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Quetta Journey from Little London to Urban Crisis Professor Dr Kaleem Ullah Barrech

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ABSTRACT

Quetta, the capital of Balochistan was once called "Little London" on account of its scenic beauty, pleasant weather, and unique geographical location. The city currently has a population of 3.5 million confronts innumerable challenges. The capital is the only metropolitan city in the province but does not have all the features that a big city usually has. The flood of 2022 in the city further intensified the challenges. Much of the road, bridges, and railway tracks including the agriculture sector of Hanna Valley and Dasht of Spezand area till Kulpur washed away by the rains. The city has been facing the challenges of urban sprawl. There are many people with no or insufficient shelters in the city. The shortage or absence of water supply is a major challenge. More than 500 tube wells extract slightly above 20 million gallons per day, falling short of the demand that exceeds 30 MGD. The real estate business in the city is in full swing. Real estate projects have resulted in deforestation, insufficient groundwater for orchards, and the expansion of unplanned settlements, posing a threat to the local ecology. Quetta City requires efficient interventions to manage and plan population densities. This involves transforming transportation routes to enhance movement, managing commercial centers, and creating open public spaces. This paper, thus, will shed light on urbanization challenges in Quetta City and will provide concrete recommendations in a bid to modernize the city. Applied research will be used in the paper by using both primary and secondary data.

Keywords: Population, Infrastructure, Metropolitan, Water Scarcity, Real Estate.

History background and Geography of Quetta

The current Quetta City, the capital of Balochistan, has had a great deal of significance for the Great British since the arrival of the East India Company in the subcontinent. The East India Company was founded by 24 businessmen on 24th September 1599 in London and landed in Surat, a small seaport of India that gradually intervened in the polity of India and within a few decades completed the occupation of the Indian Sub-continent and finally turned their eyes

towards Afghanistan. Secret missions, apparently as tourists led by Charles Masson, Pottinger, Sir Alexander Burnes, and Robert Leach, were sent to Afghanistan. They all submitted a comprehensive report to their authority. (William Dalrymple, 2013)

The British decided to overthrow Amir Dost Muhammad from the throne of Kabul, in this connection a Tripartite Treaty was signed in 1837 between the British, Ranjit Singh and Shah Shuja, the deposed King of Afghanistan and the grandson of Ahmed Shah Abdali. A huge Army of the Indus consisted of around a thousand Europeans and 14,000 East India Company sepoys—excluding the 6,000 irregulars hired by Shah Shuja—accompanied by no fewer than 38,000 Indian camp followers with 30,000 camels for baggage started their journey from the Indian city Ferozshahpur via Shikarpur Sindh and reached Quetta on March 23, 1839, then only a small village of some 500 houses. The British Army along with Shah Shuja stayed in Quetta till April 6, 1839. (Bruce, Richard Isaac, 1890)

The British decided to occupy Quetta. Quetta, Mastung, and Kachi were given to Shah Shuja, who nominated Muhammad Siddique Khan Popalzai as in charge while Captain Bean of 23rd Native Infantry was appointed as Political Agent Quetta, and under the supervision of Major General Nott a Headquarter of 23rd Native Infantry was founded, thus the occupation of Quetta by the British was completed. However, after the defeat of the British in the First Anglo-Afghan War of 1839–1842 all the British Army, including Sir Alexander Charles Burnes, Macnaghten, the Chief of the British Army, and Shah Shuja were killed. The British decided to leave Afghanistan and finally vacated Quetta on 1st October 1842, giving the authority of Quetta to the Khan of Kalat, Mir Nasir Khan II, so that they could retake it from him easily whenever the British would come and particularly to get rid of the resistance of native tribesmen of Kasi, Kakar and Durrani. (Ali, 1843)

However, the British kept close contact with the region, through their secret missions, apparently as tourists like in 1872, Dr. Bellew, and in 1875, Captain Wylie visited Quetta. On 21st February 1877 Robert Sandeman was appointed as Agent to Governor (AGG). Richard Isaac Bruce, Assistant Political Officer, and Captain Scott with a huge Army recaptured Quetta. Captain Wylie, while visiting Quetta, described the city in the following way: "The town of Shall (Quetta) is in a most dilapidated condition. It is small and built nearly a square around a mound, which is a mud fortification. The town has a mud wall around it and two fortified gates and is so shaky that it looks as if vibration from its mountain gun would bring it to the ground. The garrison consists of one gun, a crew, a company of infantry, and mounted men." (Bruce, Richard Isaac, 1899)

