

## The Development Paradox of Azad Jammu Kashmir:

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AZAD Jammu Kashmir powers Pakistan. Yet it still struggles to power itself. Its rivers generate electricity for the national grid. Projects such as the Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower Project and Mangla Dam supply energy far beyond the region's borders. The government has reduced electricity tariffs after months of public pressure, bringing some relief. But low voltage, unreliable supply, and weak services remain common complaints in many areas.

In many towns, businesses still rely on stabilisers and generators because low voltage affects homes, shops, and small industries. A region that produces electricity for the country should not

still be struggling with such basic problems.

The recent protests led by the Joint Awami Action Committee were never only about electricity bills or wheat prices. They reflected years of frustration over weak governance, slow institutions, and a growing feeling that the region has been left behind. The protests also showed that people are no longer willing to quietly accept poor services and weak leadership.

Spread across nearly 13,000 square kilometres and home to around four million people, Azad Jammu and Kashmir occupies a unique constitutional position as a self-governing autonomous region administered by Pakistan. Literacy rates are often higher than the national average. The people are hardworking, resilient, and deeply connected to their land. Yet these strengths have not produced the kind of economic progress seen in neighbouring Punjab.

That is the real irony.

Azad Jammu Kashmir has rivers, forests, mountains, fertile valleys, and one of Pakistan's strongest diasporas. Nearly two million people of Azad Kashmiri origin live abroad, especially in the United Kingdom. Their remittances support thousands of families. In many villages, the most impressive houses are built with money earned overseas.

But remittances don't build economies on their own.

They improve living standards. They help families survive. They fund homes, weddings, and daily

expenses. But they don't automatically create industries, jobs, transport systems, or functioning institutions.

Houses are being built. Futures are not.

Many young people understand this already. That is why they continue to leave. In many families, the dream is no longer to build a career in Azad Kashmir. It is to reach the Gulf, the UK, or a major Pakistani city. That steady outflow of talent is one of the clearest signs that the local economy is failing to create opportunity.

The frustration grows because people compare their hospitals, colleges, industries, and job opportunities with Punjab and see a widening gap.

Tourism should have changed this picture. Neelum Valley, Leepa Valley, Pir Chinasi, and Banjosa Lake possess the beauty to attract visitors throughout the year. Yet tourism in Azad Kashmir remains seasonal and poorly organised. Hotels are inconsistent. Public facilities are limited. Environmental management is weak.

Other mountain regions show what is possible. In Turkey, the Black Sea region developed eco-tourism, hillside farming, and food industries linked to local produce. In Switzerland, mountain landscapes became the basis for a world-famous tourism economy. In Austria, alpine communities support themselves through dairy farming, tourism, and small manufacturing

industries.

Azad Kashmir once had its own specialised industries too.

Carpet weaving, embroidery, shawl-making, and traditional wooden furniture were respected crafts. Local artisans were known for delicate woodwork and hand-crafted products that reflected the region's cultural identity. Those skills still exist, but they are fading. Young people no longer see them as viable professions because there is little investment, little marketing, and...

[6:26 pm, 24/04/2026] Haroon Rashid Qureshi: Seminar Emphasizes Youth Role in Building Stronger, Prosperous Pakistan

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Altaf Hamid Rao

MIRPUR (AJK), April 24 – A grand seminar held at the Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed Medical College, Mirpur, underscored the importance of empowering youth and channeling their energy toward strengthening Pakistan and building a brighter national future.

The event focused on the theme “Building the Future in the Light of National Narrative,”

highlighting patriotism, constructive thinking, unity, discipline, and national responsibility among young people.

Balochistan's former Secretary Hafiz Muhammad Tahir attended as chief guest. Principal

Professor Dr. Faisal Bashir, Medical Superintendent Prof. Dr. Ijaz Ahmed Raja, Director

Administration Ijaz Mahmood, faculty members, and students also participated.

Speakers said Pakistan has achieved significant progress in defence and strategic standing, describing it as an emerging influential nation on the global stage. They said the country's armed forces have played a vital role in strengthening national security and enhancing Pakistan's international recognition.

They stressed that the youth carry major responsibility as the country's future asset and must align their intellectual and ideological direction with national values. Emphasis was placed on unity, discipline, and awareness of Pakistan's national narrative to safeguard the country's progress.

Speakers also warned against negative propaganda on social media, saying hostile elements are attempting to influence youth thinking and weaken national cohesion. They urged students to counter misinformation through awareness, critical thinking, and positive engagement. They added that digital platforms must be used responsibly to promote truth, education, and national harmony.

It was further stated that while Pakistan's armed forces defend the country's borders, ideological frontlines must also be protected through education and awareness. The importance of character building, research culture, and academic excellence was also highlighted as essential pillars for

national development.

Students expressed pride in Pakistan's defence capabilities and reaffirmed their commitment to national development. They said the youth stand ready to contribute to the country's progress and will support efforts for peace, stability, and prosperity.

The seminar concluded with a call for collective responsibility in building a stronger, more united, and forward-looking Pakistan.