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Introduction

This report has been prepared by the Balochistan Human Rights Group (BHRG) and submitted to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) for the examination of the 113th Session CERD session taking place 5-23 August 2024.

The submission provides an overview on the ongoing discrimination faced by ethnic minorities in Iran, with a focus on the situation for the Baluch minority.

This submission follows from the Committee's list of themes related to the combined twentieth to twenty-seventh periodic reports of Iran, which includes the "Situation of ethnic and ethno-religious minority groups (arts. 2, 5 and 6)" and the "Situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons (arts. 2 and 5)".

The report provides information about the implementation gaps in the enforcement of the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The observations are based on government data and reports, independent studies and reports, case documentation, and recommendations by other UN human rights bodies.

This report is prepared by Balochistan Human Rights Group (BHRG), a registered NGO in Sweden which raises awareness and reports human rights violations taking place in Baluchistan, Iran..

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Background to Systematic Oppression

Governments seeking to oppress and control a region intentionally employ a variety of tactics designed to marginalise and subjugate the population. These methods often include economic deprivation, where the region is starved of investment and essential services, resulting in poverty and underdevelopment that hinder the community's ability to thrive. Cultural suppression is another key tactic, involving the erosion of local languages, traditions, and religious practices to undermine the group's identity and cohesion. Politically, regimes may use repressive measures such as arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances to stifle dissent and instil fear. Legal and institutional discrimination ensures that the oppressed population remains disenfranchised and lacks representation in government and other influential sectors. Additionally, controlling media narratives and limiting external and internal communication helps to isolate the region and minimise the visibility of human rights abuses, allowing the government to act with relative impunity. These oppressive tactics collectively maintain the regime's dominance over the region and suppress any movements for autonomy, justice, or equality (United Nations General Assembly, A/75/213).

This is precisely what has happened, and continues to happen, to the Baluch people for decades. The Iranian government has intentionally created and perpetuated an image of the Baluch as uneducated, backward, and barbaric to justify their oppression. This portrayal is entirely false and serves to rationalise the systemic discrimination and violence inflicted upon the Baluch community. By painting the Baluch in such a negative light, the regime seeks to legitimise its repressive policies and prevent solidarity or support from other regions and the international community. This strategy of dehumanisation is a critical component of the broader agenda to maintain control over Baluchistan and its people (UNHRC, A/HRC/52/12).

The Iranian regime enforces a totalitarian system that prioritises Shia Islam, the Farsi language, and Persian culture, despite Iran's rich multinational tapestry. This approach marginalises the nation's diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Baluchis and Kurds. These minorities face systematic suppression in various spheres: economically, educationally, agriculturally, and culturally. The government's deliberate neglect and active obstruction in regions like Baluchistan and Kurdistan undermine the development of infrastructure and opportunities, perpetuating inequality and stifling the unique identities of these communities.

One example is the prevention and punishment of the use of mother tongues in schools. Baluch and Kurdish children are prevented from having an education in their mother tongue and are forced to use Farsi in schools. They are systematically prevented and even physically punished for even speaking Baluchi or Kurdish. According to reports published by NGOs, another example is that over 300,000 Baluch children are not able to attend

secondary education due to a lack of schools or access to transport to the closest major cities in order to attend school. The regime does not build enough schools for children and at times multiple grades are taught in the same class with the same teacher. This is a way to prevent educational progress and access to higher-paying jobs, perpetuating a cycle of unemployment and dangerous jobs such as fuel carrying (Amnesty International, August 2021).

Religious Persecution

The human rights situation in Baluchistan, a region in southeastern Iran predominantly inhabited by the Baluch ethnic minority, is deeply intertwined with systemic racial discrimination by the Iranian regime. The Baluch people, who are Sunni Muslims in a predominantly Shia country, face severe marginalisation and oppression rooted in both ethnic and religious differences. For example, the Iranian regime systematically obstructs the ascent of Baluch individuals to high-ranking positions across all sectors, including the military, security forces, and certain university disciplines such as atomic physics and aviation. This is evident from the Gozinesh Law practised in Iran to systematically oppress the religious and ethnic minorities such as the Sunni Muslims. This deliberate exclusion aims to deprive the Baluch community of knowledge and power that could enable them to challenge the regime and assert their human rights. By barring Baluchis from these critical areas, the regime ensures that they remain marginalised and powerless, preventing any potential threats to its control and suppressing their ability to advocate for equal rights and justice. This policy is deeply rooted in the regime's sectarian ideology, which prioritises the control and dominance of Shia Muslims in governing the country. By ensuring that only their own adherents occupy influential roles, the regime safeguards its priorities and maintains its grip on power, regardless of the severe human rights violations inflicted upon marginalised groups like the Baluchis.

