

Militants strike in Balochistan province

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



In a wave of violence in Balochistan, south-western Pakistan, at least 38 people were killed in multiple attacks by gunmen, marking one of the deadliest days in the restive region. In Musakhail district, 23 people were taken from vehicles and fatally shot, with attackers also burning ten vehicles. Another attack in Qalat district resulted in the deaths of nine people, including four police officers. Six bodies were found in Bolan,

where insurgents also destroyed a railway track. Additional attacks occurred in Mastung and Gwadar, targeting a police station and vehicles, though no casualties were reported there. The Pakistani military reported that 14 security personnel were killed while responding to these attacks. In retaliation, security forces killed 21 insurgents. Balochistan's Chief Minister, Sarfraz Bugti, pledged to take strong action against the insurgents responsible for the attacks. Balochistan has long been plagued by a separatist insurgency, with frequent attacks on security forces.

History of Baluchistan province

In 1947, the Khan of Qalat announced the formation of an independent state in Balochistan. After sustained coercive tactics by Pakistan's leadership, the Khan of Kalat signed the instrument of accession in 1948. Gwadar, at the time of Pakistan's independence was part of the Sultanate of Oman. After prolonged negotiations with Oman, Pakistan was able to purchase Gwadar in 1958.

In 1955, various provinces and ethnic areas in West Pakistan were subsumed into a single province under the One Unit scheme. The scheme resulted in considerable centralisation of power and negated the basic principles of federalism. After much opposition, it was abolished in 1970 leading to the emergence of provincial assemblies, including in Balochistan. However, this did not usher in an era of genuine federalism. The provincial governments were routinely dismissed, and Islamabad continued to have a significant say in the governance of the province. The lack of provincial autonomy aggravated the discontent in Balochistan, which often became the site of multiple insurgencies and protests.

Balochistan, accounting for 44 % of the country's landmass — with significant mineral resources, such as copper, gold, coal, and natural gas — continues to be one of the most backward regions in Pakistan. The exploitation of these resources has not resulted in substantive economic benefits for the local population. According to the 2018-19 UNDP report, Balochistan accounted for 4.5 % of Pakistan's

GDP, 14 % of the national road network, and 4% of its national electricity consumption. Despite being a mineral-rich region with a long coastline, poor economic indicators have fuelled the disappointment in Balochistan against Islamabad's policies. The region's performance is less than satisfactory even with respect to child, youth, and labour development indicators.

Balochistan, a region divided between Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan, has experienced significant protests. The Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) organized a 'Baloch Raaji Muchi' (Baloch National Gathering) in the Gwadar port city to protest against human rights violations, resource exploitation, and the government's failure to provide basic amenities. These protests led to clashes with security forces, resulting in fatalities and detentions. In response, security forces imposed a crackdown and blocked major roads in towns such as Gwadar, Hub, Mastung, and Quetta, causing a sharp rise in prices for essential items like food, medicine, and petrol.

Resentment in Balochistan

There is considerable resentment in Balochistan with the government's counter-insurgency strategy. The security forces, as a part of their counter-insurgency operations, reportedly resort to enforced disappearances. The government-constituted Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances recorded approximately 2,752 cases. On the other hand, civil society groups such as the Voice of Baloch Missing Persons contend that there were over 7,000 cases of disappearances between 2002 and 2024. Various human rights organisations have also highlighted the phenomena of enforced disappearances of the Baloch people. However, security forces' attempts to use enforced disappearances to subdue Baloch nationalist sentiment have failed spectacularly. Instead, enforced disappearances have deepened discontent in Balochistan, which will also have an impact on the broader region.

China's role in the region

Today, China has emerged as a major player in Balochistan and has invested in mining, energy, airports and expressway projects as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The CPEC begins in Kashgar, China, traverses through the length of Pakistan and ends in Gwadar. Because of its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, a shipping route that witnesses substantive oil transportation, Gwadar often figured in geopolitical discussions even during the Cold War.

