

# **Pakistan / Balochistan : Baloch Activists Punished for Dissent**

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A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission

**PAKISTAN : Baloch Activists Punished for Dissent**

Since inception, Pakistan has been at war with its own citizens ; time and again the State has indulged in gross human rights violation to muzzle voices of dissent. Ethnic Balochis have especially suffered discrimination and stigmatization, by successive military and civil governments. Due to State negligence, Baluchistan remains the least developed province even though its natural resources fuel 60% of the nation's economy. The call for equal rights for Balochis is viewed as rebellion by the State and "strategic tactics" of disappearances and extrajudicial killings are employed to silence the voices of conscience.

In the latest, the Pakistan military has conducted an operation on January 30 in Mastung, Balochistan. In this operation, five persons have been killed in a house, wherein, according to the Balochistan Times, Baloch separatists were hiding.

Earlier, on January 16, the Frontier Corp (FC) raided a house and killed D<sup>f</sup>. Manan Baloch and four other persons by shooting directly at their heads. The FC and the Balochistan Interior Minister said that those killed were militants and that they died in a gun battle with security forces in Mastung District.

D<sup>f</sup>. Manan, 48, was a physician by profession and a senior leader of the proscribed Baloch Liberation Front (BLF). He joined BLF after he began having to confront many dead bodies of those who had earlier been disappeared ; these bodies had torture marks on them. He was a committed nationalists and he joined the movement for the independence of Balochistan.

Similarly, eight years ago, on 3 April 2009, the ex-President of the Baloch National Movement (BNM), Ghulam Muhammad Baloch, along with two other Baloch political activists, were abducted from their lawyer's office at Turbat, at gunpoint by security officials. Six days later their mutilated and smashed bodies were found at Murghaab, 35 km from Turbat. The killing of this Baloch leader drew international condemnation.

D<sup>f</sup>. Manan was widely respected for his tireless work for those internally displaced as a result of military and paramilitary operations in Balochistan. According to media reports, more than 178,000 persons from the Dera Bugti area - which has substantial deposits of natural gas, known as Sui gas - who were displaced as result of military action in 2005, are still not allowed to return home by the Frontier Corp. And, this is in direct violation of a Supreme Court order.

A 20 September 2015 press statement from the Interior Ministry of Balochistan states that law enforcement agencies have killed approximately 204 “militants” in operations, and 29 have been injured. However, the State has remained tight-lipped about the identity of these militants which law enforcement agency has undertaken the killings and arrests.

In the press conference, the Minister also stated that 8,363 Balochis were arrested over the span of 9 months, and 1,800 targeted operations were conducted in the Province between December 2014 and September 2015.

Next, in a 31 January 2016 press statement, the Interior Ministry of Balochistan notes that security forces conducted 239 intelligence-based operations in Balochistan over the past two months, in which 22 militants were killed and 14 others injured.

D<sup>r</sup>. Manan was killed a day after a meeting held between Sanaullah Zehri, the pro-Islamabad Chief Minister of Balochistan and Lieutenant General Amir Riaz, the highest official of the Pakistan Army designated in Balochistan. Both of them vowed to “chase the terrorists”. The Chief Minister urged security forces to work as a team and said, “I’ll be your captain.” The next day, the vocal Baloch leader was murdered in what officials describe as an “operation against the terrorists”.

Since 1948, when the Khan of Kalat refused annexation to the State of Pakistan, five military operations have taken place in the province. However, these operations have proved futile in curbing insurgency, because the government has continued with its discriminatory policies. The Federal government’s militarized approach has further eroded peace and stability in the region. The Army is itself accused of prejudice against Balochis ; a majority of Baloch leadership accuses the Army of being dominated by Punjabis and to be safeguarding the provincial political interests of Punjab.

The Federal government is viewed unfavourably by proponents of Baloch liberation, who state that perpetrators of gross human rights violation are promoted to the highest echelons of administrative affairs, which further hurts the feelings of the Balochistan people and gives rise to discontent amongst the masses. For instance, the Commander, Southern Command, Lieutenant General Nasir Khan Janjua, who was said to be the de facto head of the Balochistan government – despite the civil leadership of the Chief Minister of Balochistan, Abdul Malik Baloch – was appointed the National Security Advisor. It was during the tenure of General Nasir Khan that the Kalat Mass grave scandal broke out ; General Nasir actively deflected all charges of the agency’s involvement before the enquiry commission.

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has compelled the State to expedite Baloch ethnic cleansing. The state didn’t bother to take the Baloch administrative government into confidence before launching the project. D<sup>r</sup>. Abdul Malik Baloch, who was deposed from chief minister-ship, according to a formula with the Federal government, in a recent statement said that he was not even taken into confidence about CPEC. The effect on the Baloch population is not even regarded by the Federal government as worthy of consideration. How can the State expect nationalist sentiments from a population that is completely disillusioned with the State ?

The CPEC project has again provoked the Federal government to commence a new phase of military operations in far-flung areas of Balochistan, where there is a general feeling that with the start of CPEC, the Balochi people will become a minority in their own province.

In the past, the Baloch wanted greater autonomy and increased royalties from natural resources for provincial revenue. But due to repressive state policies, a peaceful movement has turned into an insurgency for separation. Suppression of dissenting voices will not serve any good to the province

or the country. The use of force is only fuelling the conflict, while the solution clearly lies in the political way.

D<sup>r</sup>. Manan was the General Secretary of the Baloch National Movement, a political group seeking independence from Pakistan. Although the BNM claims its struggle is peaceful, the Pakistan military has killed dozens of its leaders and activists, including its Founding President, Ghulam Mohammed Baloch, due to their separatist demand.

### **The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)**

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