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Tribal Council in Pakistan Threatens Highway Blockade Over Child's Murder

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A tribal jirga (council of elders) in Pakistan's Tank district has vowed to block the Indus Highway (N-55) on July 29, 2025, following the murder of a nine-year-old girl, sparking outrage in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The council demands justice and an end to heavy-handed security tactics. This article examines the escalating tensions, the community's grievances, and the broader failure to address lawlessness in Pakistan's tribal regions.

The jirga, convened in Gul Imam, issued an 11-point charter demanding the release of detainees without proven militant ties, an end to warrantless raids, and accountability for the girl's killing, per Times of India. The murder, which locals attribute to negligence or misconduct by security forces, fueled protests after a viral video showed residents confronting armed personnel, an act of defiance in the militarized region. The Indus

Highway, a vital artery linking Karachi to Peshawar, faces disruption at Pezu, threatening trade and transport. A tribal elder, speaking anonymously to The Express Tribune, called the government's response, offering three sheep and Rs 2.5 million (approximately \$9,000) "a hollow gesture meant to silence us," reflecting distrust in authorities.

The unrest highlights deeper issues in KP's tribal belt, where state reliance on tribal jirgas often overshadows constitutional law. The Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), banned for challenging security policies, echoes the jirga's demands, alleging collective punishment disguised as counterterrorism. A 2024 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) report notes over 400 "honor" killings annually, with systemic failures enabling impunity. The girl's death, though not explicitly an honor killing, underscores how unchecked power, whether tribal or state, endangers vulnerable communities, especially women and children.

The government's approach, promising investigations while leaning on tribal customs, lacks conviction. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's pledges ring hollow against decades of neglecting judicial reforms in tribal areas. Pakistan needs a robust legal framework, not symbolic payouts, to curb violence and restore trust. Without dismantling parallel systems like jirgas and addressing security overreach, such tragedies will persist, leaving communities to mourn and highways at risk of blockade.