

**BALUCHISTAN-BURNING ISSUES AND  
NEGLIGENT LEADERSHIP**

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## **BALUCHISTAN - BURNING ISSUES AND NEGLIGENT LEADERSHIP**

By Professor Khurshid Ahmad

It is a historical irony that lessons are not learnt from history. Arrogant and self-conceited rulers keep repeating the mistakes that cause their predecessors ignominious fall from grace. The oft-quoted remark “when Rome was ablaze, Nero was indulging himself in playing piano” became an adage, since Neros of every time appear to be interested only in self-aggrandizement and self-indulgence so much so that even the blazing cities and towns fail to awake them from their slumber of ignorance. Such is the case with our leadership as well.

When the sense of deprivation and unrest was at its peak in the former East Pakistan, in the wake of the refusal to accept the role of constitutional institutions, the military ruler of the time was declaring it ‘a rebellion of some miscreants’ and threatening to ‘use the language of force to make them all surrender’. The advice of those who counseled him for using the weapon of logic instead of resorting to the use of force was rejected as a sign of weakness and lack of courage. Quaid-e-Azam’s Pakistan was cut into two on Dec 16 the same year. Today, yet another military ruler is talking in the language of force, and issuing warnings to ‘miscreants’ of dire action. The political leadership that understands the critical nature of the situation and, therefore, wants to evolve a political solution of the imbroglio is being sidelined. It is showing signs of weakness, slackness, and waste of time.

There exists a parliament, but it is not allowed to discuss the situation and try to arrive at some solution. A Parliamentary Committee did succeed, after an exercise of 3-4 months through successful negotiations with all the concerned people, in finding ways for the resolution of the imbroglio, but its whole homework too is in danger of being shelved! So, what is the way out of this imbroglio? Before talking about the future, it would be useful to discuss the current situation, issues and their solutions, so as to find the way with the help of the milestones!

Baluchistan constitutes about 45 percent of Pakistan’s total area, and six percent of its population. It has a vast coastal area of about 900 square kilometers and hundreds of miles long borders with Iran and Afghanistan. Though rich in oil, gas, coal and other precious minerals, it is the poorest province of the country. Baloch and Pashtuns people are equal in numbers and together constitute 88 percent of the population, while 12 percent are those settlers who have gradually become part of the soil. The tribal system is still intact and its traditions are a hallmark of the Baloch society. Economic infrastructure is almost non-existent and the task of provision of transportation, communication and other facilities becomes difficult and relatively costlier since the population is thinly scattered in far-flung areas. A facility that could be provided, for example, at the cost of Rs 10 million in other parts of the country, would incur 3-4 times more expenditure in Baluchistan. This is a basic fact, which no government seems to have realized. For this very reason, the needs of the province could not be met justly. This is why the average of poverty in the rural areas of

Baluchistan is double than the average in the rest of Pakistan. Yet, what amounts to adding insult to injury is that 99 percent of the area of Sui and 95 percent of Baluchistan is deprived of the heat and light of the gas that Sui region provides to the country from Karachi to Peshawar!

The present government claims that many mega-projects and 2,500 other development schemes are being planned for the province, that it has earmarked Rs 120 billion for the next six years for the province, that start of work on Mirani Dam, Gawadar Port and Makran Highway are its big achievements. But the question is: why then Baluchistan is in the grip of waves of hatred, apprehensions and unrest? How bad is the situation can be guessed from the fact that in the two years, 2003 and 2004, there were 1529 incidents of rocket firing, 113 bomb explosions, three Chinese engineers were killed, more than 100 people died and hundreds injured. The area of Bugti is under siege, the shameful incident of Dr. Shazia's rape took place, and supply of gas is interrupted time and again - it happens frequently, and whenever it happens it inflicts a loss of Rs 150-200 million to the national exchequer. And the loss of human life is a tragedy that cannot be measured in terms of money!

Why is this so? Is it because of the tactics of some Sardars (chieftains) who have held the whole province hostage for their own petty personal interests? Is there really a foreign hand - with India having its own designs, considering Gawadar Port a threat to its interests; and America with its own game plan, being disturbed by China's influence in Baluchistan, it gets suspicious of China's role in every project, be it Sendak or Gawadar. There are reports of the presence of the US intelligence personnel to monitor on Iran and revival of Mojahideen-e-Khalq from the soil of Baluchistan. Then, there are the nationalists; they have their own views and objectives. These may contain an element of truth. But the basic thing is that 'enemy' forces can exploit the situation only when they feel the conditions are favorable to them, when there are already signs of weakness, when timely and correct measures are not taken to resolve the issues - with the view that all political, economic and societal issues can be resolved with the use of force alone.

