

Good Governance or Institutional Impoverishment in Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK)?

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Context and Introduction:

Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) is administratively divided into three divisions — Muzaffarabad, Poonch, and Mirpur — comprising ten districts, further subdivided into 32 tehsils, 189 Union Councils, and 1771 revenue villages, according to the AJK High Court.

For some time, I have wanted to write about the absence of appointments to key constitutional positions in AJK. Then came the shocking news that the AJK Assembly suspended its rules of procedure to pass the entire budget in a single day, leaving me astonished. This raises profound constitutional and ethical questions about the legitimacy of democratic governance in the region. This article is a reflection on those concerns.

Governance Under the Current Prime Minister

I have never had a personal relationship with the current Prime Minister of AJK, even though I knew his father. I have heard good things from friends in Mirpur about his integrity and adherence to principles. Political opponents have accused him of corruption without evidence — something I attribute more to his strict administrative control, tight grip on the bureaucracy, and oversight of public funds.

However, personal integrity alone is not sufficient for good governance. Comprehensive and institutionalized performance matters. Former President General Ayub Khan's biographer, Altaf Gauhar, once wrote that Ayub Khan categorized bureaucrats into three types:

1. Those who are both incompetent and corrupt.
2. Those who are honest but incompetent.
3. Those who are competent but corrupt — whom he found more tolerable.

I would categorize Anwar-ul-Haq as an honest but overly compromising leader — he has managed to control the bureaucracy, enforce financial discipline, maintain political order, and kept all parties in the coalition without corruption charges. However, his reluctance to make essential institutional appointments reflects a symbolic form of incompetence.

The Foundations of Good Governance

Modern, civilized states rely on foundational principles for good governance:

Transparency, rule of law, meritocracy, public participation, institutional effectiveness, and ongoing

accountability.

Compromising on any one of these principles shakes the entire system. Sadly, AJK today is in the midst of a governance crisis that has seriously disrupted the constitutional and administrative framework.

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Institutional Paralysis and Constitutional Vacuums

Several key constitutional offices in AJK are vacant for prolonged periods, including:

- Judges of the High Court
- The Chief Election Commissioner
- The Ombudsman
- Chairman of the Accountability Bureau
- The Service Tribunal head

These are not mere administrative delays, but signs of deliberate and systemic disregard for constitutional governance. The impact includes:

- Judicial paralysis, delaying access to justice.
- A non-functional accountability system.
- Unheard appeals from civil servants.
- A crippled and questionable Election Commission.

A Parliamentary Farce?

In the AJK Legislative Assembly, almost all ruling members have been awarded ministries, advisory roles, or parliamentary secretary positions.

The opposition has been rendered toothless. As a result, parliamentary oversight, legislative transparency, and public representation have lost all significance. This is not democracy — it is a mutual interest-sharing cartel.

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Democracy Undermined

The recent budget was passed by suspending all procedural rules in a single day.

This was not just a violation of democratic ethics, but an affront to constitutional values. Budget processes must include debate, opposition input, and the possibility of amendments. What was presented is a “Rubber Stamp Budget”, devoid of ethical legitimacy or public trust.

Such governance damages Pakistan’s international image.

Pakistan presents AJK as a self-governing democratic model to the world.

But if constitutional institutions are dysfunctional, the judiciary incomplete, and accountability mechanisms paralyzed — while the Assembly acts as a government puppet — it fuels the narrative that AJK is a mere puppet regime.

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A Propaganda Win for India?

This situation bolsters Indian propaganda, which has long claimed that AJK is not truly autonomous. The disillusionment of the people of AJK becomes evident when they see their region politically hollow and deprived of justice.

This discontent spills over to Indian-administered Kashmir, creating the impression that autonomy is a paper illusion.

People in both regions compare institutions, and draw conclusions that challenge Pakistan's stance.

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Governance and National Security

Good governance and national security are interlinked.

Security is not just about borders — it is about institutional strength, judicial efficiency, economic integrity, and public trust.

When institutions collapse and governance is insincere, internal threats arise, which adversaries exploit.

The National Security Workshop held in AJK with the support of the Pakistan Army is a positive initiative.

It brings together senior military officers, diplomats, and thinkers to address these challenges.

But while discussing national security, they must also understand the internal decay in governance in AJK.

AJK's Institutional Breakdown is a National Concern

AJK's current institutional impoverishment is not just a local governance issue.

It undermines Pakistan's Kashmir policy, weakens diplomatic credibility, and tarnishes national reputation.

AJK's Constitution was granted by the Government of Pakistan, and its design ensures that federal institutions operate here under national law — just like in other provinces.

However, AJK citizens have no representation or voice in Pakistan's federal system, making it impossible for them to raise grievances or demand reforms.

This is a massive democratic void, and it's unclear why national security agencies and political leaders remain unaware of its implications.

This lack of integration is one of the core reasons behind AJK's ineffective governance.

Conclusion: Governance or Collapse?

If institutions don't prevail over individuals,
if constitutional appointments remain stalled,
and if Parliament becomes ceremonial,
then this region will face not just political decline but regional isolation.

The choice is ours:

Do we want Good Governance — or are we content with this self-imposed institutional poverty?

It's time we recognize the difference — and act accordingly.