A Chinese firm has taken the Gwadar port on a 40-year lease and is involved in constructing and operating it. While Pakistan officials often insist that Gwadar will remain a commercial port, the apprehensions regarding a possible militarisation of the port continue to persist. A Chinese naval presence will enhance its ability to project power into the Persian Gulf and to protect its energy supplies via the Strait of Hormuz. The possible militarisation of the port, fencing and other infrastructure development has raised concerns among the locals that they would lose access to large parts of the coastline, which would negatively impact their livelihoods. Additionally, the presence of Chinese trawlers close to Gwadar prompted protests from the local fishing community that demanded an end to illegal fishing and freedom to operate in the sea without restrictions.

Many in Balochistan contend that even a decade after the initiation of the CPEC, there have been no tangible gains for their people. Instead, there is growing anxiety that the province's demography is changing rapidly as non-locals have moved into Balochistan to work on infrastructure projects. Overall, the CPEC has not addressed the perception of neglect among the Baloch people.

Way forward

There has been a steady uptick in the attacks by Baloch insurgent groups on security forces, CPEC projects, including other targets, such as on the Pakistan Stock Exchange in Karachi. The Pakistan government is responding to these events by scaling up security tactics. Perhaps the Pakistan

establishment should listen to voices calling for a prudent approach to address the challenges in Balochistan. Moreover, Islamabad's approach of building a few big-ticket infrastructure projects with external assistance and without adequate local stakeholder participation has exacerbated the Baloch grievances.

The strife in Balochistan is indicative of the challenges that Pakistan is encountering in building a nation-state purely based on religion. Movements based on ethnic identities not defined solely by religion have often, sometimes successfully, contested Pakistan's nation-building project. To compound the challenges, prolonged military rule in Pakistan with intermittent semi democratic regimes ensured that provinces rarely enjoyed autonomy to be partners in defining their destiny. In addition to Pakistan, the experiences from other parts of the subcontinent, such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar, demonstrate that the failure to address provincial aspirations tends to result in political turmoil.

Shah announces 5 new districts for Ladakh

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced the creation of five new districts in the Union Territory of Ladakh: Zaskar, Drass, Sham, Nubra, and Changthang. This move aims to enhance governance across the region. Ladakh currently comprises two districts, Leh and Kargil, each with autonomous hill development councils. Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized that this decision would improve governance and bring services closer to the people.

Response from local groups

The announcement comes shortly before a planned padayatra to Delhi by the Leh Apex Body (LAB), a significant civil society group. Despite the creation of new districts, the LAB and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) remain committed to their demand for Statehood and inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. LAB co-chairman Cherring Dorjay Lakruk stated that the decision does not alter their demands, and the march to Delhi will proceed. KDA representative Sajjad Kargili argued that the creation of new districts reinforces the need for a legislative assembly in Ladakh.

Broader demands

The LAB and KDA's demands include protections for tribal areas under the Sixth Schedule, job reservations for locals, and increased representation with two Lok Sabha and one Rajya Sabha seat. The groups have also been vocal about safeguarding the region's culture, identity, land, and employment from external influences.

Political reactions and concerns

The Congress party has raised questions about the government's intentions behind forming new districts. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh queried whether these new districts would also have elected Autonomous Hill Development Councils similar to those in Leh and Kargil, established in 1995 and 2003, respectively. The party seeks clarity on whether the same model of governance will be extended to the new districts.



"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."

—Benjamin Franklin

Kuki-Zo insurgent groups demand constitutional solution

INTERNAL SECURITY

Seilen Haokip, spokesperson for the Kuki National Organisation (KNO), stated that the Union Home Ministry has not yet detailed the violations committed by Kuki-Zo insurgent groups. Haokip emphasized that these groups are not secessionist, and their demands for a separate administration in Manipur are within the Indian Constitution. Originally seeking autonomous territorial councils within Manipur, recent events have led them to demand a Union Territory with a legislature, akin to Delhi.

Suspension of Operations (SoO) Agreement

The Manipur Assembly recently passed a resolution to abrogate the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with the United People's Front (UPF) and KNO, which collectively represent 25 insurgent groups. This 2008 tripartite agreement between the insurgent groups, the Home Ministry, and the Manipur government is now under review due to allegations of the groups inciting violence. Haokip indicated that the reasons for reviewing the agreement's ground rules have not been communicated to them.

