

Facts about the crisis in Balochistan

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AGREEMENTS abound which detail how the Khan of Kalat, the Jams of Lasbela, the Bugti and Marri Tumandars and other sardars sold bits and pieces of Balochistan to the British.

For instance, the agreement between the British government and Sardar Mehrullah Khan Marri executed on October 24, 1885 states: "I, Sardar Mehrullah Khan, son of Nur Muhammad Khan, Bahawalnazi Guzni Marri, do hereby, in consideration of receiving from the British government an allowance in the form of service to the amount of Rs.300 to be increased to Rs.500 per mensem...cede in perpetuity to the said government the exclusive right to all petroleum or other mineral oil whatsoever found or which may hereafter be found at Khatan or in any other part of the Marri country with full liberty for the said government to extract and remove such petroleum or other oil in any manner and by any way that it may seem fit."

A telegraph Agreement with the Jam of Beyla, dated 21st December 1861 says: "Jam Meer Khan, Chief of Lus Beyla...for a sum of Rs.10,000 yearly paid by the Political Agent at Khelat" permitted setting up of telegraph lines, with the stipulation, that, "obstruction or injury to the line may cause revocation of this agreement on the part of government at any time".

An agreement entered into by the Khan of Kalat Mir Khudadad Khan executed at the Dasht Plain on June 8, 1883 states: "Mir Khudadad Khan of Kelat on behalf of himself and his

This law stated that sardari "is the worst remnant of the oppressive feudal and tribal system which, being derogatory to human dignity and freedom, is repugnant to the spirit of democracy and equality as enunciated by Islam and enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and opposed to economic advancement of the people".

The Marri and Mengal sardars raised the nature and scale of revolt; they never forgave Bhutto for trying to complete the pre-independence work of the Muslim League in liberating the people of Balochistan. Zia's coup was rapturously applauded by the sardars of Balochistan, and a partnership was forged between the generals and the sardars. The sardars were pampered and handed state largesse and provided unstinted support by the agencies. The generals effectively revived the sardari system by violating the law.

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decided to put together a cache of money for the 'rehabilitation of the Marri' of which the common Marri did not see a single rupee.

Generals have been emulating the British practice of purchasing sardars under the mistaken belief that they represent the tribe. The British documented purchased loyalties: their successors in uniform struck secret deals. Money is doled out to the sardars from 'secret funds'. No questions, no accountability, no transparency. This largesse helps the sardar in his weaponization programme. No sardar dares go into his own area without the security of his heavily armed lashkar.

Bugtis also rebelled against the Tumandar of their tribe. From amongst them Mir Hamza had the audacity to stand against the nominee of the sardar in an election. Mir Hamza was murdered, but his father, the eccentric Khan Muhammad, promised to avenge his death. The murder of Salal

Bugti followed. Akbar Bugti, with all his might, could not contain his own people. Khan Muhammad and his entire clan were removed to Multan and the Bugti Tumandar given a free hand by those whose duty is to uphold the law.

Those convicted of Salal Bugti's murder filed an appeal in the Balochistan High Court. No local dared accept the brief and Advocate Talib Rizvi was flown in from Lahore, but he could not represent his clients as he was shot at the gate of the high court. The agencies are still working out who shot Talib Rizvi.

Today, Suleman, the self-proclaimed Khan of Kalat, is waxing eloquent about the Balochistan Liberation Army. However, his uncle adorned General's Zia's federal cabinet. Suleman also forgets to enlighten us how he managed to beat

heirs and successors here-by makes over and entrusts the entire management of the Quetta District and Niabat absolutely and with all the rights and privileges as well as full revenue, civil and criminal jurisdiction...with effect from 1st April, 1883," for an annual payment of Rs 25,000. The British also paid an allowance of "Rs.5,520, to the Bugtis, who had behaved themselves".

In 1947 the people of Balochistan wholeheartedly endorsed the vision of Pakistan. The message of independence was welcomed and brought the hope of emancipation from the sardari yolk. Significantly, no sardar was in the forefront of the Pakistan movement. Economic vibrancy, agricultural self-sufficiency and the peoples' penchant for education started to progressively transform the province. Later, every political party in the National Assembly voted in favour of the Constitution adopted in 1973 and the regionalist or factionalists (mistakenly referred to as nationalists) stood rejected.

