

AZAD JAMMU KASHMIR
ON THE ROAD TO DEVELOPMENT
&
PROSPERITY: 1947-2024



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Abstract

This paper emphasizes the socio-economic condition of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) in 1947 and the development from 1947 onward in different sectors. Jammu and Kashmir became a hotspot of turmoil after British India was divided in 1947. Before 1947 AJK the areas constituted AJK were the backward areas of Jammu Kashmir. Over the past 77 years, AJK has experienced significant political, economic, and social transformations. Politically, AJK has its own Government and legislative assembly. The region has witnessed numerous administrative changes to improve governance and local autonomy. AJK has achieved progress in infrastructure development, health care, and education with the help of financial assistance from Pakistani investment and foreign aid. The construction of major hydroelectric projects and improvements in road connectivity have bolstered economic growth. Socially AJK has seen progress in literacy rate, and gender equality with increasing participation of women in education and the workforce. This research is qualitative and analytical. The data was collected from official documents, books and reports. It is concluded that the liberation of this part from the autocratic Dogra regime had contributed a lot to the socio-economic development.

Keywords:

Dogra, cease-fire, conflict, AJK, Governance, Development

Introduction

AJK, which is the southern section of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, is bordered by Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) to the east, separated by the Line of Control (LoC), while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa lies to the west, the Gilgit Baltistan to the north, and the Punjab Province of Pakistan to the south. The capital of AJK is Muzaffarabad. The region is predominantly hilly and mountainous, featuring valleys and plains. It is blessed with natural beauty, including dense green forests, flowing rivers, and winding streams; the primary rivers are the Jhelum, Poonch, and

Neelum. The total area of AJK is 13297 Sq. Km and the population is 4.389 million.¹ AJK consists of three divisions and ten districts.

Before the Dogras, Kashmir was ruled by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler whose capital was Lahore at that time. The Dogras were feudal lords in the Sikh kingdom. Kashmir became a princely state within the British Empire in India from 1846 until 1947, ruled by Maharaja Gulab Singh and his successors.

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is a self-governing administrative territory administrated by Pakistan and is located west of the Line of Control (LoC) that separates it from Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir. AJK has all three pillars of the state executive, legislature and judiciary, however, defence, currency and foreign affairs are handed over to Pakistan.² The study compares the status of AJK in 1947 to the recent developments in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The government has launched several initiatives to improve the standard of living for its citizens, with assistance from foreign organizations and the federal government of Pakistan. An important area of concentration has been infrastructure development, with large sums of money invested in bridges, road networks, and transit systems to enhance connection both inside AJK and with other regions of Pakistan. AJK features a multi-party system in politics and holds regular elections. New initiatives promote economic development and support small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), tourism, and agriculture.³ In comparison to 1947, The people of



Kashmiri Labourers performing Beegar Duty on way to Gilgit manoeuvring almost vertical wall face with heavy load at Bhavanji -Astore 1898

¹ Azad Jammu and Kashmir : At a Glance 2023, Planning & Development Department GoAJK, www.pndjk.gov.pk.

² Planning & Development Department, Azad Jammu and Kashmir at A Glance - 2023 <https://pndajk.gov.pk>.

³ Ibid.

AJK work toward growth and stability; they have improved access to economic, medical, educational, and infrastructure opportunities.

Dogra Rule In Jammu & Kashmir

The state was established in 1846 after the First Anglo-Sikh War when the East India Company annexed the Kashmir Valley. The Company then sold it to the Dogra ruler of Jammu under the Treaty of Amritsar for a cost of seventy-five lakh rupees. According to the treaty, the state was defined as being "situated to the eastward of the river Indus and westward of the river Ravi" and covered an area of 80,900 square miles (210,000 square kilometres)⁴. Later, the regions of Hunza, Nagar, and Gilgit were added to the state. The British aimed to use Kashmir as a buffer against potential



