



# Indigenous Issues

[The occasional briefing papers of the Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network (AITPN)]  
P.O. Box 9627, Janakpuri, New Delhi-110058, India  
Email: [aitpn@aitpn.org](mailto:aitpn@aitpn.org); Website: [www.aitpn.org](http://www.aitpn.org)

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## **BALUCHISTAN: Jackboot justice in tribal heartland**

### **I. Baluchistan Imbroglio**

Baluchistan is the largest among Pakistan's four provinces, comprising 43 per cent of land area of the country. But only six per cent of Pakistan's population or around 8 million people inhabit Baluchistan. The Baluch make up 54.7 per cent of the population while 29 per cent are Pashtun. Despite being the richest province in terms of energy and mineral resources, Baluchistan remains one of the most under-developed provinces. The Baluch therefore have long been demanding greater autonomy and a larger share of the dividend from natural resources.

The denial of autonomy has been a major cause of the ongoing conflict. The 1973 Constitution provided that the concurrent list determining the quantum of provincial autonomy would be revised after every 10 years. This has never been done. Although the Baluchistan crisis pre-dates General Pervez Musharraf's military regime, it still remained unaddressed. Upon assumption of Presidency in October 1999, General Pervez Musharraf promised to, among other things, work towards "strengthening the federation, removing inter-provincial disharmony and restoring national cohesion."<sup>[1]</sup> However, seven years later, Musharraf proved the saying "promises are made to be broken".

### **II. Development and Militarization: Carrot and Stick approach**

Tensions have been exacerbated by President Pervez Musharraf's determination to develop the area's oil and gas fields and launched mega projects and established new army cantonments in the province without taking into account local and provincial sensitivities.<sup>[2]</sup> General Musharraf adopted the 'carrot and stick' policy to augment the military presence in the province and at the same time increase the pace of development to weaken the resistance in the province.

The Federal government has been using regular troops and paramilitary forces for "strengthening the federation". The region has been highly militarized, as Pakistan reportedly established one paramilitary post for every

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500 people.<sup>[3]</sup> There were four mega military cantonments, 52 paramilitary cantonments, five naval bases including Jinnah naval base in Gwadar and six missile-testing ranges in Balochistan.<sup>[4]</sup> Balochistan continued to be under siege due to building of army cantonments in 2006.

In January 2005, military operation was carried out to suppress the armed protests by the tribal militias, consisting mainly of tribesmen following the gang rape of a lady doctor, Shazia Khalid on 7 January 2005 allegedly by an army officer.<sup>[5]</sup> However, the Balochistan crisis intensified after Pakistan government launched full-scale military operations in December 2005 following firing of eight rockets at a paramilitary base on the outskirts of the town of Kohlu, a stronghold of the Marri tribe during President Musharraf's visit to the area on 14 December 2005. On 17 December 2005, paramilitary forces began aerial bombardment at Kohlu.<sup>[6]</sup> By mid-June 2006, about 400 to 500 innocent Baloch people were reportedly killed in the army operations including in air raids in Balochistan, especially in Marri and Bugti areas.<sup>[7]</sup> About 80 to 85% of those either killed or injured were women and children.<sup>[8]</sup> The fighting caused widespread damage to buildings, and 85 percent people of Dera Bugti were forced to flee the town.<sup>[9]</sup> The Pakistani Air Force chief Tanwir Mahmood Ahmed stated that the air force would continue to be used whenever and wherever the government desired.<sup>[10]</sup> The killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti, president of the Jamhoori Watan Party in a massive military operation in the Bhambore Hills between Kohlu and Dera Bugti districts on 26 August 2006 further escalated the spate of violence.<sup>[11]</sup> In July 2006, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz ruled out general amnesty for "miscreants" in Balochistan.<sup>[12]</sup>

In 2005, Baloch leaders presented a 15-point agenda to the government that included greater control of resources, protection for Baloch minority and a halt to the building of military bases. However, President Musharraf showed little regard for their concerns.<sup>[13]</sup> In 2006, Rs 4 billion share under the interim National Finance Commission was eaten up by additional expenditure on law and order, reduction in oil and gas production and higher pay and pension bill imposed by the federal government.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **Lack of development:**

The government of Pakistan claimed that the ongoing development projects will benefit the Baloch besides creating job opportunities for them. But previous track record does not evoke any confidence.

