

Pakistan sees red over PM Modi's mention of Balochistan in I-Day speech, terms it tactic to divert attention

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Islamabad: Responding to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reference to Balochistan and PoK in his Independence Day speech, Pakistan today said India was "only trying to divert world attention from the grim tragedy that has been unfolding in Kashmir over the past five weeks."

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz

Islamabad claimed that PM Modi's reference to Balochistan proved its contention that India has been allegedly "fomenting terrorism" in the province and asserted that the situation in Balochistan cannot be equated with Kashmir.

Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Adviser on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz, while responding to Modi's Independence Day speech, said "Prime Minister Modi's reference to Balochistan, which is an integral part of Pakistan, only proves Pakistan's contention that India through its main intelligence agency RAW, has been fomenting terrorism in Balochistan."

Aziz's remarks came after Modi brought up Pakistani atrocities on people of Balochistan and PoK in his Independence Day speech today.

"Today I want to specially honour and thank to some people from the ramparts of Red Fort. For the past few days the people of Baluchistan, the people of Gilgit, the people of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK), the way their citizens have heartily thanked me, the way they have acknowledged me, the goodwill they have shown towards me, the people settled far across, the land which I have not seen, the people I have not met ever, but people settled at far across acknowledge the Prime Minister of India, they honour him, so it is an honour of my 125 crores countrymen, it is respect of my 125 crores countrymen and that is why owing to the feeling of this honour, I want to heartily thank the people of Baluchistan, the people of Gilgit, the people of Pakistan occupied Kashmir for having an expression of thankfulness," Modi said in his I-Day speech.

This is for the first time the disturbed areas in the control of Pakistan have been mentioned by any Indian Prime Minister during his Independence Day speech.

Aziz claimed that India's involvement was confirmed by the public confession of "RAW's active service Naval Officer" Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was arrested in March this year from Balochistan.

Commenting on ongoing unrest in Jammu and Kashmir, Aziz said, "Thousands of unarmed youth are protesting every day for their right of self determination. More than 70 innocent Kashmiris have been killed and more than 6000 injured."

"There is constant curfew and complete media blackout for the past 37 days. These events have nothing to do with terrorism. It is an indigenous movement for self determination, a right promised to the Kashmiris by the UN Security Council," Aziz was quoted as saying in a press release by Pakistan's Foreign Office.

Aziz claimed that at this time, the contrast between Kashmir and PoK could not be more stark.

Aziz said India is a large country, "in fact the second largest in the world and this must be acknowledged, but a large country does not automatically become a great country, specially when it unleashes such brute force against innocent citizens to suppress their right to protest or when it deliberately uses pallet guns to permanently destroy the eyesight of

over 100 youth."

He said India should recognise that the core issue of Kashmir cannot be resolved by bullets and needed a political solution, through serious negotiations between India and Pakistan.

Aziz's remarks came after Pakistan formally invited India for talks on Kashmir, a move already rejected by New Delhi which had insisted it would talk on "contemporary and relevant" issues in Indo-Pak relations.

Earlier, Balochistan Chief Minister Nawab Sanaullah Zehri had dismissed Prime Minister Modi's assertion that the province was suffering from repression and accused India of fomenting trouble there.

Zehri made the remarks yesterday after Modi, during an all-party meeting on the Kashmir situation last week, had said the time had come to expose the atrocities committed "by our neighbouring nation" in Balochistan and the areas of Jammu and Kashmir under its illegal occupation.

Zehri, while addressing a ceremony in the provincial capital of Quetta to mark Pakistan's Independence Day, said there was no comparison between Balochistan and Kashmir.

"The government and people of Balochistan vehemently reject Modi's statement on the situation in the province," Zehri said.

"A handful of miscreants, manipulated by the Indian intelligence agency, are involved in anti-peace activities in Balochistan. People of Balochistan are loyal and patriotic... they love Pakistan and will never support the nefarious designs of the country's enemies," he said.

Zehri blamed India for unrest in Balochistan and said that arrest of a "serving" Indian navy officer vindicates Pakistan's claim.

"India is behind terrorism, militancy and anti-peace activities in Balochistan," he alleged.

Zehri asserted that the situation in Balochistan is very different from that of Kashmir where he claimed people want freedom from India and Indian armed forces.

"But in Balochistan, the people want to live within the legal framework of the country," he said.

Zehri said there was no fight for freedom in Balochistan as only a few misguided youth were involved in militancy and anti-peace activities in the province.