



AN HRCP FACT-  
FINDING REPORT



# BALOCHISTAN'S CRISIS OF TRUST

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Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

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# Introduction

This report documents the observations and recommendations of a fact-finding mission to Balochistan undertaken by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) in response to escalating concerns over the deteriorating state of fundamental rights and civic freedoms in the province.

The mission's terms of reference were to:

1. Assess the state of fundamental freedoms (freedom of expression, assembly, association, and movement) in Balochistan, with a focus on recent legal and policy developments impacting civic space.
2. Document the scale and impact of media censorship and threats to journalists, including violence, intimidation, and restrictions on news coverage.
3. Assess the scale of incidence of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary detentions, particularly of activists, students and members of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC).
4. Examine the reported repression of rights-based movements and peaceful protest, including the use of anti-terrorism and preventive detention laws against non-violent activists and demonstrators.
5. Evaluate the consequences of Internet shutdowns, closure of universities, and other restrictions on civic life and access to information.
6. Assess the broader impact of conflict and militarization on civilian life, including the effect on education, civil society (including non-Baloch settlers), and the protection of human rights defenders.

The mission took place from 9 to 12 July 2025 and was restricted to Quetta for reasons of security. The team comprised HRCP chairperson Asad Iqbal Butt, co-chair Munizae Jahangir, Balochistan vice-chair Kashif Panezai, Council members Habib Tahir and Sadia Baloch, staff members Maheen Pracha and Fareed Shahwani, and senior journalist Arifa Noor.

The mission gratefully acknowledges the insights shared by a wide range of respondents, including six political parties, academics from the University of Balochistan, representatives of the Balochistan Students Organization (BSO), members of the High Court Bar Association, activists from the BYC, and diverse civil society actors such as labour unions, women's rights defenders and journalists. The mission also values the opportunity to have engaged with the governor and chief minister of the province, as well as senior civil servants, including officials from the civil secretariat as well as police and prisons departments.

At the outset, the mission observes that this was at least the eighth such fact-finding mission to Balochistan since 2005. Many recommendations have remained consistent over the course of 20 years with little progress reported by successive missions—a matter that HRCP urges the state to consider seriously.

# Scale, impunity and public distrust: The crisis of enforced disappearances

Enforced disappearances emerged as the most urgent and widespread human rights concern during the mission. Testimonies from political leaders, civil society actors and law enforcement officials collectively point to the scale, impunity and evolving character of this practice. Accounts suggest that the phenomenon, far from being isolated or exceptional, has become systematic, thereby undermining the rule of law and severely eroding public trust in state institutions.

A key theme that emerged was the shift in the pattern of enforced disappearances from prolonged incommunicado detention to allegations of an increasingly common 'kill-and-dump' approach. Former chief minister and National Party leader Dr Abdul Malik Baloch described a context in which individuals—often picked up without warrant or due process—were held for months before being extrajudicially executed. Balochistan National Party (BNP-M) chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal appeared to confirm this trend, stating that the bodies of disappeared individuals were now frequently recovered within days of their abduction. Several political parties shared lists of people they alleged had been forcibly disappeared. These lists are available with the mission but have not been verified independently.

## Official data on enforced disappearances

Data provided by senior police officials supports the prevalence of this practice: of 356 reported cases of enforced disappearance, 116 people had been traced, 36 removed from the records due to incomplete information, 12 individuals killed in police encounters, and 192 cases remained unresolved. In 2025 alone, the Balochistan police registered 46 new cases of enforced disappearance, according to data shared by the police. Further, about 1,300 individuals listed among the 5,000 reported by BNP-M leader Sardar Akhtar Mengal

were said to have been 'recovered', although the authorities claimed that details for many others could not be verified. However, these statistics apply only to police jurisdiction, which covers less than a fifth of the province, limiting the comprehensiveness of the official record.



*Mission members at the Voice for Baloch Missing Persons camp in Quetta*

## Civil society perspectives

Several testimonies from victims' families and friends indicate that the latter continue to face harassment, intimidation and denial of justice, especially when attempting to report such cases or raise public awareness. In multiple cases, family members say they were followed, subjected to surveillance, and in some instances detained or denied professional credentials.

One woman to whom the mission spoke alleged that she had been refused a legal practising license solely because she was the sister of a missing person. Another woman, a member of the BYC, claimed that her friend was allegedly abducted from the latter's home by unknown persons—whom she suspected were associated with security agencies—posing as polio workers (see Box 1). A BSO (Panjjar) representative also drew the mission's attention to the case of Mahjabeen Baloch, a disabled student at the University of Balochistan who was allegedly disappeared in May 2025 and whose whereabouts remain unknown.

