

QUETTA - Gunmen kidnapped a Swiss man and woman as they were eating at a hotel in Pakistan's southwest Balochistan province on Friday, a senior police official said. The kidnapping underscores the deep insecurity in Pakistan, where abductions have been on the rise.

Many are carried out by criminals, and some are believed to lead to ransoms that help fund militants.

Most kidnapping victims in the country are Pakistani, but foreign aid workers, diplomats and other foreigners have also been targeted. Both Taliban and separate Baloch militants operate in Balochistan, Pakistan's biggest but poorest province, bordering Afghanistan and Iran. Nationalists have for decades been campaigning for autonomy and control of its resources, arguing that few of the profits are spent in the province.

There have been incidents of kidnapping in Pakistan over the past few years, especially in the northwest and southwest areas on the border with Afghanistan, where Islamist militants have abducted several foreigners.

Authorities were trying to figure out exactly who the Swiss pair were and what they were doing in the Loralai area, local official told.

The Swiss Foreign Ministry said it was aware of a possible kidnapping case in Balochistan. Spokeswoman said the ministry was in contact with Pakistan authorities but would give no further details.

The couple traveling from Islamabad was kidnapped near the district of Loralai, the official said quoting witnesses. They were driving from Punjab province, and when they reached Loralai, 150 km north of Quetta, the capital of the province, they were given a police escort. However, once they reached its outskirts, beyond the area under the police jurisdiction, they were left without the security guides.

Balochistan is a particularly dangerous region in Pakistan. It is going through a low-level separatist insurgency, and criminal gangs involved in the kidnapping for ransom trade are common.

## **A Swiss couple kidnapped in SW Pakistan**

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Local Correspondent.