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KARGIL CAMPUS  
UNIVERSITY OF LADAKH**

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**Press-Release**

On April 25th, 2024, the Center for Gilgit-Baltistan Studies, Kargil campus, University of Ladakh organized a one-day seminar on the theme "**Gilgit-Baltistan: Exploring Roots, Heritage, and Politics**".

Prof. S.K. Mehta, Honorable Vice Chancellor, University of Ladakh was the chief guest on the occasion along with Lieutenant Colonel Sumit Sardana from the 8<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division as the guest of honor. Renowned Scholars and Historians from Ladakh Mr. Sadiq Hardasi, Mr. Tsewang Gyaltzen (AP Political Science), Dr. Sonam Wangchok (President Ladakh Cultural Forum), Mr. Bashir Wafa, Mr. Mohd. Ali, Mr. Raza Amjad and Dr. Kunchok Paldan (AP Sociology) were the resource persons for the seminar. Officers from 8<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division, Indian Army along with scholars and students of Kargil Campus, UOL were the participants of the programme.

At the outset the chief guest, and the guest of honor was duly welcomed by worthy Rector, Kargil Campus, UOL Madam Kaneez Fatima with Ladakhi Traditional Khataks. Dr. Jaffar Ali Khan, coordinator of the Center for Gilgit-Baltistan Studies, welcomed esteemed resource persons with Ladakhi Traditional Khataks.

Moving the seminar forward, worthy Rector madam Kaneez Fathima delivered the formal welcome address. Madam Kaneez Fatima welcomed Chief Guest Prof. S.K. Mehta, honorable Vice Chancellor, University of Ladakh, along with other speakers, scholars, students, and faculty members. Madam Kaneez acknowledged the visionary initiative of Hon'ble Vice Chancellor Prof. S.K. Mehta, which led to the establishment of the Center for Gilgit-Baltistan Studies at Kargil Campus. She introduced and welcomed various scholars and experts, highlighting their grassroots-level knowledge about the culture, heritage, and politics of Gilgit-Baltistan. Madam Kaneez Fatima emphasized the historical connections between Ladakh and Gilgit-Baltistan and outlined the objectives of the center's inauguration and the seminar.

Madam Kaneez further stressed the urgent need for scholarly works to understand the interconnectedness across borders and the significance of the center in facilitating scholarly contributions. She emphasized that despite the challenges posed by the partition, the cultural, linguistic, and heritage ties between Gilgit-Baltistan and Ladakh remain strong. The center aims to provide opportunities for local researchers and empower young minds in the region.

The Guest of Honor, Lieutenant Colonel Sumit Sardana from the Eighth Mountain Division, Khumbathang, Kargil, shared historical facts about Gilgit-Baltistan and emphasized the preservation of its heritage, language, and culture. He highlighted Gilgit-Baltistan's strategic importance as a crossroads between Central Asia, South Asia, and China. He also discussed the ancient Shastri language spoken in the region and the efforts towards peace in the past and discussed the presence of Zorawar Singh during nineties. He finally mentioned that the center will



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be a visionary initiative for remembering and preserving the historical interconnections between Ladakh and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Continuing the program, the *INAUGURAL CEREMONY* of the Center for Gilgit-Baltistan Studies was conducted by the chief guest, honorable vice chancellor Prof. S.K. Mehta, in presence of worthy Rector madam Kaneez Fatima and Lieutenant Colonel Sumit Sardana.

The Chief Guest Prof. S.K. Mehta in the keynote address shared his insights and visionary ideas about the one-day seminar. He expressed the university's responsibility to address social issues, especially concerning neighboring regions like Gilgit-Baltistan. He commended Rector, Madam Kaneez Fatima for her initiative in organizing the event and discussed the significance of the center, particularly for the younger generation. He welcomed the speakers and emphasized the importance of their grassroots-level experiences. Prof. Mehta concluded his address by expressing hope for future initiatives and mentioned the eventual reunification of Gilgit-Baltistan with India.

During the transition to the technical sessions, Sadiq Hardasi, an eye-contact historian, delved into the roots, history, and politics of Gilgit-Baltistan. He illuminated Central Asia, the Silk Routes, and connections with Kashmir and Gurez. Emphasizing heritage, he underscored the poetic significance of language and the richness of folk lores. Hardasi further explored Gilgit-Baltistan's historical narrative, including its role in Buddhism, Islam, and the Mughal Empire, drawing from the Akhbar Namah to unveil initiatives in fortification and architecture influenced by the Persian world. On the political front, he shed light on the diaspora of Balti people, extending even into Himachal Pradesh.

Professor Tsewang Gyaltzen then presented his paper on the Contemporary Political Scenario in Gilgit-Baltistan, lamenting the denial of human rights and advocating for empowerment and self-governance. He also highlighted the historical ties with Ladakh, emphasizing cultural and historical networks and addressing the implications of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Dr. Sonam Wangchok delved into "Shared Heritage: Exploring the Cultural Linkages Between Ladakh and Baltistan," accentuating traditional wool processing methods shared by both regions. He meticulously explored the multifaceted significance of heritage and its role in maintaining cultural continuity, showcasing cultural artifacts and craftsmanship such as water mills, wood carving, and traditional Balti architecture.

Historian and tribal expert Mr. Bashir Wafa shared poignant firsthand experiences on "Divided Families," elucidating the complex relations between GB and Ladakh amidst globalization. He articulated the emotional toll of cross-border disparities on divided families, contextualizing the present with historical narratives.

Historian and field expert Mr. Mohd. Ali delved into "Baltistan Kay Kadhim Kabayal," tracing Baltistan's historical ties to Tibet and the subsequent migrations of Balti people to various regions.



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A short film titled "Dardistan" by Syed Mohammad Nawaz, showcasing the cultural richness and political challenges faced in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Mr. Raza Amjid, another historian and tribal expert, discussed "Shina and Their Cultural Linkages with Gilgit-Baltistan," emphasizing the assimilation of the Shina tribe amidst migrations. Dr. Konchok Paldan presented a case study on the partition events of 1971, focusing on Turtuk and elucidating the contested nature of borders and historical trade routes.

The technical sessions concluded with heartfelt appreciation as momentous and Certificates of Appreciation were presented to each speaker by Rector, Madam, Kaneez Fatima and Lieutenant Colonel Sumit Sardana. Dr. Jaffar Ali Khan delivered the concluding speech and Vote of Thanks, expressing gratitude to the guests, scholars, and speakers for their valuable contributions. Special appreciation was extended to Honorable Vice Chancellor, Prof. S.K Mehta, and the media for their coverage. Lastly, the efforts of the organizing committee and university staff were acknowledged for their tireless dedication. The event was moderated by Dr. Nargis Khatoon (Assistant Professor Sociology) and Dr. Mohammad Rafi (Assistant Professor Urdu).