

Dele. Internal Affairs & Poli Nations

I am referring to this old chapter from history for a good reason. The reason was provided by the opening by President Pervez Musharraf of section of the strategic Makran Coastal Highway, one of the truly ambitious mega projects of today. The other gigantic project on the coast is the development of Gwadar as an all-weather harbour. It is expected to generate job opportunities, and boost commerce, agriculture, fisheries, new industries, shipping as well as tourism.

these sardars have put up a similar claim to him – that whatever the enclave earns from development should be handed over to them instead of going into the Muscat treasury? This is a hypothetical question, but in view of the sardars' claim to ownership of the province it can be asked. The answer is simple: the Sultan would have laughed and said to the sardars, "You just keep out of this."

Let us see how the President looked at this issue at the inauguration ceremony on the Coastal Highway. He said he had made a commitment to the people of Balochistan to remove their sense of deprivation. "I took serious notice of it and resolved that the province should get much more than its share." He was grieved by the statements of certain Baloch leaders who claimed to be "nationalists," and said they could not be called nationalists because they were not serving the cause of their people.

There are many pockets of backwardness in various parts of the world. The leaders there keep pestering the United Nations or the USA or other advanced nations to help their people reach a modicum of development. They are pained by their people's state of lagging behind neighbours and would give anything to see them go

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ahead in education, health, material prosperity and even politics. Some of these leaders have devoted their entire lives to their people's welfare. Not so the sardars of Balochistan.

Because of tradition these sardars have a hegemony over their people and do not treat them with the paternal affection of a chief who wants his tribe to advance but like a tyrant who wants them to remain uneducated so that they do not become aware of their own sorry plight. The Baloch people are backward but their sardars are not. They move around in luxury cars and limousines and own palatial houses in Quetta and Karachi. Their sons are educated abroad, and they make sure that their people who treat them as demigods never come to know what they are missing.

Look at the Frontier province. There is no such hegemony among the Pukhtoons, and their maliks quarrel

with every government for more funds for development, even for girls' colleges, something unheard of only thirty years ago. A good percentage of the people of Balochistan too are Pukhtoons, but they do not resent or oppose development. They look at their brothers in the north and want to advance like them, not like the Baloch among whom they live and whose sardars are against progress.

This is what the President bewailed at the ceremony. The Baloch politicians were opposing projects like Gwadar seaport, the Makran Coastal Highway and the under-construction Mirani Dam. These huge projects, he said, were for the people's benefit and would change their destiny when completed. Gwadar and the Coastal Highway could also be used by the western provinces of China through the KKH for international trade and bring additional prosperity to the area.

Work will soon begin on the Gwadar-Gabd section of the Makran Highway, thus connecting it to Iran and through Iran to Turkey and the Middle East. As stated above, its potential for trade and travel is almost limitless, particularly when seen in the context of the trade and commerce needs of the land-locked Central Asian Republics.

You cannot say the Baloch leaders are unaware of this, or they do not know that development is bound to bring progress and advancement to their people. They are a highly intelligent breed, very political, and have also enjoyed the benefits of a superior education, but what can you do about their way of thinking, their mindset? Even when they talk of the fruits of development reaching the poor tribesmen they stipulate that the channel, the conduit, should be themselves, so that the people should believe it is their sardars who are looking after them and not the federal government and the administration of Balochistan.

Previous democratic governments, irritated by the hostility of the sardars, tended to be harsh and even violent with disastrous results for both sides. Despite his military personality, the President adopted a tone of conciliation and friendship, even before the advent of the present democratic government; but it seems to be making no difference. Maybe the sardars must take his decency for weakness. However, whatever it is, they are no well-wishers of the own tribes, and do not even realise that despite their despotism they cannot arrest the march of time and progress. Some day the eyes of their people will be opened, and then these leaders will rue their present attitude.