

CHIEF JUSTICE CHAUDHRY: BALOCHISTAN BURNS WHILE POLICE WATCH

Showing extreme frustration over senior police officials not appearing before his hearing today on Balochistan, Pakistan's Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammad Chaudhry lashed out at them:

Chaudhry had summoned Inspector General (IG) Balochistan and relevant Superintendent Police (SP) in the court earlier today on an immediate notice.

"If the police officials failed to comply with the court's order, they will be sent to jail," he had warned.

He censured the law enforcement agencies for their incompetency in maintaining peace in the province and remarked that the courts are being kept uninformed about the factual details.

"Balochistan is on fire but the officials are mere spectators to it," Chaudhry remarked.

The court also heard from three people who previously had been among the "missing":

In another relevant development, three people who had been recovered from Kuchlak area were presented before the court.

They narrated their ordeal before the bench and said: "We were abducted from Quetta at night; we were blindfolded and then kept at some unknown location for about 40 days."

The court issued release orders for the

three recovered people and directed the police to safely escort them to their homes.

The number of missing people abducted by government forces is very much in dispute, as pointed out on Monday in the Express Tribune:

The Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (VFBMP), an organisation striving for the safe recovery of missing persons, urged the Chief Justice of Pakistan to hold monthly hearings on the issue in Quetta.

“Relatives are coming to Quetta with the hope that the chief justice will recover their loved ones who have been missing for years,” VFBMP Chairman Nasrullah Baloch told *The Express Tribune*.

Baloch added that the relatives of all 1,300 missing persons will appear before the court and record their statements before Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. “This move will prove that the government and its functionaries are lying (when they say) merely 47 persons are missing,” he said. Baloch further explained that commissions set up by the government were not cooperating – and were even trying to complicate the issue.

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According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), as many as 172 people are missing from Balochistan while the Balochistan Home and Tribal Affairs Department stated that only 47 people are currently missing.

As I pointed out on Monday, Baloch rebels, in addition to being victims in government-related disappearances, also are taking action against road-building. That process is continuing, with

at least ten road-building laborers being kidnapped today:

At least 10 labourers working on the Dera Bugti-Sui road were abducted by a group of armed men near Sui during the early hours of Thursday.

The District Police Officer Dera Bugti confirmed the kidnapping, adding that police and security forces have mounted a manhunt in the area for the safe recovery of the labourers.

The labourers were sitting in tents pitched beside the road under construction near Sui when a group of armed men abducted ten of them at gun point.

"A few labourers were left behind as they were sitting inside another tent," official sources said.

There were eight Sindhi-speaking labourers belonging to Sadiqabad, one from Quetta and one local Bugti tribesman.

The situation in Balochistan is clearly very unstable and many factions are responsible for illegal acts. However, the fact that the Supreme Court now is taking notice and attempting to rein in both local police and the ISI while larger political discussions are also taking place raises at least the hope that tensions eventually can be eased. That is, unless a meddler tries to disrupt the process to advance his own extremist political ambitions.