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The Plight of Hazaras in Pakistan

Recent information: December 2012

By Graeme Swincer¹ for Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group

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Introduction

The Hazaras are a well-defined ethnic group whose roots are in Afghanistan. They usually have distinctive mongoloid features which clearly differentiate them from most of the other ethnic groups of the region. They are overwhelmingly Shiite Muslims, but in general their religion is expressed rather liberally and would probably qualify as folk religion in contrast to the strict observance of Shia Islam in Iran and traditional Pakistan, and certainly in contrast to the Sunni Islam practised by most of the other ethnic groups in Afghanistan and by 78% of the 200 million people in Pakistan. They are found in large numbers in other countries because they or their ancestors have been persecuted repeatedly over the past century. Iran on the west and Pakistan on the east have been obvious first countries of refuge. A total of at least 600,000 Hazaras now live in Pakistan, mainly in two or three enclaves in the south-western border city of Quetta and in the northern border city of Parachinar.

Almost daily there are reports of Hazaras living in Pakistan being targetted for violent treatment by extremist groups, most notably the Taliban and the al-Qaeda linked Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). The root of the underlying hatred is both ethnic and sectarian. The Sunni extremists/fundamentalists regard Shiites as infidels and therefore worthy of death, and Hazaras are seen as being especially reprehensible because their liberal expression of Islam. The LeJ, formed in 1996, openly vows to eliminate all Shiites from Pakistan.

While violence is a pervasive part of life in Pakistan, the majority of the population accommodate to this and accept it as an unavoidable component of their reality. However the situation is far more difficult for the Hazaras, especially the young men. They are easily distinguishable by their appearance and therefore are in constant danger of being attacked. They are not protected by the security forces nor by application of the law. The extremist groups are allowed to operate without restriction or sanction throughout Pakistan.

In contrast to the situation a decade ago and even more recently, there are now no safe places of refuge for Hazaras in Pakistan. The poor Hazaras are doomed to a life of constant fear. Those who are able to access sufficient resources have the alternative of seeking asylum in other countries, but this is proving increasingly difficult. The total number of Hazara refugees world-wide is of the order of 4 million, the largest distinctive group among the global population of 16 million refugees (defined by the Refugee Convention). Countries who are signatories to the Refugee Convention, including Australia, are tightening their interpretations of the "refugee" criteria to make it more difficult for Hazaras to make successful claims for protection, even though by any standards their claims are extremely strong.

The following information, obtained over the past year, highlights the deteriorating situation of the Hazara population of Pakistan. A consistent picture is apparent and this may be summarised as follows.



Summary

The 600,000 Hazaras of Pakistan live in daily danger of persecution at the hands of the Taliban, the LeJ and other extremist groups who all embrace the Sunni form of Islam, in contrast to the Shiite form adhered to by most Hazaras.

Of particular vulnerability are the Hazara young men who are targeted as the keys to effective genocide and ideal hostages for ransom.

Suicide bombing of Hazara enclaves, places of worship and cultural festivals has now given way to individual and small group executions by gunshot.

The Pakistani authorities do not provide effective protection to Hazaras and indeed they are now being implicated by credible sources as complicit in the oppression of Hazaras

While previously it may have been arguable that safe havens for Hazaras might be identifiable, this is no longer the case. No place in Pakistan is safe for a Hazara; their enemies are ubiquitous, mobile and out of control.

As a consequence, thousands of Hazaras are leaving the traditional enclaves located in Quetta and Parachinar and seeking asylum abroad. These are overwhelmingly young men who are (a) the specific target of the Taliban and others (b) the hope of the future for Hazara families, and (c) the sub-group with the best chance of successful travel on precarious journeys.

Hazaras fleeing from Pakistan now regard Pakistan not as a refuge but as a very temporary transit point from which they can arrange their onward journey to longed-for safety.

British Parliament Speeches and Conference

The subject of Hazaras in Pakistan was highlighted recently (1st March 2012) in the British House of Commons: <http://hazaranewspakistan.wordpress.com/>

The focus was on the city of Quetta:

“Hazaras in Quetta are being killed practically on a daily basis and it has been estimated that about 600 have been killed so far, yet not a single perpetrator has been captured and brought to justice.”

However the information indicated a much more widespread problem:

“The response of the authorities in Balochistan has been to restrict the movement of the Hazaras themselves—to forbid them entering certain districts and to apply travel restrictions—and to treat the murders with a mixture of complacency and complicity. Last September/October almost 50 Hazaras were taken from buses and wagons in separate incidents, lined up and killed. The Chief Minister of Balochistan responded with levity, saying in a television interview that he would send a truckload of tissue paper to the bereaved families. That is the kind of atmosphere in which the Hazaras are living. The authorities know that the Hazaras are a target for terrorist groups and that an al-Qaeda affiliate is seeking to make Pakistan, in their words, Hazaras’ graveyard. They state that their mission is to eliminate “this impure sect” and people “from every city, every village...and corner of Pakistan.”



Clearly, if this report is accurate, and there is no reason to believe otherwise, no place in Pakistan is safe for a Hazara. Their enemies are ubiquitous, mobile and out of control.

