

Report on the Two-Day National Conference on Balochistan Through History

Syed Umar Hayat*

A two-day National Conference on Balochistan Through History was held under the joint auspices of the Chair on Quaid-i-Azam and Freedom Movement, National Institute of Pakistan Studies (NIPS) and the National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research (NIHCR), Centre of Excellence, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, at Hotel Holiday Inn, Islamabad, on 14-15 December, 2005.

Besides the inaugural and concluding sessions the Conference was spread over five academic sessions. The Conference started at 10:00 AM on 14 December, 2005, with the chief guest Sardar Muhammad Yaqub, Vice Chancellor Quaid-i-Azam University Prof. Dr. M. Qasim Jan and the Chairman of the Conference Organizing Committee Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmed on the dais. To start with, Qari Siraj Ahmad recited a few verses from the Holy Quran and presented their translation. Then, the chairman of the Organizing Committee, Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad highlighted the historical importance of Balochistan and significance of the Conference. After him, Prof. Dr. M. Qasim Jan, Vice-Chancellor of the Quaid-i-Azam University presented the Welcome Address in which he observed that the Government was paying utmost attention to the development of Balochistan, and especially the President General Pervez Musharraf and the Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz were tackling its social, economic, and educational developmental projects by allocating maximum funds with a view to bring the province to the forefront of the developed

* Research Fellow, National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, Centre of Excellence, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

sectors of Pakistan. He also pointed out that during the British period Balochistan was kept backward in all fields including economic, social, political and cultural. It even did not have the status of a province. Hence, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, founder of Pakistan, not only demanded the development of the province but also raised voice for reforms in Balochistan by giving it the status of a full fledged province. After the creation of Pakistan also, the Quaid took special interest in the development of this province. He also observed that, for the first time in the history of Pakistan, scholars and intellectuals from all the provinces of Pakistan had been given an opportunity to reflect upon the problems of Balochistan. The VC was of the view that papers to be presented in the Conference would go a long way in underlining the importance of Balochistan and solving its problems. This was followed by Prof. Dr. Zafar Iqbal Cheema, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad's keynote address focusing on the relevance of the Conference in the present circumstances. He was of the view that the Conference would reinterpret the history of Balochistan to meet the present day requirements for the development of the region and its people. Finally, Sardar Mohammad Yaqub presented his presidential address in which he appreciated the holding of the Conference and thanked the organizers for arranging such a big gathering of intellectuals and learned persons from all over Pakistan and abroad to reflect upon the history and development of the province of Balochistan. He also shed light on the development efforts of the Government for the province and expressed the hope that the recommendations of the Conference would contribute much in these efforts.

The first academic session was presided over by Prof. Sharif al Mujahid, former Director, Quaid-i-Azam Academy, Karachi. Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmad acted as discussant. Dr. Noorul Haq, Prof. Dr. Deedar Hussain Shah Rizvi, Mr. Hanif Khalil, Mr. Manzoor Ali Vessrio, Prof. Dr. Nadir Bakht, and Prof. Dr. Tariq Rehman presented their papers in this session and highlighted numerous aspects of Balochistan's history including changing dynamics of the province vis-à-vis, its socio-economic conditions under the British. Prof. Dr. Deedar Hussain Shah Rizvi was of the view that

People of Balochistan have moved from traditionalism, conservatism and primitivism towards radicalism, diversification and cultural change. They opted for the provision of amenities and facilities of present civic disciplines. Balochistan has been

developing in all the important sectors of economy to boost up production for meeting the various needs of the society. Balochistan, with no town in 1890, today is administered with six divisions and twenty six districts.

