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Insurgency in Balochistan: Islamabad's Last Chance?

Type of Baloch Insurgency: Baloch insurgents have always kept themselves away from getting their struggle colored in religion and waged their war against Islamabad on purely political lines. The ongoing insurgency is the fourth uprising. The first insurgency started in 1951, second in 1962, third in 1973 and the fourth in 2004. Each time the rulers in Islamabad promised developmental work in Balochistan but in the shadows played the game of creating favorites and counterweights to the Baloch insurgency leadership. General Musharraf in 2000 announced to build five military cantonments along with building a mega shipping port in Gwadar and three seasonal dams. The Musharraf government entered into contracts with many Chinese and a few Western firms doling out contracts of minerals and oil exploration. He announced to recruit scores of Baloch youth in the government, especially, security related jobs in which the Frontier Constabulary (FC) was to recruit thousands of new personnel. Baloch insurgency leaders suspected that all these mega projects would attract scores of settlers and the Baloch would be converted into an ethnic minority. Thus the fourth insurgency started in late 2003 with Nawab Akbar Bugti, Gazeen Marri and Balach Marri as leaders; both sons of Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri. Akbar Bugti was killed in a military operation on August 26, 2006 while Balach Marri lost his life under mysterious circumstances in November 2007. These killings only added fuel to the fiery political and separatist sentiments of the Baloch nationalists. Although, the government claims of effectively capping the insurgency, the ground situation belies the claim.

Elected Government Making Moves: After winning a majority of seats in the National Assembly and forming government in Balochistan, Pakistan People's Party co-chairman, Asif Ali Zardari, now President of Pakistan, sought an apology from the Baloch people--especially the youth--for Islamabad's negligence and usurping their rights. He assured that his government would talk less and do more and soon after his announcement, the Federal Government, started reaching out for the hearts of Baloch nationalists by first releasing Nawab Akhter Mengal in May and then quashing all cases against Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri and his sons. There were also reports that Asif Zardari had met Gazeen Marri in Dubai while on his way to UK and US in September. Prior to his meeting with Gazeen Marri, Pakistan's Interior Minister, Rahman Malik, was already talking to the Baloch insurgents via the elected Chief Minister, Nawab Aslam Raisaani, who is revered and considered to be a man of principles among all the political classes of Balochistan. Because of Raisaani and Malik's efforts, the three separatist groups, Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), Baloch Republic Army (BRA) and Baloch

Liberation Front (BLF), announced unconditional ceasefire. "We will only attack if are attacked," their spokesman said on September 2. Also in a great symbolic cultural gesture, Rahman Malik went to the killed Baloch leader, Nawab Akbar Bugti and offered his condolence to his son, Mir Talal Bugti.

The Last Chance? Observers on Balochistan say that the Federal Government has got a good opportunity to prove to the "angry Baloch youth" that Pakistan wants to change their socio-political and economic conditions. Mir Hasil Bizenjo, Secretary General of National Party, the largest in Balochistan in terms of following, said that "violence against the Baloch people was perpetrated and they merely reacted." Now we would see what the government does, he said. Mir Jan Buledi, Balochistan National Party (Mengal Group) recently said that the Baloch youth would never prefer a militant movement to a peaceful political struggle to claim their rights. "Each time when there was trouble, Islamabad started it and we merely used our right of self defense and were the first to agree on a ceasefire," he said and added that the Baloch were cheated on every occasion of the ceasefire. "Our elders were hanged, women widowed, children orphaned and youth tortured, this is a good chance and with politicians in control in Islamabad, we hope things would improve." Resources from Balochistan have enriched the whole country and these have helped Pakistan grow but look at the situation in Balochistan, another BNP-M member national assembly said in the parliament in 2005, "it is misery, poverty, political, social and economic injustice what has been returned to the people of Balochistan." The political intelligentsia agrees that the time is short for the Federal Government for dressing the wounds on the soul of Balochistan but "politics is an art of possible; isn't it?"