Lack of mechanism to address violations

According to Haokip, there are seven camps each for KNO and UPF, with a combined total of around 2,200 armed cadres. The State has proposed a new mechanism to address alleged violations of ground rules, but there has been no functioning joint monitoring group since May 3, 2023, to discuss these issues. Haokip mentioned that the violations have not been itemized or officially listed due to the absence of a proper platform.

Central Government's stance on peace talks

Haokip reported that during his talks with A.K. Mishra, adviser for the northeast in the Home Ministry, it was clear that Home Minister Amit Shah supports extending the SoO for the sake of peace. Haokip criticized the Manipur State government for unilaterally abrogating the pact, arguing that this move goes against the goal of maintaining peace. He also noted that the State government did not send a representative to extend the tripartite pact, signalling a lack of alignment with the central government's intentions.

Modi, Biden discuss Ukraine situation, crisis in Bangladesh

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. President Joseph Biden discussed shared concerns over recent developments in Bangladesh, focusing on the safety of minorities, particularly Hindus. The conversation came after Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned amidst protests and sought refuge in Delhi, accusing the U.S. of instigating the unrest. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) highlighted that both leaders emphasized the importance of restoring law and order in Bangladesh.

Discussions on Ukraine and the Quad

During the call, Modi briefed Biden on his recent visit to Kyiv, indicating India's involvement in the situation in Ukraine. Additionally, the leaders discussed the U.S.-India-Japan-Australia Quadrilateral (Quad), showing India's interest in scheduling a date for the upcoming Quad summit. This summit is intended to coincide with the U.N. Summit of the Future, planned for September 22 and 23.

Strengthening Bilateral Relations

The call between Modi and Biden also touched upon the progress in the India-U.S. bilateral

relationship and their strategic partnership. This conversation marked the first interaction between the two leaders since the upheaval in Bangladesh, signalling a focus on regional stability and collaboration.

Modi's conversation with Australian Prime Minister

Earlier the same day, Modi spoke with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. The discussions involved reviewing the progress in bilateral relations and cooperation within multilateral frameworks, including the Quad. Modi's social media post following the call underscored the mutual commitment to enhancing partnerships and cooperation among Quad members.

Education Ministry defines 'literacy', 'full literacy' in push for adult literacy

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The Education Ministry has outlined the definition of 'literacy' and the criteria for achieving 'full literacy' as part of the New India Literacy Programme (NILP), a five-year initiative (2022-27) targeting one crore learners aged 15 and above annually across all States and Union Territories. Union School Education Secretary Sanjay Kumar stated that literacy involves the ability to read, write, and compute with comprehension, along with critical life skills such as digital and financial literacy. Achieving 95 % literacy in a State or Union Territory will be considered as achieving full or 100 % literacy. Under NILP, a non-literate person will be considered literate if they pass the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT).

Drop in Literacy Certification Rate

According to data accessed by The Hindu, there has been a decline in the literacy certification rate among adult learners participating in the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Assessment Test (FLNAT). In 2023, out of 39, 94, 563 adult learners who appeared for the FLNAT in March and September, 36, 17, 303 were certified as literate, with a pass percentage ranging between 89.64 % and 91.27 %. In contrast, in 2024, only 29, 52, 385 out of 34, 62, 289 learners (85.27 %) were certified as literate after taking the test on March 17.

Budget Allocation and Utilisation for NILP

The budget allocation for the National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NILP) has seen fluctuations. In the 2024-25 fiscal year, the Ministry allocated ₹ 160 Cr. for NILP. In the previous fiscal year (2022-23), only ₹ 76.41 Cr. was actually utilized out of the allocated budget. Although the allocation was increased to ₹ 157 Cr. in the 2023-24 Union Budget, it was later reduced to ₹100 Cr. in the revised estimates.