The speeches in the British Parliament added further relevant information:

“While the movement of Hazaras is restricted, their pursuers walk freely in the city despite the heavy presence of the police, the army and the frontier corps who all have checkpoints in and around Quetta. The reason for that persecution is not just the Hazaras’ religion—they are predominantly Shi’a Muslims—but their genetic link to the Mongol people, which allows them to be recognised by their physical appearance. Hazaras are also persecuted because have pursued higher education, enrolled in the army and occupied senior positions in government, the civil service and civic society more generally. They are the kind of law-abiding citizen who would play an important role in a free, democratic Afghanistan and a peaceful and prosperous Pakistan. Thus, they are the enemies of a whole range of terrorist groups.

“The persecution—some would say genocide—carried out against the Hazaras has been well documented by the United Nations, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and organisations such as the New York-based monitoring body Human Rights Watch. However, there is insufficient awareness nationally and internationally about what the Hazaras are going through, despite the best efforts of the Hazara community and organisations such as the Hazara Organisation for progress and Equality, or HOPE, which seeks to raise these issues in Parliaments around the world.”

Another statement made in the House of Commons is of particular relevance to the question of the continuing safety of Hazaras:

“The attacks are intensifying. Hazaras are murdered when they stay in Quetta and killed when they try to leave.”

Follow-up enquiries by House of Commons members have reinforced the earlier reports implicating the Pakistan government in the persecution of Hazaras. This was highlighted in a parliamentary conference reported in November 2012:

UK minister’s comments about Hazaras spark controversy

Murtaza Ali Shah

23 November, 2012

<http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-144544-UK-ministers-comments-about-Hazaras-spark-controversy>

LONDON: Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) reportedly said that Pakistani government officials support the killing of hundreds of Hazara Shias in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan.

Alan Johnson MP, former Home Secretary, during the Labour government, told the International Conference on the Genocide of Hazaras held in the House of Commons, organized by the Hazara



*Progressive Alliance, Hazara Organization for Peace and Equality and the Friends of Hazara, that Aliastair Burt MP had personally told him in April this year that he had made inquiries and found that **“there was absolutely no doubt that there was some kind of official sanction to what was happening in Quetta city, that there were elements in government and security forces, who were sympathetic to the people who were murdering and killing Hazara people.”***(emphasis added)

The conference in the House of Commons was attended by more than 20 MPs from various parties.

. . . As many as 5,000 Hazaras have left Quetta city which is an enormous loss to the city, students can no longer attend the university due to fear, Hazaras are under siege of terror.

. . . . MPs said in their speeches that the situation of Hazaras was grave, and they needed protection from terror groups and normal life restored to them. The MPs said the government of Pakistan had failed in its duty to protect its own people and that was a tragedy. They said Hazara professionals, businessmen and labourers were leaving the city as they were under attack.

General Situation Reports

The following report describes just one of many recent examples of attacks targetting Shiites, almost certainly Hazaras who are the most easily identified Shiites because of their distinctive facial appearance.

Terrorists kill 18 Shias in Kohistan bus attack

Pakistan Daily Times, 29 February 2012

<http://archives.dailytimes.com.pk/main/29-Feb-2012/terrorists-kill-18-shias-in-kohistan-bus-attack>

Other reports of lethal attacks on Hazaras form the basis of the following general reports.

Pakistan's evolving sectarian schism

Alastair Lawson, BBC News

4th October 2011

www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-12278919

Quotations

1.

Sectarian violence has bedevilled Pakistan for much of the last two decades



A series of bomb blasts and shootings mostly targeting Pakistan's minority Shia community in recent years shows that sectarian violence in the country can be every bit as deadly as that instigated by al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Attacks in Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta and the north-west seem to be manifestations of the bitter split between Sunnis and Shias.

In most cases, no-one claims responsibility for such attacks.

Over the past 20 years Sunni and Shia extremists from both groups have attacked each other all over Pakistan.

However analysts say that the bulk of the violence more recently has been committed by Sunni militants inspired by al-Qaeda's ideology.

Their attacks have borne a startling resemblance to bombings carried out by Sunni militants against Shias in Iraq.

2.

As the influence of the Taliban grows in the north-west, the fear is that violent sectarian groups will assert themselves once again across the rest of Pakistan - correspondents say recent violence in Punjab province could be a reflection of this.

The group accused of orchestrating the violence in recent years is Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, widely seen as the armed wing of the militant Sunni Sipah-e-Sahaba group.

Previously Sipah-e-Sahaba itself was accused of the violence, but many analysts argue that Lashkar-e-Jhangvi - inspired both by al-Qaeda and the Taliban - has now broken away from its parent organisation and is responsible for the use of suicide bombers in many sectarian attacks.

(emphasis added)

The following article and highlights the widespread and growing presence of the LeJ.

Blood Flows Freely in Pakistan

By Amir Mir, Asia Times Online

(Amir Mir is a senior Pakistani journalist and the author of several books on the subject of militant Islam and terrorism)

5th October 2011

www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/MJ05Df01.html

Quotations

1.

The Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ – Army of Jhangvi), a Pakistan-based, al-Qaeda-linked, anti-United States, Sunni Deobandi sectarian-turned-jihadi group, has let loose a reign of terror against the Shi'ite minority.