Kashmiri Labourers performing Beagar Duty on way to Gilgit manoeuvring almost vertical wall face with heavy load at Bhavanji -Astore 1898

threats from Afghanistan, China, and Russia. However, during the 1840s and 1850s, there was little imminent danger from any of these directions. Therefore, Gulab Singh was encouraged by the British to extend his authority into the tribal areas to the north of the valley, including Gilgit, Hunza, Nagar, Ponial, Chilas, Darei, Tangir, and Gor.⁵

From the middle of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century, the Dogra family ruled over the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Important Maharajas like Pratap Singh, Hari Singh, Gulab Singh, and Ranbir Singh exercised total control over the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. Strong military presence to maintain law and order, a feudal system of governance with local nobility and landlords, and high taxes to fund the royal court were cornerstones of their rule. There were little political liberties and severe repression of dissent. The goal of social and economic

⁴ R. N. Kaul, *Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah- A Political Phoenix*. (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1963), 93.

⁵ Robert A. Huttenback, "The Emasculation of a Princely State: The Case of Kashmir". *Journal of Asian History*. 7(1): 1-29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41930070>.

reforms was to increase the Maharajas' riches and power. The dynasty's founder, Gulab Singh, established authority. With this change, the region saw the end of authoritarian control and the start of democratic governance.⁶ Maharaja Hari Singh passed a law that ensured his superior position and his religious community. He usually appointed Hindus to his administration, police, and army at the senior levels. He hired the majority of non-Muslims in the department of police, 37 men held the rank of inspectors and above, and only two were Muslims.⁷

The Dogra rule in Kashmir was marked by oppression and exploitation for the majority of the population. It also led to communal polarization among the people. Jagirs and other Inam grants were transferred from the local Kashmiris to the coreligionists of the Maharaja and his trusted allies.⁸ Hari Singh imposed heavy taxes on the natives by establishing a Dharmarth Trust.⁹ Key government positions were largely denied to Kashmiris, who were primarily relegated to roles such as beggars. Over time, the people of



Kashmir began to voice their dissent against the autocratic Dogra rule.¹⁰

The people of Kashmir were against this autocratic rule of Maharaja. They started the first organized political movement against Mahraja in 1931 and in June 1947 this movement was converted into an armed struggle. A portion of the State was liberated and on 24th October 1947, Azad Jammu Kashmir Govt. was established.¹¹ India's

⁶ Professor Muhammad Sarwar Abbasi, *Kashmiri Musalmano Ki Jodo Jahad e Azadi*, 1892-1947 (Muzaffarabad: Institute of Kashmir studies, 1992), 33-34.

⁷ Christopher Snedden, *The untold story of the people of Azad Kashmir*, (Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.

⁸ Muhammad Yousuf Ganai, *Kashmir Struggle for Independence 1931-1939*. (Srinagar: Mohsin Publications 2003), 1.

⁹ Robert Thorp, and F.M. Hassnain, *Kashmir Misgovernment*. (Gulshan Publishers: Jammu, 1980), 9-38.

¹⁰ Bawa Satinder Singh, *The Jammu Fox: A Biography of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Kashmir*. (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1974), 171.

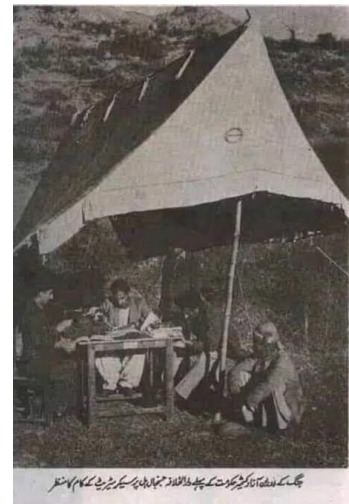
¹¹ Christopher Snedden, *The untold story of the people of Azad Kashmir*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 85.

soldiers invaded the state of Kashmir on October 27, 1947, and they have stayed there ever since. Pakistan supported the Kashmiris, and pro-Pakistan forces engaged in fighting with the Indian military until the ceasefire brokered by the United Nations took effect on January 1, 1949.¹²

Azad Kashmir Before 1947

The part of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir liberated in 1947 known as Azad Jammu and Kashmir was a backward area in 1947. Before 1947 Srinagar, Jammu and Poonch were developed cities. There was an airport in Srinagar and a railway track up to Jammu. The areas of Azad Jammu and Kashmir were considered border areas and the rulers in Srinagar did not have any interest or focus in development. Muzaffarabad district was considered as the Pahri tribal area and Poonch Jagir had four Tehsils namely Haveli, Mendhar, Palandari and Bagh. The tribes of Poonch and Muzaffarabad were warrior and they had a history of rebellions against the rulers.

