MEMBER PROFILE

BALOCHISTAN

Balochistan National Party
Status: occupied territory
Population: 12.34 million (2017 census data)
Capital: Quetta
Area: 134,051 mi²
Language: Balochi, Urdu, Pashto and Brahui
Religion: Sikhism, Hinduism, Parseeism, Islam
Ethnic Groups: Baloch, Brahui and Pashtuns

OVERVIEW

Balochistan is presently split between the three states of Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Situated in southwest Pakistan, Balochistan borders Afghanistan and Iran in the west and the Arabian Sea in the south. It accounts for nearly half of Pakistan’s land mass and is immensely rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, coal, copper and gold. Despite Balochistan’s immense mineral wealth, it is one of the poorest and under-privileged provinces. Much of the population is malnourished, illiterate and living with no electricity or clean drinking water. Since the controversial decision of the Khan of Kalat in 1948 to sign the Instrument of Accession that paved the way of Balochistan being incorporated into Pakistan, the Baloch people report gross human rights violations that seldom surface in international media channels.

Furthermore, the province has the highest infant and maternal mortality rate, the highest poverty rate, and the lowest literacy rate in Pakistan. Pakistan fails to provide basic rights to the people of the province of Balochistan, including educating children. Young girls are dropping out of school at an alarming rate. Nine out of every ten girls are out of school in rural Balochistan, making girls and women the biggest victims of illiteracy in the territory.

Baloch insurgents have been engaged in a protracted conflict with the Pakistani state since the Instrument of Accession. This has seen five separate periods of heightened insurgency against Pakistan for the restoration of their freedom and right to self-determination. The Pakistani state has always used aggressive military means to suppress the Baloch insurgency that often. The Pakistani Government has even tested nuclear bombs in Balochistan and has continuously polluted the region.

Since 2003, when the fifth insurgency began, there has been an increase in the use of enforced disappearances by Pakistani state agents as a way to silence Baloch freedom fighters and their families. In the past five years, there have been an extensive amount of “kill and dump” operations, in which Pakistani security forces abduct Baloch people and kill them. Further, there is no adequate accountability mechanism to hold the security forces to account, and thus there exists large scale impunity. This means that there is no case against
the perpetrators or any legal process. Often, the bodies are found days later with visible signs of torture or mutilation. In other instances, the bodies are never found and the Pakistani Government denies responsibility. In 2011, the Pakistani Interior Minister acknowledged that around 1,100 Baloch people have disappeared. However, Baloch activists claim that more than 10,000 people have disappeared.

**UNPO REPRESENTATION: Balochistan National Party (BNP)**

The BNP was established in 1996 by Akhtar Mengal, a former Baloch politician whose father was the first democratically elected Chief Minister of Balochistan. The Mengal family is known for having spent their lives fighting for Baloch residents to be equal owners of the province, irrespective of their ethnicity and language.

The Party is deeply rooted in Baloch society in Eastern Balochistan, Karachi, among the Baloch Diasporas in the Gulf Arab countries and among Baloch refugees and immigrants in Western countries. It also has branches in most European countries and North America. They believe in greater autonomy for Balochistan through peaceful and democratic means and aim to continue the cause of the Baloch National Movement. The Party also aims to eradicate economic exploitation in Balochistan, as well as promote equal employment opportunities for people in the region. Additionally, they intend to set up a secular Baloch national state which respects all faiths, religions, and cultural traditions.

The Baloch National Movement (BNM), a Baloch nationalist political organization, believes that Balochistan should be declared a disputed territory and the international laws applicable in such a case should be implemented. In declaring Balochistan a conflict zone, the aspirations of the Baloch people should be taken into consideration for the solution of the conflict.

The BNM seeks help from the international community to assist the Baloch in their struggle for an independent state. A free, liberal and secular Balochistan would be a step forward towards a liberal and secular South Asia.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Balochistan, meaning the land of the Baloch, has existed well before the 7th century AD. The Baloch land has served as a buffer zone between ancient empires and during the last few centuries between the Russian central Asia and British India. Balochistan served as a trade route for ancient peoples of central Asia, India and the Middle East. It is the cradle of some of the earliest civilizations and, after several invasions, has seen many social, religious, economic and political changes in the region.