To further consolidate its control, the regime enlists Shia Muslims from Afghanistan (Fatemiyoun), Iraq (Hashd al-Shaabi), Lebanon (Hezbollah), and Pakistan (Zainabiyoun) to serve in the security forces within Baluchistan. These recruits, often donning local attire to assimilate, have been implicated in violent actions against the local population, as documented in eyewitness footage and reported by various news outlets such as Rasank News. Incidents like Bloody Friday illustrate this tactic. Recruits are incentivized with Iranian nationality, identification cards, and employment, while the identification cards of local residents are frequently confiscated on grounds of alleged illegitimacy. An example of such actions is a refugee in the UK who had their identification revoked (BHRG).

Refugees in Baluchistan, Iran

According to UNHCR, the Iranian government claims that there are around 762,000 Afghan refugees in Baluchistan, Iran. Afghani refugees in Baluchistan, face severe human rights violations rooted in systemic discrimination and neglect by the Iranian authorities. Despite international obligations to protect refugees, the Iranian government has frequently

subjected Afghani refugees to harsh treatment, including arbitrary detention, forced deportations, and denial of basic rights.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran has highlighted numerous instances where Afghani refugees have been arbitrarily detained without due process. These individuals often face deportation back to Afghanistan, despite the dangerous conditions in their home country, violating the principle of non-refoulement enshrined in international refugee law (UN General Assembly, A/75/213).

Economic exploitation is rampant, with many Afghani refugees working in precarious, low-paying jobs without legal protections. Employers frequently exploit their undocumented status, leading to widespread labour abuses, including withholding wages and subjecting workers to unsafe working conditions. The lack of legal recognition and protection leaves Afghani refugees vulnerable to such exploitation, further perpetuating their marginalisation (Amnesty International, August 2021).

Access to education and healthcare is also severely restricted for Afghani refugees in Baluchistan. Children of Afghani refugees often face significant barriers to enrolling in schools, while those who manage to attend are frequently discriminated against. Healthcare access is similarly compromised, with many Afghani refugees unable to receive necessary medical treatment due to their undocumented status and fear of deportation if they seek help from authorities (UNHRC, A/HRC/52/12).

Moreover, the Iranian government has systematically destroyed refugee settlements in Baluchistan under the pretext of urban development and security concerns. This has led to the displacement of thousands of Afghani refugees, exacerbating their already precarious living conditions and further infringing on their right to adequate housing (UNPO, 2020).

These human rights violations against Afghani refugees in Baluchistan reflect broader discriminatory policies and practices by the Iranian regime. The government's failure to uphold international human rights standards and its active participation in the marginalisation and exploitation of refugees underscores the urgent need for international attention and intervention.

Economic Oppression and poverty

One of the most visible aspects of racial discrimination in Baluchistan is the economic disparity. Despite the region's rich natural resources, including oil and gas, the Baluch population experiences high levels of poverty and unemployment. This economic neglect is not merely incidental but reflects a broader pattern of discrimination. The Iranian government has been criticised for deliberately underinvesting in the region, leading to poor infrastructure and inadequate access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and transportation. This economic marginalisation is a direct consequence of the racial

discrimination that prioritises development in Persian-majority areas while neglecting minority regions like Baluchistan.

Persian supremacy in Iran manifests across various dimensions, including religion, culture, heritage, art, and language. Despite Iran being a multinational country, its policies heavily favour Persian dominance. This is starkly evident in the severe lack of healthcare infrastructure in Baluchistan, where limited hospitals and health facilities force many residents to seek medical care in major cities like Tehran, often resulting in fatalities during transit. Such neglect highlights the regime's indifference to the needs of the Baluch population. One illustrative case involved a victim who was shot in the head by an unknown armed individual. The victim had to be transported to Tehran for private medical care and rehabilitation, services that are non-existent in cities like Iranshahr in Baluchistan. This scenario is typical for many Baluch residents, who, lacking financial resources, are unable to access essential medical care.