**Box 1: Testimonies from the BYC and families of the disappeared—and the state's response**

*'Fifteen to twenty people came to my friend Gulzadi's house, disguised as polio workers. They dragged her out despite our protests that she should at least be allowed to cover herself with her dupatta.'*

— BYC activist, Quetta

The mission met members of the BYC and families affected by enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Testimonies imply widespread and systematic violations, including abductions, custodial deaths, post-release killings, harassment of families and collective punishment.

The BYC alleged a sharp increase in enforced disappearances following the Raji Mucchi [national gathering] convened in Gwadar in July 2024. Of 752 cases documented by the BYC, 181 individuals were later released, 25 were confirmed to have died in custody, and 546 remain missing. While the mission could not verify these numbers independently, there appear to be grounds to suggest an uptick in enforced disappearances in the last 12 months.

Respondents from Voice for Baloch Missing Persons also shared several unresolved disappearance cases, including that of a man whose son was reportedly disappeared in June 2025 in Mastung. Subsequently, claimed the respondent, his body was brought to the Civil Hospital in Quetta, where his family was told that they could take custody after the formalities had been completed. Instead, on the third day, they were told that the body had been given to the Edhi Centre and buried.

BYC leaders frequently alleged the use of 'collective punishment', with the relatives of BYC workers, such as the fathers of Sabiha Baloch and Beebow Baloch, having been detained arbitrarily in connection with their daughters' activism. Several respondents described receiving death threats, having their homes raided and facing what they deemed 'fabricated' legal charges. Court interventions and commission appeals have yielded no results; instead, families were told the matter was 'their problem.'

*Continued...*

State representatives provided a consistently negative narrative with respect to incarcerated BYC leader Dr Mahrang Baloch,<sup>1</sup> alleging familial links to insurgency, questioning her public stance on national sovereignty and casting doubts as to her means of income. Some state respondents criticised the BYC as an 'unregistered' organization and claimed that it had undertaken 'problematic' symbolic acts such as flag-burning, arguing that the state's tolerance of such dissent is 'unusually high' and that the law against flag-burning was strictly enforced. Another state office-holder alleged that the BYC leadership did not recognize the state's 'right' to impose 'lawful' curbs on assemblies and instead, organized protests 'according to their convenience.'

## State perspective on enforced disappearances

When questioned on the issue, Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti acknowledged that enforced disappearances were a concern, although he attempted to reframe the issue as a 'complex' and 'contested' one. While insisting that he did not condone 'even a single instance of enforced disappearance,' he claimed that some cases may in fact constitute instances of 'self-disappearance' – a term he did not categorically define. Mr Bugti further argued that militant groups such as the Baloch Liberation Army were also responsible for abductions, although such claims could not be independently verified by the mission.

Governor Sheikh Jaffar Khan Mandokhail offered a guarded perspective, stating that 'disappearances happen when insurgencies take place,' thus framing them as a byproduct of conflict rather than as a violation of fundamental rights. While he acknowledged the need for accountability, he also defended the government's efforts to 'give legal cover' to such practices in the shape of the recently passed Anti-Terrorism (Balochistan Amendment) Act 2025 (see Box 2).

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<sup>1</sup> The mission requested permission to meet incarcerated BYC leaders, jailed since March 2025, but were told by law enforcement and prisons officials that only blood relatives were legally allowed to visit.

### **Box 2: Viable grounds for internment centres?**

Under the Anti-Terrorism (Balochistan Amendment) Act 2025, passed in June 2025, suspects can be detained (including by the armed forces and security agencies) without charge or warrant for up to 90 days, based on 'reasonable suspicion' or 'credible information'. Interrogation will take place in purpose-built internment centres run by the police, with external security provided by the Frontier Corps. Individuals deemed 'hardcore terrorists' may be detained without trial for up to three months.

Several state representatives justified the introduction of this law to the mission. Chief minister Safraz Bugti expressed concern over what he viewed as an imbalanced discourse: whereas groups such as the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) are consistently framed within a counterterrorism paradigm, Baloch separatist groups, he argued, benefit from 'a human rights framing'. He cited several cases, including the 2012 killing of academic Nazima Talib and the murder of seven Punjabi barbers in Gwadar in 2024, to highlight what he saw as insufficient public sympathy for victims of separatist violence. In this context, he defended the need for legal reforms, maintaining that such measures would apply only to individuals 'actively shooting at security forces,' while conceding that intelligence-led operations inherently operate in a 'grey area.'