The second academic session was chaired by Dr. Lal Baha Ali, former Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Peshawar. Discussant was Dr. Manzoor Akbar Kundi. Five papers were presented in the session by the scholars namely Dr. Inamul Haq Kausar, Dr. Munir Ahmad Baloch, Dr. Sohail Insha, Dr. M. Qasim Soomro, and Mr. Yar Mohammad Badini. These scholars highlighted different aspects of Balochistan including its history and socio-cultural developments. Dr. M. Qasim Soomro in his paper observed that Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah kept Balochistan close to his heart. He advocated the cause of Balochistan in his famous Fourteen Points and the Balochistan Muslim League Volunteer Corps was in the forefront during the historic annual session of the All-India Muslim League held at Lahore in 1940.

The third academic session was presided over by Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad and discussant was Prof. Dr. Nadir Bakht. Papers were presented by Dr. Abdul Saboor, Dr. Abdul Latif Tunio, and Mr. Mohammad Shafique. In those papers Balochi customs, provincial autonomy, and historical aspects of the region came under discussion. Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad while presenting his comments on the papers, pointed out that the scholars had put forward the historical aspects of Balochistan highlighting the social, political and cultural background of the province in a new manner suggesting the problems and their solutions befitting to the present day scenario of Pakistan in general and that of Balochistan in particular.

The fourth academic session was held in the morning of the second day of the Conference with Dr. Perveen Shaukat Ali from United States of America in the chair. Dr. Abdur Razzaq Sabir acted as the discussant. In this session Mr. Wahid Bakhsh Buzdar, Dr. Shoaib Ahmad, Miss Farhat Iftikhar Gill and Prof. Sharif al Mujahid presented their papers. History and socio-cultural aspects of Balochistan were highlighted with their implications for the present day scenario of Balochistan. Prof. Sharif al Mujahid was of the view that Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah played a tremendous role in the development of Balochistan particularly through his efforts for the introduction of reforms in the region during the British period. Dr. Perveen Shaukat Ali, the president of the session, commended the scholars for presenting valuable research papers in the Conference. She said problems and their solutions which have been highlighted in those papers would help the Government of

Pakistan in chalking out new strategy for the socio-economic development of the province.

The fifth academic session was chaired by Syed Fasih Iqbal and its discussant was Dr. Munir Ahmad Baloch, while the paper presenters included Dr. Abdur Razzaq Sabir, Prof. Dr. Lal Baha Ali, Dr. Rashid Ahmad Khan, Prof. Dr. Zeenat Sana, Syed Umar Hayat and Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad. Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah's special attention and concerns for Balochistan with particular reference to his visits to the province were discussed elaborately by Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad. He pointed out that Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah was especially concerned for the development of Balochistan because it was the most backward province of Pakistan at the time of its creation. Umar Hayat while presenting a gist of his paper especially referred to the statements of the Quaid in which he had expressed unprecedented concern as well as sympathy for the people of Balochistan during the freedom struggle.

The concluding session of the Conference was presided over by Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed, Chairman, Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Secretary General of Pakistan Muslim League. The chief guest was Mir Mohammad Naseer Mengal, Minister of State for Petroleum and Natural Resources. The speakers of the session were Dr. Ghazanfar Mehdi, Prof. Sharif al Mujahid and Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad. Mir Mohammad Naseer Mengal in his speech pointed out that the Conference was the need of the hour and hoped its deliberations would contribute much in the efforts of the Government directed towards the socio-economic development of Balochistan. In his presidential remarks, Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed observed that the Government of Pakistan was feeling a special concern for the development of Balochistan. Adequate funds were being provided for that purpose and all efforts are directed towards bringing the province at par with other provinces of Pakistan. Numerous development projects were being implemented to achieve this objective. Prof. Sharif al Mujahid while presenting the Report and Resolutions of the Conference remarked that the papers presented in the Conference should be published immediately, so that the thought provoking ideas can be extended in a widespread manner particularly to the thinkers and the planners of the country, for chalking out new strategy befitting to the present day needs and requirements in the process of the development activities for Balochistan. Finally, Prof. Dr. Riaz Ahmad thanked the distinguished scholars, guests and the audience in general for gracing the occasion through their presence hoping that the ideas discussed in the Conference would be well taken for further promotion of knowledge regarding the multipurpose development needs of the province of Balochistan.