During the last year, I had an opportunity to study the situation in Baluchistan more deeply, to make detailed tours to different important areas of the province, to see with my own eyes the prevailing conditions, and to meet many individuals at responsible positions. While my belief that all issues can be resolved amicably through political process was reinforced, I also got a strong feeling that some forces in the corridors of power are not interested in finding solutions of problems; rather they are bent on creating complications and further deterioration of the situation. This is proved by what has happened to the Parliamentary Committee that Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain had announced to form during his brief stint as the Prime Minister. The committee was unique in the sense that it was composed of representatives of all the political parties in the Parliament, including the nationalists, and, more than this, it had 16 members from the ruling

party and its allies and 22 from the opposition parties. Established on 17 Oct 2004, it was tasked to complete its work within 90 days.

This Parliamentary Committee formed two sub-committees: one, under Senator Wasin Sajjad, was given the task of suggesting recommendations on constitutional issues; second, under Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed, was asked to finalize recommendations on political and economic issues. I was in the second committee. I am happy that this committee worked with sincerity, open mind, and kept the interests of the country in view throughout its deliberations. Rising above political affiliations, it finalized its recommendations on 5 January 2005 on the basis of Pakistan's interests and the demands of justice. But it is sad that these have not got through the Parliament yet, what to talk of their implementation! In the meanwhile, some events in March 2005 further deteriorated the situation. The volcano appears to be cold now, but the lava is gushing beneath the surface. The rulers are proud of their 'Raj', though the members of the committee are disturbed over their negligence and delay.

It is difficult to surmise when and how the committee will present its report, but we think that time has come for us to take responsibility of giving expression to the essence of the committee's deliberations and recommendations, which represent the majority view and in whose finalization this writer also played a role along with the other members. We have no hesitation in saying on record that Senator Mushahid Hussain, and Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain himself, exhibited positive attitude. But why are they unable to further the case and take it to its logical end, despite our repeated insistence, is beyond comprehension.

To us, it is necessary to determine the foundations and realize some facts for resolving the problems. This is what we tried to impress upon the committee:

1. There cannot be a military solution to the problem. The issue is political and needs a political response.
2. All concerned quarters would have to adopt the approach of amicable resolution of problems through negotiations with the spirit of mutual understanding. They would have to try to achieve consensus, or, when it is impossible to achieve, to decide matters with the consent of the majority.
3. It needs to be accepted that the notion of 'strong center' is wrong and against the principles of justice. Center can be strong only when provinces are strong and become a means of one another's strength with complete harmony and unity. Now is the time to shift the focus of attention from the Center to the provinces in a way where strong provinces pave the way for a strong Center. The existing dichotomy between the Center and the provinces should be replaced by concord,

harmony and a sense of mutuality. This was the demand of the Constitution of 1973, which was not complied with.

4. Since the strength of a chain depends on its weakest ring, it is necessary for the strength of the country to bring the oppressed and impoverished classes to the level where others are, so that all may have the same sense of strength and prosperity. In other words, we all should act on the policy of ensuring justice to all and empowering the weak. Justice is all about equality and balance, and it is what has been absent from economic planning and political measures.
5. In this whole process, the real importance is of the interests of the people, of the region, and of province and participation of all in the political process and the economic activity. It is concentration of power in one individual or a group of individuals of power brokers that is the root cause of the rot. The issue is economic, yet it is also about provinces' rights on their resources, participation in political and economic decisions, and freedom to determine their priorities. Release of some grants or doling out some concessions to keep shut the mouths of opponents cannot resolve any problem. The need is to devise a system of rights, ownership, powers and participation in the decision-making process.
6. The role of the military in this regard is yet another important issue. It is necessary for the military to perform its duty of defending the country under civilian rule. It's meddling with political and other matters of the nation, and becoming a ruling political force in the process, is itself a cause of many ills. If cantonments are needed for the defense and security of the country, then the issue should be settled on merit. But if people become apprehensive that these cantonments are in fact for controlling the civilian order, it inevitably gives rise to tension between the civilian segment and military force. The military mind-set is quite different from the civilian one, and healthy existence of the country's system can be guaranteed only when both work within their respective spheres with the spirit of cooperation. Arrogance only makes the situation worse. It can never produce something good. This is reflected from the care that the Committee prescribes in regard to establishing cantonments, but the military's spokesman is using harsh language.