In the 7th century AD, Arab forces invaded Balochistan, converting the Baloch people to Islam. The Baloch tribes gradually embraced Islam, replacing their centuries-old Zoroastrian religion. The Arab rule lasted a bit under two centuries. During the chaotic last phases of Arab rule, the Baloch tribes established their own semi-independent tribal confederacies, which were frequently threatened and overwhelmed by the stronger forces and dynasties of surrounding areas.

The history of the Baloch during the rule of various regional dynasties in Iran is marked by persecution, deportation, and migration. During the reigns of these regional powers in Iran after the Arab rule, the Baloch in Kerman and Sistan suffered the worst genocides. The confrontations with emerging powers caused the dispersion of the Baloch tribes in Makuran, Turan, and into Sindh and Punjab. The Buyids, the Ghaznavids, the Mongols, and the Timurids treated the Baloch people in inhuman ways. The effects of these conflicts were so
devastating that it took many centuries for the Baloch to assert themselves as a significant political or social entity in the region.

The defeat of Baloch forces at Khabis and Bumpur (modern-day Iranshahr) resulted in the complete victory of the Ghaznavis dynasty over Balochistan. During most of the 12th century southern Balochistan was under the control of the Seljuks, before the arrival of the Mongols. Towards the beginning of the 16th century the Portuguese captured several places along the Makran coast.

The period between the 12th and 17th centuries was of great importance for the development of the Baloch national identity. During this time, large-scale migrations of the Baloch people began to escape the hostile political situation and to ensure the survival of their livestock. This marked the beginning of far-reaching social and linguistic changes in Baloch society.

In 1666, the state of Khanate of Kalat was founded in the province of Balochistan, and existed until 1955. In 1839, British forces occupied Kalat, marking the greatest turning point in Baloch history. During British Raj, four princely states were recognised as comprising Balochistan, including the Kalat, Lasbela, Kharan and Makran. Under the Treaty of Kalat in 1876, all four princely states were brought together under British protection, but under the rule of the Khan of Kalat. Yet while the unified Princely States came under British protection, they still retained a separate status to the other provinces of British India.

They were never under full administrative control of the British, thus the decision as to the future of Balochistan fell to the Shahi Jirga, a special body of tribal elders, who predominantly opted to join Pakistan. Thus, the three Princely states of Kharan, Lasbela and Makran acceded in 1947. However, the Khan of Kalat wanted to gain complete independence on the level of its pre-1876 status. Thus, a roundtable conference was held between Viceroy Lord Mountbatten, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Khan. In the ensuing negotiations, a communique was agreed whereby:

a. The Government of Pakistan recognizes Kalat as an independent sovereign state in treaty relations with the British Government with a status different from that of Indian States
b. Legal opinion will be sought as to whether or not agreements of leases will be inherited by the Pakistan Government.
c. Meanwhile, a Standstill Agreement has been made between Pakistan and Kalat.
d. Discussions will take place between Pakistan and Kalat at Karachi at an early date with a view to reaching decisions on Defence, External Affairs and Communications.

The Standstill Agreement laid out plans that the status quo, as had existed between the Khanate of Kalat and British India would be transferred and continue with Pakistan until a more suitable deal was adopted. Yet, by October 1947 Muhammad Ali Jinnah had a change of heart and wanted the Khan to sign an instrument of accession. The Khan maintained his claim to independence and was disapproved with the decision of the other three Princely states to join Pakistan. The Khan’s refusal of Jinnah’s wishes for the Khanate to merge with Pakistan resulted in the Pakistani army moving into Baloch coastal areas of Pasni, Jiwani and Turbat on March 26 1948. The following day it was announced that the Khan, while being threatened with a gun, had capitulated to Pakistan’s demands to merge into its territory, something Jinnah happily accepted. Yet, it has to be noted here that this act of aggression was illegal, and thus started the illegal occupation of Baloch land. This is for the fact that the Balochistan assembly had declared against any fortification of the independence of Balochistan, and it was not mandated by the British Empire either, thus the forced capitulation was void.
the government and military’s approach whereby they agree to deliver the project whatever the cost; former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif even went as far to call those opposing CPEC enemies and traitors of Pakistan.

Balochistan as a whole, but also the Gwadar port, hold a crucial role in the success of CPEC not only for Pakistan as well as China. However, owing to the long-standing struggle for self-determination in Balochistan, the implementation does not come without its troubles. A main concern is that CPEC will become another manner through which the Pakistani government, with the full backing of China, can exploit resources from the land without compensating the people originally living in these territories.

