Fear stalks Turbat as Islamists vow acid attack on women faces

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The militant Lashkar-i-Jhangvi has threatened to throw acid on the faces of women who venture to the bazaars in Mekran's largest town of Turbat, according to a radio report.

"The militants sent text messages to the public that women who venture to go for shopping in the market place like the Lehri market and StarPlus market on their own would be attacked by Lashkar-i-Jhangvi," a caller told the pro-militant Radio Gwank based in Sweden.

Balochistan has been a battleground for secular and democratic forces and Islamists for many years, but the Islamists mostly existed on the fringe of society.

During the military dictatorship of General Ziaul Haq, Saudi Arabia pumped in millions of dollars to finance hundreds of madressahs where poor Baloch students went for religious education.

"What we see now is the coming of age of the graduates of those madressahs," said former speaker of the Balochistan assembly Mir Akram Dashti of the National Party.

There have been at least three reported cases of acid throwing in Balochistan in the last two years. According to Amnesty International, on 29 April, three sisters, Fatima, aged 20, Sakeena, aged 14 and Saima, aged 8, were disfigured by acid thrown at them in Kalat town, Balochistan, apparently for violating a ban on leaving the house without a male guardian.

The latest threat has come in the Muslim Lent, or Holy Ramadhan, when Islamists generally become more excited because of the hunger pangs due to fasting.

In Turbat, itself there cases two years when needles were pricked into the bodies of women shoppers by attackers who would run away after harassing the women, according to Radio Gwank.

In the last decade militancy has also raised its head in Balochistan. The separatist militants have often targeted the softer nationalist for not raising the independence slogans by accusing them of being government informers.

Those killed by the militants include Maula Bakhsh Dashti, Mohammed Hussain, Dr Lal Bakhsh and Nasim Jangiyan of the National Party

Just 10 days back Dr. Malik Baloch, president of the National Party deplored that political immaturity of the militants was helping the rise of fundamentalists in Balochistan and said as many as seven different government agencies are busy countering the secular and democratic forces.

Secular Democrats in Balochistan complain they are sandwiched between the military, mullahs and militants.

Moreover, at least one in every four Baloch is a Zikri, who do not believe in going for Hajj to Saudi Arabia, and any growth of Islamic fundamentalism is likely to tear apart the Baloch political fabric.

Saudi dollars and agents are said to be busy at work to this day not only inside Balochistan but also London and Washington DC to fan religious extremism in Eastern (Pakistan) Balochistan and Western (Iranian) Balochistan.

Baloch members of Lashkar-i-Jhangvi that issued the threats to the women have been involved in the massacre of Shia Hazaras.