In its latest attack, the LeJ on Tuesday killed 13 Shi'ites traveling on a bus to work in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan province. The attackers forced the Shi'ites off the bus, made them stand in a line and then opened fire.

This followed the July 14 release of Malik Mohammad Ishaq, one of the founding members of the LeJ, which has already claimed responsibility for the September 20 cold-blooded execution-style killing of 29 Shi'ite pilgrims of the Hazara community in the Mastung area of Balochistan. All those killed were on their way to Iran from Quetta. Armed with Kalashnikovs and rocket launchers, the attackers stopped the bus and forced the pilgrims to get off. While women and children were spared, they were made to witness the execution of their dear ones who were lined up and sprayed with bullets.

It was the deadliest attack on the Shi'ite community in Pakistan since September 4, 2010, when a suicide bomber killed 57 people at a procession in Quetta. The Mastung attack is not an isolated incident, but part of a systematic campaign of violence directed towards the Shi'ite community. Over 400 Shi'ite Hazaras have been killed in Balochistan by the LeJ since 1999.

2.

While claiming responsibility for killing the 29 pilgrims in Mastung, a spokesman of the LeJ, said: "Our activists will continue to target the Shi'ite community." The massacre was carried out amid the usual hate speech and wall-chalking, branding Shi'ites as apostate and worthy to be killed.

A few weeks before the massacre, the LeJ had circulated an open letter addressed to Hazaras in Quetta. Written in the Urdu language, the letter stated:

All Shi'ites are worthy of killing. We will rid Pakistan of unclean people. Pakistan means land of the pure and the Shi'ites have no right to live in this country. We have the edict and signatures of revered scholars, declaring Shi'ites infidels. Just as our fighters have waged a successful jihad against the Shi'ite Hazaras in Afghanistan, our mission in Pakistan is the abolition of this impure sect and its followers from every city, every village and every nook and corner of Pakistan.

Like in the past, our successful jihad against the Hazaras in Pakistan and, in particular, in Quetta, is ongoing and will continue in the future. We will make Pakistan the graveyard of the Shi'ite Hazaras and their houses will be destroyed by bombs and suicide bombers. We will only rest when we will be able to fly the flag of true Islam on this land of the pure. Jihad against the Shi'ite Hazaras has now become our duty.

3.

The Lashkar stands out for its secrecy, lethality and unrelenting pursuit of its core objectives – targeting Western interests in Pakistan and the Shi'ite community as a way to the eventual transformation of the country into a Taliban-style Islamic state. It has become the group of choice for hard-core militants who are adamant in pursuing their jihadi agenda in Pakistan.

The LeJ consists of loosely coordinated cells, of approximately five to eight militants each with limited contact with one another, spread across Pakistan with self-regulating chiefs for each of them. The operational successes of the group over the years are attributed to its multi-cell structure.



While not much is known about its structure of operations, intelligence reports indicate that, after each attack, Lashkar cadres disperse and subsequently reassemble at various bases/hideouts to plan future operations. **The LeJ's presence has been reported from locations as varied as Lahore, Rawalpindi, Gujranwala, Multan, Islamabad, Jhang, Khanewal, Layyah, Bhakkar, Sargodha, Rahimyar Khan, Orakzai, Sahiwal, Karachi, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Kohat, Sukkur, Bajaur, Parachinar, Kurram, South Waziristan, North Waziristan, Hangu, Hyderabad, Bahawalpur, Nawabshah, MirpurKhas, Chitral, Gilgit and Quetta.**(emphasis added)

4.

Most terrorism experts agree that LeJ operatives are the most highly trained and equally vicious killers the world of terror has to offer. Intelligence sources say the LeJ has finally moved to center stage and the past claims by Pakistani agencies of its demise after the capture of its salar-e-Aala (commander-in-chief) AkramLahori have proved to be wide off the mark. This is evident as the group has already started a fresh recruitment drive to form new cells at the district and provincial levels, especially following the release of Ishaq.

The world turns a blind eye to killing of Hazaras in Pakistan

By Abdul Hekmat

17 May 2012

<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=13628>

Quotations

1.

Imagine if the targets of Sydney's drive-by shootings were not members of feuding bkie gangs but people singled out by virtue of their appearance to be shot dead while travelling to work by bus or car, shopping, attending a medical appointment or visiting relatives. It is beyond comprehension to imagine such a situation. Yet that is exactly what is happening to Hazaras in Pakistan. In recent years, armed terrorist groups have been targeting ordinary Hazara men, women and children on a weekly basis in Quetta, Pakistan. Over half a million Hazaras feel terrorized by these frenzy killings.

2.

However, in the past two years, the tactics have changed from suicide bombing to shootings where unknown gunmen fire on cars and buses that carry Hazara passengers.

There are nearly 600,000 Hazaras in Quetta some of whom had fled persecution in Afghanistan a century ago. There are also so many who have come to escape the Taliban. They are living in a state of terror and fear, waiting for the next moment to pass without incident. They are besieged in their own homes and areas.

