Unrest in Balochistan

Why in news?

In the past few weeks, Balochistan, in Pakistan, has witnessed large-scale protests.

What is the issue in Balochistan?

Balochistan

• **Geography** - It is a region with a distinct cultural and historical identity that is now divided between three countries mainly *Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan*.
• **Formation** - In ***1947***, the Khan of Kalat announced the formation of an independent state in Balochistan and signed the *instrument of accession in 1948 with Pakistan*.
• **Annexation of Gwadar** - At the time of Pakistan's independence, *Gwadar was part of the Sultanate of Oman*.
• After prolonged negotiations with Oman, Pakistan was able to *purchase Gwadar in 1958*.
• **One Unit Scheme** - In ***1955***, various provinces and ethnic areas in West Pakistan were subsumed into a single province.
• It resulted in considerable centralisation of power and negated the basic principles of federalism.
• After much opposition, it was *abolished in 1970* leading to the emergence of provincial assemblies, including in Balochistan.



- **Recent issue** - The Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) had called for a *Baloch Raaji Muchi in the Gwadar port* city to highlight various issues like
  - Human rights violations
  - Resource exploitation
  - Government's inability to provide basic amenities
- Also, there is a steady uptick in the *attacks by Baloch insurgent* groups on security forces, CPEC projects, including other targets, such as on the Pakistan Stock Exchange in Karachi.
- **Crackdown** - The security forces' crackdown and blockade of major towns and cities,

such as *Gwadar, Hub, Mastung and Quetta*.
- **Consequences** - It resulted in a sharp *increase in the prices of necessities* such as food, medicine, and petrol.

What are the reasons for current uprisings in Balochistan?

- **Dismissal of provinces** - The provincial governments were *routinely dismissed*.
- **Lack of provincial autonomy** - Islamabad continued to have a significant say in the governance of the province.
- **Economic neglect** – The region continues to be one of the most backward regions in Pakistan.

Balochistan accounts for 44% of the country's landmass with significant mineral resources, such as copper, gold, coal, and natural gas.

- The exploitation of these resources has not resulted in substantive economic benefits for the local population.
- **Deprived social development** - The region's performance is less than satisfactory even with respect to child, youth, and labour development indicators.
- **Extra-judicial killings** - The security forces, as a part of their counter-insurgency operations, reportedly resort to enforced disappearances, extra-judicial killings and *fake encounters*.
- **Lack of local participation** - Infrastructure projects with external assistance and *without adequate local stakeholder* participation has exacerbated the Baloch grievances
- **Threat of Chinese** - The *possible militarisation of the Gwadar port* and fencing has raised concerns among locals of losing access to large parts of the coastline.

What is the role of China in this issue?

- China has emerged as a major player in Balochistan's geopolitical and economic matters.
- It has invested in mining, energy, airports and expressway projects as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

• It is a *3,000-kilometer-long* network of infrastructure projects.
• **Route** - It begins in Kashgar, China, traverses through the length of Pakistan and ends in Gwadar.
• **Goal** – To make a secure and shorter path for China to get energy from the Middle East.
• It helps china avoid the existing route from the Straits of Malacca between Malaysia and Indonesia to secure energy imports.



- **Control over Gwadar Port** - A Chinese firm has taken the Gwadar port on a *40-year lease* and is involved in constructing and operating it.

  ***Gwadar** is located close to the Strait of Hormuz, a shipping route that witnesses substantive oil transportation.*

- **Influence over Persian Gulf** - A *Chinese naval presence* will enhance its ability to project power into the Persian Gulf and to protect its energy supplies via the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Impacts** - Even a decade after the initiation of the CPEC, there have been no tangible gains for their people.
- The presence of Chinese trawlers closes to Gwadar prompted protests from the local fishing community that demanded an end to illegal fishing.
- The province's demography is changing rapidly as *non-locals have moved into Balochistan* to work on infrastructure projects.

What is India's stake in Balochistan matter?

- **Issues over Indo-Pak relations** - Islamabad has repeatedly *accused India* of fomenting attacks and creating issues in Balochistan.
- Historically, the separatist and anti-state elements in Balochistan have also been linked to Afghanistan and India.
- **CPEC infiltration in India** - CPEC route a *passes through the controversial territories of Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir* between India-China and India-Pakistan respectively.

- **Impact Chabahar port** - Chinese development at Gwadar port might affect India's efforts in the Middle East region and Chabahar port in Iran.

What lies ahead?

- Pakistan establishment should listen to voices calling for a prudent approach to address the challenges in Balochistan.
- Pakistan should work to solve the province's burning issues, such as the missing persons and socio-economic disparity.

References

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