Significant challenge

According to the 2011 Census, India faces a significant literacy challenge with 25.76 crore non-literate individuals in the age group of 15 years and above, comprising 9.08 crore males and 16.68 crore females. Despite the progress made under the Saakshar Bharat programme, which certified 7.64 crore individuals as literate between 2009-10 and 2017-18, an estimated 18.12 crore adults in India remain non-literate. The letter says non-literate individuals face disadvantages in various aspects of life such as financial transactions, job applications, understanding of rights and participation in higher productivity sectors.

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Foreign rebels plan to use Mizoram as training ground

INTERNAL SECURITY

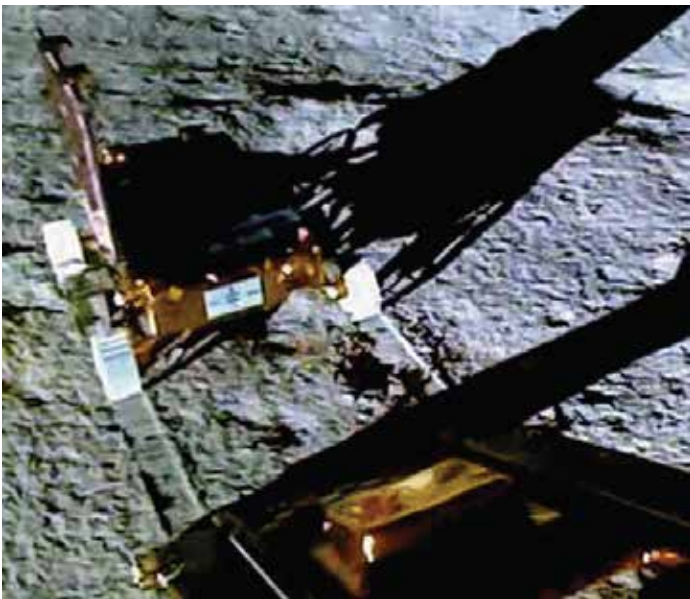
A letter from the Khumi National Democratic Party (KNDP), an organization representing a small ethnic community in Bangladesh, has raised concerns among security agencies about Mizoram potentially being used as a base by foreign rebel groups. The letter, addressed to Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma, requested support for establishing a Khumi National Army (KNA) training camp in the border area of Lawngtlai, near the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. The KNDP claims their people face oppression from the Bangladesh armed forces and need a camp to train without fearing attacks.

Security Concerns

The Mizoram Chief Minister's Office has denied any involvement with the KNDP, suggesting the letter might have been planted to discredit the Zoram People's Movement government. However, security agencies have not dismissed the letter's authenticity, noting the historical context of persecuted indigenous groups from Bangladesh, like the Chakmas and Kuki-Chin, seeking refuge in Mizoram. The Khumis and Kuki-Chin are part of the Zo ethnic group, which includes the dominant Mizos of Mizoram. Authorities are concerned due to the recent movement of foreigners in the state and meetings held by Myanmar-based insurgent groups, facilitated by local civil society organizations.

Pragyan rover reveals signs of Magma Ocean on ancient moon

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



Pragyan rover, part of India's Chandrayaan III mission, completed its scientific mission before shutting down due to the moon's sub-zero temperatures, 14 days after landing. During its operational period, Pragyan met all of ISRO's expectations by studying the lunar soil and confirming the presence of elements like sulphur and ferroan anorthosite. These findings align with past discoveries from the U.S. Apollo and Soviet Luna missions, suggesting that the moon's surface once had an ocean of magma billions of years ago.

Discovery of ferroan anorthosite

In a significant discovery published in Nature, ISRO scientists, led by Dr. Santosh Vadawale, found evidence of ferroan anorthosite in the lunar soil. This supports the theory

that the moon was formed from the debris of a collision between Earth and another celestial body, with the surface initially being molten. The detection of anorthosite was made possible using the rover's Alpha Particle X-ray Spectrometer (APXS), which analysed the moon dust around the landing area, Statio Shiv Shakti.

