

Beginning of the rights of Balochistan

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Serious work has begun on the phase-wise implementation of "Aghaaze Haqooqe Balochistan" (Beginning of the rights of Balochistan) package which indicates that the Zardari-Gilani dispensation is serious about bringing relief and sense of dignity to the people of Balochistan whose rights had been ignored by successive regimes for five to six decades. The implementation is going to be vigorous and sustained, as the Islamabad administration's mood suggests which is not willing to make any compromises even on those issues that no civilian government had dared touch in the past like, for instance, the issue of missing persons. In this matter alone, the government would not only be doing a big service to the people of Balochistan but would also be extending full support to the existing system of justice that is much concerned-- quite too naturally-- about the fate of missing persons. By this action alone, the government would be able to create greater harmony among the national institutions that are of vital importance to the country's stability, a condition that has been missing in the past for almost all the years following our Independence. And while this humanitarian and just step has generated immense confidence within the Baloch fraternity, yet another move has been well received from the economic point of view as well as in the 'national unity perspective'. And that is the breaking of 37-year-old gas royalty stalemate, from 1954 till 1991. The total amount comes out to Rs. 120 billion rupees which is not a small figure on any count. But the Gilani government has taken it upon itself to do justice without further delay or dilly dallying. The genuine demand has been accepted without even the wink of an eye. As such, Rs. 120 billion have been pledged to the province by the federation. By all political, administrative and human standards it is an act of fair play on the part of the Centre that has put a complete full stop on the discriminatory practices of the past. Indeed, the patriotic Balochs would reciprocate in the same coin i.e play their due role in nation-building with more vigour and affection for their beloved homeland. That's not all. The seriousness of purpose tells us that the government is not going to stop at the mere resolution of missing persons' problem or simply at payment of gas royalty. It rather wants to do more and more for Balochistan on a constant footing. The legacy of goodwill that the PPP-led regime would leave for their successor governments would have to be put on a yet faster and progressive forward track given the promising nature of "Aghaaze Haqooqe Balochistan". Now we are hearing about the early implementation of the government's plan to provide additional 5000 jobs, from Basic Scale 1 to 16. As per the latest official announcement, these jobs would be provided within Balochistan. The government is also giving serious consideration to the already existing 7,000 vacancies right up to Basic Scale 17. In order to meet the financial demand for these jobs, the federation has chalked out a plan to provide the requisite amount to the province (according to a report the payment would be completed within three years' time or even earlier). In fact, the entire Balochistan package emanates from only one thing that it has come from the people of Pakistan to the people of Balochistan. Apart from the economic prospects and goodwill actions for the Baloch youth and the initiation of plan to resolve the missing persons' issue, the government is also determined to do away with neglect of all types that the Balochs have been subjected to most of the times, in the past. Take, for example, one such act. It is the government's announcement to implement, within the legal framework of the Constitution, unanimously passed resolutions of Balochistan Assembly from 2002 to date. And take into account other plans that are reflective of the government's concern for the people of Balochistan whose demand for an impartial probe into Nawab Akbar Bugti Shaheed's assassination as well as of some other Baloch leaders has been accepted

in totality, the judicial probe and fact-finding work to be supervised directly by judiciary superiors. Even the troublesome issues of 'no more cantonments and military operations' have been addressed with sincerity and seriousness. The fact is that the government means business in Balochistan and is not going to permit further exploitation of the Baloch people whose love for their homeland is unprecedented. One thing about this package is really good that it would be monitored on a regular footing by the parliamentary committee and that the federal and provincial governments would brief the committee on the implementation status every month whereas both the federal and provincial governments would submit a similar report every three months before both the houses of the parliament, separately. In addition to that, the standing committee on establishment of the Senate will present a report every three months on the employment opportunities for Baloch youth. There are many other good dimensions of the Balochistan package. Circles sympathetic to the genuine concerns of the Balochs have lauded the government for initiating these moves that are:- establishment in the near future of a free economic zone at Gwadar where all appointments from scale one to 16 would be from the local population; all new mega projects would require consent of the provincial government; federal government would transfer 20 % from its 30 % shares in Saindak project to Balochistan (this project would be exclusively handed over to the province on completion). Even before the announcement of Balochistan package, the federal government provided sufficient financial assistance to the province by owning its Rs. 17.5 billion overdraft and by increasing the PSDP of Balochistan from Rs. 42 b last year to Rs. 50 b this year. On the political front too, the government has fared well as all political workers will be released and cases withdrawn against those who have yet to be charged. Above all, all the Baloch brethren, whether they are living within the country or abroad, whether they are angry or are in self-exile, have been offered an olive branch to come and have a dialogue, the only viable solution to all problems, controversies and grievances. Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani has made this offer of dialogue in dead earnest. Of course, it augurs well from the angle of national unity and cohesion. The package has come belatedly due to the lapses of previous regimes but 'it is never too late to start'. And the PPP government deserves commendation for taking the start with speed, without any qualms and apprehensions.