Attacks since 2001 have produced a staggering human toll -over 700 have been killed and nearly 2000 injured. Not a single perpetrator who has been brought to justice by the provincial Baluchistan government. In fact, the Pakistani government is involved with the attackers. The Asian Human Rights Commission implicate Pakistan's secret agency, the ISI, in financing and collaborating with

terrorist organizations in Baluchistan, 'Their main tasks include counter-insurgency, spread of Talibanization, sectarian violence, killings of Hazaras and Shias, attacks on NATO supply routes and targeting journalists and lawyers.'

The Chief Minister of Baluchistan, Nawab Raisani, has shown no sympathy for Hazara victims in the province for which he is responsible. He said in a recent comment to the media addressing the bereaved families 'We will send over truckloads of tissue paper, so they can wipe out their sorry tears.'

In recent years, Quetta has become infested with extremist groups. After the collapse of the Taliban in 2001, Quetta which lies on the border of Afghanistan, has become a safe haven to Quetta Shura and members of the Taliban leadership including, Mullah Ommar.

Another terrorist group that freely operates in Quetta is Lashkar-e-Jhagavi (LeJ). The group has been responsible for violence against Hazaras. It is banned by the UK, US and the Australian government.

This militant group shares strategic and ideological goals with the Taliban in Afghanistan. They consider that the Hazaras are not Muslim and their killing justified. LeJ distributed leaflets in Pakistan saying:

Just as our fighters [referring to the Taliban who massacred Hazaras in Afghanistan] have waged a successful Jihad against the Shiite Hazaras in Afghanistan, our mission in Pakistan is the eradication of this impure sect and its followers from every city, every village and every nook and corner of Pakistan.

There has been a spate of sectarian violence and terrorist attacks gripping the whole of Pakistan, targeting other minority groups like Ahmadi and Baluch. However, the Hazara situation is quite different for two reasons.

First, Hazaras, are easily identifiable because of their distinctive facial Mongol features. Last year in September, a group of 29 Hazaras travelling on a bus en route to Iran were forced to get off, leaving the non-Hazaras passengers, then lined up and shot in Mastung, Quetta.

Second, the Hazara are Shiite in a predominantly Sunni country. They have been attacked by Sunni extremist groups that view the Shiite as heretics. There are other ethnic groups in Pakistan who are Shiite (Shiite represent about 20% of population in Pakistan) but Hazaras bear the brunt of most the attacks in recent years because of their ethnicity (appearance).

3.

The plight of Hazara maybe invisible to the world as they are not in the headlines but what is unfolding in Quetta is genocide with the implications for peace far beyond Pakistan. Hazaras stretch out their hands to the world and hope the human rights groups, governments and peace loving people will act soon before it is too late.



Persecuted Hazaras flee Pakistan; some die trying

Kathy Gannon, Associated Press

(Kathy Gannon is AP special regional correspondent for Pakistan and Afghanistan and can be reached at www.twitter.com/kathygannon

AP writers Ali Kotarumalos in Indonesia, Sean Yoong in Malaysia and Kristen Gelineau in Australia contributed to this report.)

October 18, 2012

<http://news.yahoo.com/persecuted-hazaras-flee-pakistan-die-trying-090659084.html>

Quotations

1.

In Quetta, Shiite leaders say many of the attacks against Hazaras are carried out by the Sunni militant group Lashkar-e-Janghvi, which they contend is backed by elements within Pakistan's intelligence agency, the ISI. Pakistan's Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and a panel of three judges last month ordered authorities to investigate allegations that vehicles illegally imported by the ISI were used in suicide bombings targeting Shiites.

Most of the Afghans who cross into Pakistan with the intention of going on to Australia and elsewhere are thought to be Hazara.

"Every month hundreds of Hazaras leave Afghanistan for another country," said Waliullah Rahmani, executive director of the Kabul-based Center for Strategic Studies, a privately funded think tank. In the last two months more than 20 Hazaras have died in targeted killings blamed on the Taliban, he said.

Hazaras, who were massacred by Afghanistan's ruling Taliban in the late 1990s, fear that the religious militia will return to power after the departure of U.S. and other NATO service members in 2014, according to Rahmani.

"With 2014 getting closer, most of the Hazaras think that the history will repeat again," he said. "So that is why they risk their lives for illegal immigrations to Australia and other places."

2.

The Pakistan Embassy document, based on interviews with survivors, said there appears to be "a mafia working in Quetta who is using the incidents of target killings and sectarian violence, unleashed against the Shia community particularly the Hazara tribe as a tool to instigate, motivate and persuade the youth to seek asylum in other countries."

"This mafia seems to be deep rooted and has an extensive network in different countries," the document said.

It described interviews with more than 25 Pakistani Shiites languishing in immigration detention centers in Indonesia after failing to reach Australia. The refugees all told of the same terror that drove them to leave Pakistan. None was willing to return to Pakistan, preferring to stay in jail in Indonesia in hopes of getting refugee status, said the document, which was given to the president and prime minister's office.



Discriminated in Afghanistan and vulnerable in Pakistan

By Rakshit Chopra/OneWorld South Asia

June 28, 2012

<http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/discriminated-in-afghanistan-and-vulnerable-in-pakistan#.ULSPvOS-obE>

The Hazara community who left their country to take refuge in Pakistan, face a life of mass ethnic persecution and discrimination, a predicament that has been largely ignored by the international community.

