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1. Who is behind the mass abductions in Nigeria and what do they want? What has caused the recent surge in kidnappings? Why do they specifically target schoolchildren?

Why in News?

Battling its worst economic crisis in years, Nigeria is also facing serious security challenges amid a resurgence of kidnappings in its troubled northern region. Over 600 people, including at least 300 schoolchildren, have been kidnapped in the northeastern and northwestern parts of the country since the end of February.

What is the latest crisis?

Reports of a mass abduction first emerged from a remote area in northeastern Borno earlier this year. On February 29, suspected Boko Haram militants abducted at least 200 internally displaced people, mostly women and children, while they were gathering firewood outside their camps, in the Ngala Local Government Area. Similar incidents were reported from the northwestern region in quick succession. On March 7, 287 students were kidnapped from a government school in the Chikun area of Kuriga town in Kaduna State. The attackers abducted children and a few staff members, demanding one billion naira (about \$6,00,000) for their release.



Nigeria last experienced a surge in targeted attacks on educational institutions in 2021. Approximately 150 students were kidnapped by armed men in four months. Although most were eventually released, at least five were killed. The 2014 kidnapping of 276 girls by Boko Haram insurgents from a school in the Chibok town of Borno State continues to be one of the worst crimes committed in recent years. Of the 276, several were forced to marry and endure physical and psychological abuse. A decade later, 98 are still missing.

Who's behind the mass abductions?

At the time of the first attack in February, Boko Haram emerged as the primary suspect, given its track record of violence in Nigeria. The group has been engaged in a prolonged insurgency, causing widespread devastation and displacement. Kidnapping has been a key component of their terror tactics. However, with no organisation claiming responsibility for the recent abductions, there are suspicions that local armed gangs in these regions, commonly referred to as bandits, might be behind the incidents.

Relatively new actors in the turbulent security landscape, bandits are believed to be an outcome of years of conflict over land and water between nomadic herdsman and farming communities. While disputes earlier centred around such basic needs, bandits have evolved into organised armed groups in recent times. They have taken to looting, kidnapping for ransom, and forcibly seizing control of valuable assets like gold mines and farmlands.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

Source: The Hindu

2. Who are the Majeed Brigade, the Baloch militants who carried out Gwadar attack?

Why in news?

The Majeed Brigade of the separatist group Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) has claimed responsibility on a complex outside Pakistan's strategic Gwadar Port. Pakistan has said eight militants and two security personnel were killed in the attack; the BLA has, however, claimed to have killed 25 security personnel.

The BLA is the most prominent of the many separatist groups in Pakistan's Balochistan province. The Majeed Brigade, which has been active since 2011, is the BLA's dedicated suicide squad. The unit is named after two brothers, both of whom were called Majeed Langove.

The Balochistan context

Balochistan, in Pakistan's southwest, is the country's largest and most sparsely populated province. It has oil reserves and abundant natural resources, but the ethnic Baloch are Pakistan's poorest and most under-represented people.

At the time of Partition, Balochistan comprised multiple chiefdoms owing allegiance to the British. Ahmed Yar Khan, the chief of Kalat, was the most powerful of these tribal chiefs, and hoped to secure an independent state for his people. However, he was forced to accede in 1948, after Pakistan invaded Kalat.



Map showing Baloch areas in Pakistan and Iran.

This triggered an insurgency which remains ongoing, fuelled by persisting economic disaffection, political disenfranchisement, and repression by the Pakistani state.

In many ways, the China-backed Gwadar Port is a symbol of the economic injustice faced by the Baloch — despite rampant unemployment in the province, engineers and technical specialists were hired from Punjab, Sindh, and even China.

In recent years, Baloch militants have repeatedly targeted both Gwadar and Chinese nationals in the country.

Majeed Sr and Bhutto

In May 1972, the National Awami Party (NAP) came to power in Balochistan. Nationally, the NAP sat in opposition to Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP). The NAP had long advocated for greater regional autonomy in Pakistan, and it was emboldened by the secession of Bangladesh in 1971.

But Bhutto, chafing from the humiliation of Pakistan's defeat to India, was unwilling to grant any major concessions. From the beginning of the NAP's term in the provincial government, Bhutto attempted to undermine its working, using the office of the governor and the bureaucracy of Balochistan, which remained under the control of the Pakistan central government.

Meanwhile, the more radical Baloch nationalists continued the insurgency, which created a serious law and order situation in the province.

After a cache of arms supposedly meant for insurgents was discovered, Bhutto dismissed the NAP government in February 1973. This led to both the insurgency and the Pakistani state

repression becoming worse in Balochistan. Between 1973 and 1977, thousands of fighters and military personnel were killed in the fighting, and there were reports of mass atrocities against the Baloch by Pakistani forces.

It is in this context that Majeed Langove Senior, then a young Baloch man, decided to assassinate Bhutto. On August 2, 1974, as Bhutto arrived in Quetta to attend a public gathering, Majeed Senior waited atop a tree, a grenade in hand. He had no plans to escape, and was most certainly going to lose his life in his bid to kill Bhutto.

And he did — even before he had a chance to kill the Pakistani leader. The grenade burst in Majeed Senior's hand as he waited for Bhutto's motorcade, killing him instantly.

Jr's sacrifice, Majeed Brigade

The death of Majeed Senior was mythologised for posterity by the actions of his younger brother, Majeed Langove Junior, who was born two years after Senior was killed.

On March 17, 2010, Pakistani forces surrounded a house hosting a number of Baloch militants in Quetta. One man — Junior — decided to put up a fight, and buy time for his comrades to exit. After an hour's resistance, Junior was killed.

Majeed Junior's death was mourned by nationalists across Balochistan. After it became widely known that he was the younger brother of Senior, who too had given his life for the cause of Balochi freedom, the Majeed Langove brothers were raised to near-mythical status.

When Aslam Achu, a BLA leader, decided to establish a suicide squad, the name 'Majeed' was chosen for it.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Source: Indian Express