

Leave PoK alone

Why in news?

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A Bill seeking to reserve seats in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha for the people of Gilgit and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir has been listed to be introduced in the Budget session.

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What is POK?

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- Azad Kashmir is an autonomous administrative territory of Pakistan.

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- Gilgit-Baltistan, formerly known as the Northern Areas, is the northernmost province of Pakistan.

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- They are together referred to by the United Nations and other international organisations as "Pakistan-administered Kashmir".

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How did the POK problem emerge?

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- The region under British control was divided into two parts.

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- It included areas directly administered by the UK called British India, and those ruled by indigenous rulers under British paramountcy called the princely states.

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- During partition, the Indian Independence Act 1947, gave the princely states the options of joining India or Pakistan or remaining independent.

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- Hari Singh, the maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, wanted his state to

remain independent.

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- Western Jammu province wanted to join Pakistan.

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- So the city of Srinagar was attacked by Pakistani guerilla soldiers to liberate it.

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- To repel this, Raja Hari Singh of J&K sought the help of the Indian army by signing Instrument of Accession.

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- This handed over the control of defence, external affairs and communications to the Government of India in return for military aid.

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- Both Indian and Pakistani armies were mobilised.

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- Both gained control more or less around what is now known as the Line of Control.

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- India later approached the United Nations, which mandated the holding of a plebiscite with regard to Kashmir's future.

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- This required the withdrawal of the Pakistani Army along with the non-state elements and the subsequent partial withdrawal of the Indian Army.

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- This never happened.

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- Since then, the issue of PoK has become a much-debated topic.

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What is the stand of Pakistan regarding POK?

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- In the last several decades, Pakistan has not shown any interest in either peace talks with India or engaging with separatist movements in PoK.

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- Earlier attempts by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who undertook the Samjhauta Bus journey to Lahore ended up in the Kargil war.

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- The Simla Pact, Agra Agreement and Lahore Declaration all remained ineffective.

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Is integration of PoK with of India a permanent solution?

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- Merely acquiring 13,000 square kilometres of land and embracing all the violent after-effects, is unlikely to bring a sensible solution.
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- India devotes about 35% of its annual budget to its defence and security. One of the main reasons for this is the ongoing conflict along the Line of Control in Kashmir.
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- If India does indeed get PoK, this spending will increase in order to defend it.
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- There are no safeguards to ensure that such a move will translate into long-lasting peace.
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- Gaining possession of the disputed land will not ensure its inclusion in the development process. Given the terror infrastructure ingrained in PoK and a section of its population being radicalised, it is unlikely that India will be welcome.
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- If a move is made to occupy the disputed land, the flames of terror in the neighbourhood will not only engulf PoK, but we may lose our side of Kashmir as well.
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- When we see the issue in its perspective on economic, social, political or technical lines, it becomes more and more clear that the Kashmir issue will not be resolved even if we secure PoK.
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- Our focus should be on our side of Kashmir only and the well-being of its people.

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Source: The Indian Express

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