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Controversy Over Afghans Issued Pakistani IDs - Residents of southeastern border region appeal for government action.

By Khairuddin Zaki

Residents of a district in the border province of Paktika are being issued with Pakistani ID cards, an IWPR investigation has found.

Local leaders have urged central government authorities to intervene, suggesting the practice amounted to an act of aggression by the neighbouring country.

“Many people in Barmal district now have Pakistani IDs,” said Baryali Jabarkhail, a member of Paktika’s youth parliament. “If this isn’t stopped now, Pakistan will likely start to distribute their cards in other districts as well.”

Aziz, a resident of Urgan district, said, “Every government has the responsibility to protect and secure its own borders, but the Afghan government has not understood this.

“Pakistan is trying to influence people’s attitudes and strengthen their country’s influence on Afghan soil.

“They can do pretty much anything they want here; from conducting military operations to building border installations.

“Now they’ve started a new game by distributing Pakistani IDs to Afghans in Barmal district. This is aggressive behaviour.”

Hayatullah Safi, the governor of Barmal district, said he had requested that Afghan border police attempt to put a stop to citizens using Pakistani IDs.

He told IWPR, “I have informed both Paktika’s provincial office and the Afghan ministry of interior about the issue so that they can take the necessary actions.

“I have also begun arranging tribal gatherings to inform local people about their

responsibilities and the government’s responsibilities in the region.”

The issue is highly sensitive, not least because of ongoing border disputes between the two countries.

No Afghan government has ever recognised the legitimacy of the 1,500 mile Durand Line, established by the British in 1896, as it cuts off traditional Pashtun tribal lands which Afghans see as theirs.

Pakistan’s attempts to establish fences and border posts in the region have met with stiff resistance. Periodic skirmishes between the two countries have also continued to aggravate an already delicate relationship.

Paktika council member Abdul Mubeen Faqirzada accused Pakistan of aggressive interference.

He urged authorities to stop turning a blind eye to the phenomenon and said that continued neglect could only lead to further hostilities.

“The government has to focus on our borders,” he argued. “And for the sake of unity and patriotism our people have to support the government.”

Civil activist Khushal Tasal said he regarded the distribution of Pakistani IDs as a disgrace.

He said, “The Afghan government needs to respond. If Pakistan is distributing their IDs today then who knows what tomorrow brings.

“They could try to impose their curriculum on Afghans. It will become impossible to stand against them.”

Ali Mohammad Nazari, a civil activist living in the region, said that local Afghans were accepting Pakistani IDs out of growing frustration with their own government’s failures.

He said that the region was in desperate need of investment in health, education and infrastructure, and that the Afghan authorities had ignored its peoples’ plight.

“This investment - these opportunities - are not being provided here and so people start to look to Pakistan for help,” he said. “The public need to have trust and confidence in their own government but this is lacking. The Afghan government must take responsibility for its borders.

Paktika governor Mohammad Elyas Wahdat acknowledged the fact that Pakistani IDs were being distributed in some areas of the province.

He denied the matter posed a risk to the stability of the region, however, and instead argued tribal groups had long carried both Afghan and Pakistani IDs.

This was a practical measure step to allow local people – who often owned homes and land on both sides of the border – to move freely. Residents of Barmal district often had relatives in the Pakistani areas of North and South Waziristan, he said, and without the cards crossing the border would become a huge bureaucratic headache.

But he continued, “Afghans should understand that carrying a foreign identity card should not be a source of pride for them.

“They should continue to see Afghanistan as their home country, allowing them the dignity they deserve.”

Paktika provincial council member Niamatullah Baburi said that Wahdat’s apparent lack of concern was “dangerous” and urged officials in Kabul to take action.

He claimed the tactic was a deliberate ploy by Pakistan to further cement the validity of the Durand Line, the international border between the two countries which remains largely unrecognised by Afghanistan.

“If the government continues to remain silent and ignore this issue then Pakistan will likely extend their issuing of IDs to wider areas,” Baburi continued.

“In time, the result may be that groups in this area are more likely to consider themselves Pakistani rather than Afghan.”

The Pakistani embassy in Kabul failed to respond to repeated requests for comment on this story.

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