

## TRAIN HIJACKING IN PAKISTAN: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

**NEWS:** A train hijacking has reignited questions about Pakistan's national security

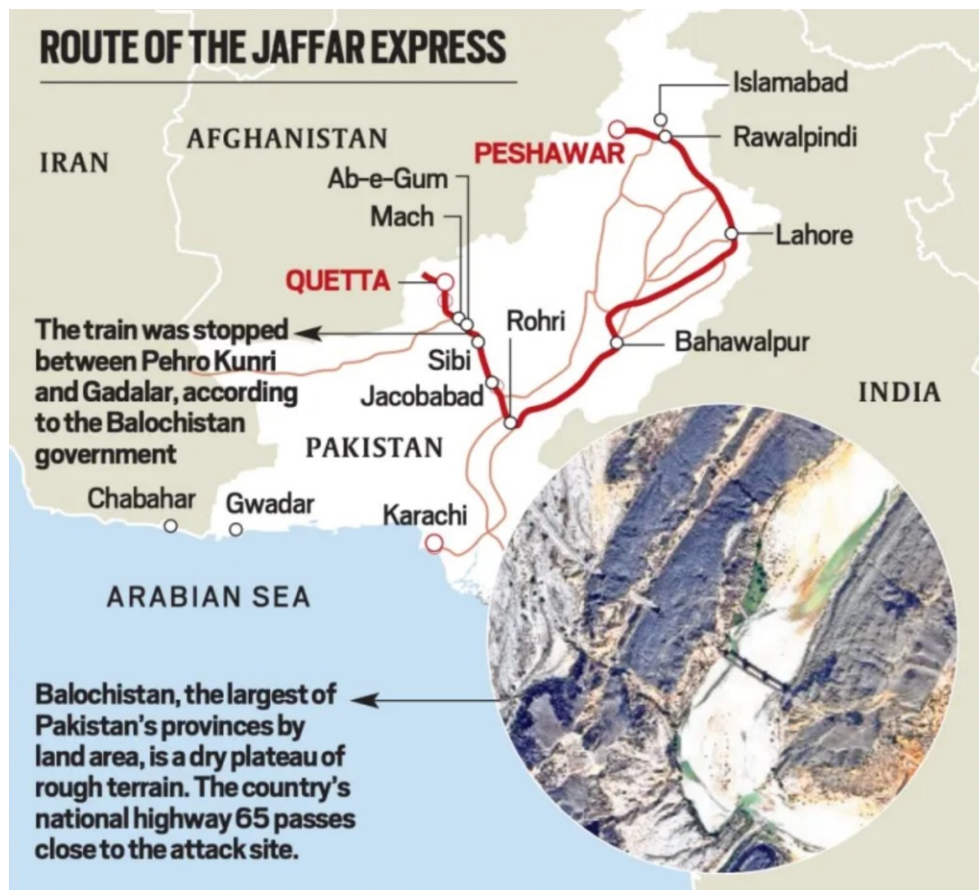
### WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) continues its insurgency for an independent Balochistan, with recent attacks targeting Pakistani and Chinese interests. The region's economic exploitation and historical grievances fuel the ongoing conflict, which destabilizes Pakistan and impacts the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

### Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) - Overview and Attack on March 11, 2025

#### 1. Who is the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)?

- **Ethnonationalist Group:** The BLA is a **Baloch ethnonationalist militant group** advocating for the creation of an independent **Balochistan** region, which spans across Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan.
- **Banned Organization:** The group was banned in **Pakistan** in **2006**, and it has been designated as a **global terrorist organization** by the **United States** in **2019** due to its violent insurgent activities.
- **Key Objectives:** The primary goal of the BLA is to establish an independent Balochistan free from the control of Pakistan and Iran, with a focus on the region's rich natural resources and economic autonomy.



## 2. Role of BLA in the March 11, 2025 Attack

- **Attack on Train:** On **March 11, 2025**, **BLA insurgents** stopped a **long-distance train** in the **Quetta region** of Balochistan and took passengers **hostage**.
- **Majeed Brigade:** The attack was carried out by **BLA's Majeed Brigade**, a **suicide squad (Fidayeen unit)** active since **2011**. This unit is known for its high-profile attacks on Pakistani establishments.
- **Other BLA Units Involved:** Apart from the Majeed Brigade, other specialized BLA units such as **STOS**, **Fatah Squad**, and **Zirab Units** participated in the attack. These units are responsible for carrying out various forms of insurgent activities, including bombings and ambushes.
- **Previous Attacks:** The BLA has previously targeted Pakistani establishments and projects, particularly in Balochistan.
  - **March 2024:** The BLA attacked a **security complex** near **Gwadar Port**, a strategic area due to its proximity to the **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)**.
  - **October 2024:** A **suicide bombing** carried out by the BLA killed **two Chinese nationals** working on **CPEC projects**, further exacerbating tensions related to Balochistan's autonomy.

## 3. Balochistan - A Brief Background

- **Geographical and Economic Importance:**
  - **Largest Province:** Balochistan is Pakistan's largest province by area, but it is also the **least developed** and **poorest** region of the country.
  - **Rich in Resources:** The province is rich in **oil, gas, gold, and copper**, making it a significant economic asset for Pakistan. However, the local population has not benefitted equitably from these resources.
- **Economic and Political Issues:**
  - **Economic Exploitation:** Many Baloch ethnic leaders accuse the **Pakistani federal government** (which is dominated by the **Punjab province**) of **economic exploitation**. The Baloch believe that the region's wealth is being extracted by the state without providing sufficient compensation or development in Balochistan.
  - **Lack of Development:** Despite its natural wealth, Balochistan remains **underdeveloped**, with minimal infrastructure, education, or health services, contributing to the grievances of its people.

