

Baloch chiefs to approach International Court of Justice

Islamabad - Tribal chiefs in Pakistan's Balochistan province have decided to move the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over what they term as violation of an agreement between the erstwhile Kalat state, the British and Pakistan at the time of the subcontinent's partition in 1947.

The decision was taken at a grand jirga (meeting) of Baloch tribal chiefs at the palace in Kalat, with the 'Khan of Kalat' Mir Suleman Dawood in the chair.

The declaration alleged that the agreement - aimed at Kalat state's accession to Pakistan - had constantly been violated since day one. The British did not heed the Kalat prince's demand that their state should be on a par with Nepal in its relations with England. Kalat acceded to Pakistan in 1948.

The meeting, the first after 130 years, comes four weeks after the killing of Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti, the controversial chief of the Bugti tribe -- a development that has unleashed violence and anti-government sentiments in Balochistan.

'The grand Baloch Jirga of Kalat demands of the government to do away with the official interference with the property of Nawab Bugti in Dera Bugti. The heirs of Nawab Bugti are the legal heirs of Nawab Bugti's property,' the declaration said.

Baloch tribal chiefs, also called sardars, came down heavily on the 'government-backed Dera Bugti Jirga' held recently and rejected the announcement about the end to the sardari system in Dera Bugti.

Ending the sardari system is part of President Pervez Musharraf's plans to finish the age-old feudal system, the separatist sentiments it has fomented and place the country's largest province on a modern track.

The participants underlined the need for unity among the Baloch for securing their rights and launching a joint struggle for this cause. They were of the view that a 'practical struggle should be launched for securing the rights of the Baloch nation in consultation with all those who matter'.

According to The Nation newspaper, the jirga demanded redefining of Baloch territories and formation of a 'purely Baloch unit comprising Baloch territories present in Sindh and Punjab provinces'.

It also demanded a halt to the ongoing military operation in Balochistan and a stop to the establishment of military cantonments in Sui, Kohlu and Gwadar. It condemned the mass extra-judicial arrests of Baloch youth and demanded their immediate release.

The tribal leaders said the Baloch, especially the younger generation, were looking towards their sardars for a 'decisive' line of action.

They called for devising a 'clear-cut course of action to get due rights of the Baloch nation' and make them 'owners of their resources', The News International said in a detailed report.

'It is high time to make a decision and get it implemented, otherwise, the martyrdom of Nawab Akbar

Khan Bugti would go in vain as in the case of Nawab Noroz Khan,' said Nawab Zulfiqar Magsi.

Noroz Khan, as the Khan of Kalat, had led a prolonged separatist movement in the late 1950s.

Prominent among the participants of the grand jirga on Thursday were former prime minister Sardar Balkh Sher Mazari (southern Punjab), former Balochistan chief

minister Nawab Zulfiqar Ali Magsi (Jhal Magsi), former chief minister Sardar Akhtar Mengal (Wadh, Khuzdar) and Sardar Muhammad Asif Mengal (Naushki).

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