

Gilgit-Baltistan & Pakistan: An update on Baba Jan and his 11 co-detainees - The defence campaign

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On Monday 16th October, Baba Jan review petition at Supreme Court of Gilgit Beltistan was to be heard. On the day, all the lawyers from the valley were on strike on the issue of appointment of the judges. The executive of the valley is appointing the judges instead of a judicial commission as is the case in Pakistan other parts.

The chief justice of Supreme Court Gilgit Beltistan dismissed all the cases that were to be heard on the day. Normally, it is adjournments but this was not the case on the day. That means that Baba Jan final appeal at present is dismissed.

However, in such cases, where your case is dismissed due the judiciary lawyers conflicts, application are moved again to reopen the cases because this was a case of "non prosecution". The lawyers were not heard. We have moved an application already and when the strike will end, our application will be taken up by the court. Hopefully, the review petition against the life sentence of Baba Jan and 11 others will be restored.

Three local lawyers are appearing on our behalf, they have argued well last time. These lawyers are advocating on volunteer basis, as we cannot afford the heavy fesses of these lawyers. They are expensive lawyers, however, they are fully committed with Baba Jan and his friends. We are helpful just to cover the small costs of the courts and legal papers etc.

There are twelve person sentenced to life including Baba Jan. Five of them are from ruling Muslim League as well. The Muslim League government and the chief minister has declared all of them political activists several times publically. However, the establishment is against Baba Jan and others.

The Baba Jan constituency is the first one after you enter to Pakistan from China. There is a recent contract between the two countries of 57 billion Dollars CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) to build a link road from China to Arabian Sea through Pakistan. It will reduce China trade route to Middle East and several other countries by some 7000 kilometers.

A massive Gawader Port in Balochistan province of Pakistan is been built by Chinese companies and roads all the way are under constructions. Thousands of Chinese are in Pakistan at present working on this and other projects including the manual labour.

Baba Jan is most popular political working class leader of the valley at present time. He is seen as threat to many, particularly to those contractors who are building the roads as he would not let them do the corruption. He had raised the issue of China taking over resources of the valley. Through mass movements of the local community, Baba Jan before going to jail, has prevented several multi nationals companies to dig the valley for natural resources. This was to be a sheer loot and plunder

of the natural resources of the valley.

Baba Jan was sentenced to life after his election nomination papers were accepted to contest a bye election for the Gilgit Beltistan 35 members' assembly in 2016. The elections were postponed to hear the pending case of Baba Jan at Supreme Court.

The only way to stop Baba Jan from winning a seat from behind the bar was that if he is a convict. It never happened in the judicial history of Pakistan and Gilgit Beltistan that you take out a procession for the fair compensation of the victim of a "natural" disaster and you are sentenced to life. But this happened and within two days of hearing of the case at Supreme Court, he along 11 others were sentenced to life. Baba Jan was out of parliamentary race after his conviction.

We went to Supreme Court again for a review of the case after the election were held and the ruling Muslim League won the seat. A positive decision on the review petition is the last chance for Baba Jan release. Several hearings has taken place and no final order was announced until this decision on 16 October when all cases including this one were technically dismissed.

We are now waiting our application for restoration of the review petition to be taken up.

A massive international and national campaign has taken place during the last three years. Baba Jan has become the most known political prisoner of Pakistan and Gilgit Beltistan. He is popular on social media as well. Our campaigns for his release including will continue. We are appealing to all to sign the petition [\[1\]](#).

Farooq Tariq

Footnotes

[1] ESSF (article 1088), [China, the WTO and the Anti-Globalization Movement](#).