The economic oppression of the Baluch in Iran by the government is marked by deliberate neglect and systemic discrimination, aimed at marginalising this ethnic group. The Baluch region, rich in natural resources, remains one of the most underdeveloped areas in the country due to minimal governmental investment in infrastructure, industry, and services. This neglect is coupled with policies that restrict economic opportunities for the Baluch people, such as limited access to education, employment, and financial resources. The government's focus on extracting the region's resources without reinvesting in local development exacerbates poverty and unemployment, forcing many Baluch to migrate in search of better opportunities. Additionally, the displacement of Baluch communities through land confiscation and destruction of homes for so-called modernization projects further erodes their economic stability. This systematic economic marginalisation not only stifles the growth and prosperity of the Baluch people but also reinforces their social and political disenfranchisement.

Recent data indicate that Sistan and Baluchestan Province in Iran has the lowest annual income in the country. This province, home to approximately four million people, including around 700,000 Afghan nationals, has been hit hard by the current economic crisis facing the regime. The region suffers from severe poverty, evidenced by bread and fuel shortages, limited access to drinking water, severe droughts, and widespread unemployment.

According to the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), the period from March 2022 to March 2023 saw Sistan and Baluchestan emerge as Iran's poorest province. The SCI report reveals that the average annual income for rural households in the province, where the majority are Sunni, was just over \$900. This figure is 55.3% lower than the national average income for rural households across Iran. Urban households in the province fared slightly better, with an average annual income of nearly \$2,200, but this still represents a 35.4% deficit compared to the national urban average.

Despite numerous promises from successive administrations to address these issues, there has been little tangible investment in the region. Efforts to create jobs, build adequate housing, and establish decent schools have been insufficient. Additionally, narcotics smuggling from Afghanistan exacerbates the region's woes, with hundreds of small-time traffickers facing execution each year under Iran's harsh drug laws.

The province has emerged as a focal point of civil unrest, particularly evidenced during the demonstrations subsequent to the death of Mahsa Amini while in custody last year, which recorded the highest casualties among all 31 provinces. This unrest is exacerbated by the overarching economic instability within Iran, exacerbated by persistent high inflation since 2019. According to the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), inflation rates in the food and beverage sector surged to as much as 87% during certain months of the previous Iranian year (Iran International, 2021).

Sistan and Baluchistan, the second largest province in Iran, has the highest levels of absolute poverty in the country. According to the Parliament Research Center, around 45 percent of the province's population lived below the absolute poverty line in 2016. This means that nearly half of the residents could not afford the minimum 2,100 calories per day necessary for basic sustenance.

In 2016, it was estimated that 1,232,275 individuals, or approximately 269,341 households, were living in poverty in the province. The average household size among these impoverished families had 4.6 members, about 0.7 percent larger than the provincial average, indicating that poorer families tend to be larger than wealthier ones (According to the Gozinesh report and other national statistics gathered within Iran).

Fuel Carrier work in Baluchistan

Fuel carriers in Baluchistan, Iran, endure severe human rights violations due to hazardous working conditions and systemic exploitation. Predominantly Baluch ethnic minorities, these carriers transport oil and gas under perilous circumstances, often on poorly maintained roads and facing risks from both natural elements and criminal elements.

Reports from human rights organisations detail incidents of exploitation, extortion, and violence against fuel carriers by security forces and other actors (Amnesty International, "Iran: Repression and Discrimination in Baluchistan," 2021). The Iranian government's response to issues like smuggling includes arbitrary arrests, detention, and at times, extrajudicial killings, violating international standards on fair trial, security, and the right to life (Human Rights Watch, "Iran: Discrimination Against Ethnic Minorities," 2020).

Baluchistan's economic underdevelopment exacerbates the vulnerability of these workers, lacking basic infrastructure and investment. Cultural and religious discrimination against the Baluch further marginalises them, compounding their socio-economic challenges.

