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**China's presence in Gilgit-Baltistan: NYT**

PTI

In a quiet move, Pakistan is handing over de-facto control of the strategic Gilgit-Baltistan region in the Occupied Kashmir to China in an area witnessing a simmering rebellion against Islamabad. *The New York Times* said there were two important developments in Gilgit-Baltistan; a simmering rebellion against the Pakistani rule and the influx of an estimated 7,000 to 11,000 soldiers of the Chinese People's Liberation Army in the area, which is closed to the world.

“China wants a grip on the strategic area to assure unfettered road and rail access to the Gulf through Pakistan,” said the paper, and is building high-speed rail and road link.

The link up would enable Beijing to transport cargo and oil tankers from eastern China to the new Chinese built Pakistani Naval base at Gawadar, Pasni and Ormara in Balochistan, just east of the Gulf in 48 hours.

“Many of the PLA soldiers entering Gilgit-Baltistan are expected to work on the railroad. Some are extending the Karakoram Highway, built to link China's Xinjiang province with Pakistan. Others are working on dams, expressways and other project,” said the paper.

It said mystery surrounds the construction of 22 tunnels in secret locations, where even Pakistanis are barred. Tunnels would be necessary for a projected gas pipeline from Iran to China that would cross the Karakorams through Gilgit.

“But they could be also used for missiles storage sites,” said the *Times*.

So far, the paper quoting foreign intelligence sources, Pakistani media and Pakistani Human Rights groups, said the PLA construction crews had been living in temporary encampments and went home after completing their assignments.

But now they are building a big residential complex, clearly designed for a long term presence, and the *New York Times* said what is happening is a matter of concern for Washington.

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