This is the logic that was once employed by the armies of British colonizers: that they had developed the territories under their occupation. No doubt that development is very much needed, but in a way that the relationship is not that of the ruler and the ruled, one of equality, where matters are settled with the participation of all. Control on one's own resources is part of one's freedom. Mere greenery and provision of a loaf of bread is not the true standard of development and progress.

Some important recommendations that the Committee had finalized in the light of these principles, included:

First, meeting the demands of provincial rights, 29 of the 46 items from the Concurrent List of the Constitution shall be transferred to the provinces immediately, while 17 more items shall be transferred to them within the next five years. The items on the second part of the main List of the Constitution shall be included in the Concurrent List. Moreover, the Council of Common Interest shall be made an effective institution, under constitutional obligation to meet twice in a year, with its own secretariat so as to make it independent of others' largesse.

Second, the option of use of military might be abandoned in order to make the political environment better and healthy; issues be settled through negotiations, and release of political workers be ensured.

Third, the province be given control over its resources and the demands of justice and need be kept in view in the transfer of resources from the Center. In this regard, the formula for the determination of royalty on gas and other minerals needs to be devised judiciously.

Fourth, it should be ensured that the fruits of economic development reach the people of the region. For this, it was suggested that it should be made compulsory for mineral exploration and development companies to use at least five percent of their total investment for education, health and other basic amenities to the people of the region, and, moreover, 15 percent of their profit should be used for the development of the region.

Fifth, special efforts be made for the provision of education, health, water, electricity and gas to the province, and local population and people of the province be given preference in jobs. To achieve this on merit, local population's education and training for technical jobs and skills be arranged.

Sixth, Frontier Corps and Coastal Guards be employed for protection of coastal areas and borders only, their civil role be abolished. More than 500 posts, which have been erected in the name of checking smuggling, be removed; this task of checking smuggling be given to the Excise Department, not to the Frontier Constabulary and the Coastal Guards. Similarly, the matter of building military cantonments should not be made a subject of political debate and contention, but be decided on merit keeping in view only the defense purposes; their establishment be postponed for now so as to make room for right decisions in better conditions.

Seventh, Gawadar Port Authority be shifted immediately from Karachi to Gawadar. It should have proper representation from the province; the program of its development should keep in view the needs of the province. It should be ensured that the people of the region get their rights, outsiders should not change the identity of the region after occupying lands there, and the affectees be

rehabilitated in the nearest areas. Moreover, the way in which the army, navy and other influential individuals or institutions have grabbed large chunks of land is loathsome and needs to be checked; the master plan of the entire region be prepared anew.

Eighth, there is a dire need to create harmony and balance between the Baloch and Pashtuns people of Baluchistan. The demands of judicious and balanced development of all the regions and peoples of the province must be met in any case. The regions that have been hit by drought for the last eight years, measures be taken to compensate their losses and for their development.

Ninth, the Levies has central role to play in the traditional system of maintaining law and order in Baluchistan. It should be maintained and developed, rather than replaced by police - which has failed even in areas under its jurisdiction now.

Since it is not our aim here to cover all the deliberations of the Committee or narrate all of its recommendations, we just want to draw attention to that approach of thinking that the Committee has brought to fore.

This is the way through which we can find solutions to problems of not only Baluchistan but of other provinces as well, of all regions and peoples of the country. This is possible only when decisions are really made in the Parliament, with people's participation; when political issues are settled politically through negotiations; when vested interests and the grip of civil-military establishment is loosened - allowing the people to rise for the protection of their rights and decide their own future through the democratic institutions.

Provincial leadership too has a big responsibility. Baluchistan's provincial governments are responsible for the deterioration of situation, but to an extent, but more responsible for the existing state of affairs is the Center, especially the ruling clique. It seems that it is this band that has become the stumbling block in the way of the Committee's work.

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