Addressing these abuses necessitates legal reforms to protect workers, infrastructure development, and efforts to combat discrimination. International pressure remains crucial in holding Iran accountable for these violations and ensuring respect for the rights of all individuals, including fuel carriers, in Baluchistan.

Cultural Oppression

Cultural suppression is a significant facet of the racial discrimination faced by the Baluch people in Iran. Their language and cultural practices are systematically repressed, with scant opportunities to celebrate and preserve their rich heritage. This cultural repression is intertwined with religious discrimination, as the predominantly Sunni Baluch face stringent restrictions on their religious practices and are systematically excluded from key governmental and military positions typically reserved for Shia Muslims. The regime's policies appear designed to erode the Baluch identity, reflecting a broader strategy of assimilation and control over minority groups.

The deliberate preservation of ancient tribal systems within Baluchistan is another strategy employed to perpetuate internal conflict among the Baluch people. These tribes, composed of family names and lineages, often find themselves in prolonged conflicts over issues such as land ownership and revenge killings. In instances of murder or manslaughter, the regime frequently involves the victim's family in deciding the fate of the perpetrator, further entrenching tribal divisions. The regime's lack of support for civil rights exacerbates these situations, fostering an environment of perpetual tribal warfare. This internal strife is intensified by acts of violence, such as the killing of 300 people by unknown armed individuals last year, with sources linking these assailants to IRGC security forces. This scenario underscores Tehran's control over the region and its disregard for the well-being of the Baluch people.

This overarching theme of systemic discrimination and neglect reflects a broader strategy of marginalisation and control, aimed at undermining the cultural and social fabric of the Baluch community in Iran.

Political Repression and lack of Human Rights for the Baluch

Political repression in Baluchistan is characterised by severe and racially motivated discrimination, reflecting a systematic violation of human rights under international law. The Iranian government has consistently suppressed dissent and autonomy demands within the region, employing tactics such as arbitrary arrest, detention, and executions without due process. These actions contravene fundamental principles outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantee the right to freedom of expression, fair trial, and protection against torture and arbitrary detention.

Reports from human rights organizations document widespread instances of torture, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances perpetrated by Iranian security forces in Baluchistan. Such practices not only violate the UDHR's prohibition of torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment but also undermine the right to life and security as enshrined in the ICCPR. The absence of accountability for these abuses exacerbates a climate of fear and impunity, reinforcing discriminatory practices that marginalise and devalue the lives of Baluch individuals.

In response to sporadic protests and uprisings in Baluchistan, the Iranian authorities have routinely employed excessive force to suppress dissent, further violating rights protected under international law. The government's actions undermine efforts to achieve equality and recognition for the Baluch people, as called for by the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which prohibits racial discrimination in all its forms and requires state parties to undertake measures to combat such discrimination.

Despite calls from the international community for the Iranian government to address human rights abuses in Baluchistan, substantive progress remains elusive. The regime's persistent policies of racial discrimination and repression perpetuate a cycle of marginalisation and injustice, denying the Baluch population their fundamental rights and freedoms. Effective intervention to protect Baluch rights necessitates concerted efforts to hold Iran accountable under international human rights law, ensuring that all individuals within its jurisdiction, regardless of ethnicity or religious affiliation, are afforded equal protection and dignity.

Lack of formal Identification Documents

The intentional oppression and systemic discrimination faced by the Baluch people in Iran is so pervasive that it affects them from birth to death. From the moment they are born, many Baluch children are denied basic human rights, starting with the difficulty of obtaining a birth certificate. Without this essential document, access to necessities such as infant milk formula becomes nearly impossible (Rasank News), as it is rationed and controlled, available only to those with money or formal identification. This lack of documentation extends into education, where children without birth certificates are barred from attending school. Consequently, these children grow up unable to secure formal employment or open a bank account, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement.

