

Italy offers to upgrade Skardu airport

By Shabbir Mir

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GILGIT: The Italian government has offered help to upgrade Skardu airport, it has been learnt.

“Italian Ambassador Vincenzo Prati made the offer to Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Chief Minister Mehdi Shah in a recent meeting in Islamabad,” said a source in the provincial government.

Apart from the airport, they discussed the possibilities of other development projects in Skardu, the capital town of Baltistan that was declared the twin of Italy’s Cortina city in August 2010.

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani addressing an election rally in Skardu in 2009 had promised to upgrade Gilgit and Skardu airports but no progress has been made yet.

Baltistan is home to various peaks including the 8,611-meter K2, the second highest peak in the world.

K2 was scaled first by two Italian mountaineers, Lino Lacedelli and Achille Compagnoni, on July 31, 1954.

“People in Italy are emotionally attached with Gilgit-Baltistan, particularly Skardu, and declaring it a twin city with Cortina is testimony to it,” he said.

In the meeting, the Italian ambassador told the chief minister that EV-K2-CNR, an Italian NGO, would build 10 schools in Braldo and Hushay valleys in Baltistan, said the source.

He said that construction of two hospitals in G-B was also part of the plans that the ambassador shared with Chief Minister Shah.

A library equipped with information for mountaineering expeditions will also be built in Skardu.

The library will be of immense use for mountaineers attracted by the 18 of the world’s 50 highest peaks located in G-B.

Italy has already been assisting Karakoram International University in Gilgit in the fields of research and higher education, and has indicated an increase in this assistance.

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