A senior police official noted, however, that such facilities require clear legal regulation to ensure safeguards against abuse. He expressed the view that properly regulated internment centres could constitute a more 'civilized' and transparent mechanism to deal with high-risk detainees in terrorism-related cases. When asked why a 90-day detention period was warranted, a highly placed state representative candidly expressed the view that this was necessary for the authorities 'to break' suspects.

Respondents from the legal fraternity at the Balochistan High Court presented a different view, arguing that the new amendment mirrors the model employed in the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – allowing internment for up to 90 days without an FIR, under the pretext of 'aid of civil power.' They expressed concerns that this would violate the right to due process and protection against arbitrary detention and custodial torture.

# Law and order, policing and security infrastructure

Balochistan continues to grapple with a complex security environment shaped by both separatist militancy and limited state capacity. Senior law enforcement officials described the situation as an 'incipient insurgency,' with militant activity concentrated in districts such as Mastung, Turbat, and Khuzdar. They also claimed that armed groups in districts such as Surab, Kalat, and Mastung continue to receive material and ideological support from local communities. In contrast, Pashtun-majority areas increasingly face security threats from extremist groups such as the TTP and Islamic State Khorasan Province.

## Fragmented jurisdiction and the policing deficit

During its meeting with senior police officials, the mission was informed of several structural, operational and legal impediments hampering effective policing across the province. Chief among these is the jurisdictional division between 'Category A' and 'Category B' areas, which continues to fragment law enforcement authority. Currently, only 18 percent of Balochistan is designated as 'Category A' and falls under the jurisdiction of the provincial police. The remaining 82 percent is administered by the Levies force, which operates under the direct control of the civil bureaucracy. This bifurcated system, according to one official, undermines operational coherence, impedes accountability and complicates the coordination of law enforcement activities.

A senior police official identified several districts—Makran, Khuzdar, Kachhi (Nasirabad Division), Duki, Dera Bugti, Harnai, and Kohlu—where the absence of a consolidated police presence contributes to a security vacuum. In Mastung and Surab, law enforcement gaps have become particularly acute. As a result of these shortfalls, the state often resorts to deploying paramilitary and military forces for routine law enforcement tasks. However, he cautioned that these forces, trained primarily for territorial control and counterinsurgency, are not equipped for civilian policing.

The official highlighted that efforts to expand police jurisdiction have encountered resistance from within the bureaucracy, with limited appetite for integrating Levies personnel into the formal police system. Compounding this issue is the implementation of the Police Order 2011 without adequate consultation with the provincial police, resulting in additional operational and institutional ambiguity.

## **Human resource constraints**

The senior law enforcement leadership also acknowledged the acute resource constraints faced by the police. Despite the vast geographical scope and security demands, the effective police strength remains limited to 18,000 personnel. A significant portion of this force is routinely assigned to VIP protection and guarding sensitive installations, leaving insufficient personnel for public safety and criminal investigations. This staffing imbalance is exacerbated by the frequent absence of Levies personnel in key regions, further straining provincial capacity.

## **Security narratives and the stifling of nationalist politics**

Concerns over deteriorating law and order were reiterated by virtually all the political parties that met the mission. Political actors, particularly from the BNP-M, reported threats and attacks by insurgent groups opposing electoral participation—underscoring the dual pressures faced by political actors from both state and nonstate actors.

However, political stakeholders also argued that the situation was being used to treat Balochistan as a security zone rather than a political community. The National Party expressed concern over what it deemed the arbitrary use of restrictive laws such as the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance (3-MPO) and the Fourth Schedule, which continue to be deployed disproportionately against nationalist political actors. Party members described how nationalist organizations are subjected to a form of 'blacklisting' by intelligence agencies, who reportedly categorize them as 'white,' 'grey,' or 'black,' thereby determining the extent of restrictions placed on their

activities. The result, they argued, is a system in which political engagement is increasingly criminalized.

# Governance, resource control and erosion of provincial autonomy

The mission documented widespread concern among political stakeholders regarding the perceived erosion of provincial autonomy, particularly in relation to natural resource governance and the functioning of democratic institutions. Multiple interlocutors, including representatives from the National Party and Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), expressed frustration over what they viewed as a rollback of the gains made under the 18th Constitutional Amendment.

