats and a harassment campaign by the ruling PTI party; the two journalists shared this on their Facebook post.

Sultan Madad and Hasnain Ramal were arrested on 2 August under section 16 of the MPO for criticising on social media the government's policies regarding sectarian issues in GB. Journalist Mehtab Ur Rehman was allegedly tortured by police in Gilgit in the same month on his way to his office. The victim provided this information to the Gilgit Press Club. On 26 August, a journalist from Ghanche Muhammad Ali Alam allegedly faced intimidation and threats from the police for highlighting human rights violations.

Ali Mujeeb, the head of local digital media house Ibex Media Network, narrowly escaped a kidnapping and murder attempt on 8 October. However, the culprits have not yet been arrested. On 26 October, social media activist Shaheen Shah from Gupis, Ghizer, was booked for allegedly criticising the armed forces and maligning the state on social media. Liaqat Ali Khan, a social media activist from Iskoman, was also booked on the same charges on 12 November. An Astore-based journalist by the name of Shams Ur Rehman was booked under false allegations on 5 December.

Freedom of assembly

Mass protests were carried out by the Awami Action Committee (an alliance of political parties, religious parties, and civil society organisations, which raises its voice for the rights of local people) and civil society groups across GB throughout the year against the imposition of taxes, a cut in wheat subsidies, increase in load-shedding hours during the winter and price hikes. A number of these protestors were booked in different cases, including 25 protesters in Hilal Abad, Kharmang, for demanding an increase in the quota of wheat for their area, according to Shabir Mayar, a local social and political activist.

Such cases indicate repression of GB citizens' right to freedom of assembly. This trend is evident in other cases as well, such as a protest against load-shedding that was staged by people from several villages – Goher Abad, Gitch, Singul and Thingdas in Singul – from 9 to 16 January. An FIR was registered against seven persons leading this protest under sections of the ATA. Later, the FIR was withdrawn due to public outrage. The president of Thore Youth, Khunu Alam, and social activists Samee and Chodari Jaffer were also booked for advocating for the rights of affectees of the Basha Dam incident on 20 April.

In another instance, 25 protestors were booked in Ghakuch, Ghizer, in July for protesting against the harassment of women in a local park. Later, the GB chief court quashed the FIR. On 1 October, the police resorted to baton-charging women and residents of Shigar who were

demonstrating against the forced acquisition of land for a hospital. Eleven of these demonstrators were arrested, but were later released. On 21 December, the local people of Minawar, Gilgit, staged a protest against the assistant commissioner of Gilgit for alleged land occupation. They later submitted an FIR against the assistant commissioner as well. However, 11 of these demonstrators were reportedly booked under the ATA for allegedly threatening the local administration.

Another protest took place on 7 April by the residents of Aliabad, Hunza, against the allegedly illegal acquisition of their land by the local administration. On 8 April, civil society groups in Baltistan protested against the vice-chancellor of Baltistan University for his alleged involvement in the sexual harassment of two students. However, instead of any action against him, he was again appointed acting vice-chancellor after his tenure ended. Female students from Karakoram International University (KIU), Gilgit, protested against the lack of separate transport arrangements for female students on 13 April.

Candidates for vacancies in the health department also protested against unfair test interviews conducted by the said department, which were then cancelled on 30 July. In another case, the GB government had advertised over 600 temporary posts for lady health workers in the national program for family planning and primary healthcare in ten districts of GB. Following tests and interviews, a notification for appointment was issued on 30 November which was put into abeyance by Chief Minister Khalid Khurshid Khan on 12 December. The chief minister also constituted an inquiry committee to probe irregularities during the appointments. The association of lady health workers protested and blamed the government for mishandling the issue and succumbing to pressure imposed by the failed candidates.¹⁰



Political participation

Deprived of the right to representation in Pakistan's policymaking institutions, including the Parliament, GB's political status remained in limbo throughout 2022 despite pledges made by the previous PTI government after the elections and by the federal PML-N government. Women's rights activists also expressed concern on the lack of women's representation in the GB cabinet and council.