On 24th October 1947 Azad Jammu and Kashmir Government was established and this Govt. has started work for the development of this region.



Education

The 1947 educational environment in AJK was characterized by low literacy rates, restricted access to educational opportunities, and poor infrastructure placed a low value on education, and the majority of people, particularly in rural areas, had very little access to formal education. The literacy rate was below 5 per cent. Old data on education from 1947 shows, that the total number of primary schools was only 250, 33 middle and lower middle schools, 1 girl high school, 8 high schools, and



¹² Ibid.

1 inter-college only. There were no kindergarten (KG) schools, degree and oriental colleges.¹³

After the establishment of the Azad Kashmir Govt. education was the priority of new established Govt. This stands in sharp contrast to the ratio of allocation made by the Dogra Government for the whole state. Thus, while the Azad Government allocates 31 lacs for one million people, the Dogra Government spent 4 lacs for 4 million people inhabiting 84,000 sq. miles of the state. In addition, the government allocates substantial sums of development funds for the construction of buildings in Azad Kashmir.

Comparison of Education Sector Development in AJK: 1947 vs. 2022

Institution	Year 1947 ¹⁴	Year 2022
Universities	0	06
Medical Colleges	0	04
Post Graduate Colleges	0	13
Degree Colleges	0	79
Intermediate Colleges	01	88
Higher Secondary Schools	0	121
High Schools	06	789
Middle Schools	30	1048
Primary Schools	254	4023
Cadet Colleges	0	02
Literacy Rate	Below 5 %	77.8%

¹³ Planning & Development Department. <https://pndajk.gov.pk/statyearbook.php> .

¹⁴ Muhammad Iqbal & Ahmed Shamim, *Azad Kashmir on Road to Progress*, (Muzaffarabad: Information Department Azad Jammu and Kashmir , 1965),65.

Health

In 1947, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) had underdeveloped health system. There was a severe scarcity of medical professionals and very few hospitals and clinics with little emphasis on public health and preventive care, health services were mostly concerned with providing emergency care.



In 1947, total number of hospital beds in AJ&K was only 30.¹⁵ Diseases like dysentery and cholera were caused by widespread hunger and poor sanitation. Soon after the liberation of this part Govt. of AJK and the Pakistan Army started to establish hospitals in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

COMPARISON OF THE HEALTH SECTOR OF AJK: 1947 VS. 2022

1947:

Only 11 Civil Dispensaries and 30 Beds were destroyed in 1947-49 by Indian forces air strikes.

2022

Hospitals		Training Centers	
CMH/AIMS/ DHQ Hospitals	11	In-service Training Schools	03
Dental Centers	56	Dental Centers	413
Expanded Program Immunizations	357	Training Institutes	07
Rural Health Centers	47	Medical Colleges	03
Civil Dispensaries/ First-Aid Post	419		
Maternal and Child Health Centers	201		
Basic Health Units	229		
THQHs/ Civil Hospitals	11		

Staff in Hospitals and Training Centers

¹⁵ Ibid, 70.