A recent report published in 2019 by an NGO highlights the significant issue of statelessness among children in Baluchistan. Government estimates indicate that approximately 40,000 children, both of whose parents are Baluch, lack national identity cards. However, local sources suggest that the actual number may be much higher, ranging from 80,000 to 100,000. This discrepancy underscores the severity of the problem and the need for urgent attention to the documentation and rights of Baloch children in Iran. ([UNPO: West Balochistan: Iran's Invisible Children](#))

As they reach adulthood, many Baluch are forced into dangerous jobs, such as fuel carrying, to make ends meet. These jobs are not only perilous but also criminalised by the state, leading to frequent incidents where security forces shoot and kill these workers. The regime often denies these deaths, justifies them as necessary due to the illegal nature of the work, or simply hides the incidents from public view. This leaves families broken, without breadwinners, and trapped in extreme poverty.

Environmental Infrastructure

According to recent NGO reports, Baluchistan remains the poorest region of Iran, despite being one of the richest in natural resources, including gold, gas, and hundreds of kilometres of coastline. The economic deprivation is stark and deliberate, ensuring that the Baluch people do not benefit from the wealth beneath their feet. Instead, they endure severe hardship and oppression, systematically denied the means to improve their lives. This comprehensive and calculated marginalisation underscores the regime's commitment to maintaining control over the Baluch through relentless discrimination and repression.

Deprivation in Baluchistan is exacerbated by the government's systematic diversion of resources away from the people in the province. Notably, the revenue generated from oil extraction in the region is not reinvested locally but is instead directed to other parts of the country, depriving Baluchistan of vital funds needed for development. Additionally, the construction of dams and water diversion projects systematically redirect water away from the province, worsening the already dire water scarcity situation and further crippling the agricultural sector. For example, the diversion of water from the Helmand River has led to severe drought conditions, impacting thousands of Baluch farmers who rely on this water for irrigation.

Baluchistan, Iran, suffers from a severe lack of environmental infrastructure, exacerbating the region's socio-economic challenges and further marginalising its population. This deficiency is evident in several critical areas, including water management, waste disposal, and environmental protection, which collectively contribute to the deteriorating quality of life and ecological degradation.

Water scarcity is one of the most pressing issues in Baluchistan. The region's arid climate and irregular rainfall patterns necessitate efficient water management systems, which are largely absent. The existing infrastructure for water storage and distribution is inadequate, leading to frequent water shortages and poor water quality. Many communities rely on unsafe and unreliable water sources, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. Many children lose their lives while trying to collect water from large reservoirs, falling into these and drowning. This is, for many in rural areas, the only source of water. Moreover, the lack of investment in sustainable water practices, such as rainwater harvesting and modern irrigation techniques, exacerbates the problem, making agriculture, a primary livelihood for many, increasingly difficult. The poorly managed water systems have also led to rivers overflowing and severe flooding, causing widespread destruction. Civilian videos document these floods, highlighting the severe lack of governmental intervention to assist those in need.

Waste management is another critical area where Baluchistan lags significantly. The absence of organised waste collection and disposal systems leads to the accumulation of garbage in residential and public areas. Open dumping and burning of waste are common practices, contributing to air and soil pollution. This environmental neglect not only poses health risks to the local population but also diminishes the region's overall aesthetic and ecological value. The lack of recycling facilities and programs further exacerbates the waste

problem, preventing the community from adopting more sustainable waste management practices.

Additionally, Baluchistan faces substantial challenges related to air and soil pollution. The region's industrial activities, often unregulated and environmentally destructive, release pollutants that degrade air quality and contaminate soil. The lack of regulatory oversight and enforcement allows these practices to continue unchecked, resulting in long-term environmental damage. The absence of green spaces and urban planning also means that there are few natural buffers to mitigate pollution and enhance the livability of urban areas.

Environmental protection efforts are minimal, with insufficient measures in place to conserve natural resources and biodiversity, contravening Articles 3, 24, and 29 of the UDHR. The region's unique ecosystems and wildlife are at risk due to habitat destruction and overexploitation of natural resources. There are few, if any, protected areas, and environmental conservation programs are underfunded and poorly implemented. This neglect not only threatens the ecological balance but also deprives future generations of their natural heritage.