Local government

GB has been deprived of local bodies for the past 14 years. A local bodies act was passed by the GBLA in 2014 but elections were not held. The sitting government has also introduced new local bodies. Elections have not been held yet in spite of a strong demand for polls among civil society.

Shrinking spaces and the role of assemblies

The GBLA has highlighted shrinking spaces and lack of powers since its inception in 2009. The existing GBLA passed a resolution on 9 March 2021 demanding that GB be made a provisional province of Pakistan, while previous assemblies passed several resolutions demanding the integration of GB into the Constitution of Pakistan. However, the federation did not heed these demands.

On the other hand, GB-based nationalists and some progressive groups have rejected the demand of the GBLA while calling members of the assembly supporters of their 'colonial masters'. Instead, they have demanded that the issue of GB be resolved as per the resolutions of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan and the aspirations of the local people without damaging the identity of the area.

A number of members, while addressing the assembly, complained that the role of the GBLA in the promulgation of laws and accountabilities was denied by different power centres in GB. While addressing the GBLA session on 30 September, the only nationalist member of the assembly, Nawaz Khan Naji, criticised the shrinking role of the assembly and stated that the assembly was bound and had zero powers. He further stated that the bureaucracy, judiciary and religious segments were more powerful than the GBLA.



Women

Violence against women persisted in GB, with cases often underreported. Such cases include honour killings, domestic violence and harassment at the workplace. Unfortunately, protection and redressal mechanisms for women are slow to be implemented in GB, with shelter homes for women having been under construction for the last five years, and the draft bill for the protection of women against domestic violence pending for the last year.

HRCP's Gilgit office received over 25 complaints related to gender-based violence in 2022, with women comprising the majority of victims. In two cases of domestic violence, as per complaints received by HRCP, a woman from Yaseen committed suicide on 24 May and left a written note in which she accused her in-laws of domestic violence. Another woman from Chipurson, Gojal, was found to have been homeless for the last six years due to domestic violence by her in-laws and brothers.

In crimes related to honour, which have been on the rise in GB for the past five years, a man named Ummer Khan killed his wife and a policeman in Asumber on 25 February.¹¹ Later, a young boy killed a van driver of a local college in Yaseen. HRCP's Gilgit office also received a complaint related to honour crime: in one case, a complainant said that a young boy and a married girl from Thor valley, Diamer, had been killed on 20 September by the girl's husband as the victims had allegedly committed adultery. HRCP's Gilgit office also received a number of complaints related to cyber-harassment of women.

A campaign was launched by women and human rights activists in GB on International Women's Day, 8 March, to highlight how women in the region are continuously deprived of their inheritance and property rights. According to women activists, this economic dependency is a major cause of violence against women in the region.

Women in GB continue to suffer from harassment at the workplace, with most cases going unreported due to lack of hope for redressal. The law against workplace harassment in GB that was passed in 2013 is yet to be implemented properly; the code of conduct of the said law has yet to be displayed in workplaces.

Alarmingly, access to public spaces and recreational activities for women were also threatened in 2022 when religious groups in Gilgit protested against a women's sports gala which had been announced by the chief secretary. Instead of standing firm against these demands, the government negotiated with the protestors and the sports gala was renamed to a 'meena bazar' which was held on 5 October.

Transgender persons

The rights of transgender persons continue to be denied in GB. According to local activists, the transgender community hides their identity due to social pressure and out of fear of reprisal. A transgender woman from Gupis escaped her home due to domestic violence in September; she was shifted back by the police, irrespective of the fact that it was an unsafe place for her.

HRCF's Gilgit office received a complaint regarding a trans person who had gone into hiding after receiving threats from various groups, including the religious clergy, for dancing at a festival in Astore on 20 July. She also received death threats on social media.

Children

According to surveys carried out by the Benazir Income Support Programme and UNICEF, 20–30 percent of children in GB are out of school. Some of the reasons behind this figure include corporal punishment at schools, gender disparity, poverty and long distances from homes to schools.