Doctors	1058
Specialist	296
Lady Health Visitors	374
Health Managers	60
Nurses	649
Medical Officers	702
Dental Surgeons	79
Gazatted Officers	119
Paramedics	2566
Supports Staff	4286
Lady Health Supervisors	142
Lady Health Workers	3007
Field Staff	329

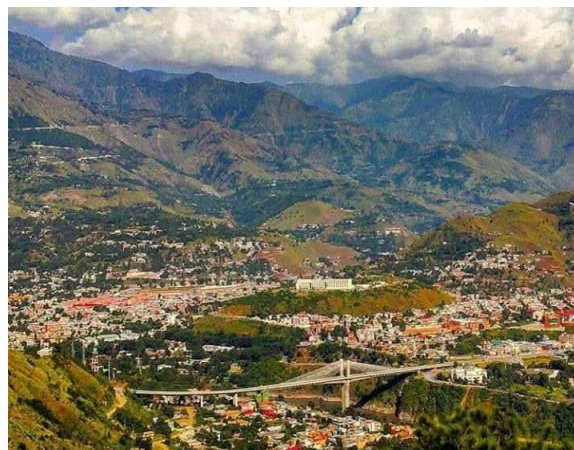
(Source: <https://health ajk.gov.pk/our-joumey/hospitals-journey>)

The Govt. of AJK has notified a health package in 2024. The new health package is a groundbreaking step towards enhancing healthcare in our region. It includes the establishment of 65 new positions for specialist doctors at Grade 18, directly tackling the critical shortage of specialists. Furthermore, the addition of posts for Medical Superintendents and Senior Medical Officers, 102 positions for Medical Officers and 8 for Dental Surgeons in Grade 17 will strengthen the hospitals' administrative and medical services, ensuring efficient operations. Additionally, Govt. will upgrade 52 healthcare facilities across Azad Kashmir to modern standards, significantly improving

service delivery and ensuring that prompt medical assistance is readily available to the public.¹⁶

Communication and Works

In 1947, there was only one main road Srinagar- Rawalpindi road. Besides, there were two minor roads, namely, Muzaffarabad-Abbottabad-Road and Mirpur- Jhelum-Road. The interior was almost inaccessible except for mule and foot-tracks. Priority was given to the communication sector because progress in all fields depends on improvement in this sector. A maximum share of the development grant was therefore set aside for the construction of new roads, improvement of existing ones and the building of new bridges. Side by side with bridges, an extensive program of construction and improvement of roads was spread over the second plan period.¹⁷ The progress of road construction during the second plan period is as follows: -



Neelum Valley Road	20 miles
Bandi Abbaspur road	16 miles
Saran-Chikar road	widening and metalling completed
Neli-Reshian Road	10 miles
Swa-Mang road	34 miles
Mongbajri-Khaligala road	17 miles metalled

¹⁶ Rizwan Abbasi, “ Azad Kashmir Govt nears finalization of historic health package” *Daily Ausaf*, November 8, 2024, <https://dailyausaf.com/en/health/azad-kashmir-govt-nears-finalization-of-historic-health-package/>.

¹⁷ Muhammad Iqbal & Ahmed Shamim, Azad Kashmir on Road to Progress,(Muzaffarabad: Information Department Azad Jammu and Kashmir , 1965),89.

Forest roads in Mirpur

33 miles

In 2022, Total Roads were 18,686 Km, Metaled Roads 10,851Km, and Fair Weather Roads 7,835km, there are many link roads constructed by Local Government and Local Councils. Another significant contributor has been the Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which aims to increase trade and mobility through the construction of new roads and highways. Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) has made significant strides in infrastructure development since 1947.

Electricity and Hydropower Development

In 1947, only some houses in Muzaffarabad were electrified by a power station (generator) in Makri, all other areas were without electricity. There have been numerous attempts throughout the years to extend the electrical infrastructure and provide power to remote areas. To reach isolated and underserved areas, electrification projects were started, greatly expanding the area covered by the delivery of electricity in AJK. In AJK, there are 723,121 power connections overall, and 723,121 of the localities have electricity. Up until now, 95.43% of the population has access to electricity.¹⁸ The electricity rates are the lowest in the whole region.