The regime's neglect of Baluchistan's environmental infrastructure is a reflection of broader systemic discrimination and marginalisation. The lack of investment in critical environmental infrastructure underscores a disregard for the region's development and the well-being of its inhabitants. Addressing these environmental challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes substantial investment in infrastructure, community engagement, and stringent regulatory frameworks to ensure sustainable development and environmental conservation. Without such efforts, Baluchistan will continue to face significant environmental and public health challenges, further entrenching the region's marginalisation.

Bloody Friday, the deadliest day linked to the Woman Life Freedom Movement

Zahedan's Bloody Friday stands as a stark and tragic example of racial discrimination by the Iranian regime, resulting in the senseless deaths of innocent children, women, and men. On that fateful day, security forces opened fire indiscriminately on peaceful demonstrators and bystanders in Zahedan, the capital of Sistan and Baluchestan province, who were supporting the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. The brutality of the crackdown was unparalleled, with no regard for the lives lost or the suffering inflicted. Reliable sources report that more than 120 people died, with many more unaccounted for due to threats made to family members that if they spoke out, they would be targeted (Amnesty International, 2021).

Many of those who were shot later died because they were intentionally refused life-saving medical care at hospitals. Doctors who dared to help the victims were arrested, tortured, and many subsequently lost their lives as a result. This fear is compounded by cultural norms that frown upon women attending public events like demonstrations, further silencing the community. NGOs have suggested that the reason this extreme and deadliest event since the Woman, Life, Freedom movement occurred in Baluchistan was because the regime targeted the most oppressed people of Iran, knowing it would not gain much media attention

and that they could get away with it. According to a report by the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), Baluch deaths are among the least documented from Iran, receiving little to no media coverage (UNPO, 2020). This intentional lack of visibility allows the regime to continue its oppressive tactics with impunity. The government's response on Zahedan's Bloody Friday was not just an act of repression but a calculated display of force aimed at instilling fear and demonstrating its willingness to use lethal violence to maintain control over the marginalised Baluch population. The massacre of innocent civilians underscores the extreme measures the regime is willing to take, reflecting its broader strategy of systemic oppression and racial discrimination against the Baluch people.

Since the presidency of Ahmadinejad, IRGC forces have been directed to modernise the coastal region of Baluchistan, aiming to populate the area with Farsi-speaking Shias. This has resulted in the displacement of local Baluch residents (sources as mentioned in Rasank News and BHRG website), with homes being bulldozed and rural towns destroyed. This is an ongoing situation. The regime's religious discrimination is also stark, as Sunni mosques have been systematically destroyed since the regime's inception, targeting ancient sites over 600 years old, such as in Bojnord and Masjid Faize in Mashhad. In regions where Shia Muslims are a minority, large Shia mosques are constructed, while minority religious monuments face demolition and new sites are prevented from being built.

The IRGC Qods department's treatment of the Baluch as foreigners highlights a deep-seated policy of alienation and marginalisation. This approach is evident in the operations of the Mereshad section, which controls drug trafficking in Baluchistan. By dominating smuggling activities, the regime not only secures a source of illicit revenue but also exerts tight control over the region. This control extends beyond economic exploitation to encompass cultural and social dimensions, effectively undermining the Baluch people's identity.

This strategy of control through illegal activities creates an environment of pervasive insecurity and lawlessness. The Baluch people, already marginalised and discriminated against, find themselves further disenfranchised as their region becomes synonymous with criminal operations orchestrated by the state. This perpetuates a cycle of violence and instability, as local communities are caught between the pressures of illicit activities and the repressive measures of the regime.

Furthermore, the systemic discrimination faced by the Baluch people is compounded by their displacement and the destruction of their homes and towns. The regime's deliberate efforts to erase their cultural and religious heritage, through the destruction of Sunni mosques and the prevention of new religious sites, signify a broader aim to dilute the Baluch identity. This not only affects their spiritual and communal life but also disrupts their historical continuity and connection to their land.

In essence, the IRGC Qods department's actions represent a calculated effort to suppress the Baluch population by treating them as outsiders in their own land. This multifaceted approach of economic exploitation, cultural erasure, and systemic violence not only destabilise the region but also entrenches the Baluch people in a perpetual state of vulnerability and marginalisation. The regime's policies ensure that the Baluch are continuously struggling against both external oppression and internal strife, leaving little room for them to advocate for their rights and wellbeing.

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