The geography and location of Quetta are primarily described by Lala Hatoram as he was a Munshi and Extra Assistant Commissioner with Robert Sandeman in his book History of Balochistan: "From North to South till the end of Dasht down to Chiltern mountain and Bolan valley is almost 30 miles and from East to West about 20 miles." The villages and Karez were known by the tribal names of Kasi and Bazai Kakar. These are still known as Wazir Muhammad Kasi Karez, Chasma Achozi Kasi, Kasi Fort, Lowar and Koz Karez, Speen Gul Kasi Karez now known as Samanguli where the Quetta International Airport and Samanguli Air Base are located, and Popalzai Durrani constructed Durrani Fort where now the Staff College is located at Quetta Cantt Arbab Karan Khan Road, Malak Jan Muhammad Kasi, Akhter Muhammad Kasi, Faqir Muhammad Road and Kasi Fort and Sirki Fort etc. (Kasi, Arbab Muhammad Usman 2014 and Raverty, Major Henry George, 1862).

The major urbanization process in the small city of Quetta started with the construction of a railway track to Quetta and Chaman towards Qandahar. The project was known as the Qandahar State Railway. The Ruk Railway Station, a city between Sukkur and Shikarpur Sindh, was chosen and under the supervision of Governor Mumbai Richard Temple, the railway track from Ruk to Shikarpur and Sibi was completed on 14th January 1880. Later on, Sibi to Harnai and Bostan to Quetta Railway line was finalized on 27th March 1887 and then Sibi, Mashkaf via Bolan to Quetta Railway track was completed, thus from 1897 Quetta was connected with the rest of India and also with Iran via Nushki and Chaghi and Qandahar via Chaman and Zhob via Kan Mehterzai, Hindo Bagh Railway track, paving the way for huge migration and urbanization to the small populated city of Quetta. (Ranayagun, 2009)

Quetta in 1935 faced an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.7 with huge destruction killing thousands of people. The British government then founded a new town with seven types implementing a strict building code but now due to huge urbanization the building code is ignored which of course would be more dangerous. (Samad Khan Achakzai, An Autobiography, 2022) Since then, Quetta has been the capital of Chief Commissioner Province of British Balochistan. The Shahi Jirga of British Balochistan joined Pakistan in June 1947. After imposing the One Unit Scheme of 1955 in Pakistan, most of the areas of Chief Commissioner Province were called Quetta Division while the four states like Qalat, Kharan, Makran and Lasbela came under Qalat Division. However, with the end of One Unit Scheme the Quetta and Qalat divisions were merged with full-fledged Governor Province of Balochistan with Quetta as the capital of the province which led the people of several cities to migrate and settle in Quetta with no care of proper management. (Arbab Muhammad Usman Kasi, 2014)

The following are the major urbanization challenges in Quetta City Dismal Health Sector

The health sector, ostensibly, is one of the most important sectors for human security which unfortunately is in a crumbling situation in Quetta city. After the 18th amendment health sector is now a provincial subject which has not been implemented in letter and spirit. Due to the insufficient health facilities thousands of kids die before reaching the age of 5 years across the province. Quetta has a population approximately of 3.5 million and has the largest ratio of the number of casualties in the country. (Arshad Jan Marri, 2018)

The major public hospitals in the city have laboratories lacking modern healthcare standards. Hospitals hardly have machines for CT scans, MRI, anesthesia and ultrasound. For more than 8,000 to 10,000 patients every day the main hospital of the city known as Sandamen Hospital and Bolan Medicals Complex merely provides the proper medical facilities. The Hepatitis ward of the hospital and pediatric intensive care unit instead of the government funds are being supported by welfare organizations providing medicines and supplies. Due to the lack of space, an important ward of the physiotherapy department remains non-functional. The hospital administration reports maintain that "We have repeatedly requested the authorities to take notice of hospital security asking for additional guards, cameras and walkthrough gates," the administration said. "For months, X-Ray films were being purchased on credit only for the operation theatres because of inadequate anesthesia facilities." (Express Tribune, 2018)