Region	AJK	HOJK
Per Unit rate(up to 100 units)	Rs. 3/ PKR	Rs . 3.95 IR

Water Supply

In 1947 there was not any facility for water pipe supply.¹⁹ To increase access to reliable and secure water, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is developing its water supply through several programs and projects. Building and modernizing infrastructure, such as reservoirs, water treatment facilities, and pipelines, is part of these initiatives. Projects to improve water quality and increase water supply networks are funded by the government and foreign organizations. According to recent data, 51.63% of AJK's

¹⁸ Azad Jammu And Kashmir At A Glance -2022, <https://Pndajk.Gov.Pk/> Accessed On 11.7.2024)

¹⁹ Muhammad Iqbal & Ahmed Shamim, *Azad Kashmir on Road to Progress*, (Muzaffarabad: Information Department Azad Jammu and Kashmir , 1965),90.

population has access to a water pipe supply. Overall, 5,698 (45.35%) houses have been provided with this facility.²⁰

Economic Empowerment

In 1947 the people of AJK were living below the poverty line, their only sources of income were agriculture and livestock. In the valley, there were skilled artisans, carpets, wool and other cottage industries but the areas which were liberated didn't have any cottage industries. After 1947 it was a big challenge for the Govt. of AJK to economically empower the people. The Govt. of AJK is facilitating the industrialists for the establishment of Industries in AJK. The ratio of Govt. employment is higher

than any state of the world. The Govt. of Pakistan is also providing job opportunities to people of AJK in every sector even a two per cent quota is allocated in CSS, which is highest in comparison to population. Approximately



3.24% of the population is employed in the Army/CAFs. Approximately 35.24% of the population is employed in the Army, Civil Armed Forces, Federal, and AJK Government, demonstrating the state's commitment to its people. In Azad Kashmir, no one sleeps on footpaths due to hunger or non-availability of shelter.

	AJK	IOJK	Pakistan
Road Denisty	0.66	0.52	0.32
Literacy Rate	76.8%,	67%	62.3 %
Teacher-to-student ratio	1:7	1:20	1:44
The doctor-patient ratio is	1:2315	1: 2660	1:2405
The poverty /unemployment rate	22%	23.1%	43%

²⁰Azad Government Of The State of Jammu & Kashmir, *Statistical book 2023*
<https://pndajk.gov.pk>(accessed on 12.7.2024)

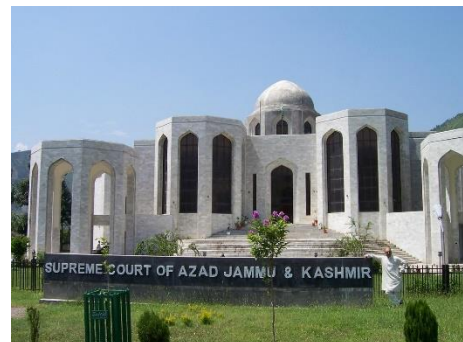
Democracy and Self Governance

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) is a self-governing state, with its own elected President, Prime Minister, Legislative Assembly, Kashmir Council, and local bodies up to village level.²¹ The Prime Minister serves as the Chief Executive with the support of a council of ministers. There are 53 members of the legislative assembly, 45 directly elected members and eight indirectly elected members, comprising five women, one technocrat, and one Mashaikh. Every citizen of AJK fulfilling the criteria for registration of a political party can apply for registration. Political parties participate in elections of a legislative assembly and local bodies. The AJK Interim Constitution 1974 is enforced and provides the role and responsibility of every constitutional body. It also provides and protects the fundamental rights of every citizen.

Human rights

The Interim Constitution Act 1974 of AJK protects all fundamental rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Azad Jammu Kashmir High Court has writ jurisdiction. The jurisdiction conferred on the High Court under Section 44 is known as the writ jurisdiction. Jurisdiction to protect Fundamental rights of persons is also conferred on the High Court under this section. Fundamental Rights of persons are listed under sub-section (4) of Section 4 of the Constitution.²² The same are briefly stated as under:

1. Security of person;
2. Safeguard as to arrest and detention;
3. Slavery and Forced Labour prohibited;
4. Protection against retrospective punishment;
5. Freedom of Movement;
6. Freedom of assembly;
7. Freedom of association;
8. Freedom of trade, business or profession;
9. Freedom of speech;
10. Freedom of religion;



²¹ Government of the State of Azad Jammu & Kashmir – Official Portal. <https://ajk.gov.pk/>. (Accessed date 11-07-2024)

²² Azad Jammu Kashmir Interim Constitution Act, 1974. Art4.

