

How it all began

late 1940s to 1950s

IN 1946, when a British cabinet mission was visiting India to work out a future political arrangement after Britain would quit the subcontinent, the Khan of Kalat submitted a memorandum. The Khan's contention was that in the subcontinent the legal status of Nepal and Kalat was different from that of other princely states in India. The "naive states" maintained their relations with British India, but Nepal and Kalat were dealing directly with London. Under the same treaty, the British government gave special status to the Gorkhas. The British had signed a treaty with Kalat Confederacy in 1876. The Khan's demand was that after the British would leave the subcontinent, Kalat should retain the status that it had enjoyed before 1876 and all its tributary states — Khairan, Mekaran and Lasbella — should be returned to its fold.

It was on June 29, 1947 that leaders of British Balochistan decided at a meeting that their region should be merged in Pakistan. However, the Khan of Kalat announced independence. He organized elections to form a 52-member lower house of the Kalat assembly. It was on the floor of the Kalat assembly in December 1947 that the 29-year-old Aligarh-educated Chaus Bux Bizenjo declared: "We have a distinct culture like Afghanistan and Iran, and if the amalgamate with Pakistan, then Iran and Afghanistan should also be amalgamated with Pakistan." He demanded the newly independent Pakistan "to treat us as sovereign people, we are ready to extend friendship". But if Pakistan did not do so, they would be forced to accept this fate, something that would fly in the face of democratic principle, Bizenjo warned, "every Baloch will fight for freedom".

Since then, there has been no end to troubles in Balochistan. It has remained a disturbed region since 1947. Some say there have been three, some say four

since. The current situation, if it escalates into a war, may be the fourth or fifth in the last 56 years.

The first war was fought in 1948 when the younger brother of Khan of Kalat Prince Abdul Karim decided to resist. Prince Karim was Kalat's governor in Makran. He took possession of all the arms and ammunition and collected treasury funds and crossed the border to Afghanistan in 1948. From Afghanistan Prince Karim issued a decree in the name of Baloch National Liberation Committee. But he did not find much support in Balochistan.

With the formation of One Unit in 1954 the Balochs were again up in arms. Prince Karim, after being released from a Pakistani prison, formed Ustuman Gul (People's Party) in 1955. The Pakistan army moved into Kalat on October 6, 1958, and arrested the Khan. It happened just a day before martial law was declared in Pakistan. More than 500 Balochs were arrested and detained in sub-human conditions in what came to be known as the Kali camp. On October 10, 1958, the Pakistan army fought a battle near Wadh with the 90-year-old Sardar Nawroz Khan. Baloch nationalists allege that many villages were bombed. Tired of unending battle, army leaders, according to the Balochs, invited Sardar Nawroz and other Baloch leaders for talks in 1960. They gave a pledge on the Holy Quran for safe conduct and a patient hearing of Baloch grievances. However, they arrested Sardar Nawroz, his son and some others. Sardar Nawroz died in captivity in the Kohlu prison. His son and five others were hanged.

All meetings of the Balochistan Students Organization (BSO) begin with an anthem in memory of Sardar Nawroz, his son and other Balochs. It was during the '60s that under orders from Ayub Khan, the Pakistan army destroyed fruit orchards of Khair Bux Marri.

Yahya Khan's decision in 1969 to undo

One Unit filled the Balochs with some hope. For the first time in history the province of Balochistan appeared on the map. Sardar Khair Bux Marri contested elections for the National Assembly and won a seat from Balochistan. Dr Abdul Haye Baloch, then a young medical student at the Dow Medical College, defeated a prince of Kalat royally to become the youngest member of the National Assembly. Chaus Bux Bizenjo and the late Jaffer Musa were the other members from Balochistan.

The National Assembly drafted and approved the 1973 Constitution. Sardar Khair Bux Marri did not sign the Constitution because he was unhappy with the quantum of provincial autonomy. But Bizenjo and other Baloch members gave their approval and signed the 1973 Constitution. There was a built-in provision and the then Prime Minister Bhutto himself pledged to review the concurrent list of subjects after a decade, that is, in 1983. This was enough guarantee for the Balochs to seek the desired quantum of autonomy. Khair Bux remained sceptical. He argued that when the Bengalis, who were in majority, were subjected to excesses, how would the Balochs, who were hardly four per cent of the Pakistan's population, be able to get their rights?

Khair Bux Marri is often called a disgruntled feudal and an arrogant Marri rather than a Baloch nationalist who is against all development work in his area in Kohlu. For many young Balochs, Khair Bux is a militant nationalist. Whatever the case may be, the fact is that the year 1983 never came and the concurrent list of subjects was never reviewed. Instead came the 1977 martial law. The amendments to the Constitution between 1977 and 1988 defaced the original Constitution beyond recognition.

The May 1998 nuclear explosion at Chaghi in Balochistan was another blow to the Balochs. Quetta was the only city in Pakistan where college and university students took to the streets to protest against nuclear explosions. The October 1999 military take-over in Pakistan further alienated

the Baloch youth. Marri was implicated in a judge's murder case and was arrested. The mounting discontent manifested in a flare-up of the situation in 2004 when rocket firing and bomb blasts became too frequent.

How autonomous the Balochistan government is can be gauged from the fact that its private member nominated on the National Finance Commission (NFC) has not lived in Quetta or in Balochistan for the last several years. Gulfaraz is a retired brigadier and a former federal secretary of petroleum and natural resources. His name was proposed by the Balochistan government but it originated from Islamabad. The then Prime Minister, Zafarullah Jamali, was reluctant to give his approval. But finally he gave in. Balochistan has recently signed an agreement with the State Bank of Pakistan to convert its more than Rs10 billion overdraft into a block loan. The loan will be payable in monthly instalments of Rs100 million in the first year, Rs150 million per month in the second year and Rs200 million per month in the third year. The provincial government was compelled to take the overdraft from the State Bank because of resource scarcity.

Even a pliable Balochistan government is demanding a Rs600 billion compensation from Islamabad for exploiting Sui gas for the last 50 years. Out of total of gas consumers in Pakistan, hardly two per cent Balochs use gas in their kitchens.

Now there is a parliamentary committee headed by Chaudhry Shujaat which is working out a formula to satisfy the Balochs. The mainstream media now reports and advocates Balochs' grievances stressing the need for justice. "It took more than 700 rocket firing, over 15 bomb explosions and deaths and injury to many besides arrest and detention of many Baloch youngsters in the last one year to convince Islamabad politicians and bureaucrats and the intellectuals of mainstream media of the grievances of Balochistan." It is a cynical remark of a Baloch young man. But it speaks of the frustration that the young Balochs are going through. — *Sabihuddin Ghauri*