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Press Release

PM AJK seeks structural reforms, reaffirms 25% quota to young people in LB election in a youth policy dialogue

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The Prime Minister of Azad Jammu Kashmir, Raja Farooq Haider Khan encouraged all stakeholders including political parties and the civil society organizations to support the Government in framing youth policy, aimed towards creating equal opportunities for youth in politics, education and employment irrespective of class, gender and caste. He was of the view that this policy will cut across the traditional factors of dynastic and caste-based politics thereby driving youth towards a society more open and progressive. He was addressing on the participants at first youth policy dialogue arranged by Centre for Peace, Development and Reforms in collaboration with the British Council in Muzaffarabad under then theme “**Our Youth Our Future: Creating Socio-economic and Political Spaces for Young People**”. He spoke candidly about the challenges and issues faced by his government to improve governance and bring in structural reforms in the education department which happens to be the largest job provider in AJK. He also spoke at length about the undertaken reforms in the Public Service Commission and introduction of NTS for induction of the government employees in order to promote merit and transparent selection schemes for youth which was lauded by young people across the board.

While addressing a diverse gathering of young enthusiastic young people, he reaffirmed that his party would reserve 25 per cent seats for young people including women in upcoming local bodies' elections. He pledged that his government would work hard to empower AJK Assembly by curtailing executive and administrative powers of Kashmir Council in the days ahead. While responding to a question, Raja Farooq Haider hoped that issues related to royalty/water use charges of hydel power projects located in AJK would be settled down with the WAPDA, besides getting raise in financial allocation from the Federal Government. He also stated that his government is making a task force of professionals and experts to advise the authorities in government on the issues surrounding good governance, reforms and other related matters.

Around 150 young participants, belonging to different political parties and civil society, were very enthusiastic and full of praise to see their elected Prime Minister with them and get the opportunity to interact with him. Many of them raised questions about the performance of incumbent government and future road map to which the premier replied aptly. Speaking on the occasion, Executive Director Centre for Peace, Development and Reforms, Ershad Mahmud shared that around 60% of the AJK population is comprised of youth having a literacy rate of 70%. He was of the opinion that a sustained and constructive dialogue is essential between the political leadership at various positions in the government, and young people to create a facilitating environment, conducive to informed policy-making.

While answering a question about increasing unemployment and lack of foreign investment in AJK, the Prime Minister stated that his government is constantly making efforts in this regard, carrying out efforts to simplify the processes like obtaining No Objection Certificate (NoC) for the entry of foreigners to AJK and facilitating them for investment and business purposes. Responding to a question about the lack of business loans and other youth support programs from AJK bank, he stated that he is trying hard to make this a scheduled bank so that it may align its policies and services with the policies of the State Bank of Pakistan. He announced that the Government of AJK would initiate health emergency services from January 2017, fully equipped to treat patients of all nature.

This event was held by CPDR in collaboration with the British Council, which has been working in tandem with civil society in AJK from last few years. Umair Tamim, the head for Active Citizenship Programme of the British Council, hailed efforts of CPDR and the AJK Government in arranging such platforms for young people. He stated that the idea behind these efforts is to foster better relationship between government and youth, and different sections of the society at large. This helps in policymaking processes and better governance. Setting the context of policy dialogue, Governance and Public Policy expert, Dr. Waqas Ali highlighted the need for more structural reforms in existing governance mechanisms, stressed on capacity building of young people and highlighted issues like unemployment and nepotism in system. Commenting on the recent cross Line of Control (LoC) firing, he stated that besides loss of lives and property, our flora and fauna in Neelum valley were badly damaged to which most of us remained silent.

Following are the key commitments were made by the PM during dialogue

1. His party, Pakistan Muslim League (N) will allocate 25 percent quota for young people below the age of 35 in upcoming local body election.
2. He (PM-AJK) is determined to bring massive reforms in Kashmir Council by bringing back administrative, legal and financial powers of council to the AJK Legislative Assembly.
3. He is keen to restore student unions, after the consultation with all key stakeholders with new-shared terms and conditions.
4. He advised both CPDR and British Council to involve local political parties; their youth wings and help his government to make a youth policy of AJK.
5. He ensures that his government is keenly taking up issue of obtaining Non Objection Certificate (NoC), for foreigners to enter into AJK with Prime Minister of Pakistan and he will ensure smooth and hustle free process for obtaining NoC.
6. He committed that he will be supportive to initiatives like policy dialogues and suggested both CPDR and BC should arrange wider AJK level youth dialogue of larger scale by involving all parties to explore their vision of youth.
7. His Government is kicking off first ever-emergency medical service in the month of January 2017.

8. His government is intended to set up Task Force comprising of young professionals and Experts to guide government on good governance and reforms and he ensured that young educated professionals people will be given chance to become part of it.
9. He stated that his government would ensure that AJK gets royalty/water use charges of all hydel power generation projects located in AJK with the same rate as paid to other provinces.

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