## Dispossession from resource governance

National Party leaders specifically highlighted the case of the Saindak copper-gold project as emblematic of the systemic marginalization of the province in natural resource management. They stated that Balochistan's share in the project had diminished to just 2 percent, while 50 percent was allocated to Chinese stakeholders and 48 percent to the federal government. Furthermore, a PKR 500 million deposit requirement for obtaining mining licences was cited as a prohibitive barrier for local communities and businesses seeking to participate in resource extraction.

Concerns were also raised over the Balochistan Mines and Minerals (Amendment) Act 2025 passed by the Balochistan Assembly earlier in March, which, according to several parliamentarians, contravenes the spirit and substance of the 18th Amendment. The final version of the Act reportedly deviated from decisions made during committee reviews and was passed without the inclusion of key legislative inputs. Notably, (a) two federal government officials were added to the provincial mining decision-making committee, (b) the authority to define 'rare earth' minerals was delegated to the federal government, and (c) approval powers for large-scale mining operations were centralized under federal institutions.

PKMAP respondents linked these developments to the broader operational scope of unelected bodies such as the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), arguing that the SIFC framework has effectively transferred control of seven to eight provincial departments to federal authorities—oversight described by respondents as 'a direct threat to the constitutional federation' and a manifestation of 'creeping centralization'.



*Mission members with PKMAP leadership*

Former senator and veteran politician Mir Lashkari Raisani, who served on the committee that drafted the 18th Constitutional Amendment, has challenged the Balochistan Mines and Mineral (Amendment) Act in the Balochistan High Court. He told the mission that Balochistan had been systematically deprived of its political and legal rights, alleging instances of electoral manipulation and institutional bias. Mr Raisani accused the Election Commission, judiciary and other state institutions of colluding to marginalize elected representatives, reducing politicians to mere pawns in a larger struggle over the province's natural resources.

## **Governance deficits and procedural irregularities**

The mission received multiple reports of procedural inconsistencies in legislative and administrative functions. Key among these was the allegation that critical budget documents, containing sensitive or contested allocations, were not made available to elected representatives during the budget session. Lawmakers expressed

concern that this lack of transparency hindered informed debate and oversight.



*Meeting with National Party leadership*

Additionally, there was consensus among interlocutors that decisions taken during committee stages were routinely ignored in final legislative drafts. These deviations were viewed as symptomatic of a broader governance malaise and disregard for parliamentary norms. National Party chief Dr Abdul Malik Baloch characterized the current provincial administration as 'paralysed,' describing it as functioning under 'authoritarian rule' that sidelines elected representatives.

# Electoral integrity and political marginalization of nationalist parties

The mission received consistent and wide-ranging concerns from political stakeholders across the spectrum—particularly from the National Party, BNP-M, Hazara Democratic Party (HDP), Awami National Party (ANP), Pakhtunkhwa National Awami Party (PKNAP) and PKMAP—regarding the erosion of democratic processes and growing political marginalization in the province.

## Electoral process undermined

The integrity of the February 2024 general elections was a focal point of concern. Across all parties that engaged with the mission, there was consensus that the electoral process had failed to meet democratic standards of fairness, transparency and representation. Several National Party leaders described the elections as an 'auction,' claiming that outcomes were predetermined and manipulated through financial inducements and administrative coercion. In Quetta, they alleged that non-local candidates had won all seats in dubious circumstances.

These concerns were not limited to anecdotal grievances. HDP representatives presented detailed allegations of electoral rigging in key constituencies, including NA-262, PB-40 (Hazara Town) and PB-42 (Alamdar Road). They claimed that despite receiving real-time updates from presiding officers confirming candidate leads, the final results had declared HDP candidates as losers. The loss of historically held seats was viewed as emblematic of a wider strategy to sideline established political actors through state interference.

Multiple political stakeholders also highlighted the failure of legal institutions to address electoral grievances. Allegations of vote-rigging, tampering and disenfranchisement have, according to respondents, been met with inaction or complicity from election officials and the judiciary. There was widespread consensus that the

judiciary had not upheld its constitutional role as a guarantor of democratic integrity.



*Mission meeting with HDP leadership*

## Depoliticization and voter disengagement

Political stakeholders from the National Party and BNP-M warned of a deliberate process of depoliticization, particularly among the youth. According to party representatives, students in universities and colleges are increasingly disillusioned with electoral politics, perceiving elections as neither free nor fair. This has contributed to growing civic disengagement and weakened democratic participation, which they attributed to both coercive measures and systemic disenfranchisement. As a BSO representative remarked, 'We want to raise our voices under the Constitution, but for doing so, we are labelled "terrorists".'