Quotations

1.

"Our mission is the destruction of these impure people, the Shiite Hazara refugees, from every city, every village and every corner of Pakistan. The jihad against the Shiite Hazara has now become our primary duty".

These chilling words were inscribed on a Fatwa issued in 1996 against the Hazaras by Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a Pakistani terrorist organization having close links with the Al Qaeda.

The Hazaras in Pakistan, mostly Afghan refugees, have for long borne the brunt of the ethnic minority backlash orchestrated by the Sunni majority in the country. The Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which continues to operate freely inside the Baluchistan province despite being banned by both the United States and Pakistan in 2002, is the principle perpetrator of the atrocities and mass killings of the Hazara refugees in Pakistan.

2.

However, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi is not alone responsible for committing heinous crimes against the Hazaras. According to recent reports published by the human rights watchdog, Amnesty International, "Routine targeted killings against the Hazara and other groups because of their ethnicity, religion, or political affiliations raises serious questions about the will or ability of Pakistan security force to protect the people of Baluchistan".

In Pakistan, the Hazaras Are Punished Over Race and Religion

Malik Siraj Akbar | [Huffington Post](#)

6th April 2012

<http://www.wahdatnews.com/archives/541>

Quotations

1.

Protestors killed at least one policeman and burnt several official buildings last week in renewed demonstrations in the capital of Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province following the killing of five members, including a woman, from the Hazara ethnic minority community. The attackers are



believed to be connected to Sunni terrorist group, the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which has previously accepted responsibility for similar attacks that have killed hundreds of innocent Hazaras.

2.

In Pakistan, around 500,000 Hazaras live, mainly in Quetta, where they have offered impressive services in local police, bureaucracy, labor force, education, information technology and sports.

The Hazaras in Balochistan present an inspiring example of community awareness and development. Visitors to their localities admit that they are always impressed with the clean streets and enviable sewerage system in Hazara towns. In addition, the Hazaras perform better than other communities in terms of girls' school attendance, computer-literacy and fluency in English language. Despite these advantages, life remains miserable for the Hazaras.

Over the past few years, incessant attacks have killed the most talented of the Hazaras, compelling the rest of them to remain confined to their ghettos in Marriabad, Alamdar Road and Taugi Road localities in Quetta.

3.

Emboldened over government's inaction, terrorists have indiscriminately butchered Hazaras in an extremely callous manner. On September 20, 2011, at least 29 Hazaras were killed by members of the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi in two separate incidents near Quetta.

In the first attack, armed men stopped a passenger bus which was taking Hazara pilgrims to Iran. They force all the passengers to come down of the bus before they began to inhumanly kill them. Soon after, the attackers killed three more members of the Hazara community, who had come to shift the critically injured victims of the shooting to a local hospital.

On October 3, 2011, two weeks after the earlier attack, a bus carrying Hazara pilgrims to Iran was once again intercepted and 13 passengers were gunned down while another six were critically injured.

4.

The Amnesty International, in a statement issued on October 3, said, although sectarian violence had largely contributed to the general breakdown of law and order in Pakistan, these attacks seemed to indicate a new targeting of the ethnic Hazara community.

5.

The response of the Pakistani authorities to this human rights crisis has been that of absolute indifference and utter arrogance.

When journalists asked the chief minister of Balochistan, Nawab Aslam Raisani of the ruling Pakistan People's Party, what his government was doing to provide justice to the families of those who have lost their loved ones, he smugly replied all he could do was to send them a truckload of tissue papers so that they could wipe their tears.

6.

The persecution of the Hazara community is unlikely to end in the near future until the Pakistani security establishment fully abandons its covert support to Sunni fundamentalist groups such as the



Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. There is ample evidence of contacts between the Pakistani authorities and these terrorist groups. In addition, the legislature, judiciary and the executive branches of the government have still not included the plight of the Hazaras in national policy debates.

Currently, the Pakistani government does not have a clear policy on how to protect basic rights of communities such as the Hazaras, who face dual discrimination because of their race and also religious belief.

The following article provides a graphic summary of the plight of Hazaras in Pakistan

Another Massacre of Hazaras in Balochistan by Pro-Al Qaeda Elements

B.Raman

23 September, 2011

<http://ramanstrategicanalysis.blogspot.com/2011/09/another-massacre-of-hazaras-in.html>

(The writer is Additional Secretary (retd), Cabinet Secretariat, Govt. of India, New Delhi, and, presently, Director, Institute For Topical Studies, Chennai, and Associate of the Chennai Centre For China Studies.)

Quotations

1.

Twenty-six Shia pilgrims belonging to the Hazara community were dragged out of a bus in which they were travelling at Mastung in Balochistan on September 20, 2011, lined up and shot dead by unidentified gunmen suspected to be belonging to the anti-Shia Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), which is close to Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Three others – of unknown sectarian or ethnic origin – were killed subsequently. They were medical attendants who were in an ambulance which was rushing to the spot of the massacre.

The Hazaras have been the frequent targets of attacks in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan by anti-Shia groups—by the Taliban and the LeJ in particular.

