

## The economy and human rights in Sistan and Baluchestan

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Charts on statistics and the development of infrastructure in various locations around Iran usually show that, despite its relatively large population of three million, the province of Sistan and Baluchestan continues to occupy the lowest position in the development rankings. There is a significant gap between indicators which points to a lack of human resource and economic development in Sistan and Baluchestan in comparison with national averages. This not only suggests a politics of centralisation and a complete lack of balance in development at the national level, but also to discriminatory economic policies in order to ensure the progress of this deprived province is held back because of seemingly security, political or even religious justifications. Some decision makers at the national level refer to religious preferences and privileges as well as to the cultural values and identity of this specific province, or to the ethnic and national enhancement of economic development, discriminating against the majority Sunni population. Meanwhile, this largest province which accounts for more than 11% of the land and 4% of the country's population, its natural resources, rich agricultural, marine and fisheries, and even the nation's sole oceanic port, benefits from less than 1% of gross national product.<sup>1</sup> This discrepancy has brought some officials to express their shame in the face of such discriminatory measures, using descriptions- such as a 'thick cloud of deprivation'. Furthermore, the prerequisite for a just approach to economic development must be based on recognition of the existence of economic, social and cultural inequalities across the country. More than 37 years since the Islamic Revolution, the position of the province of Sistan and Baluchestan is not accidental. In fact, over the past twenty years, this province should have reached the top of the national development charts, but it has not due to the discriminatory policies it has experienced.

### Human Development

One of the most important indicators of human and social development as well as sustainable development, ultimately leading to economic improvements, is literacy. Based on a report published by the Farhang Negar Information Agency and available statistics, education indicators such as the average spend per capita on education in Sistan and Baluchestan is at the lowest level compared to the rest of the country. What is more surprising is the fact that the devastatingly low average in Cha Bahar county is used as the standard and symbol of development in the eastern part of the country. Farhang Negar adds that no one is able to believe that in light of its special place in leading different fields, including its impact on the economy, Cha Bahar maintains the lowest indicators for education among all provinces to the point that this province has the lowest standard of living and remains the lowest among 19 province capitals. Based on the level of education investment per capita in previous annual budgets, it will take Cha Bahar at least 60 years in order to simply reach the level of other provincial capitals. Referring to a UNESCO report, Farhang Negar indicates that Cha Bahar students have the second highest IQs in the world<sup>2</sup>, however, unfortunately these students on the coastal fringes of Makran have access to the lowest levels of educational opportunities, and the deprivation they face in this region is well-known. The right of children to education is endorsed in various international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The literacy rate in Sistan and Baluchestan is the lowest among the thirty provinces in the country<sup>3</sup>. In 2015, around 200,000 children and young people in this province were deprived of access to education. Furthermore, a mere 50% of those who enrol in schools are able to graduate and receive their high school diplomas. In addition, one third of classes are below the required standards. Accordingly, those who graduate from university face serious discrimination in securing employment. Consequently, the unemployment rate of Baluchis at the provincial level is the highest in the country. According to the Online News Agency quoting a member of the parliament, more than 70% of the population living in the province are living below the poverty line. Based on statistical reports published by the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), Sistan and Baluchestan has the lowest rate of economic participation in the country. IRNA also states that the real rate of unemployment in this province is between 35-40%. In reality, the unemployment rate among Baluch natives and Sunnis is more than 50%.

As a result, indicators such as economic participation, unemployment, literacy, and hope for the future of living in the province are among those that stem from a security-based outlook, in other words, one that maintains an outward-looking perspective. If we examine the budgets allocated for Baluchestan over the past 27 years, we will gain an understanding of the depth of the poverty and the causes of this lack

<sup>1</sup> The Port of Cha Bahar is on the Indian Ocean rather than in the Persian Gulf.

<sup>2</sup> Farhang Negar, The most intelligent students in disadvantaged schools, <http://www.farhangnegar.ir/news/9996>

<sup>3</sup> Payvand Iran News, Tehran ranks second in illiteracy among Iran's provinces, May 2008, <http://www.payvand.com/news/08/may/1173.html>

<sup>4</sup> Islamic Republic News Agency, Deputy Governor: Sistan and Baluchestan unemployment rate is 40%, <http://www7.irna.ir/fa/News/81472220/>

of development. The security and policing budget for the province, whether looked at on a per capita or land area basis, in comparison with the national average, has been the highest in the country. This is while Baluchestan has the lowest per capita budget for development and expansion when compared to other provinces, either based on raw numbers, by proportion of the development budget or per capita compared to other provinces.<sup>5</sup>

The development budget of Baluchestan is less than 0.001% of the total national budget. More than half of the development budget is spent on security and policing in the province. While hundreds of billions of tumans (a unit of 10 rials) are spent to establish security and police stations and Revolutionary Guard Centres, many students continue to occupy sheds as classrooms. It must be noted that they are among those who are lucky enough to have a teacher and a shed.