World Mental Health Day across the world is observed on October 10 annually. However, the people of Balochistan in general and Quetta in particular undergo mental health challenges by virtue of various factors encompassing natural disasters, worsening law and order, limited

opportunities and inflation. In Quetta, many people committed suicide because they have less access to psychiatrists and proper mental health support in the city. (Imrana Imdad, 2023)

Air pollution has been increasing rapidly in the capital. Vehicular emissions are being caused by an increasing number of vehicles. The majority of vehicles are poorly maintained and outdated. The city also lacks the proper emission control mechanism resulting in enhancement of the air pollution. Various brick kilns, including cement industries cause industrial emissions. The release of nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide in the air without proper pollution control measures is intensifying respiratory issues in the city. The air population, by and large, is generating a great deal of implications for public health. The people of the city are witnessing cardiovascular diseases, respiratory problems and premature death. Air pollution also contributes to climate change by releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere harming the environment harming ecosystems, and contaminating water bodies and vegetation. The growing number of respiratory illnesses is likely to cost higher healthcare and will reduce productivity. Most worrisomely, the poor health sector will discourage tourism and investment in the capital.

In Quetta city, one could find many private hospitals. Government doctors spend more time in their private hospitals and spending less time in government hospitals. Their priority seems to be plundering the poor patients. In public hospitals, needy patients are not given medicines and medicines are sold on the black market. In the recent past, the Secretary of Health proposed that the government medicines should be given in green packing so that the government medicine should be recognized. But it was unacceptable to the medicines lobby and he was transferred from his post. (Jeela Khan, 2023)

There are innumerable flows in the health sector. Doctors are not performing their duties properly. The civil hospitals lack advanced equipment and medicines. Medicines for cancer and chronic diseases are unavailable in Quetta City. Patients of the city do not have trust in the doctors of Quetta majority of them mostly go to Karachi for medical treatment. (Dr. Khalid, personal communication, December 20, 2023)

Poor Educational Institutions

Educational institutions are in limbo in Quetta City. The University of Balochistan which is the oldest and largest university and other public sector universities located in Quetta has been confronted with financial crisis over a decade. Although after the 18th amendment running the university now becomes a provincial subject but the Fedral Government still has not shifted the financial and administrative powers to the Provincial Government. The provincial government has failed to address the economic crisis of the university. The faculty members and staff of universities mostly are on protest for monthly salaries. Nearly 70 per cent of students of the university belong to peripheral areas of Balochistan. The majority of the students are poor and destitute and are unable to pay high fee. In t 2022-23, the provincial government of Balochistan merely issued 750 billion rupees for the budget. Ironically within 750 billion rupees, the provincial government allocated only 2.5 billion rupees as aid and grants for the eleven universities of the province while the Federal Government allocated only Rs. 65 billion for about 200 public sector universities across Pakistan in which only Rs.3.5 billons are allocated to all 13 public sector universities of Balochistan. Such tiny amount is insufficient for higher education, particularly in the era of research and development science & technology. (Dost Barrech, 2022)

Meanwhile, the provincial government claims it would implement Article 25-A of the Constitution in letter and spirit by giving free compulsory for the children. But the

implementation of Article 25-A is a pipedream. In the province, nearly 7,000 schools are shelterless having merely a single room and one teacher. Quality education is wishful thinking for the people of Quetta. They are unable to send their children to private education, the increasing inflation forced the parents to abandon the schools and their children are either studying in Madrassa or working as child labor inadequate teachers seem to be the prime reason behind the poor education in Quetta city. The vacuum of the educational institutions has been filled by incompetent educationalists who have opened private institutions for the sake of money that instead of providing advanced education further damage the educational careers of the students (Syed Ali Shah, 2015 and Ghulam Wali Khan personal communication, December, 2023) Water Scarcity

Since Quetta got the status as a capital of the province. The city's population has been increasing rapidly due to the migration of refugees, urbanization and mostly because it's strategic location as a transit hub for Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia with such huge population the water demand of the city has now reached 61 mg but the city so far has 24.5 mg (Rafi Khan & Maria Malik, 2023). The groundwater in Quetta City is depleting at a prompt speed. Currently the underground water status is 800 to 1000 feet, up from 300 feet in 2010. The depletion of water increases by 25 feet each year and still it continues. The increasing urbanization will further pave the way for water shortage. According to the statistics of the WASA, 27 gallons of water are being received by each person on a daily basis. The production of the water in Quetta city remains at 24.5 md causing a 36 mgd shortfall. WASA is able to give nearly 600,000 gallons of the 1 million gallons of water delivered from Urak Valley to Quetta. Nearly 60,000 cubic feet of water is being wasted that is supposed to be utilized (Amir, 2019).

