

# Adding fuel to

By Syed Fazl-e-Haider

IF Washington launches drone attacks inside Balochistan, it will push the least developed and insurgency-hit province back to the Stone Age. Its economically backward areas such as Aranji, Gandhawa, Kan, Nokandi and Gulistan present the features of medieval age.

The key to defusing militancy and discouraging Taliban recruitment is to create economic opportunities for the impoverished people of the province.

"Drone attacks will create social chaos and retard the ongoing development process in the province", said professor Tousif Akhtar, the Balochistan member on the panel of economists in the Planning Commission of Pakistan.

He told Dawn that the ongoing mega projects have yet to make a dent in the prevailing poverty and fruits of development have yet to trickle down to local people. The drone attacks will destroy the little infrastructure developed over the last few years and upset the development activities which are yet to attain momentum.

"Gwadar Port has yet to become fully operational. It still requires communication network to link it to the major commercial centres in the country and the region. Efforts are underway by the democratic government to restore peace and stability that is essential to attract investments. "Drone strikes will destabilise the whole situation and discourage foreign and local investment in the province", he added.

"Instead of resorting to the air strikes, Professor Tousif said, "the US should create economic opportunities for the local people by establishing Reconstruction Opportunity Zones (ROZs), which would be a positive step in combating economic backwardness, poverty and extremism."

The ROZs seen as the preferential trade initiative that would allow duty-free export of products from designated areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan to the American market. At present, only the border districts of the province with Afghanistan have been included in the ROZs list of eligible areas. Pakistan has already proposed to the US to include the whole of Balochistan for establishment of ROZs. The proposal for setting up ROZs has been on the agenda for long but nothing has happened.

The province is reeling under abject poverty and illiteracy which would pro-



vide a favourable environment to Taliban. The economic backwardness, lack of employment opportunities and worsening law and order may further push the disgruntled and frustrated youth to join Taliban camp.

The reports suggest that the drone attacks are likely to hit the targets in northern Balochistan and also in and around Quetta city as Americans say that top leadership of Al-Qaeda and Taliban is hiding somewhere in the province. Northern Balochistan produces a great variety and high quality fruits, particularly apples and comprises Zhob, Loralai, Qila Saifullah, Pishin, Gulistan and Quetta districts inhabited by Pakhtuns..

Balochistan has immensely suffered the fallout of the crisis in Afghanistan. The local economy is burdened with over one million Afghan refugees since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. This has been followed by a fresh influx of refugees as a result of US attack on Afghanistan after 9/11/2001. The prov-

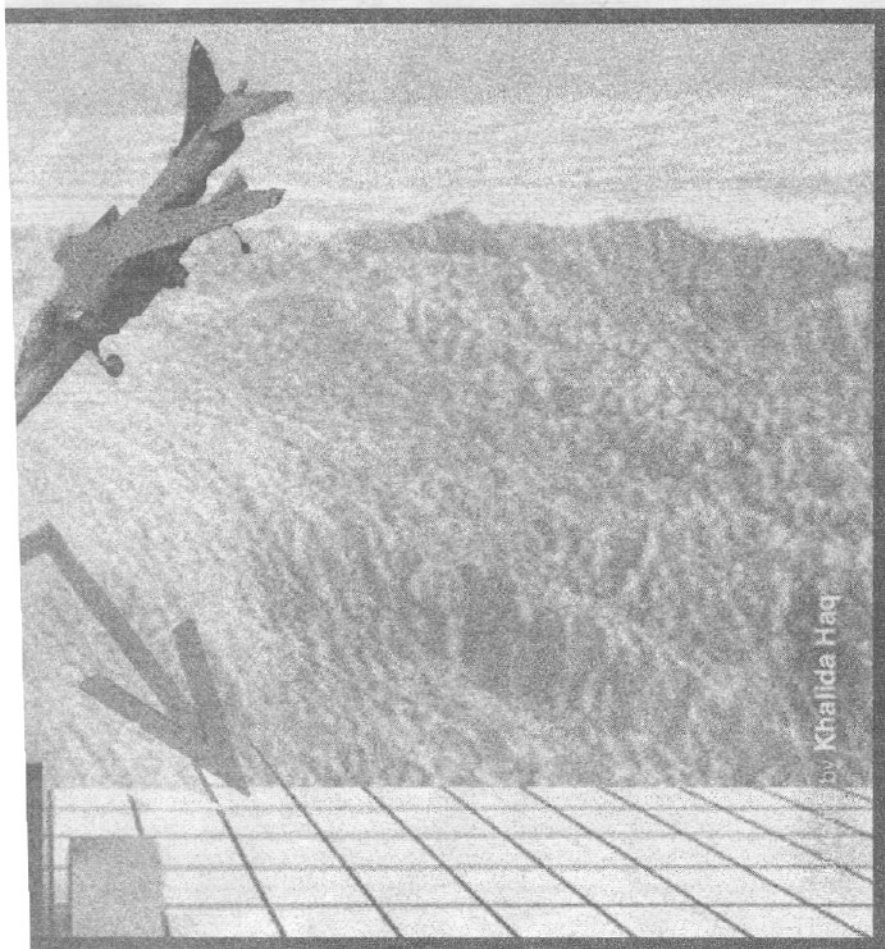
ince has been hit by acute unemployment problem and it frequently faces the resource scarcity to feed, clothe and employ the local people.

Balochistan has the highest percentage of the highly deprived, both in terms of income and other indicators of poverty and the fate of the common people has been in the hands of 'sardars' (tribal chiefs) and 'sarkars' (regimes). The sardars continue to exploit the people and the governments facilitate this exploitation. The result is the socio-economic backwardness, poverty, regional disparity and vulnerability of the common man. A rapid economic progress poses a threat to centuries old status of the tribal chiefs..

There is virtually no infrastructure, no industry, no viable road network, no agriculture extension services and no technical training centres and quality education institutions. The province has no skilled and trained labour to utilise in its natural resources. Its resource potential remains untapped as the province has been caught up in an underdevelopment

# to the fire

Pak. National  
Security



by Khalida Haq

trap.

Some districts have the lowest enrolment and literacy rates in the world, with one district recording only two per cent enrolment at the primary level, observed a World Bank official recently. With low participation in general education and low completion rates at primary and secondary levels, the average literacy rate of the population aged 10 years and above is below 30 per cent. As a result, while the unemployment and underemployment rates in the province are higher than the national rates, job vacancies are often not filled due to lack of trained personnel.

In rural areas, only 39 per cent of households have access to improved water sources within a 2-kilometer distance from their homes. Drinking water is often polluted and distributed without treatment. According to an estimate, only in five districts (out of 30 districts), sanitation is accessible to more than 51 per cent of the population; in nine districts adequate sanitation is available to

26-50 per cent of the population, and in 13 districts, household sanitation coverage is only 4-25 per cent. Access to sewage disposal infrastructure is largely absent. In most districts, less than three per cent of the people has access to wastewater disposal facilities.

The province is rich in natural resources including fisheries, natural gas, copper, lead, zinc, iron and marble. It has the potential to emerge as new economic frontier. The government has decided to set up Balochistan Trust Fund for which Pakistan would seek assistance from Friends of Pakistan group in its conference in Japan on April 17.

Balochistan is excessively dependent on the centre for meeting its financial needs and obligations. It has so far witnessed five military operations, which have not been without heavy human, social and economic costs. Drone attacks would bring further economic dislocation for the people already facing the brunt of tribalism, militancy and military operations.