2.

Surprisingly, despite the suspected hostility of the Hazaras to Al Qaeda, the Taliban and the LeJ, Osama bin Laden chose to have his hide-out in Abbottabad, where there is a sizable Hazara community. Ever since bin Laden was killed by the US Navy SEALs in his Abbottabad hide-out on May 2, the LeJ has reportedly been suspecting that some members of the Hazara community of Abbottabad might have helped the US intelligence in tracking down bin Laden.

Since the death of bin Laden, there have been three attacks on the Hazaras in Balochistan by suspected cadres of the LeJ. There have been fears that the LeJ might attack the Hazaras of Abbottabad too—but this has not happened so far.

3.

The Shias of Pakistan in general and the Hazaras of Balochistan in particular have been living in dread ever since the release on bail by a court in July of Malik Ishaq, the leader of the LeJ, who was under imprisonment since 1997 facing charges in over 40 cases of terrorism—many of them directed against the Shias and Iranians living and working in Pakistan.

4.

Since his release, Ishaq has been touring in Punjab making venomous speeches against the Shias and justifying the LeJ's attacks on the Shias as meant to protect the honour of the holy Prophet. In one of his speeches to his followers after his release from jail, he had said: "Prisons will not stop our mission. The LeJ is not a terrorist outfit. It was set up to ensure proper respect for the companions of the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Our struggle will continue."

Fears that his hate speeches might lead to a fresh wave of attacks on the Shias of Punjab and Sindh have not materialised so far. However, there has been a surge in the attacks on the Hazaras of Balochistan.

Specific Reference to Quetta

The following article describes the growing danger for the hundreds of thousands of Hazara refugees essentially trapped in the border city of Quetta.

For Some, Quetta Is A Volatile Prison

By Aubrey Belford

December 12, 2012

<http://www.hazarapeople.com/2012/12/20/for-some-quetta-is-a-volatile-prison/>

<http://www.theglobalmail.org/feature/for-some-quetta-is-a-volatile-prison/518/>

Once a haven for refugees from Afghanistan, the Pakistani city of Quetta has turned into a deathtrap. Many see escape to Australia as their only hope.

Quotations

1.

This city near Afghanistan has long been a transit point for would-be asylum seekers from across the border, many of them Shia Muslim ethnic Hazaras. The Afghans would enter, make contact with smugglers and arrange documents, and head on to Australia. Many of those in transit would stay with relatives among the half-million-strong local community of Hazaras who have settled in the city over more than a century — seeking refuge from waves of massacres and oppression in Afghanistan.

But Quetta is no longer a haven. Recent years have seen a dramatic rise in the killing of Hazaras and other Shias by the extremist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which is allied to the Taliban. The killers, who

often strike in the daytime and brazenly leave their faces exposed, carry out their work with little hindrance from the authorities. Some allege they have state support.

Quetta has now become a place that Hazaras are desperate to leave.(emphasis added)

Syed Ahmed last saw his father, Syed Ewaz, alive on September 16, as he headed to work.

“My father woke up early in the morning. He was smiling and said ‘Goodbye, I’m going to my shop,’” recounts Ahmed, who lives in Mehrabad, one of two Hazara enclaves in town. “Later on, we were picking his body up from the hospital.”

Ewaz traveled by rickshaw to his tyre shop in an ethnically mixed part of town. As he was setting up for the day, four masked gunmen entered the market and homed in on four Hazara-owned shops. Identifying the Hazaras by their distinct east-Asian faces, the gunmen executed one person in each shop, casually walked back to their motorbikes and drove away. The attack took minutes.

Hazaras have been the targets of such attacks for more than a decade, but recently these have become much more frequent. More than 100 people have been killed this year. It is almost unheard of for anyone to be brought to justice for the attacks. The one exception was the jailing of two militants over a 2003 attack; held in a high-security prison after their conviction, the militants managed to escape in 2008.

Few Hazaras trust the police, soldiers or the paramilitary Frontier Corps, and few are now brave enough to travel freely around town.

“Every Hazara is afraid to go to the bazaar. We’re bound in our areas,” Ahmed explains. “I’m afraid to go to the market, too. I’m afraid of the police and especially I’m afraid of the Frontier Corps. They say they’re security, but they’re part of [the killings], too.”

2.

The violence in Quetta is tied to the worsening violence across Pakistan’s vast and porous borderlands. In much of the country, militant outfits, created with the sponsorship of the powerful military, have grown and produced splinter groups. Quetta had also been the headquarters in exile for the Afghan Taliban, and its leadership may still be in town. While some of these disparate groups have stayed loyal to Pakistan, others have turned against the government or have simply begun targeting the country’s fragile minorities out of sectarian hatred.

3.

In Balochistan, many Hazaras believe Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, the extremist group, is being used as a military proxy to tackle the insurgency by fomenting hatred between Sunnis and Shias. The group is well-armed and subscribes to a radical brand of Sunni Islam. Its leader, Malik Ishaq, was released from jail last year and lives openly in the country’s east, in spite of the fact that the group is known to



be responsible for hundreds of deaths. According to Lashkar-e-Jhangvi's world view, Shias are infidels and should die. Hazaras are just the most easily identifiable prey.

