**Lessons from Mastung**

[Adnan Aamir](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/adnan-aamir)

On July 13, a suicide bomber wreaked havoc in the Mastung district of Balochistan. Targeting the election gathering of Siraj Raisani, the Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) candidate, the suicide bomber took the lives of 149 people and injured 186 people, as per official sources.

Local sources believe the death toll is over 220. This suicide attack proved, among many things, that the security situation is still abysmal in the province.

In addition, the Mastung massacre has once again proved many things that the government in Balochistan is not willing to accept. First, it once again negates the claim made the government that the backbone of terrorism has been broken. While, over the years, the capacity of Baloch insurgents to carry out acts of sabotage has been curbed to a great extent, the striking capability of militant organisations – such as the LeJ and TTP as well as the Islamic State – has, contrary to the government’s view, increased. This is, indeed, a troubling sign for the people of Balochistan who have borne the brunt of this in the form of sudden and massive terrorist attacks.

Second, the responsibility for the Mastung attack was claimed by the IS. This once again raises questions about the claim made by the Balochistan government that the IS doesn’t operate within the province. Officials of the Balochistan government have repeatedly asserted that such claims by the group are a mere eyewash.

The sheer sophistication and planning with which the Mastung attack was carried out suggests that the IS is not only present in Balochistan, but is also fully capable of striking targets that are associated with the state of Pakistan in any way. If the government keeps denying the presence of the IS in Balochistan, they will be underestimating the threat posed by this lethal group. This will make it easier for the outfit to carry out attacks in the future.

Third, the Mastung incident proves that governance in Balochistan is in shambles. When the blast took place, it took ambulances almost an hour to reach the site because they had been sent from Quetta. The injured were subsequently transported to Quetta due to the dearth of proper healthcare facilities in Mastung. Some people reportedly died because they didn’t get timely treatment.

The injured were shifted in different wards of Sandeman Provincial Hospital Quetta, known as Civil Hospital, where there were no medicines. The relatives of the injured were asked to buy life-saving drugs from the market. This is wholly unacceptable given the fact that the Balochistan government has budget of almost Rs1 billion to procure medicines.

This is not the first time that the healthcare system has failed to respond in an effective manner in the aftermath of a terrorist attack. After the August 8, 2016 attack in Quetta, which took place at the same hospital, many lawyers died due to excessive bleeding. Although two years have passed, the situation remains the same, which is appalling. There is almost no excuse for the Balochistan government that prevents it from improving the healthcare system. The governance system in the province simply doesn’t serve the people and the fallout of Mastung incident reiterates this assertion.

Fourth, the Mastung attack confirms that the ‘sacrifice narrative’ is still being used to evade accountability. Whenever there is a terrorist attack, the death of victims is glorified as sacrifices for the country and questions of accountability are brushed under the carpet. As per the best practices of governance, the officials incharge of security are held accountable when there is a terrorist attack.

However, this novel idea of accountability is always ignored and no one is held responsible for the death of hundreds of people in terrorist attack. Instead, the death of victims is glorified on the pretext of sacrifice and martyrdom. If this approach is upheld, terrorist attacks will continue to occur and the ‘sacrifice narrative’ will hold sway.

Furthermore, the attack in Mastung has generated a unique demand this time around. Former senator Haji Lashkari Raisani, the elder brother of late Siraj Raisani, has demanded that a truth commission should be constituted in Balochistan. He has demanded that this commission should be formed with the backing of the government and should investigate everything that has happened in Balochistan since Ziaul Haq’s tenure. He has also asked every person, group, political party or government institution held responsible by the truth commission to be punished as per the law. Lashkari Raisani has maintained that this is the only way to prevent further bloodshed in Balochistan.

The notion of a truth commission is undoubtedly the need of the hour. It can be used to avoid a blame game, and must be taken into account by the next government. However, if history is anything to go by, there is a strong likelihood that the idea of the truth commission will instead be downplayed by the next government. As a result, terrorist activities will go unabated and no one will be held responsible.

With time, the government machinery of Balochistan will further deteriorate and that, in turn, will become the new normal. This bleak picture is, by no means, a form of pessimism. It is a grim reality that awaits the people of Balochistan.

The writer is a freelance columnist.

Email: Adnan.Aamir@Live.com