The hangman of an elected prime minister however reopened settled issues. General Zia feared retribution and his self-preservation instinct made him undermine the PPP and the entire political process. The interest of the generals and the state of Pakistan started to diverge. Pursuant to a depoliticization policy non-party elections were held. The people were encouraged to vote for ethnic and tribal considerations. In Balochistan this policy gave a boost to the sardari system that was dying a slow and natural death.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had directly come up against the intransigent ways of the Sardars in Balochistan when he wanted to build roads, schools and hospitals in areas where the sardar exercised influence. The sardar realized that development and education would result in the weakening of their control over the people. The National Assembly passed the System of Sardari (Abolition) Act in 1976 which prescribed punishment of three years imprisonment for anyone exercising any right of sardari, or being "in possession of, or derive any benefit from, any land belonging to a tribe".

The sardari clan draws deep into the resources of Balochistan and ensures that the people remain subjugated so that they cannot object. Balochistan has had the misfortune of a succession of sardars as its chief ministers, senior ministers and governors. The sardars of the Mengal, Bugti, Marri, Raisani and Jams of Lasbela; a kaleidoscope of Baloch and Brohi sardars have wielded power since Zia's days.

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The people of Balochistan are unlikely to see development as long as the preferred choice of the agencies for the post of chief minister remains the sardar. Of the development amount earmarked in the last budget for Balochistan only 30 per cent has been spent by the provincial government headed by a sardar, confirming that sardars do not want Balochistan to develop.

With Zia's exit and the revival of the political process the sardari system again came under pressure. The sardars of the Mengal went to sojourn in London and of the Marri to Afghanistan. There were no longer any safe seats in elections. The larger Bijrani group of the Marri tribe openly rebelled against the Marri sardar. Shairoo Marri ('General Shroff') declared that the sardari system has brought nothing but misery to the Marri people and that henceforth no one be considered a sardar amongst the Marri.

With the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the fall of Kabul the Marri sardar became a hostage to the Taliban, but not for long. Generals came forward again to resuscitate a sardar. A Pakistan Air Force plane was flown to retrieve the Marri sardar and bring him and his family safely back to Pakistan.

On the return of the Marri sardar the ubiquitous agencies

how he managed to beat the murder charge against him as an absconder.

During the Marri sardar's absence the common Marri started to prosper. Mohammad Nawaz Marri, a local of Kohlu town in the Marri heartland, became a high court judge and was in line to become the chief justice of Balochistan. He would refer to the sardars of Balochistan as 'evergreens' and joked about their strong 'trade union'. To a sardar such a man is an anathema. He was mercilessly gunned down in the cantonment area of Quetta on his way to the high court — the first murder of a high court judge in the history of Pakistan and it happened during General Musharraf's time.

The sardars, their fathers and their children, despite having never worked, have ample money; live princely lives, in a flurry of land cruisers and a retinue of armed guards, while their people are in utter poverty. Today there is no writ of the government in Balochistan. The sardars directly or impliedly admit blowing up telegraph and electricity lines, gas pipelines and railway tracks under the bogey of the Balochistan Liberation Army. Having removed all opposition from within their own tribes with the help of the generals and having been permitted to maintain their private lashkars, their 'trade union' is all set to renegotiate the wages of blackmail.

The three members of the government who are going to resolve the 'Balochistan issue' hail from Punjab, had supported Gen Zia, and have displayed flexible loyalties. They have not so far met a single lawyer, teacher, doctor or businessman of the province.

Before this trio gets busy tampering with the Constitution, again, they should ensure implementation of the existing laws such as the System of Sardari (Abolition) Act, and "private armies forbidden" (Article 256 of the Constitution). The people of Balochistan want disclosure of the amounts paid by the agencies to the sardars and seek justice for their slain. They want the federal and Balochistan governments to realize that the resources of Balochistan belong to its people, and not the sardars.