4.

As the violence has increased, daily life for Hazaras in Quetta has become dramatically harder, locals say. Up until a few years ago, markets stayed open until midnight, but a series of attacks means they now close at sundown. Shias travelling in buses both around and out of town have, frequently, been stopped, singled out and massacred. The road connecting the two Hazara enclaves of Hazara Town and Mehrabad is now seen by many as too dangerous to travel.

Young Hazaras used to study at the city's colleges and universities. But in June, a bus carrying students was hit by a roadside bomb, killing six, including five Hazaras. Young people have now given up their studies, or take classes inside their own neighbourhoods. With travel cut off, it is difficult to find work and businesses are suffering. The more fortunate families live off remittances from the estimated 30,000 locals who have moved to Europe or Australia. Many other Hazaras have moved to other parts of Pakistan, but there are fears — borne out by sectarian violence elsewhere — that the number of safe places in the country is dwindling.

It's true that people are driven to leave Quetta for economic reasons, but it's the violence and fearing for their lives that drives their economic distress.

Extermination of Hazaras Continues in Pakistan

Daily Outlook Afghanistan

Updated on November 10, 2012

http://outlookafghanistan.net/editorialdetail.php?post_id=5864

This brief summary report, focussing on Quetta, is quoted in full

Targeted killers, if not backed by certain factions in a given geographical location, can never triumph. In Quetta the capital city of Baluchistan province of Pakistan, the ethnic minority Hazaras are falling victims of targeted killing on routine basis.

For them, the city has turned into a river of blood. The role of Pakistan government has been no more than of a spectator and therefore fingers are pointed at it for death of more than 700 Shiite Hazaras killed over the last decade in various incidents of targeted killing that have appeared in different shapes – suicide attacks, hit and flee, car bombs and firing of rockets.

For that huge number of deaths no one has been prosecuted so far. The banned Lashkar e Jangvi (LeJ), a terror group with strong affiliation to al-Qaida and Taliban, has been taking responsibilities of almost all the bloody attacks on the Hazaras in Pakistan. Although banned, LeJ appears to be operating freely in Pakistan against its Shiite population.



Pakistan, the nuclear state that is also considered to have a strong army, has terribly failed to secure the life of the tiny Hazara minority whose number is estimated about half a million. Pakistan's federal and provincial governments have turned a blind eye over the plight of Hazaras – their systematic extermination.

In a news report published on October 25, Matthew Green, Special Correspondent covering Afghanistan and Pakistan wrote, "Attacks on Hazaras have been escalating since 1999, but this year the militants have beaten their previous personal bests, killing more than 100 in the first eight months of the year alone."

While the terrorists have been killing the innocent people cold-bloodedly, the Pakistani government has failed to capture and prosecute a single culprit. Matthew Green further writes, "The grip LeJ exerts on Quetta is difficult to appreciate from the drawing rooms of Islamabad, where brief reports of bombings or assassinations carried on the inside pages of newspapers fail to capture the scale of the persecution now faced by the city's 500,000 Hazaras."

Silence of the United Nations on the ongoing persecution of Hazaras in Quetta city of Pakistan has been a matter of great disappointment for the community. The Hazaras demand the UN and Human Rights Organization to wake up and take notice of their killings and pressurize the Pakistani government to take action against militants.

Pakistan: Now or Never?

By Matthew Green

6 November, 2012

<http://blogs.reuters.com/pakistan/2012/11/06/in-the-shadow-of-violence-quettas-divides-multiply/>

Perspectives on Pakistan

In the shadow of violence, Quetta's divides multiply

Quotation

In Pakistan, so many minorities are threatened by homicidal extremists that travelling the country can feel like hopping across an archipelago of communities under varying degrees of siege.

Rarely is the impression stronger than in Quetta, the fear-filled capital of Baluchistan province, and a cauldron of the bigotry and intolerance that has poisoned so much of Pakistan's body politic.

A wave of killings unleashed on the Hazara community has left its 500,000 members afraid to venture out of their enclaves in the east and west of the city. At least 100 have been killed in Quetta and its environs since January. Nobody has been prosecuted.

Hazaras blame Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a Sunni militant group, for the killings. The group has stepped up its campaign against Pakistan's Shi'ite minority this year, spreading fear from hamlets in the foothills



of the Himalayas to the backstreets of Karachi. The Hazaras of Quetta, who are Shi'ites, have suffered the heaviest losses.

Insight: Pakistani death squads spur desperate voyage to Australia

By Matthew Bigg, Matthew Green and James Grubel

(James Grubel reported from Canberra; writing by Matthew Green; editing by Bill Tarrant)

24 October, 2012

<http://hazaraasylumseekers.wordpress.com/2012/10/27/insight-pakistani-death-squads-spur-desperate-voyage-to-australia/>

Hazara Asylum Seekers is a news blog which aims to provide updates regarding Hazara asylum seekers around the globe in general and about those en-route to Australia in particular.

Quotations

1.

In the past year, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a Sunni extremist group, has turned Quetta into a hunting ground. Gunmen shoot Hazaras every few days while leaflets shoved under doorways warn they are infidels deserving of death.

