

Is it a roadmap for peace?

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A 3-day Indo-Pak Conference on 'roadmap for peace' has been planned in New Delhi from January 10 by a consortium of Indian fora. Participants have been invited from Pakistan and Jammu and Kashmir in addition to participants from the host country, and the conference will be opened by former Indian premier IK Gujral. On second day of the conference ie January 11, the topic is "Issue of Autonomy: Kashmir and Balochistan", which will be chaired by Rajendra Sacchar former chief justice of Delhi High Court. The session will be addressed by Asma Jehangir of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Quetta-based journalist Siraj Malik Akbar, JKLf chief Yasin Malik, Sajjad Lone of Peoples Conference and Senator Hasil Khan Bizenjo. One does not understand how members of Pakistani delegation have agreed to the topic which is bracketing Balochistan with Kashmir. They are either too naïve or are infatuated with India that they do not see the conspiracy? Don't they realize that the Kashmir dispute is a matter between two sovereign states India and Pakistan, and there are United Nations Security Council resolutions giving Kashmiris the right to decide through plebiscite under UN aegis to join India or Pakistan. But Balochistan is a federating unit of Pakistan and there is no relevance with Kashmir dispute.

However, quantum of autonomy issue is the internal matter of Pakistan and can be resolved through dialogue. It is common knowledge that India's RAW is involved in fanning centrifugal tendencies and supporting insurgents in Balochistan, which matter was brought up by Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the Sharm Al-Sheikh. Anyhow, the organizers of conference claim that this conference is being organized to mobilize the peace activists and peace groups from India and Pakistan and to influence both the governments to resume the peace process. In fact, effort has been made to internationalize Balochistan issue in a subtle manner and to lend support to point of view of a few Baloch Sardars who openly say that they don't believe in negotiations with the federal government. And that they would not accept anything short of an independent Balochistan. In this backdrop, those who advocate holding negotiation with sardars' scions who are in self-exile should try and see their real visages.

Chairperson of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Asma Jahangir, Co-chairman of HRC Iqbal Haider and IA Rehman also would address the controversial session of the conference. Last year, when three Baloch leaders were killed, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in a statement had said: "The facts strongly suggest that members of state security picked up the three victims, and tortured and killed them before dumping their bodies." The HRCP office bearers relying upon the members of the banned organizations said that the three men were taken away in cars who were closely followed by Frontier Corps vehicles. One does not understand as to why human rights organizations and activists do not see the murder of settlers from other provinces especially teachers in Balochistan? Do only sardars are human beings and other poor Balochs and settlers are not human beings? According to another report, there were more than a dozen FIRs registered against murdered Baloch leaders on various charges of attacking Frontier Corp, laying anti-tank mine, destruction of government and public property etc. Perhaps it is in this backdrop that fingers of accusation are being pointed towards government and its agencies. Nevertheless, foreign hand behind the murder of Baloch leaders could not be ruled out, as Indian Raw is out to exacerbate the contradictions and fuel passions in Balochistan..

Since 1950s, Baloch sardars have been coming out with unreasonable demands. There were of course some genuine grievances of the people especially after formation of the One Unit. Anyhow, the long dormant crisis had erupted into a brutal confrontation with the center in 1973 when late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had tried to establish educational institutions and construction of roads in Balochistan. The insurgency had lasted for four years from 1973 to 1977, and it was after promulgation of Martial Law by Late General Zia-ul-Haq that sedition cases were withdrawn against Baloch sardars. It has to be mentioned that sardars and feudal chiefs thrived even amid the clashes between them and the security forces. In other words, poor people of Balochistan stand to suffer in general by sardars during peace times and also become fodder for the sardars when they challenge the writ of the state. It is unfortunate that the civil society does not consider it worthwhile to comment on what sardars have been doing to their people. No human right activist cries over the atrocities inflicted on them by their feudal lords and sardars in their private jails. It is too well known that RAW, CIA and Mossad are active in Balochistan and FATA to destabilize Pakistan, and Pakistani leadership – ruling and opposition parties - should work in unison to frustrate the designs of enemies of Pakistan.

There is no denying that during British Raj and after independence Balochistan and NWFP were neglected so far as its development is concerned. But this is also true that despite being part of the provincial governments, sardars had neither done anything to develop Balochistan nor persuaded the central government to make development plans for their province. They consider all natural resources of Balochistan their personal property and want to pocket all the profits and royalties. From the statements and interviews of scions of Akbar Bugti, one can understand that the bone of contention between late Akbar Bugti and the federation arguably was that the latter wanted increase in gas royalty. As regards Mian Nawaz Sharif's suggestion of holding talks with those who are not in Balochistan is intriguing and he is trying to draw political mileage from the contradictions between sardars and the government. He should have known that Brahamdagh Bugti is ensconced in Afghanistan near President Karzai's palace and Mir Byar Marri is in London and both are reported to have the backing and support from enemies of Pakistan.

There is no denying the fact that tribalism is firmly rooted in Balochistan, and ethnic and tribal identity is a potent force for both individuals and groups in Balochistan with the result that there exists deep polarization among different groups. Each of these groups is based on different rules of social organization, which has left the province inexorably fragmented. Tribal group-ism has failed to integrate the state and enforce a national identity. But those who have not weaned from the poison of sham nationalism should take a look at the history of the Balkans, and the fate they met. A couple of times Sardar Ataullah Mengal appeared in a television interview, and said that America does not pay any attention and would accept any outside help to disintegrate the country. Sardar Ataullah Mengal, Sardar Khair Bakhsh Marri and scions of late Akbar Bugti should try to safeguard the interests of Baloch people but through democratic struggle and not through violence and bloodshed. It is heartening to note that there is realization on the part of the central government as well as provinces; and in this regard Punjab and Sindh have sacrificed part of their share to Balochistan.

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