The Defense Housing Authority DHA is further exhausting the water of the city. Balochistan High Court in in its verdict on DHA claims that DHA is "established for the benefit of a limited class of people, with an aim of income generation. It is a non-governmental authority." According to the Land Acquisition Act 1894 DHA Quetta is not permitted to acquire the land for public interest. This law can only be used by the state. The court maintains that "Such power of the concerned Government cannot be entrusted to a non-governmental authority or entity." (Pakistan Defense, 2020)

The overpopulation of the city is one of the main reasons behind the water crisis in the city. The policymakers also lack plans and strategies to cope with the water challenges. Climate change is also worsening the water issue. The deforestation in the city is leading to less rain and snowfall and disturbing groundwater recharge. Deforestation also causes soil erosion, reducing precipitation and silting up the few existing dams. Policymakers have failed to execute regular tree-planting programs that could be instrumental in creating rains and supporting replenishing the water table (A. Batur, personal communication, February 12, 2022). Quetta is engulfed by mountains from three sides having less space for agriculture but people are trying to pursue agriculture. The persuasion of agriculture has resulted in the overexploitation of groundwater and illegal tube wells. The government needs to encourage the business sector in a bid to discourage people not to relying on the agriculture sector. (A. Wahab, personal communication, February 14, 2022).

The political parties and administration of Quetta city lack knowledge and institutional coordination to address the water scarcity in the city. The incompetency of the government is stoking delays in the projects. Due to the adjournments of the projects the cost of projects such

as Burj Aziz Khan and Mangi dams will increase in the near future. The water scarcity issue cannot be overlooked. Ignoring the issue is extremely likely to cause a humanitarian crisis in Quetta. (I. Hamid, personal communication, December 10, 2023)

Overpopulation

Over-population and demographic changes are the biggest challenges Quetta City is confronting. Quetta is the only metropolitan city in the Balochistan. People of the 35 districts of the province visit the city and settle here because there are somewhat better health, and educational facilities for people of the far-flung areas. Though the population is increasing swiftly there is no infrastructure for the growing population. There are no schools, or health facilities for the increasing population. The influx of refugees further worsened the situation. The refugees also brought socio-cultural impacts on the indigenous population of Quetta. The majority of the refugees were illiterate and the indigenous culture was already stagnant and their presence, thus, mixed the culture with unwanted changes. On the other hand, many specialists such as doctors, educationists and other experts from the other districts of the province have been settling in Quetta city which has been causing a scarcity of specialists in their native places. (Dr Muhammad Rahim Nasar, personal communication, December 20, 2023).

Balochistan in general and Quetta in particular is different from the rest of the provinces in the context of over-population. Over the last 19 years, the concentration of population remained unchanged within the other three provinces. On the contrary, Balochistan underwent a massive change where the capital population had gone up from over one-fourth of the province to over one-third. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), the population of Quetta over 19 years has increased by 143%. "Within the Quetta Division, the Quetta District's population has increased by 194% to 2.275 million — at 5.83% annual growth rate that is the highest rate recorded in any district of Pakistan". (Shahbaz Rana, 2017)

When it comes to real estate business in the country, Quetta by and large is not different from them. The capital has been witnessing new housing societies which have no facilities for power and water supply. Nevertheless, people purchased the land constructing homes. It is very unfortunate, that housing societies are being built exponentially without proper and systematic checks and balances. Consequently, it paves the way for overpopulation and crumbling the already fragile infrastructure. The owners of the real estate and developers mostly settle themselves in Islamabad, Karachi, or Dubai leaving the people of the city at the mercy of unorganized and unsystematic real estate infrastructure. (Adnan Amir, 2022)

Traffic Issues

Traffic issues are becoming a very sensitive in Quetta City. The Non-Costumed Paid NCP vehicles are abundant in the Quetta stoking traffic issues in the city. There have been many illegal markets in the city narrowing the roads and resulting in traffic jams. Most considerably, many drivers do not have licenses to drive. Vehicles are increasing due to the over-population but the city still has the old road infrastructure of the 1980s.