BNP-M members further alleged the abuse of coercive laws such as the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance (3-MPO) and the Fourth Schedule to detain or restrict the movement of political activists during election periods. They stated that such measures were used to suppress dissent and prevent legitimate electoral campaigning (see also Box 3).



*Mission meeting with BNP-M leadership*

### **Box 3: The dangerous sidelining of political dissent**

In March 2025, BNP-M chief Sardar Akhtar Mengal led a peaceful long march from Wadh to Quetta to protest against enforced disappearances and the incarceration of BYC leaders. Protestors were forced to proceed on foot after the authorities reportedly scattered metal spikes along the route. According to Mr Mengal, a truck carrying armed men shadowed the march but withdrew when confronted by the crowd's size.

On reaching Mastung, marchers were blocked from entering Quetta, while BNP-M supporters within Quetta were barred from joining them. A sit-in was held in response. During the protest, a suicide bombing occurred, reportedly targeting Mr Mengal. Although strict security measures minimized casualties, the official response was delayed—needlessly so, according to the BNP-M. Witnesses reported that police and forensic teams arrived several hours later, and no officials interviewed protestors, underscoring a pattern of institutional non-engagement. When a highly placed state representative was asked about the status of the investigation, he said he had no information but wondered why the attack had not been successful.

Mr Mengal has also reported a campaign to silence 'dissent': his social media accounts were flagged, his family's bank accounts frozen and his public statements censored—conditions he described to the mission as 'more repressive than those during General Musharraf's rule.'

## Pashtun political perspectives

Meetings with the ANP, PKNAP and PKMAP officials revealed equally grave allegations of electoral manipulation and political repression. Asghar Khan Achakzai of the ANP characterized the current administration as 'illegitimate', asserting that those in power could not have secured electoral victory under genuinely free and fair conditions.

PKNAP leaders alleged serious threats to their leadership, especially in the context of the death of Senator Usman Kakar. Before his death, Mr Kakar had publicly stated that if he were harmed, Pakistan's security agencies should be held responsible. A neurosurgeon's post-mortem report reportedly raised the possibility of a fatal fall from a significant height, casting doubt on the official account. These circumstances continue to fuel suspicions of political assassination and impunity.



*Mission meeting with ANP leadership*

PKNAP leaders also told the mission that their central committee member, Sadiq Khan Khajak, had been missing for three months. The party complained that first investigation reports had been lodged against many of their members for protesting peacefully. Several respondents also made serious allegations of extortion against the Frontier Corps in Harnai, Machh and Duki.

# Media censorship, intimidation and violence

The mission documented several concerns regarding the shrinking space for press freedom in Balochistan. Journalists and media professionals consistently reported a climate of fear and suppression, particularly when reporting on sensitive issues such as enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings or criticism of state policies.

Senior journalists described a pattern of punitive measures against media outlets deemed critical of the state. These include financial sanctions (freezing of accounts), withdrawal of government advertising and, allegedly, direct intimidation by state or paramilitary forces. In one example cited by a respondent, Frontier Corps personnel were reportedly deployed outside newspaper offices following the publication of content referencing high-profile figures such as Mahrang Baloch, Mama Qadeer or Akhtar Mengal.



*Meeting with journalists at Quetta Press Club*

Local reporters alleged that covering public protests, particularly those organized by families of the disappeared, remains virtually impossible without facing harassment or reprisal. They also pointed out that victims of enforced disappearance are unwilling to recount

their experiences to the press for fear of reprisals. Editorial decisions continue to be reportedly influenced by informal 'guidelines' communicated through security officials or intermediaries. Some respondents acknowledged, however, that the chief minister Sarfraz Bugti was attempting to improve journalists' financial conditions in the province.

Of particular concern for respondents was the as-yet-unsolved murder of journalist Irshad Mastoi, who was shot dead in Quetta in 2014. Several journalists alleged that those arrested for Mr Mastoi's murder were subsequently killed in a staged security encounter. The mission was also told that Mr Mastoi's family had still not received compensation from his employers.

When the mission raised concerns about restrictions on press freedom with the chief minister, Mr Bugti clarified that while press conferences at the Quetta Press Club are permitted, holding seminars is treated as a 'commercial activity' under local regulations. As such, prior approval from the deputy commissioner is required – effectively imposing a bureaucratic barrier that can be used to prevent public dialogue on contentious issues.

