

Chiefs with eroding power threaten tribal peace

By Nadeem Saeed



DERA GHAZI KHAN: A common scene in tribal areas where there is no dearth of arms — Dawn photo

DERA GHAZI KHAN, July 1: One thing which can easily be assessed from recent events in the district's tribal belt, especially in the Bozdar area, that grip of Tumandars on their subjects has started loosening as common people have not even started contesting elections against their Sardars but are also questioning their conduct in running tribal affairs.

Earlier, a sardar's order was not challengeable and people had to obey them even against their will. But now the situation has started changing as, after the May 28 last violent protest of Leghari clansmen when chiefs asked people to surrender some 20 men as a result of a deal with local administration to hush up the issue, none of the tribesmen got ready to become the 'scapegoat'.

The Bozdar chiefs also faced a similar situation after bloody by-polls of June 10 in their domain. So far, the chiefs have not been able to bring round their tribesmen to reconcile the matter and hand over people wanted in the murder case of eight people.

Except the Khosas who still have a grip in the areas of their influence, all other sardars, including Legharis, Kasranis, Bozdars and Londs, faced opposing candidates in the May 20 LB polls even in their strongholds. The vote percentage of anti-sardar candidates is showing improvement after each and every election.

But, ironically, the change in this century-old system is not smooth and after the Sirbail incident in Bozdar area in which seven people were gunned down in a polling clash it is being feared that matters may become similar to those being observed in chieftains of Balochistan where Bugti, Rind and Raisani chiefs are at war with sub-groups within their tribes. It will be interesting to note that intra-clashes of Balochistan's tribes also geared up from the rivalries of local bodies polls. For instance, wars in Bugti areas started from the LB polls of 1991 when anti-Nawab Bugti people formed an alliance to dethrone the chief and that alliance's strong position led to the assassination of its main campaigner and PPP leader, Mir Hamza

Bugti.

Another aspect observed during the recent tribal unrest was that besides tribal traditions state machinery like border military police (BMP) and civil administration have failed completely in solving problems amicably and consequently people from the top had to intervene in the matters to avert further tension.

Actually, the BMP comprised mainly of nominees or favourites of tribal chiefs as, in return, they gave assurance of peace in their areas. But with eroding influence of sardars on their subjects the BMP's influence has consequently started diminishing because its personnel always remain loyal to sardars rather than the state.

Before the separation of judiciary and executive in 1996, post of the political assistant (PA) was very important in resolving tribal feuds as tribal people respected the office due to its enormous powers. The PA convened annual Jirga of the tribes at Fort Munro where all the chiefs held a meeting collectively to honour the PA and the following day latter arranged a dinner for all the Jirga members. The forum of Jirga

had played a vital role in maintaining lasting peace among rivals by deciding the matters very justly.

But now the role of the PA has shrunk to mere a DSP of police. He can neither call a Jirga nor decide disputes. This disability of once prestigious post was evident during the recent crisis in Dera's tribal area when Legharis and Bozdars put up their cases with bureaucratic circles of the provincial capital. The deputy commissioner, as senior commandant of the BMP, and PA, as commandant of the same force, looked helpless in the whole situation.

The emerging disappearance of authority in the heavily-armed tribal area is a matter of great concern. A Baloch intellectual, Allah Bukhsh Bozdar, thinks that the problem emerged when judiciary and executive were separated without keeping in view the culture and traditions of Balochi tribes.

He said it was a good step but not at the right time because without introducing basic infrastructure in the tribal area it was unjust to make tribal people victim of miseries like delayed disposal of cases.