Role of meteor strikes

Pragyan's findings indicate that Vikram's landing site, near the South Pole-Aitken Basin, could contain material from the moon's upper mantle. This area, known for being the largest impact crater in the solar system, likely has a mixture of magnesium-rich debris and anorthosite due to ancient meteor strikes. The

rover's data confirmed a high magnesium content, supporting theories of a primordial magma ocean and subsequent meteor impacts.

Importance of close analysis

Dr. Vadawale emphasized the importance of Pragyan's close-up analysis compared to data from orbiters, which cannot determine the abundance of elements or operate without sunlight. The rover's on-ground analysis provided more detailed and higher-quality data, laying the foundation for further study of the moon's composition and history. The team is now using data from past and ongoing lunar missions to corroborate their findings.

Future research and national recognition

While the rover's mission is over, the data it collected could yield more discoveries, particularly regarding the concentrations of minor elements. ISRO's research teams continue to analyze this data, anticipating a series of scientific results. The publication of the findings coincides with India's newly designated 'National Space Day' on August 23, celebrating the success of the Chandrayaan-3 mission.

No more delays

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The Union government is reportedly mulling the expansion of data collection in the long-delayed Census to include caste enumeration. That caste may be one of the variables in the Census could be an outcome of the strident demand for a caste census by several political parties. But considering the incomplete and poorly constructed nature of the Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011, which resulted in data that were unwieldy, inaccurate, and hence unusable, the government must not hurry into utilising the office of the Registrar General and other agencies to tabulate caste. There must first be a definite time frame to conduct the Census on a war footing. If the delay is deliberate, in order to allow for delimitation to be conducted first in 2026, this will be harmful not just to public policy but also to relations with States. As of June 2024, out of 233 countries, India was one of 44 not to have conducted the Census this decade. The ostensible reason provided by the Union Home Ministry was delay due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but 143 other countries conducted the Census after March 2020, which marked the onset of the pandemic. India shares this dubious distinction of not having a Census with countries affected by conflict, economic crises or turmoil such as Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine, Sri Lanka and in sub-Saharan Africa.

There remains little excuse to continually delay the decennial Census, an exercise that has been conducted without fail from 1881 to 2011. Yet, the deadline to freeze administrative boundaries of districts, tehsils, towns and municipal bodies — a prerequisite before the conduct of the Census — lapsed on June 30 this year. This deadline has been extended 10 times since 2019. Several public schemes such as the National Food Security Act, the National Social Assistance Programme and the delimitation of constituencies are dependent upon the Census being conducted. Besides, statistical surveys that go into setting policy such as those related to household and social consumption, the National Family Health Survey, the Periodic Labour Force Survey, and the Sample Registration System, among others, use the Census to set their sampling frames. With the 2011 Census data getting increasingly out-dated and phenomena such as migration across and within States, the urbanisation of Indian societies, and the suburbanisation of cities becoming increasingly prominent in recent years, the lack of a Census is telling. The reliance on a bevy of sample surveys to fill in the gap is only resulting in debates over methodology and conclusions based on cherry-picking according to one's political choice. Clearly, the Union government must stop being derelict in its duties and should proceed with the Census quickly.

Unending war

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The ongoing war in West Asia has spread from Gaza to Israel's northern border with Lebanon, highlighting the escalating tensions between Israel and Hezbollah, the Iran-backed Lebanese Shia militia. The conflict intensified following Israel's air strike on Beirut, killing senior Hezbollah commander Fuad Shukr, and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran. In retaliation, Hezbollah launched hundreds of rockets and drones at Israel, killing and injuring several. Despite a temporary de-escalation, both sides continue to engage in conflict, with Hezbollah committed to attacking as long as Israel's Gaza offensive continues.

Widening regional conflict

Israel's extensive bombing in Gaza, supported by the U.S., has resulted in over 40,000 Palestinian deaths. Despite Hezbollah's attacks turning northern Israel into a conflict zone, Israel's military responses have not effectively deterred further aggression from Hezbollah. Israel's aim to dismantle Hamas and strengthen its southern security has paradoxically led to increased insecurity in the north. With no straightforward military solution to the Hezbollah threat, the ongoing Gaza conflict poses a risk of escalating into a broader regional war.

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