# Prisons and judicial processes

The mission assessed the state of prison conditions, political detentions and judicial safeguards in Balochistan through meetings with senior officials at the provincial prisons department. While prison authorities claimed progress in infrastructure and rehabilitation, several concerns were raised regarding transparency, due process and the alleged misuse of detention laws.

## Status of political detainees

According to officials, no 'political prisoners' remained in custody as of July 2025, although approximately 70 had been detained earlier in the year. The mission noted, however, that civil society groups had contested this claim, citing continued detentions under the MPO ordinance and newly amended anti-terrorism laws. A senior official attributed extended detentions, such as those involving Dr Mahrang Baloch—whom, he contested, was not a 'political detainee'—to decisions made by a government committee.

He explained that detainees under the MPO are classified as 'Special B-Class' and reportedly granted limited privileges, such as access to reading material and improved visitation rights. Responding to the mission's concern regarding the alleged midnight prisoner transfer of Beebow Baloch in April 2025, he said that this was 'standard procedure' driven by 'security needs'. He denied that legal counsel had been obstructed in some cases.

## Prison infrastructure and capacity

The mission was informed that Balochistan has no A-Class prison facilities due to inadequate infrastructure and resource constraints. Only two jails—Mach and Quetta—offer B-Class amenities, including separate visitation areas, newspapers and food from home. The province also lacks specialized facilities for persons with disabilities, raising concerns among mission members as to the welfare of incarcerated BYC leader Beebarg Baloch, who is wheelchair-bound. A senior official added that long distances

between districts force some detainees to travel up to ten hours for hearings or transfers.

Healthcare services are limited but include separate wards for psychological treatment and tuberculosis care. However, vocational training opportunities remain sparse, with some interest expressed by prison authorities in collaborating with technical institutions such as NEVTEC to build prisoner rehabilitation programmes.

# Higher education and the alienation of Balochistan's youth

The mission observed that Balochistan's higher education sector faces serious financial, administrative and political challenges, contributing to widespread youth disenfranchisement.

## Repression of student politics

Respondents from student and faculty bodies recounted the systemic repression of political activity on campuses. Court rulings have been cited to justify the continued ban on student unions, while students and faculty engaging in activism have faced detention under the 3MPO ordinance.



*Mission meeting with university faculty*

Cases were shared of students being surveilled, compelled to renounce political expression or even disappeared, allegedly by state agencies. A BSO (Markazi) respondent from Noshki cited the cases of University of Balochistan students Sohail Baloch and Fasih

Baloch, who were allegedly disappeared from Quetta in November 2021 (and whose whereabouts are still unknown), and Balach Qadir, a university gold medallist facing terrorism charges after taking part in a protest in Gwadar. The respondent also alleged that he had been added to the Fourth Schedule of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 after taking part in a protest against enforced disappearances. Additionally, security concerns have long permeated academic spaces in the province. The mission was told by a senior academic, for example, that the vice-chancellor's residence has remained under the control of the Frontier Corps since 2006.

## Academic decay

The reported nonpayment of faculty salaries appears to have caused further deterioration in the quality of higher education. Faculty members at the University of Balochistan reported going unpaid for two months, citing a chronic shortfall in funding. A senior academic explained that federal contributions have stagnated at PKR 3 billion annually, while the provincial government has provided only PKR 8 billion against a demand of PKR 14 billion. Rising tuition fees and the lack of institutional support for research have further demoralized academic staff and restricted access to quality education.

# Border closures and economic despair

The mission heard widespread concerns regarding the severe economic impact of border closures with Iran and Afghanistan. Political leaders, particularly from the National Party, described these closures as 'devastating' for Balochistan's economy, particularly in the agricultural and cross-border trade sectors. Estimates provided by party members ranged from 300,000 to nearly 2 million people currently unemployed, with daily-wage labourers and small-scale traders among the hardest hit.

This economic decline has triggered significant internal displacement and a surge in irregular outward migration. HDP leaders reported that approximately 20,000 youth have migrated to Australia—many through perilous land and sea routes. Others are now seeking asylum in Europe. The Hazara community cited the intersection of economic disenfranchisement, sectarian violence and the absence of meaningful opportunities as driving factors behind this exodus.

The labour leaders whom the mission met decried the government's prioritization of military expenditures over public investment, while miners' unions said that workers continued to face hazardous conditions, lack of legal protection and suppression of union activity, with many unaware of rights such as EOBI registration.

Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti acknowledged structural shifts in employment patterns, noting that the majority of Balochistan's workforce is now employed in the private sector or under informal contractual arrangements. When asked what progress had been made to register fisherfolk under a 2023 policy, he cited resistance from some community leaders—reportedly due to fears of incurring social security obligations—as an obstacle to formalizing the sector.

## Other civil society concerns

Generally, civil society stakeholders—including students, lawyers, academics, women's rights defenders and labour activists—voiced grave concerns over what they see as the escalating erosion of human rights and civic space in Balochistan. Discussions revealed a convergence of structural exclusion, gendered vulnerability, repression of youth voices and the weakening of public institutions.

Respondents highlighted the worsening plight of Afghan refugee women and children following mass deportations in 2023. Many have been exploited by smugglers and coerced into illicit trade or forced prostitution. Children are reportedly being pulled out of schools and pushed into child labour and smuggling, raising concerns about trafficking and child protection failures.



*Consultation with civil society actors*

Women's rights defenders called for urgent legislation against child marriage and honour killings. They reported rising cases driven by poverty and weak law enforcement. Forensic mishandling and lack of medical expertise undermine justice in rape and gender-based violence cases, which are sometimes misreported as honour killings or suicides, they stated.

# Mission observations

The mission observes with concern that while state narratives acknowledge the practice of enforced disappearances, this is framed as part of a broader conflict landscape that risks normalizing what is considered a crime against humanity in international human rights law. State representatives have implied that efforts to call for dialogue within apex security forums are repeatedly postponed following new incidents of militant violence, particularly against non-Baloch settlers and migrant workers. This reflects a wider pattern in which security imperatives continue to overshadow any hopes of a political resolution, even as enforced disappearances contribute to deepening cycles of grievance and alienation.

Despite the finality of the Supreme Court's landmark verdict in the Mohabbat Shah case<sup>2</sup> (December 2013)—which explicitly identified the involvement of state elements in enforced disappearances and directed the government to ensure accountability—there has been little meaningful progress in implementing these directives. The failure to act on the court's findings reflects a broader pattern of impunity and lack of political will to hold security agencies accountable, thereby undermining both judicial authority and victims' right to justice.

The allegation by several political parties and civil society actors that citizens who have publicly complained about the enforced disappearance of their loved ones, risk being killed and their bodies dumped must be taken seriously and investigated.

While cognizant of the fact that militant groups have increased the frequency and scale of attacks against both the public and security personnel—acts that cannot be condoned in any circumstances—the mission believes that the newly enacted Anti-Terrorism (Balochistan Amendment) Act 2025 will be counterproductive to curbing militancy and crime in the province. Rather, the law is likely to further erode due-process protections, particularly in the absence of judicial oversight, and increase resentment among residents of Balochistan. It also remains unclear as to whether detained persons

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<sup>2</sup> HRC No. 29388-K/13 (10 December 2013).

will, in practice, have access to their families and legal counsel. Additionally, the fact that state representatives have justified the need for 90 days' detention on the grounds that this is necessary to 'break' suspects, lends credence to the mission's concerns that suspects may be subjected to torture in custody in contravention of the law and Pakistan's international human rights obligations.

The mission notes that despite the state's claims that it has enforced its writ through administrative control and legal reforms, significant structural, institutional and political deficits continue to hinder effective law enforcement and civilian oversight in Balochistan. The lack of a unified policing system and overreliance on paramilitary and military forces, coupled with limited accountability, have undermined the effectiveness of the police and contributed to an environment where rights violations persist with impunity rather than one that upholds the principles of accountable and community-based policing.

Of particular concern to the mission is the systematic delegitimization of human rights defenders: the state's public rhetoric around the BYC and leaders such as Mahrang Baloch focus less on addressing their demands and more on discrediting them through unverified allegations. Tarring (violent) militancy and (peaceful) advocacy with the same brush is likely to further alienate Balochistan's population and particularly its youth.

The mission observes with deep concern the widespread disillusionment among the people of Balochistan with electoral processes and democratic institutions. Persistent allegations of electoral manipulation, the political marginalization of nationalist parties and the coercive use of restrictive laws have severely undermined public confidence in the credibility of democratic governance. Particularly, allegations of manipulated power transfers must be taken seriously, given that this has likely contributed to the ongoing insurgency and is part of an entrenched pattern in the province. The consensus among most respondents was that electoral manipulation has produced a set of lawmakers unable—or unwilling—to respond to people's genuine needs. Compounding this is the federation's continued efforts to control the province's natural resources—a historical grievance that has arguably fuelled past insurgencies—through flawed laws.