Incidents of violence against children also took place in 2022. On 8 June, a young girl was killed by her father in Chachi, Ghizer – the father later confessed to the police at the Phander Police Station that it was part of the training that he was receiving from a militant group. The sexual abuse of a seven-year-old child in Shiger was reported on 22 July. The offender was arrested and the case is under trial. On 2 October, a six-year-old boy was sexually abused in Skardu, according to local human rights activists. The offender in this case was also arrested. In December, GB chief court Judge Ali Baig took suo moto notice of a case involving the sexual assault of a young college student by a gang near the KIU campus in Gilgit. The police were ordered to arrest the perpetrators and produce them in court. The offenders were arrested following these orders.¹² On 29 December, a child by the name of Rondu Tormik was sexually abused by eight people. Local human rights activists confirm that the accused were arrested under ATA charges, and the case is under trial in Gilgit's ATC.

Labour

GB's labour department remained nonfunctional in 2022 due to lack of resources and capacity. As a result, there is little awareness of existing labour laws and labour rights in GB, and labour exploitation has become a major issue in the region. In one incident, a labourer was physically tortured by his employer in Skardu, Baltistan, on 8 September, according to information from a local police station in Skardu.

The elderly

Despite the passage of the Gilgit-Baltistan Senior Citizens' Welfare Act in 2022, the implementation of this act is pending and there is a serious lack of facilities for senior citizens in GB.

People living with disabilities

Despite a job quota fixed for persons living with disabilities (PLWDs) in the public sector, violations of this quota persist and many cases involving such violations are under trial. PLWDs with mental health issues are particularly afflicted by a lack of accessible healthcare facilities; while psychiatric services were shifted from the remote area of Jotial, Gilgit, to the provincial headquarter hospital in Gilgit for better accessibility, locals demand that a full-fledged mental health facility should be set up in the region.

PLWDs have also demanded reserved seats in GB as the issues they face continue to be sidelined in the GBLA. According to Irshad Kazmi, president of the Association of Persons with Disabilities GB, PLWDs account for 10 percent of GB's society and thus must be adequately represented in the assembly.

On 20 January, a person with mental health issues, Galaya Ustad, was tortured by local police in Juglot, Gilgit. The DIG of the Gilgit region took notice and local police then apologised to the victim. On the same day, another person with mental health issues, Qasimo, was arrested in Ghizer on blasphemy and anti-terrorism charges for allegedly disrespecting a mosque in the Sherqilla village of Ghizer. *See Freedom of thought, conscience and religion*

Cases concerning the rights of PLWDs remained in limbo during 2022. For instance, a hostel intended for use by PLWDs as a special education complex continued to be illegally occupied by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) despite the GB chief court issuing orders for its evacuation. Special provisions for remissions in registration and tuition fees, as well as transport and accommodations for PLWDs, have also not been implemented in KIU along the lines of HEC policy.

Internally displaced persons

IDPs from Rondu and Attabad continued to face hurdles in their rehabilitation, education of their children and access to healthcare. The 2022 floods unfortunately led to an increase in the number of IDPs awaiting rehabilitation and resettlement.

Protests by flood-affected people also took place in November in which demonstrators claimed that the authorities had not paid heed to their rehabilitation and access to healthcare. This was reported by Fida



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Hussain, a social activist from Rondu. Those affected by the Kargil war also await their rehabilitation—they can neither return to their villages near the Pakistan-India border due to landmines, nor have they been given appropriate compensation.

In welcome news, work on a model village for IDPs of the 2022 floods is under process in Buber. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved this on 2 September after his visit to Buber, a village badly affected by the floods.



Land rights

While land disputes between the government and local communities have been a persistent issue over the past five years, these disputes resurfaced during 2022 amid the absence of land reforms or policies enacted in GB regarding barren land.

A clash occurred between residents of Nagar colony, Konodas, and the residents of Gilgit after the GB government issued a notification banning land acquisition by non-locals on 28 January. After the clash in Nagar colony, the local magistrate confiscated the land on 31 January.

A dispute on Dong Das between Nagar and Ganish, Hunza, became critical when a mob from Nagar attacked the funeral procession of a notable person from Ganish in Dong Das on 28 March. The dead body, which had been buried in a Ganish-owned graveyard in Dong Das, was allegedly thrown onto the road.