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On 28 August 2006, General Pervez Musharraf warned that the elements opposed to Balochistan's development would be crushed.<sup>[15]</sup> Monitoring cells have been established in the Planning Commission in Islamabad and Quetta to monitor the projects.<sup>[16]</sup> Several mega projects in Balochistan including Gwadar deep sea port, coastal highways between Karachi and Gwadar, Mirani and Subakzai dams, costing more than Rs 135 billion were started.<sup>[17]</sup>

However, the Balochis fear that most of the jobs being created by the new port city of Gwadar and Saindak copper mining project will be given to non-Balochis and they alleged that 75% of their lands have been acquired by serving military officers at throwaway prices.<sup>[18]</sup> Besides, the Balochis have not been benefiting from the huge reserves of mineral resources despite Balochistan producing about 36 percent of natural gas of Pakistan.<sup>[19]</sup>

Balochistan also faces high illiteracy problem with the average literacy rate of the population aged 10 years and above being only 36 percent.<sup>[20]</sup> On 10 July 2006, the government of Pakistan signed a US\$ 22 million agreement with the World Bank for financing the Balochistan Education Support Program (BSEP) to improve access to quality primary education, in particular for girls.<sup>[21]</sup>

### **III. Non-implementation of the recommendations of the Sub-committee**

The failure to implement the recommendations of the parliamentary sub-committee is another cause of estrangement of the Baloch. On 29 September 2004, a Parliamentary Committee headed by President of Pakistan Muslim League, Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain was formed "to examine the current situation in Balochistan and make recommendations thereon." The committee was subsequently divided into two sub-committees - one headed by Wasim Sajjad mandated to examine the question of provincial autonomy and the other headed by Mushahid Hussein Sayed mandated to address the immediate crisis in the province.

On 13 July 2006, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz after attending a meeting to review the status of implementation of the recommendations of the sub-committee on Balochistan led by Senator Mushahid Hussein Sayed stated that the government had started implementing 30 of the 35 recommendations made by the parliamentary sub-committee on Balochistan relating to political issues. However, he did not elaborate precisely which recommendations were being implemented. The sub-committee on constitutional issues headed by Wasim Sajjad had failed to submit its final report.<sup>[22]</sup>

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#### **IV. A climate of political repression**

Balochistan crisis is a political problem which could only be resolved through dialogue. By using brute force, the government of Pakistan has been trying to bulldoze provincial autonomy. Hundreds of Balochis are being held without being charged or produced before courts.

##### **a. Arbitrary arrest, illegal detention and torture**

A fact-finding team of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), which visited Balochistan in December 2005-January 2006, reported disappearances, torture, and other rights violations by the security forces.<sup>[23]</sup>

Political leaders and party activists were often the targets. According to a report released on 12 December 2006 by the Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M), around 4,000 Baloch youths, mainly political activists were in custody of Pakistani intelligence agencies. They were allegedly tortured by electric shocks, cigarette and candle burns, blows to sensitive parts of the body and various other methods. The report further alleged that torture cells and illegal detention centres were run by the intelligence agencies.<sup>[24]</sup> Although the government has reportedly admitted that a few Baloch have been detained, it has refused to give the exact figure of those detained and their whereabouts.<sup>[25]</sup>

Some of the political leaders and activists arrested included Sajid Tareen, acting chief of Balochistan National Party (BNP) along with other party workers, who were arrested by police under the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance (MPO) from the Quetta Press Club premises on 1 December 2006;<sup>[26]</sup> Gulam Mohammad Baloch, chairman of Baloch National Movement, and Sher Mohammad Baloch, a central leader of the Jamhoori Watan Party, who were arrested on 3 December 2006 by law enforcement agencies while trying to organize a public meeting near Juna Masjid, Shah Latif Bhitai Road to condemn the killing of Nawab Akbar Bugti,<sup>[27]</sup> 26 members of the Balochistan National Party (Mengal), the Jamhoori Watan Party and the National Party who were arrested by police from their houses in Killi Qamrani suburb in Quetta on 3 March 2005 for opposing the construction of large projects in Balochistan<sup>[28]</sup> and 13 leaders and activists of the Pukhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PMAP) who were arrested by the University Town police under the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance

