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Amnesty Urges CM Bugti to Free Detained Baloch Activists

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On July 15, 2025, Amnesty International issued an urgent appeal to Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti, demanding the immediate release of six Baloch activists who were detained for peacefully exercising their rights. The appeal highlights concerns over Pakistan's use of restrictive laws to suppress dissent, sparking debate about balancing security and human rights in the restive province.

The activists—Mahrang Baloch, Beebow Baloch, Gulzadi Baloch, Shah Jee Sibghat Ullah, Bebag Zehri, and Ghaffar Baloch—were arrested on March 22, 2025, during a sit-in near the University of Balochistan protesting alleged extrajudicial killings. Amnesty condemned their detention under the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) ordinance as unlawful, noting that the detention exceeds the legal 90-day limit. Amnesty called the arrests part of a wider crackdown on human rights in Balochistan and urged Chief Minister Bugti to drop the charges and uphold Pakistan's international obligations.

The Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), led by Mahrang Baloch, has faced intensified state pressure. Activists were transferred to terrorism custody on July 8, a move the BYC described as illegal and unconstitutional. Nadia Baloch, Mahrang's sister, said that state tactics—including denial of access to legal counsel—aim to silence dissent. She added, "Mahrang remains strong, but we fear for her life."

Chief Minister Bugti defended the government's position, stating on July 13 that the human rights narrative about Balochistan was inconsistent with facts and needed correction. He questioned the legitimacy of violent protests, asking, "What kind of rights movement involves killing people?" This reflects a broader state narrative that frames activism as a security threat, a stance critics say masks systemic abuses.

The detentions have fueled widespread concern. As Balochistan continues to grapple with unrest, the tension between state security measures and activists' rights calls for a balanced, nuanced approach to restore trust and uphold the rule of law.