11. Safeguard against taxation for purposes of any particular religion;
12. Safeguard as to educational institutions in respect of religion etc.
13. Right of State subjects to acquire, hold and dispose of property;
14. Protection of property;
15. Equality of State subjects;
16. Non-discrimination in respect of access to public places;
17. Safeguard against discrimination in services;
18. Abolition of untouchability.

In the High Court Human Rights wing is also working under a director general and any person on simple application can apply for legal remedy. The courts in AJK are very active and vibrant in the protection of human rights. The lawyer's fertility is very active. In the early days after liberation the number of Legal Practitioners was almost negligible. Only a few lawyers and petition writers came forward when the Judicial Department was organized. In the year 1948-49, there were two advocates and forty Pleaders in the role of the High Court, but now the number of lawyers and Advocates is in the thousands²³.

Govt. of AJK is providing support to journalists and press clubs to ensure freedom of the press. Shujat Bukhari (late), a senior Journalist who visited AJK commented about the freedom of the press in AJK in his article, "One can hardly match the strength and growth of Kashmir media with that of PaK, but the media fraternity is far more vocal and vibrant with Press Clubs established in almost every big and small town. This helps them to consolidate their views not only on issues related to media but also on socio-economic politics. This part is surely missing in Valley."²⁴

The Govt. of Azad Jammu and Kashmir is also respecting the right of freedom of association and assembly. In December 2024, the people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir were protesting against an ordinance, they have blocked the major routes of AJK. Instead of using state power or forces the Govt. of AJK invited them for a dialogue and accepted their demands.²⁵

²³ Muhammad Iqbal & Ahmed Shamim, *Azad Kashmir on Road to Progress*, (Muzaffarabad: Information Department Azad Jammu and Kashmir, 1965), 50,

²⁴ Shujat Bukhar, Muzaffarabad, *Kashmir Life*, June 27, 2011, <https://kashmirlife.net/muzaffarabad-2-1559/>.

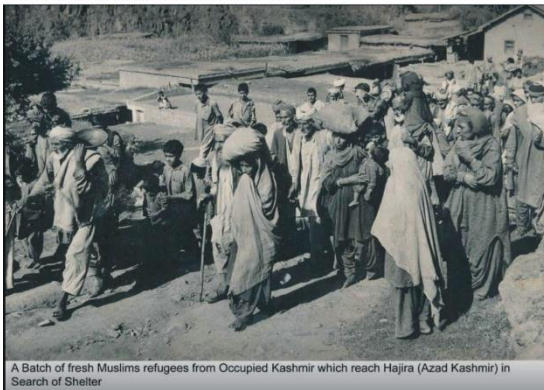
²⁵ Tariq Naqash, "Mass Protests force AJK Govt. to withdraw the Conterverioal Law", *Dawn*, December 09, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1877636>.

Conclusion

After British India was divided, the area that is now known as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) saw intense political unrest and violence in 1947. Early post-independence years were characterized by volatility, a developing political system, and an emerging economy. AJK has significantly expanded in several areas over the previous 77 years. The area has advanced significantly in terms of infrastructure, economic growth, healthcare, and education. Higher literacy rates and more educational options for young people are the results of educational institutions' expansion. The public now has greater access to medical care and better facilities, which have enhanced healthcare services. The people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir are enjoying basic human rights. The system of government is democratic and people elect their government by their votes. Subjudges to the Supreme Court judicial system are very effective and independent. Azad Jammu and Kashmir have potential in tourism, livestock, agriculture and cottage industries, which should be explored.