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during strike observed by the Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement in Peshawar on 31 March 2005.<sup>[29]</sup>

The relatives of the nationalist leaders and political workers of Balochistan also suffered violations of their rights at the hands of the security agencies. Some of them included Obaidullah and Samiullah Baloch, brothers of Senator Sanaullah Baloch, who were allegedly kidnapped by intelligence agencies near Askari Park in Quetta Cantonment while heading towards Quetta Airport on 16 July 2006,<sup>[30]</sup> and three relatives of Senator Agha Shahid Bugti of Jamori Watan Party (JWP) identified as Jamal Bugti who were kidnapped by intelligence agencies from Sariab Road on 23 June 2006 and Bilal Bugti and Murtiza Bugti who were kidnapped by intelligence agencies on 14 July 2006.<sup>[31]</sup>

### **b. Disappearance**

According to the HRCP, 170 persons were still missing from Balochistan as on 12 December 2006,<sup>[32]</sup> most of them with no links with militant activities.<sup>[33]</sup> In July 2006, the chief of an intelligence agency had allegedly admitted that one Ali Asghar Bungulzai, a tailor from Quetta, who has been missing since 18 October 2001, was in their custody.<sup>[34]</sup>

### **V. Displacement: The plight of the displaced Balochis**

According to United Nations estimates, there were 84,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Balochistan of which 26,000 were women and 33,000 were children as of December 2006.<sup>[35]</sup> As per the statistics of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, about 50,000 people have fled their villages and settlements from Dera Bugti as of July 2006. The officials have not provided relief as it claimed that the people who have fled Dera Bugti were very well off.<sup>[36]</sup> Due to total blockade of Marri and Bugti areas by the Pakistani army, about 8000 to 10,000 allegedly died due to exodus, malnourishment, lack of shelter and disease. They had been reportedly living in deplorable conditions in the makeshift camps with no access to potable water, food, and other basic necessities. No products, medicine and medical facility, doctor and electricity or even fuel to run water pumps were not provided to these areas.<sup>[37]</sup> The government was reportedly offering 10 goats to those who have returned to their homes in order to make their ends meet.<sup>[38]</sup>

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Unfortunately the plight of the displaced has been overshadowed by the conflict in the region, which has been aggravated by the killing of Baloch chief Akbar Bugti. The government of Pakistan had failed to hear the cries for help of the displaced due to its occupation with the operation against the tribal militias. The government has deliberately created the humanitarian crisis by not even recognizing the presence of IDPs in the province. Although the government had sought the intervention of the United Nations to avert the humanitarian crisis on 21 December 2006, it was too late.<sup>[39]</sup> Besides, the situation further aggravated as the government prevented journalists and aid groups to reach the affected areas.<sup>[40]</sup> Even the assistance sought from the UN was alleged to be conditional as only three districts of Naseerabad, Jaffarabad and Quetta, which housed majority of the IDPs were given permission. The other districts Sibi and Bolan were not considered. Besides, the UN was asked to carry out its relief operation through health facilities in the districts and under the supervision of local authorities.<sup>[41]</sup> The aid workers who had earlier visited the area alleged that military trucks rounded up displaced people and hid them ahead of their visits.<sup>[42]</sup>

There had been reports of severe malnutritional crisis among the IDPs. UNICEF in its internal assessment report on nutritional status of women and children among the IDPs revealed that 28 per cent children under the age of five were 'acutely undernourished', out of them, six per cent were in the state of 'severely acute malnutrition' and 80 per cent of the deaths among the IDPs were children under the age of five.<sup>[43]</sup> Six percent of the children were so underfed that they would die without immediate medical attention.<sup>[44]</sup>

In December 2006, the United Nations approved a \$1 million humanitarian relief package for six months to address this crisis. The package includes immediate setting up of 57 supplementary feeding centres and three therapeutic feeding centres in the three districts, provision of food, medicine and nutrition for children, blankets, water purification and sanitation equipment and technical assistance.<sup>[45]</sup> However, the relief package was a peanut considering the presence of large numbers of IDPs.

Besides, development projects in the Gwadar area could also displace about 70,000 people. Given that those who have been displaced by previous development projects like Mangla Dam and the Tarbela Dam have not been rehabilitated, it is highly unlikely that those likely to be displaced would be adequately rehabilitated.<sup>[46]</sup>

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