An FIR was registered against ten religious and political leaders from Nagar in Aliabad police station, but no arrests were made. The residents of Ganish protested on the Karakoram Highway for 24 hours with the dead body, only ending their protest when a prominent religious leader from Gilgit intervened. This incident was brought to HRCP's notice through a complaint as well in a fact-finding mission in Aliabad in June.

A longstanding border dispute between KP and GB at Basha re-emerged on 10 August, six months after it was resolved, following a demarcation of the land by the Kohistan local administration and a jirga. One of the parties to the dispute, the Thor tribe from Diamer, came forward to reject this demarcation on the grounds that they were not taken into confidence.¹³ Boundary issues at Shandur and Babuser between GB and KP also remained unresolved in 2022.

Other land disputes in Sakwar (Gilgit), Chilmish Das (Gilgit), Maqpoon Das (Gilgit), Konodas (Gilgit), Barmus (Gilgit), and in some parts of Diamer and Baltistan remain in the courts.

Education

On 7 November at midnight, a girls' school in Darel Barogi, a remote area in Diamer, was burnt down. An FIR was registered against unknown persons but the culprits were not arrested.¹⁴ Otherwise, girls' education has seen significant improvement in GB, with new reforms introduced by the government such as the establishment of libraries and computer laboratories in girls' schools, a separate pink bus service for women, and the establishment of a women's sports complex in Gilgit.

Health

There is a shortage of specialist doctors and medical equipment in GB, due to which people are forced to seek medical treatment outside the region. Access to mental healthcare is even more scarce since there is no fully-fledged mental health facility in the region. There is also no forensic lab or medico-legal expert available which hinders the processing of medical evidence for crimes.

Drug trafficking has also increased in GB, but no concrete steps for rehabilitation have been taken by the government, barring some initiatives taken by local police. According to one survey conducted by locals in the Ishkoman valley of Ghizer, there are 144 addicts in the valley. These locals have demanded a rehabilitation centre be built in Ishkoman, but to no avail. In fact, the entire region of GB does not have any rehabilitation or treatment centres for addicts.

Housing and public amenities

The number of unregistered settlement in GB is increasing, particularly on the peripheries of the river belt, in the upper areas of Gilgit and Skardu, and in other towns of GB including Ghakuch, Chilas. This can be attributed to the increase in the number of IDPs in 2022 as a result of the Rondu earthquake and the floods.

Environment

The adverse effects of climate change were keenly felt in GB during 2022. Already vulnerable to climate-induced disasters, GB experienced a significant increase in glacial lake outburst floods, landslides and earthquakes which impacted people's rights to life, livelihood, housing, food and health.

According to the GBDMA, the floods from June to August damaged 640 houses completely and 450 partially, and vastly damaged infrastructure and agricultural land. Seventeen people died and six people were reportedly injured. Apart from economic losses, these disasters also affected mental health, particularly of vulnerable groups such as women, children, PLWDs and elderly citizens. The disaster also displaced many people, worsening GB's already existing IDP issue.

In the last week of September, underground soundwaves in Gulmit, Gojal, were detected by local people – the same geological activities had been detected before the 2010 Attabad disaster. However, the government has yet to conduct any geological survey to identify the cause of these activities.

Environmental pollution also remains a significant issue in GB. The government had banned construction on the river belt, but illegal

construction in that area has led to water pollution, particularly in Gilgit, Phander, Astore, Diamer, Skardu and other parts of GB. A lack of effective laws and policies for responsible tourism has also contributed to rampant pollution of lakes and rivers.

On 14 December, the GB government banned the manufacture, import, use and purchase of polythene bags under its plastic-free GB project. Directives were also issued to the Environmental Protection Agency for the implementation of this project.

Culture

GB has a rich diversity of cultures with seven languages spoken in different parts. However, attempts to promote and preserve these cultures and languages were scarce. Notably, the culture department of GB remained dysfunctional in 2022, and an academy for the promotion of local languages announced by the previous government also remained pending during the year. A member of the committee has said that the development of curriculums in local languages has made significant progress, which is welcome news.

Endnotes

- 1 17 lives lost in Gilgit-Baltistan floods. (2022, August 29). Business Recorder. <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40194386/17-lives-lost-in-gilgit-baltistan-floods>
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