

Balochistan erupts again

The most important factor that not only alienated but also infuriated the people of East Pakistan was their sense of deprivation in not getting their rightful share in the governance of the country and the nation's wealth. The Bengali leaders, who were selected by the Presidents to serve as ministers in their cabinets with unimportant portfolios, did not represent the people of East Pakistan. In fact most of them were hated as stooges of the West Pakistan rulers. Likewise all the top-level bureaucracy that in fact ruled the country came from West Pakistan and most of them governed East Pakistan as its colonial masters.

This same sense of deprivation, combined with the greed of tribal leaders and backwardness, poverty and lack of education among the people of Balochistan, surfaced when Mr. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto took over power from General Yahya following PPP's landslide victory in West Pakistan in 1970 national elections. He formed his government in 1972 at federal level and in the provinces of Punjab and Sindh, while NAP&JUI coalition formed governments in Balochistan and NWFP led by Sardar Ataulah Mengal and Maulana Mufti Mahmood respectively.

The Federal Government exchanged pinpricks with NAP-JUI coalition governments and their relations were anything but smooth. A minor law and order situation in Balochistan developed into a major confrontation when Mr. Bhutto dismissed the democratically elected provincial ministry. In protest, the NAP ministry headed by Maulana Mufti Mahmood in the NWFP also resigned. This led to a chain reaction and Baloch tribes felt offended at the dismissal of their elected government.

In accordance with their traditional tribal style of expressing their resentment and anger,

their men left their homes, took up positions on the hills, and started sniper firing at the vehicles that plied the roads down below. The Federal Government felt that its writ was being questioned. Having failed to exert its authority through the civil law and order agencies, the situation was handed over to the army to bring it under control.

Shortly before dismissing the



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Bizenjo-Mengal government, in Balochistan, Mr. Bhutto visited Quetta for the first time as head of state in 1972. Since I covered this visit for PTV I am an eyewitness to the widespread agitation and violent disturbances against the federal government. As Mr. Bhutto landed at the Quetta airport amid tight military security, people were raising anti-Bhutto and anti-Pakistan slogans in the streets of the city. The city was in turmoil because the coalition government of NAP-JUI was in constant confrontation with the federal government for what it considered the

anti-Balochistan policies of Mr. Bhutto.

NAP leader Khan Abdul Wali Khan also arrived in

Quetta the same day and was given a rousing welcome by the people in contrast to the cold and in rather hostile reception accorded to Prime Minister Bhutto under army bayonets. Director Public Relations of the Balochistan government requested me that Khan Abdul Wali Khan's arrival should also be covered for TV news. When I expressed my inability to do so, he said, in that case the

caped with our lives.

The same feelings of frustration and hostility against the federal government have erupted again under the leadership of Sardar Ataulah Mengal and Nawab Akbar Bugti. The Baluchi insurgents are sporadically attacking targets of the under construction Gwadar Port and military cantonments in Dera Bing and Kohlu. The situation is all the more serious because of the strategic importance of Gwadar port. Only recently army helicopters bombed the Gwadar area where insurgents had attacked the port with rockets.

In fact the tribal Chiefs have been the main hurdles in the progress of Balochistan for decades. They want to keep this poverty stricken province dark and closed from all sides to deprive the people from the light of education and progress. When Mr. Bhutto tried to end the Sardari system, they rose in revolt against him and now when President Musharraf wants to open the doors of prosperity through a mega development project like Gwadar port they are trying to sabotage it.

In a recent interview President Musharraf described the Balochistan situation as not very explosive. He said, "Some people are against Gwadar port and are playing into the hands of the enemy. We want to create cantonments at Sui, Kohlu and Gwadar. I am confident that with the coming up of cantonments, the situation will be under control".

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Balochistan government would not be responsible of the safety of the PTV team. Fearing the worst, I sent a camera team to the airport to film the arrival of the NAP leader just to register PTV's presence on the scene. The story, however, was not telecast in PTV news.

The following day as Mr. Bhutto was flying to the village of Wadh in an army helicopter, in which the TV crew including myself was also traveling, two rockets were fired at the chopper by Balochi insurgents from a hill top position. They luckily missed and Mr. Bhutto and all of us barely es-