The mission takes this opportunity to caution the state that unless it urgently seeks an enduring, transparent and inclusive political solution to Balochistan's legitimate grievances, the ongoing insurgency will remain difficult to quell. Additionally, continued militant violence against non-Baloch settlers and migrant workers could spill over into ethnic reprisals in the rest of the country, thereby deepening inter-provincial mistrust and undermining national cohesion.

# Recommendations

In light of its findings, the mission presents the following recommendations to the state to address the human rights, governance and political challenges currently facing Balochistan:

1. Immediately cease the practice of enforced disappearances. Ratify and implement the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and account for the status of the domestic bill passed against enforced disappearances in 2022. Disband the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, which has failed to hold accountable those responsible for such practices (despite having the prosecutorial powers to do so), and instead establish a new commission with effective leadership and a fresh mandate to prosecute any state elements found responsible for perpetrating enforced disappearances.
2. Ensure transparency, fairness, and accountability in all electoral processes. Investigate allegations of electoral manipulation and coercion thoroughly and transparently. Promote civic engagement and depoliticize administrative structures to restore public faith in democratic governance.
3. Withdraw the Anti-Terrorism (Balochistan Amendment) Act 2025 and review all security-related legislation to ensure alignment with international human rights standards. Guarantee due process and judicial oversight in all instances of detention and dismantle any form of indefinite or arbitrary detention.
4. Given that the internment centres proposed under this Act appear to replicate those established in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Supreme Court is urged to decide the pending appeals against the Peshawar High Court's judgment on the Action (in Aid of Civil Power) Ordinance 2019, and to direct that all internment centres be formally notified as sub-jails.
5. Ensure that all individuals suspected of involvement in militant violence are held accountable through transparent judicial processes, strictly in accordance with national laws and

international human rights standards. The state must replace extrajudicial and opaque measures with credible, impartial investigations and fair trials, thereby reinforcing the rule of law and demonstrating the state's commitment to justice and accountability. All instances of extrajudicial killings must also be investigated and the perpetrators held accountable.

6. Reinstate the constitutional guarantees provided by the 18th Amendment concerning provincial autonomy, especially in natural resource management, and ensure that lawmaking in this sphere is transparent and genuinely democratic. Reverse legislative and administrative actions undermining local control, such as those related to the Saindak project and the Balochistan Mines and Minerals (Amendment) Act 2025, ensuring the meaningful inclusion of local stakeholders and the equitable distribution of employment and revenue benefits.
7. Demilitarize the province and create conditions conducive to meaningful dialogue with all genuine political stakeholders to rebuild public trust and address Balochistan's longstanding grievances. In the first instance, this could take the shape of a high-level national truth and reconciliation commission to promote interprovincial trust and reaffirm Pakistan's commitment to a federal and inclusive democracy.
8. Integrate Category A and B areas under unified civilian police control, ending reliance on paramilitary forces for civilian law enforcement. Provide the Balochistan police with adequate resources, training and capacity-building to enable accountable, human rights-compliant policing.
9. Cease the intimidation, delegitimization and harassment of human rights defenders, including groups such as the BYC. Publicly affirm their legitimate role and ensure their protection in line with international human rights commitments. Engage constructively with peaceful voices—even when they are critical of state policy—to foster a culture of democratic dialogue.
10. The Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication must investigate allegations that persons posing as polio workers have attempted to intimidate and harass rights activists and enter their homes forcibly. Unless such individuals are brought

to book, this could damage the credibility of national polio campaigns.

11. Immediately halt state interference, financial coercion and intimidation of media outlets and journalists. Ensure freedom of expression by facilitating unrestricted media coverage of human rights issues, public protests, and criticism of state policies, consistent with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
12. Urgently reopen border crossings with Iran and Afghanistan to facilitate legitimate economic activities. Provide targeted economic support and infrastructure investment, particularly in agriculture and trade sectors, to mitigate widespread unemployment and economic desperation driving internal and external migration.
13. Halt the arbitrary and inhumane expulsion of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom have lived in Pakistan for over four decades. Such expulsions – when carried out without due process or individual assessment – amount to violations of fundamental rights, including the right to dignity, equality and protection under Article 4 of the Constitution, which extends to all persons, regardless of citizenship.