Placed within the background of the pre-existing conflict, how CPEC is currently being implemented is causing more disillusionment and anger against the Punjabi dominated establishment. Pakistan’s obsession to protect project sites in Gwadar has led to the heightening of the military and civilian government’s rhetoric to quell any nationalist tendencies in the province, using tactics such as enforced disappearance against activists and their families. When taking into consideration the preceding issues of under-development and infrastructural mismanagement that have played a large causal factor in Baloch nationalism, many feel that putting in place a few ad-hoc developmental projects and boosting the infrastructure of the Gwadar port – where there has been no due consideration for the local Baloch population – is not enough compensation for what the Baloch have suffered at the hands of Pakistani authorities.

The feeling that Balochistan will be excluded from the potential rewards that CPEC promises to bring comes with good reason when looking at the facts. In 2016, whereas 12 percent of infrastructural development funds were allocated to Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 70 percent was allocated to Punjab and other areas.

**ECONOMY**

The Balochistan province is one of the poorest regions in the world and its inhabitants are among of the most deprived on Earth. An average resident of Balochistan lives on less than a dollar a day, with little or no access to clean potable drinking water. Medical facilities and rural illiteracy exceeds 90%. Baloch people are twice as poor as their counterparts living in any of the three provinces as Pakistan Balochistan’s per capita income is less than half of the country’s average.

Balochistan does not have proper physical and economic infrastructure. Roads and railways were built for the sole purpose of extraction. Because there are no farm-to-market roads
and no local processing facilities, grain and fruit farmers, animal raisers, and fishermen all remain poor. When the British occupied Balochistan, they built road systems for their own colonial strategic purposes, not for the purpose of the economic development of Balochistan.

In addition to agriculture and industry, the other potentials of economic growth of Balochistan come from mineral resources, transit routes and coastal development. However, people of the province have no authority to run their own economic affairs and have no control over their natural resources. For example, the Sui Gas case is a classic illustration of economic exploitation of Balochistan. In the early 1950s, natural gas was discovered on the Sui site in the Dera Bughti district in Balochistan. It was supplied to all provinces of Pakistan except for Balochistan.

Pakistan’s neglect towards industrial development in Balochistan has been severely affecting the region. Balochistan remains one of the least developed regions in the world in terms of all the human development indicators despite the abundance of their natural resources.

CULTURE

Baloch cultural heritage is known for its vibrant tradition of storytelling, and hold storytellers and poets in high regard. Music also plays an important role in Baloch culture, with the drum, the lute and the shepherd’s flute as their most common instruments.

Tribes

The people belonging to the Baloch tribe speak Balochi, which is an ancient language. Its roots are traced back to Iranian branch of Indo-European family, which resembles languages such as Sanskrit, Avesta, Old Persian and Phalavi. These languages are now dead languages. The Baloch tribe is further divided into the following: Rind, Lashar, Marri, Jamot, Ahmedzai, Bugti, domki, Magsi, Khosa, Rakhshani, Dashti Umrani, Nosherwani, Gichki, Buledi, Sanjarani and Khidai.

Traditional clothes

In Baloch culture, just like in other provinces of Pakistan, the national dress is the shalwar kameez except with additions and modifications. In all the tribes, they dress the same way without any distinctions. The turban is the typical headwear worn by Bloch men, along with the wide loose shalwar and with knee-long shirts. Women wear shirts which have a big pocket, embroidery and embedded round mirror work in the front. A big Dupatta/ Chaddar is taken to cover the head and shoulders.
Festivals

Both religious and social festivals are celebrated by Baloch people. The religious festivals are the same as the festivals celebrated across the country like the Eid-ul-Azha and Eid-ul-Fiter. These religious festivals are celebrated by decorating houses, wearing new dresses, and cooking special dishes. Baloch culture is full of many social festivals like the Sibi festival which has folk music performance, cultural dances, handicrafts stalls, cattle shows and a number of other entertaining activities showing the colourful side of Baloch people. Buzkashi is another festival showing the tactfulness and bravery of Baloch people. It is celebrated on horse-back by two teams that use their skills to snatch a goat from the other.

Food

In the Baloch culture, women and men eat separately. Wheat, millet and rice are part of the Baloch meal. Meat is also an important part, and “Sajji” is the favourite dish of most people. Sajji is typically eaten with a knife, whereas other dishes are eaten without utensils. Milk, butter and vegetables are also part of the Baloch cuisine.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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