One would find more auto-rickshaws than people in Quetta City. The drivers of the auto-rickshaws are untrained and many of them do not have driving licenses while majority of the auto-rickshaws are also not registered. It is very unfortunate that the governments granted them permits but did not see the capacity of the roads and infrastructure of the city. Bear in mind, that Quetta City does not have a metro system the way other major cities like Lahore, Rawalpindi, Multan and Peshawar have .The Public parking facility is not provided so majority of the people

park their vehicles on the main roads resulting in traffic jams in the heart of city. (Aslam Nazar Baloch personal communication, December 21, 2023) The city does not have functional traffic signals. Arguably, traffic signals play a crucial role in managing the flow of traffic across the world. The people of the city lack civic responsibility and are unwilling to follow the traffic rules. Everybody unnecessarily seems to be in a hurry to reach homes or offices in no time without realizing that their recklessness causes the violation of the traffic signals. Ironically, traffic constables are powerless to fine those who disobey the traffic signals. (The Balochistan Express, 2020)

Policymakers do not have policy management in the development of the city. Though the government has started the initiatives to broaden the roads influential people within the city are creating obstacles for the expansion of the roads. They maintain that roads should not pass their properties. However, the masses still use overloaded and old buses (Ghulam Wali Khan personal communication, December 20, 2023). Broadly speaking, the death casualties in Balochistan in traffic accidents are higher than in terrorist attacks. According to the National Highway Authority NHA, more than 6 thousand people are being killed in traffic accidents in Balochistan and more than 10 thousand people are wounded in the traffic accidents in the provinc in a decade. It is pertinent to mention here that Balochistan is the only province in Pakistan that does not have a motorway infrastructure. (Dost Barrech, 2019)

The city roads were planned and designed for a population of 50,000 people. At the current juncture, the number of vehicles is outnumbered by thousands. Quetta Development Authority QDA is obliged to provide transport infrastructure facilities unfortunately due to lack of expertise and traffic professionals. Suffice it to say, that the provincial transport department in Quetta city does not have a transportation/traffic engineer showcasing the apathy of the government's interest in modernizing the transportation infrastructure system in the capital of Balochistan. (Sabir Baloch, 2020)

Poor Infrastructure

The poor infrastructure of sewerage system in Quetta City is in dismal condition. Roads of the Quetta are inundated with impure water. The provision of electricity and gas is the basis responsibility of the State but in Quetta electricity load shedding always at its peak while in winter seasons the city face gas loads. Interestingly, the electricity load shedding timings of 2024 remain the same that existed in 2007 and 2008 which shows the incompetency of the policymakers that they have not prioritized the energy issue. (Aslam Abid, personal communication, December 20, 2023)

Meanwhile, the floods of 2022 caused havoc in Quetta City many housing built on the natural flow of the water were inundated with flood water. Hana Orak a famous tourist resort in Quetta was badly damaged by the incessant rains. Many houses in the Hana Orak were collapsed. The people of Hana Orak demanded that the area be declared a calam-ity-hit area and the government should start rehabilitation and relief for the affected people. It is a matter of grace concern that damaged debris is still in the same condition the government so far even has not rehabilitated the region and construction of the area appears to be a pipedream. (The Nation, 2020)

The following are the pictures of the Hana Orak after the devastation of the 2022 floods



https://www.app.com.pk/photos-section/flood-has-damaged-the-building-of-a-government-middle-school-in-hana-orak-a-picnic-point-at-the-suburbs-of-quetta/



https://www.google.com/search?q=hana+orak+was+hit+by+floods+2022&sca_esv=594933686&tbm=isch&sxsrf=AM9HkKkufyJd7Ngc5wHVNj-

MktCa6lFDlw:1704131569625&source=lnms&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwilo-

 $\frac{7m4LyDAxWdSKQEHUsHA9wQ_AUoAnoECAQQBA\&biw=1280\&bih=618\&dpr=1.25\#imgrc=d0J1BhnllNs6edeM$

Suggestions

- The provincial government ought to initiate an advanced infrastructure for the growing population.
- The provincial government should initiate residential areas and commercial areas separately.
- The government should give special focus to the growing population. The Bangladeshi modal should be followed by taking religious clerics in confidence.

