Making Gilgit-Baltistan the Fifth Province

Why in news?

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Pakistani government was considering making Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) the fifth province of Pakistan.

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What is the importance of GB?

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- **GB is one of the two parts of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK).**
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- The other one is **"Azad Jammu and Kashmir" (AJK)** and both formed part of the territory of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).
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- The territory was handed over to the newly created state of Pakistan in November 1947 by the action of a British officer of the Gilgit Scouts.
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- Despite being in the service of the Maharaja of Kashmir, he revolted and joined Pakistan.
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- GB has an area of 72,000 sq. km and comprises about 85% of the total area of PoK.
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- **It is a strategic location** i.e. provides land access to China, contains vast reservoirs of fresh water and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) passes through it.
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- Despite this, GB does not form part of the territory of Pakistan.
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What is the current move?

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- The administrative units of Pakistan consist of four provinces, one federal capital territory, and two autonomous and disputed territories.
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- The four provinces of Pakistan are Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province **(KPK),** Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan.
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- The tribal belt adjoining KPK is managed by the Federal Government and is named FATA i.e., Federally Administered Tribal Areas.
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- Currently Pakistani government is planning to make Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) the fifth province of Pakistan.
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What is its significance?

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- There are many impediments in the way of making GB the fifth province of Pakistan.
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- Previously, when every time such a proposal was made, the conclusion has been that GB is part of J&K and **any such move would seriously damage Pakistan's Kashmir case.**
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- Two UN resolutions of 1948 and 1949 clearly established a link between GB and the Kashmir issue. It mentioned that "pending a final solution, territory evacuated by the Pakistan troops will be administered by the 'local authorities'.
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- Making GB its fifth province would thus **violate these UN resolutions** that would damage its position on the Kashmir issue.
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- That would also be **violative of the 1963 Pak-China Boundary Agreement** that calls for the sovereign authority to reopen negotiations with China after the settlement of the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India.
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- It is also **violative of the 1972 Shimla Agreement** that mentions that "neither side shall unilaterally alter the situation".
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- Pakistan would also have to overcome the adverse reaction of Kashmiris on both sides of the LoC.
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What is the reason behind the Pakistan raising the issue?

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- With a $50 billion investment in the CPEC, China would hardly does not want the CPEC route on a disputed territory.
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- Pakistan has raised the controversy to tell the Chinese how difficult it is to make GB its fifth province and how this would compromise its long-standing position on the Kashmir issue.
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- Thus the issue has been raised to appease China and distract India.
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Source: The Indian Express

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