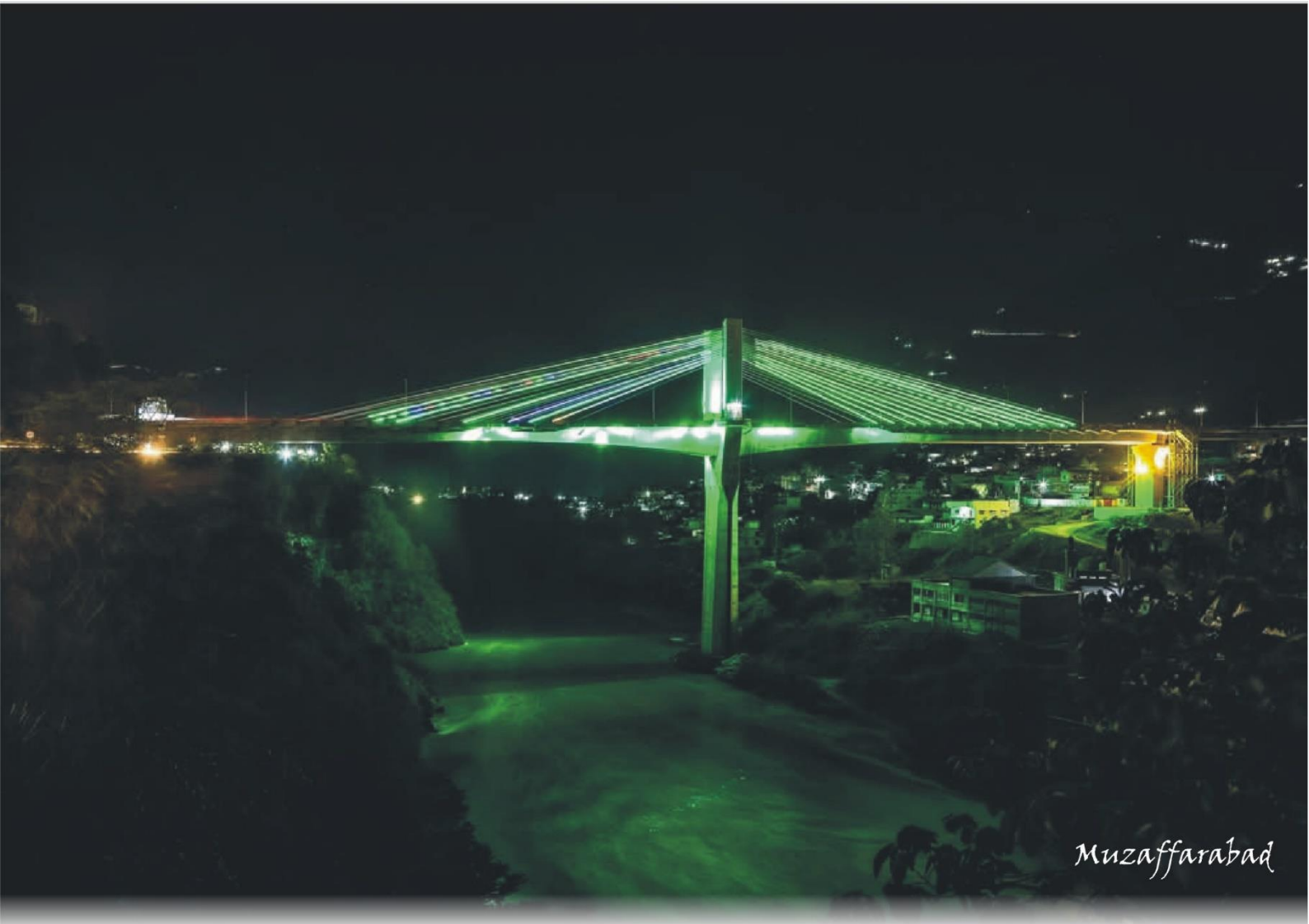


A group of Muslim refugees from Teh. Rajaouri, Indian Held-Kashmir is waiting for bedding at Kotli Transit Camp in Azad Kashmir on November 8, 1965.



A Batch of fresh Muslim refugees from Occupied Kashmir which reach Hajira (Azad Kashmir) in Search of Shelter





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