



Marri tribesmen at a camp near Kandahar in Afghanistan. (Photo: Anthony Mascarenhas)

Baluch Cauldron

national spokesman for the independence movement. "Boreham Wood," he told me with a smile, "is Boreham Wood in Baluchistan."

The smouldering Baluch separatist movement is once again showing signs of coming alive. There are persistent reports that between 6,000 and 8,000 Baluch men, who have been trained and equipped with modern weapons by the Russians in Afghanistan, are preparing to launch an armed struggle this summer to win independence from Pakistan in their province. The reports identified their leader as Khair Bux Marri, chief of the Marri tribe. He is the most charismatic of the Baluch leaders and the one who has never compromised with the Pakistan government by accepting public office. Khair Bux has been living abroad since 1979 but does not seek political asylum. He left London for Kabul last summer after failing to obtain a term permission to live with his family either in Britain or in Pakistan. His arrival in Afghanistan was a Christmas gift to the Baluch and Afghans who have been looking for someone of his

calibre to unite the Baluch tribes who have been battling with the Pakistan army, on and off, for more than 30 years.

It has been suggested that the Soviet Union has long sought an effective riposte to the Afghan Mujaheddin groups by encouraging a counter-uprising in Pakistan where they have their bases. If this gambit has not been tried before, it is because of Pakistan's hitherto ambivalent position vis-à-vis the superpowers. American aid and the new American dominant influence in Pakistan, however, is said to have removed the need for such constraints and the Russians are now preparing to play their so-called "Baluch card."

This could, indeed, be the Russian and Afghan strategy. But the Baluch nationalists have their own reasons. As Sardar Atallah Menghal made clear in a remarkably candid interview he gave me recently. He said the Baluch had "no alternative" to a renewed struggle for independence since General Zia, as other Pakistani leaders before him, had firmly shut all avenues for a political settlement. Meng-

ghal contact with Khair Bux in Kabul, would neither confirm nor deny reports of an imminent armed uprising by the Baluch tribes. But he did say, in answer to my question, "the possibility is very much there."

He also spoke about the inevitability of violence and bloodshed. "No country," he told me, "has got out of the clutches of a colonial power just by begging, through the courts or by shouting slogans on the road. Bloodshed has to come in one way or another. Bloodshed has to occur in Baluchistan. Certainly our people will have to fight it out."

"Are you convinced now that there is no other way but independence?" I asked him.

"Yes," came Menghal's firm reply. "All other avenues have been closed to us. Even when I was in Pakistan (before he left to seek asylum in the West) I was convinced there was no way other than independence."

"Pakistan," Menghal said, "was gone the day they kicked East Pakistan out. For us, the Baluch, Pakistan was thrust upon us and even today we hate to be part of it. But let me say we

rape enjoyable but they did not even let us do that."

Explaining the historical perspective of the Baluch struggle against Pakistan, Menghal recalled that the start of the trauma came with the founding of Pakistan in 1947. Baluchistan, he claimed, "was the only state which did not accede willingly to Pakistan. That's on record. Kalat (the Baluch state) had the same status, the same relations with Britain's Whitehall as Nepal had. It was quite different from the relationship existing between Britain and the other (princely) states of India. But nobody bothered about this even when Kalat's two assemblies unanimously passed resolutions reiecting accession to Pakistan. What was the result? Mr. Jinnah sent his armed forces there and the ruler of Kalat was forced to sign the accession to Pakistan."

The Baluch never forgot this aggression, he said, and over the years had tried to remind the Pakistanis: "Look here, you have forced this accession on us and we are not going to accept it in our hearts." In retaliation, Pakistan launched a further

chistan is a vast but underpopulated area. And now that most of the world—Britain, Canada, the USA and parts of the Gulf—is closed to the Punjabis, they want to colonize Baluchistan just as they have colonized and taken the best lands in Sind."

In Baluchistan, Menghal said "99.9 per cent of the Central government bureaucrats, commissioners, secretaries and other functionaries are outsiders. Even labour is being brought from outside as in the case of the Hub River area near Karachi where the locals are denied jobs given to outsiders. Should there be a referendum tomorrow, the outsiders will outnumber us. This is what the intention is."

"But to achieve this," Menghal warned, "they will have to walk over innumerable dead bodies of the Baluch."

Blood Will Run

Menghal got extremely emotional. "Bloodshed has to occur in Baluchistan," he declared. "We are a small nation with practically no means. But things keep changing on this globe. I don't think we should be pes-



ans and Afghans who have
looking for someone of his hal,



Baluch children at



Harri leader, Malik Mohammad