

## **What is the score in Balochistan? “A new phase of extra judicial killings has started”**

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After the killing of Professor Saba Dashtyari, a renowned scholar of Balochistan, a question commonly asked by the people is: What is the latest score in Balochistan? The killings, whether extrajudicial or through target killings, have become so common that not one day passes when one or two bullet riddled bodies are not found dumped on the roads. The Baloch nationalist and political activists claim that the state intelligence agencies abducted the victims and held them for some days incommunicado and then killed them. Killing the abductees after interrogation is the easiest method for law enforcement agencies, the military, Frontier Corps and invisible soldiers of intelligence agencies, to destroy all evidence of such acts against humanity. On the other hand the government and law enforcement agencies never produce a clear statement or try to deny these claims, they prefer to keep silent to enforce the idea that this is their ruthless way of dealing with persons they see as a threat. It would also appear that the provincial government of Balochistan has been instructed by these ‘forces’, to keep their mouths shut.

Only one person, the Federal Minister of the Interior claims that there is an insurgency in Balochistan and the insurgents are Indian agents. However, he has produced no concrete evidence to back this up, but whenever there are talks between Pakistan and India he pulls out this stereotyped statement. On one occasion the prime minister himself said in Sharm-ul-Shaikh, Egypt during the meeting with the Indian prime minister that Pakistan had handed over evidence of Indian involvement in the Balochistan insurgency. However, this ‘evidence’ has never been revealed to the Pakistani people. The Frontier Corp (FC) tried to help the government in finding Indian hands behind the so called insurgency by producing a person before the media. The man, Murad Khan Marri, had been in FC custody after his disappearance in 2009 and was produced only in March 2010 as he was ‘found’ crossing the Afghanistan border with Indian currency. The FC also claimed his head money (reward) but the claim was found to be false after it was learned that he had been kept in the FC torture cell at Mastung city and was brought out to prove that the movement of the Balochi people for greater autonomy was funded by India.

During the regime of general Musharraf, who created the phenomenon of disappearances on a mass scale, the abduction and disappearances were common and people were kept for months in the military torture cells. But since last year, when the government and military could not find any evidence to implicate the movement of the Baloch people as an Indian attempt, a new phase of extra judicial killings was started. Since 2010 approximately 140 political activists, journalists, academics and students were killed in extrajudicial killings. Included in the lists are also those who were killed in target killings by unknown persons.

Up until 2007 the province was under direct military operation during which the Pakistan Air Force carried out aerial bombardments. But since 2008, when a civilian government took over power the military operation was withdrawn and the FC was given the responsibility of law enforcement of the province. The military was not recalled and they still patrol and have their check posts and business in constructing the cantonments there. The police role has been minimized to just follow the FC or help in abduction of activists. The FC has proved itself worst than the military as it runs its own torture cells in private premises throughout Balochistan, no law can be applied on it and no court

can ask the FC about its extra-constitutional methods.

One Baloch leader, Mr. Shah Zain Bugti, was arrested by dozens of FC persons on the charges of carrying arms, whereas the FC does not have the authority to arrest anyone. Only police have that authority. Though Bugti was released after many days by the court no action was taken against the FC for taking this authority into their own hands. There is always impunity for the FC.

In a recent case FC killed two innocent women and three men extrajudicially. It was announced by the FC that they were Chechen citizens and suicide attackers who were killed by their own hand grenades. However, after examining the bodies it was found that they had been killed by gunshot wounds. Now, because of the pressure created by the people and media an inquiry is being conducted against the FC where the invisible forces are trying to destroy the evidence.

It is firmly believed that the extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances of Balochi citizens is an attempt at genocide and that there is a scheme to get rid of them entirely from Pakistan in a similar manner to that of the Bengalis. The Balochis also feel that the Pakistan army is dealing with them in the same manner as they did with the people of Bangladesh.

Due to the introduction of extrajudicial killings, through abductions and disappearances or target killings, the whole of Balochistan now resembles a deserted or barren province. Generally people go to their homes early in the evening, universities, colleges and schools are with fewer students, the parents, who have resources prefer their children to study in other provinces; the streets, cafes and roadside hotels keep their doors open in the optimistic hope that their establishments will be filled as they were in the past. The customers who do come to these places are reluctant to sit and chat; there is no sense of relaxation.

Quetta, the capital of the province used to have a literary and social culture quite apart from its commercial activities. However, it is now becoming a haunted city because the people are avoiding the areas and places that used to attract and encourage them in their literary efforts and culture. Parents no longer allow their children out of the house unless it is to attend school or some other activity. Their late arrival at home is enough to send the parents into a panic.

There is no longer any rule of law in Balochistan. The government has turned its back on the concept of justice and fair trial. No sensible inquiries into disappearances are conducted and no one is ever held accountable. Despite the testimonies of the few fortunate people who have survived their abductions and torture, the courts take no action, even when the perpetrators are positively identified.

One comment sums up the feelings and emotions of the people: "We are tired of carrying home the bodies of our loved ones".

The increase in extrajudicial killings and the daily discovery of bodies has created a sort of graveyard humour in the people who live outside the province which prompts them to ask, what is the score in Balochistan today?

**Baseer Naweed**

Senior Researcher

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