

**AJK HAS POTENTIAL TO BECOME A SILICON VALLEY OF PAKISTAN:  
MASOOD KHAN**



ISLAMABAD, February 10: The Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) President Sardar Masood Khan has highly appreciated the Akhuwat Foundation's welfare projects that aim to alleviate poverty and improve health and education for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the country.

He said this after a briefing given to him by a senior member of the Board of Directors of Akhuwat Foundation Pakistan, Mohammad Salim Ahmed Ranjha here on Wednesday. The President said that AJK will fully cooperate with the Akhuwat Foundation in its endeavour to combat hunger, alleviate poverty and improve the health and education sector in AJK.

With the highest literacy rate and the spirit of cooperation among over ambitious educated youth, AJK could be transformed into a Silicon valley and IT hub of Pakistan if the youth of the area are provided guidance and required training.

Speaking on the occasion Mr Ranjaha told that Akhuwat Foundation is providing interest-free loans to the underprivileged youth of all the four provinces and Azad Jammu and Kashmir and response of Azad Kashmir in repayment of the loans is a way better than all other provinces of the country.

Highlighting the details of the Foundation's AJK specific projects, Ranjaha said that Akhuwat Foundation is considering expanding its interest-free loan scheme to the remote areas of Azad Kashmir to alleviate poverty besides providing medical facilities to the people in remote rural areas through telemedicine.

He said besides the microfinance scheme, the Akhuwat Foundation is considering to introduce Kashmiri handicrafts at home and abroad, and establishing an educational institution in Muzaffarabad on the pattern of NJV School Karachi.

He maintained that the Akhuwat Foundation under the Islamic concept of qarz-e-hasna has provided more than 130 billion rupees through its 831 branches in the length and cranny of the country, while the Foundation has established 200 rest houses for the poor segments of society and 301 schools to provide quality education to more than 47,000 poor students. The Foundation, he added, had provided 2.16 billion rupees to 60,000 families in Azad Kashmir, and the state government has extended full cooperation to the Foundation in this regard.

He stated that the Foundation had established 23 telemedicine centres affiliated with the best hospitals of the country. Besides, it has provided 20 ambulances and more than 400,000 patients have used this service so far, and now we want to repeat the same exercise in Azad Kashmir also as the people of remote mountainous areas have no access to hospitals in urban areas.

Salim Ranjha further stated that in collaboration with the Technical Education & Vocational Training Authority [TEVETA], we intend to come up with a comprehensive plan to impart vocational education to the youth, while we have planned to set up a business incubation centre to connect the students of five public sector universities of the liberated territory with the job market so that the students and researchers have an interest in devising business plans get basic infrastructure.

He said that the youth of Azad Kashmir have the potential to turn different areas of the state into Silicon valleys provided they are properly guided and necessary education and training is provided to them.

Ranjha concluded that with the cooperation of the state president and the state government, we will draw up a comprehensive plan to introduce handicrafts and other products of Kashmir at home and abroad so that side by side with economically empowering the craftsmen of Kashmir, the centuries-old Kashmiri culture is introduced to the world.