# What is Balochistan Liberation Army?



**What it is**

- The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), active since 2011, is the most prominent of the many separatist groups in Pakistan's Balochistan province
- **Majeed Brigade** is the BLA's dedicated suicide squad

**The context**

- Balochistan is the country's largest province. It has oil and other natural resources, but the ethnic Baloch are Pakistan's **poorest and most under-represented** people
- Till 1947, Balochistan comprised multiple chiefdoms.
- Ahmed Yar Khan, the chief of Kalat, was the most powerful. He was **forced to accede to Pakistan in 1948**, after Pakistan invaded Kalat
- This triggered an insurgency which remains ongoing due to **'unjust' behavior of Pakistan gov towards Balochs**

**Current scenario**

- China-backed Gwadar Port is a symbol of the economic injustice faced by the Baloch — despite rampant unemployment in the province, engineers and technical specialists were hired from Punjab, Sindh, and even China
- In recent years, Baloch militants have repeatedly targeted both Gwadar and Chinese nationals in the country



**Demands for autonomy**

- There have been demands for greater regional autonomy for Balochistan, and it was emboldened by the secession of Bangladesh in 1971
- Since the dismissal of the provincial gov't (National Awami Party) by the then PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (Pakistan Peoples' Party) followed by 'human rights abuse' in the province, there has been a rise in insurgency.
- There have been sympathies for brothers Majeed Langove Sr (killed in 1974) and Majeed Langove Jr (killed in 2010).
- When Aslam Achu, a BLA leader, decided to establish a suicide squad, the name 'Majeed' was chosen for it.
- The Majeed Brigade carried out its first suicide attack on December 30, 2011
- After a long hiatus, the group became active again in 2018. It has been very active since then




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#### 4. Historical Background of Balochistan and the Insurgency

- **Post-Partition Period (1947-48):**
  - After the **Partition of India in 1947**, Balochistan was an independent state under the **Khan of Kalat**.
  - However, in **March 1948**, Pakistan pressured the Khan to **sign an accession agreement**, bringing Balochistan under Pakistan's control despite the initial resistance from the Baloch leadership.
  - This event marked the beginning of Baloch discontent with Pakistan, as many Baloch continued to support independence or greater autonomy.
- **Decades of Insurgency:**

- Following the annexation, Balochistan saw numerous insurgencies led by separatist groups, demanding independence or autonomy for the region.
- Over the years, tens of thousands of people have been killed in the ongoing insurgency, with the BLA and other separatist groups often in the forefront of these conflicts.
- Pakistan's response has often been harsh, involving military crackdowns and human rights violations, further exacerbating the discontent in the region.

## 5. Impact of the Insurgency on Balochistan and Pakistan

- **Loss of Lives:** The ongoing Baloch insurgency has resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of lives, both among insurgents and civilians.
- **Economic Strain:** The insurgency and constant conflict have hindered the development of Balochistan and have placed a significant economic strain on Pakistan. The region's potential for development, particularly through projects like **CPEC**, is often disrupted by insurgent activities.
- **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Projects:** Baloch insurgents, including the BLA, have frequently targeted **Chinese nationals** and **CPEC-related projects** in the region, fearing that these initiatives will benefit Pakistan and China, rather than the local Baloch population. This has caused significant concerns for both Pakistan and China regarding the security of these strategic projects.

## 6. Geopolitical Implications of Baloch Insurgency

- **Alleged Indian Involvement:** Pakistan has often accused **India** of supporting Baloch insurgents, alleging that India provides funding and assistance to separatist groups as part of a broader strategy to destabilize Pakistan. However, India has consistently denied these allegations.
- **International Attention:** The Baloch insurgency has attracted international attention, particularly due to its implications for **CPEC**, a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure project that is part of China's **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. The security challenges posed by the insurgency have raised concerns for international investors and stakeholders involved in CPEC projects.

## 7. Future Prospects and Challenges

- **Ongoing Conflict:** Despite various efforts by the Pakistani government to negotiate with Baloch leaders, the insurgency continues, fueled by economic disparity, political grievances, and the desire for autonomy or independence.

- **Regional Stability:** The Baloch insurgency remains a significant challenge to regional stability in South Asia, particularly for Pakistan, as it faces internal unrest while managing its relations with neighboring countries, including **India** and **China**.
- **International Involvement:** The role of **China** in Balochistan, particularly with CPEC, and its security concerns over the region's instability, is likely to shape future geopolitical dynamics in the area. Additionally, the increasing attention to human rights in Balochistan may attract greater international scrutiny.

### **Conclusion**

The ongoing **Baloch insurgency**, led by groups like the **BLA**, remains a major issue in Pakistan, with implications for both national security and regional stability. The insurgency's root causes lie in the **historical** and **economic grievances** of the Baloch people, who seek greater autonomy or independence. While Pakistan has responded with military action, the conflict continues to affect the region, with geopolitical, economic, and human rights challenges that will likely persist in the coming years.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/a-train-hijacking-has-reignited-questions-about-pakistans-national-security-9887430/>