- The government has to use social media forums for the reduction of overpopulation.
- Educational institutions should be enhanced with the pace of the increasing population.
- At least 4% of GDP should be allocated for education sector
- Public sector universities are to be granted with the required amount so that at least complete monthly salaries could be paid timely.
- Quetta City has the same old hospitals and educational institutions but the policymakers need to build new hospitals and educational institutions by considering the rapid speed of the population.
- Policymakers are supposed to build modal cities in the other major cities of Balochistan in order to divide the population. People instead of settling in Quetta should settle in the modal cities.
- Those facilities which are available in other major cities should also be provided to the Quetta city.
- Doctors should spend 8 hours at government hospitals and need to shun the culture of earning more and more money at private hospitals.
- The government is supposed to reduce the number of unlimited auto-rickshaws on the streets of Quetta.
- Government needs to introduce an efficient and affordable public transport system that covers all the areas of the city stopping the use of private vehicles.
- Reforms should be implemented in traffic police officers to ensure efficient service on their part.
- The urban planning of the capital should be reimagined in a bid to make it livable for its citizenry.
- The provincial government ought to get into introspection and ponder over widening all main traffic arteries in the capital.
- Widening main traffic arteries will certainly require demolishing many commercial buildings. The government, thus, should pay the compensation for the demolished buildings.
- The provincial government has to enforce a rule granting permission for rickshaws with odd number plates to be allowed to operate one day and those with even numbers the next day. Or rickshaws should be replaced with the metro bus system for public transportation.
- Public parking spaces to be constructed.

Conclusion

Quetta the capital of Balochistan is considered the only metropolitan city in the province. Though Quetta is called the metropolitan city it still does not fall in the metropolitan city lacking the definition of the metropolitan city. Quetta City was built by the British for merely one lake people. However, presently nearly 35 million people are residing in the city. People across the 35 districts of the province frequently visit Quetta city due to the availability of hospitals, educational institutions and job opportunities resulting in over-population, poor infrastructure and dismal road conditions.

On account of the insufficient health facilities, thousands kids die before reaching the age of 5 years across the province. Over-population air pollution has been increasing rapidly in the capital

of the province. The people of the city are witnessing cardiovascular diseases, respiratory problems and premature death. Meanwhile, the provincial government claims that it would implement Article 25-A of the Constitution in letter and spirit by giving free compulsory for the children. But the implementation of Article 25-A seems to be in pipedream. In the province, nearly 7,000 schools are shelter less having merely a signal room and one teacher. Quality education is wishful thinking for the people of Quetta. The city does not have advanced education its educational sector is almost behind the 50 years with the rest of the provinces. The syllabus of the educational sector is still old- and outdated one that does not match the requirements of the advanced era.

The groundwater in Quetta City is depleting at a rapid speed. In 2021 the groundwater level in the city was 600 feet, up from 300 feet in 2010. The depletion of water is increasing by 25 feet each year and still it is continuing. The increasing urbanization will further pave the way for water shortage. Balochistan in general and Quetta in particular is different from the rest of the provinces in the context of over-population. Over the last 19 years, the concentration of population remained unchanged within the other three provinces. On the contrary, Balochistan underwent a massive change where the capital population had gone up from over one-fourth of the province to over one-third. The sewerage system in Quetta City is in the dismal condition. Roads of the Quetta are inundated with impure water. In summer seasons electricity load shedding will be at its peak while in winter seasons the city will face gas load shedding.

The geostrategic location and natural resources of Balochistan have become a buzzword. Unfortunately, the 6 per cent population remained the least priority. The dismal condition of Quetta City is the clear manifestation of the ground reality that the capital of the largest province lags far behind in the economic and social indicators. The prosperity of Balochistan by and large depends on the progress of Quetta city. The more the city progresses the more it will usher the path of prosperity for Balochistan. Overlooking the growing urbanization challenges of Quetta city will prove destructive for Pakistan in general and Balochistan in particular.

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