

## THE BALUCHISTAN RED HERRING

By Dr. M.N. Buch

At Sharm-el-Sheikh, at the Islamabad bilateral meeting of Foreign Ministers, at every possible level Pakistan, which has no answers to our charges of state sponsorship of terrorism against India, has trotted out a mythical Baluchistan card. Instead of rubbing this outrageous effort of Pakistan to put India in the dock our reply has been weak, almost apologetic in tone. If my hearing did not let me down I think I heard Mr. S.M. Krishna at Islamabad at the press conference mutter “Where was the proof” when someone broached the Baluchistan issue. Are we made of such straw?

Baluchistan is a Province of Pakistan, the most backward, the most neglected and yet possessed of a treasure house of natural resources. Dams are built or are planned in that Province but irrigation is done in the Punjab. Natural gas abounds in the Sui gas field but benefit flows to Karachi and Lahore, with the royalty going to Islamabad. Baluchistan pleads for a fair deal on gas royalty and usufruct but what it gets is Pakistan bullets. Baluchistan is dry and desert like but it gets hardly gets any share of impounded water. By every indicator of development Baluchistan is at the bottom of the chart. This is not of our doing because we are not and never have been in a position to dictate to the Pakistanis how they should govern and what should their behaviour be to their constituent province. If the Baluchis are unhappy and recalcitrant the Pakistanis have only themselves to blame.

How has Pakistan treated Baluchistan? Stephen Cohen, the American analyst who writes extensively on Pakistan has recorded that Pakistan fought three minor wars with Baluchistan in 1948, 1962 and 1968 and a fourth in 1973 which almost became a major war of genocide. In 1948 when the Khan of Kalat sought a separate status the army took severe action and the Khan was deported and several of his followers were executed. The repression in 1963 and 1968 was also quite severe. However, it is in 1973 that Pakistan turned on the Baluchis almost as if they were enemies from a foreign land. When the Baluchis agitated for a fair deal and this movement took the form of using Sui Gas as a weapon, the Pakistan Government under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto struck back hard. Police, Army, even the Air Force were mobilised and the Baluchis suffered thousands of casualties. Uneasy peace was restored, but the Baluchis remained sullen and agitated. The movement was spearheaded by Nawab Akbar Bugti, an alumnus of Cambridge, at one time Interior Minister of Pakistan and Governor of Baluchistan.

Then came Musharraf, who not only carried on the repressive policy of Bhutto but took it to its nadir. This became the fifth Baluch war. The blockade of the Sui Gasfields was lifted with great force, in which air power and armour were ruthlessly used. The Baluchis, especially the Bugtis and Mengels, suffered heavy casualties and eventually the aged, suave, cultured Nawab Akbar Bugti was hunted down and bombed to death in a cave in which he had taken shelter. India had no hand in this and one is ashamed that, looking at the record of ISI, our intelligence agencies and government failed to condemn the human right violations of the Baluchs by Pakistan, much less exploit the Baluchi fault-line. The fact that many Baluchis are Shia and Iran, which also has a Baluchistan Province, has reached out to the Baluchis, offered a fine opportunity to India to fan Baluchi resistance. But like Patience Sitting On A Monument we did absolutely nothing and let the Baluchs martyr themselves for a just cause. And what we got in return is the disgusting Pakistan charge of doing in Baluchistan (which we did not do) what Pakistan is doing in Jammu & Kashmir, that is, create so much trouble that government calls it a day, packs up and sneaks away. Our reply to this is the piteous bleating of a goat staked out as bait for a tiger, instead of a thunderclap of roaring which makes Pakistan quake in its collective boots.

Why do we close our eyes to Pakistani motive, tactics and strategy in playing the Baluchistan card? That Pakistan state agencies are spearheading the campaign to disrupt and destroy India is no longer a matter of speculation. The proof given by us, the information collected by the U.S. agencies, the evidence found in investigation of specific incidents have exposed Pakistan's deeds in totality and that country has no more alibis to plead, no more rational arguments to offer, no justification for its actions. All this has stripped away the last veil of secrecy and Pakistan stands naked and exposed. Lacking argument or justification Pakistan only has bluster to offer and Baluchistan is a part of this tactic to try and obfuscate its own role in exporting terrorism to India. Direct confrontation to call Pakistan's bluff is the only sensible way to blunt Pakistan. One does not make indelicate suggestions in an article, but India should tell Pakistan what precisely it can do with its charges on Baluchistan. Baluchistan is not Kashmir and we have never questioned its status as a Province of Pakistan, but Pakistan does question our locus standi in Kashmir to justify its promotion of separatism and terrorism there. Because Baluchistan is part of Pakistan we certainly do not support separatism regardless of provocation. I only wish we did!

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