**Smuggling in Balochistan**

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Balochistan is bordered in the north by Afghanistan and in the west by Iran. To the east are the provinces of Sindh and Punjab, and to the northeast is Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). In the south, it has a 760-kilometer-long coastline along the Arabian Sea. Balochistan covers 43 percent of the total land of Pakistan and spreads over an area of 347,190 square kilometers. The province is sparsely populated and largely barren. It shares a 1268-kilometer border with Afghanistan and a 909-kilometer border with Iran. It provides land routes to landlocked Afghanistan through Chaman and Badini and to Iran via Taftan. The location of the province is strategically important because it lies closer to the Strait of Hormuz. The importance of the province has increased manifold with the start of CPEC; therefore, several hostile agencies are interfering in the province to disturb the project.

A vast area of the province is barren and tough due to non-availability of water and low rainfall. The underground water level is alarmingly low across the province and has adverse effects on agriculture and livestock. According to media sources, in some areas, boring has to be dug up at a depth of 1500 to 4000 feet. Poverty, lack of agricultural activity due to no availability of water, vast barren land, lack of development, and unemployment have led to smuggling as an alternative. For decades, millions of people have been involved in smuggling commodities from Iran and Afghanistan for their livelihood.

[Machine operator killed during anti-encroachment operation](https://www.nation.com.pk/10-May-2023/machine-operator-killed-during-anti-encroachment-operation)

Firstly, in the case of Afghanistan, containers bound for Afghanistan from Karachi, after crossing the Friendship Gate (Chaman), are unloaded a couple of kilometers from the gate at Wesh market. The unloaded items are brought back to Chaman (Pakistan) without paying any tax. Thousands of cart pullers known as lughari carry cheaper goods/edible to Chaman. The people of Chaman go to Wesh market to buy the products at cheaper rates and bring them back to Pakistan. From Afghanistan, major items smuggled into Pakistan include clothes, spare parts, electronics, fresh and dry fruits, and gutka. Non-customs paid (NCP) vehicles are also brought to the province, and these can be seen on the roads being driven by influential people. Earlier, due to the porous nature of the border, smuggling was done easily, but now after fencing, it is done through main routes in containers bound for Karachi. Thousands of people from Chaman and Killa-Abdullah are involved in border trade activity with Afghanistan (Wesh market).

[Korean Mission of UN-Habitat for Pakistan calls on Karachi Administrator](https://www.nation.com.pk/10-May-2023/korean-mission-of-un-habitat-for-pakistan-calls-on-karachi-administrator)

Secondly, from the Iranian border, besides other stuff, mainly Iranian petrol is smuggled into Pakistan. Iranian fuel is cheaper than the fuel sold at the filling stations in Balochistan. The major route used for smuggling is along Makran division by using speed boats, double cabins, and trucks. Ratuk (Iran) to Mashkel (Pakistan) is the main route, and authorized token systems are being followed. Tokens are issued to single cabin vehicles to cross the border with an authorized quantity of petrol per day. Reportedly, some 2.2 million people are associated with the smuggling of petrol. For the smuggling of petrol, patronage and complicity of staff deputed at the crossing sites/border cannot be ruled out. According to media sources, Pakistan bears a loss of 12 billion dollars in the smuggling of Iranian petrol. Besides the loss of revenue to the country, the effects on the economy are devastating. Although fuel is cheap, it is of low quality and reportedly affects the engine functioning of a vehicle. If this activity is stopped, then it will create a shortage of fuel in Balochistan and affect those dependent on this illegal activity.

[Sindh Abadgar Ittehad denounces violation of Indus Water Treaty by Indian govt](https://www.nation.com.pk/10-May-2023/sindh-abadgar-ittehad-denounces-violation-of-indus-water-treaty-by-indian-govt)

Unfortunately, unemployment, lack of industry, and water scarcity have forced locals to resort to smuggling from Afghanistan and Iran. The provincial government must take concrete steps to address the issues faced by the people of Balochistan. This illegal activity can be made legal by formulating policies in coordination with Iranian and Afghan authorities. A legal system can be followed where fuel transportation is allowed and taxed. An effective border trade concept can be introduced by establishing joint border markets along the borders. The border agencies, such as customs, FIA, and immigration, should be provided with the latest gadgetry to monitor entry and exit in a beneficial manner. Concerted efforts need to be made to ensure close coordination between organizations like the Frontier Corps (FC), Customs, FIA, Immigration, Police, Levies, ANF, and intelligence agencies. The federal government may establish a petroleum regulating authority to regulate the trade. What is the harm in obtaining cheap petrol from Iran, especially when it is in the local currency? The government of Balochistan, in close coordination with the federal government, needs to address the issue of smuggling from Afghanistan and Iran while taking all stakeholders on board.