### **Economic potential in Sistan and Baluchestan**

The province of Sistan and Baluchestan is positioned on the metal and mineral belt that stretches from the former Yugoslavia to Pakistan. These rich natural resources include metal and mineral deposits such as chromite, copper, manganese, lead, zinc, tin, tungsten, as well as deposits of non-metallic elements such as talc, magnesite (the medicinal plant of white flowers), as well as construction and decorative stones, in particular, granite. During recent exploration projects the Department of Archaeology, confirmed finding more than ten million tons of gold in Mir Javeh.<sup>6</sup> In October 2012 Iranian experts located major sources of gaseous hydrates near Makran shores in Baluchestan.<sup>7</sup> The project manager in charge of this exploration emphasised that the volume of gas discovered is equal to Iran's total gas and oil sources.

From an industrial standpoint, given proper infrastructure, the development of human resources and other essential factors, this province will make a major contribution to marine and fisheries as well as to the manufacturing segments of the market. As an example, the Iranshahr Baluch textile factory with 2,500 employees, considered one of the largest textile units in the country, and one of the major production units established during the previous regime in Iran, is now operating with less than 200 employees and facilities that amount to a ruin. Even the production of handmade crafts and traditional products of Baluchestan, such as needlework, coin embroidery, pottery, kilim (woven carpet) production, knitted bags, jewellery making, mat weaving, wood turning and rug weaving are either destroyed or on the brink of elimination.

In terms of agriculture, Sistan and Baluchestan benefits from half a million hectares of farming land (barley, fallow, water) dedicated to agricultural and horticultural products. However, due to mismanagement, lack of support on the part of the government, and a failure to manage water resources, a significant portion of these lands are no longer conducive to agricultural production. For instance, not so long ago, benefiting from Hamoun, the third largest lake in Iran after Khazar and Oroumiyyeh, Sistan was considered the third largest source of cereal crops in Iran, but today it is a dry wasteland. Due to a lack of packaging, processing and branding, high quality and sweet dates from Baluchestan are now exported as Bam Mazafati dates.

### **The impact of the economy on the issue of human rights in the province**

Keeping in mind that the total number of primary students throughout the province amounts to approximately 550,000, lack of access to education for 200,000 children and young people in an underdeveloped province such as Baluchestan does not only amount to a catastrophe, but from a human rights perspective, it is a clear violation of the most basic rights of children. Poverty and injustice in every society across the world can serve as the bedrock of social maladies. In addition to economic discrimination and poverty in Sistan and Baluchestan, political and religious elements influence the rise of dissatisfaction among the masses. It is due to this that over the past three decades, and particularly over the past ten years, frictions and tensions borne out of a lack of provision and mismanagement have caused political dissatisfaction and objections on the part of the people.

In order to reduce opposition to such policies and suppress citizens' demands, the Islamic Republic has resorted to relying on using the security and police forces. The rate of executions in proportion to the

<sup>5</sup> Tabnak, Sistan and Baluchistan's resources, July 2015, <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/mobile/news/514426/%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A8%D9%87-31-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%A8%D9%84%D9%88%DA%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B1-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%87%E2%80%8C%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%AA%DA%AF%DB%8C>

<sup>6</sup> IRIB, Gold Mountain in Sistan and Baluchestan, (in Farsi), January 2016, <http://www.iribnews.ir/fa/news/988212/%DA%A9%D9%88%D9%87-%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D8%A8%D9%84%D9%88%DA%86%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D9%86>

<sup>7</sup> Shana- Petro Energy Information, May 2012, <http://www.shana.ir/fa/newsagency/pdf/189712/%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%AA%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%81-%D8%B0%D8%AE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D9%87%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%DA%AF%D8%A7%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%AC%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A8-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%82-%DA%A9%D8%B4%D9%88%D8%B1>

total population in Sistan and Baluchestan province is significantly high. Security policies have resulted in the creation of armed opposition forces, which in turn has added to the overriding sense of insecurity throughout the province. This problematic cycle of violence and execution has not only eliminated trust between the masses and the Iranian administration, but also resulted in an increasing rate of human rights violations in Sistan and Baluchestan.