Thousands choose to face the ocean's terrors rather than risk an encounter with the death squads stalking their city's streets.

"Mothers are selling their jewelry so that their sons can leave Quetta for abroad," said Khaliq Hazara, chairman of the Hazara Democratic Party, a Quetta-based political party. "We are under siege."

2.

"Every day there were killings," said Warasi, recalling life in Quetta. "We got chicken-hearted, like we were in a cage."

A CITY DIVIDED

Overshadowed by the forbidding hills that define the wild geography of the Pakistani province of Baluchistan, Quetta was once a town where ethnic groups and sects mingled freely. Today, LeJ is offering Hazaras a choice: leave or die.

In the neatly swept lanes of the Hazara enclave of Mehrabad, the fear is palpable. LeJ has turned swathes of Quetta into virtual no-go zones for Hazaras, who number perhaps 500,000 of the city's population of about two million.

As members of both an ethnic minority and Shi'ites, Hazaras make particularly attractive targets for extremists.

"If you went out in the morning you cannot be sure that you'd come back home," said Muhammad Mehdi, who closed his children's clothing shop in an ethnically mixed market after gunmen went on a shooting spree in April. Like many Hazaras, he is now reluctant to set foot outside Mehrabad.

In the cheerfully decorated classrooms of the district's Ummat Public School, ambitious teenage girls fear their terrified parents will not allow them to venture into the city to attend college.

“We can be like Mark Zuckerberg, we can be like Bill Gates,” said Farheen, 15. “We can show the world that we are talented.”

A few minutes’ drive away, grave-diggers have had to open a new section in the century-old Hazara cemetery to accommodate the rapidly growing number of gunshot and blast victims.

Activists say at least 800-1,000 Hazaras have been killed since 1999 and the pace is quickening. More than one hundred have been murdered in and around Quetta since January, according to Human Rights Watch.

The state’s failure to protect them has fuelled Hazaras’s suspicions that elements within the security forces still support LeJ, which was nurtured by intelligence agencies in the 1990s as a proxy force.

Specific reference to Parachinar

The following article, published 30 months ago, gives a clear picture of the situation in the north west city of Parachinar and shows why so many young Hazaras have fled from Parachinar since 2009. The siege and consequent suffering for Hazaras is described in detail. Personal communication from friends with links to Parachinar indicates that the situation has not improved.

Parachinar–Pakistan’s Gaza Strip

By Abdul Nishapuri

4 June 2010

<http://therearenosunglasses.wordpress.com/2010/06/04/parachinar-pakistan%E2%80%99s-gaza-strip-2/>

Quotations

1.

Surprisingly, at a time when the “civilized” world is on a so-called offensive against “terror”, coverage of the sorrow-filled plight of Parachinaris within western media has been periodical at best. The reasons for this are unclear. May be it is because Parachinar, fatefully, does not sit over barrels of oil.

2.

Today, the Taliban / Sipah-e-Sahaba led violence against Shias has spread out over a larger radius extending all the way through to the southern tips of the NWFP and the rest of the country. Attacks on Shias in Kohat, Hangu, Dera Ismail Khan, Peshawar, Chakwal, D.G. Khan, Quetta and Karachi have become a norm.

The systematic targeting of followers of the Shia sect in various regions of Pakistan, more specifically in the north-west of the country, amounts to nothing other than a project of ethnic cleansing.

According to a reputed scholar of the phenomenon of ethnic cleansing, Drazen Petrovic, he defines it as such:

‘ethnic cleansing is a well-defined policy of a particular group of persons to systematically eliminate another group from a given territory on the basis of religious, ethnic or national

origin. Such a policy involves violence and is very often connected with military operations. It is to be achieved by all means, from discrimination to extermination ...'

The above definition provides an almost perfect fit to the present situation of Shia in Pakistan, particularly in Parachinar. If international silence continues as it has over the last three years, the same story will have repeated across many towns in the FATA, NWFP and all over Pakistan.

That the Pakistani government, Pakistan Army in particular given its persistent patronage of and links with Taliban and Sipah-e-Sahaba, holds principal blame for its failure to restrain the killings is indisputable and goes without mention. Wider global apathy to an ongoing project of ethnic cleansing however, is certainly not comprehensible and deserves a great deal of mention.

Parachinar deserves better. And the people of Parachinar certainly deserve better. The least we can do is speak out and urge our leaders to press the Pakistani government to bring an immediate end to these massacres. Then, and only then perhaps, can it be said that we have extended a hand to the forgotten victims of Parachinar.

3.

Call for Help

The humanitarian crisis in Parachinar demands urgent action. We can't afford to sit idle and wait for our army generals and government ministers to attend to their responsibilities. Thousands of people are literally on the verge of death. The objective of the protracted, low-scale ethnic cleansing is to drive them out of their ancestral lands and to provide a safe haven for terrorists of Taliban and Sipah-e-Sahaba. The brave people of Parachinar have been able to defend themselves for many years now. But their capacities are nothing compared to the organized terror machinery of their opponents. Their plight is indeed desperate. In the name of God and in the name of humanity, please come forward and help your brothers and sisters in need.