

History and Politics of Sindh



By Jawaid Riaz

For months now Karachi has been engulfed in violence. It is imperative that the government sorts things out. Military interventions are never desirable. But then neither are continuing chaos and the disruption of life. Our most urgent need at the moment is to bring this anarchy to an end any way we can. Karachi, as the country's commercial capital, is obviously significant in more ways than one. It is also true that at least major political parties in the city have already called for army intervention. The MQM have said that troops should be deployed. This reflects their level of concern and lack of faith in the government's ability to control the situation. Given that things appear to have gone from bad to worse quite rapidly, the army's concern is easy to understand. Ideally, the institution should refrain from making forays into politics. Under General Ashfaq Parvez Kiyani it has largely avoided doing so. The short, terse statement issued by the ISPR however reflects growing alarm that is shared by many in the country. The millions who live in Karachi, and have suffered most, occupy first place among them.

An administrative body from a small geographic area, such as a city, town, county, or province is headed by elected peoples of the locality A local government will typically only have control over their specific geographical region, and cannot pass or enforce laws that will affect a wider area. Local governments can pass taxes, and do many other things that a national government would do, just on a smaller scale.

The 2001 **Local Government Ordinance** provides for devolution of government to district administrations. (Districts are the third tier of government, being sub-divisions of Provinces Prior to the Local Government Ordinance they were known as *sub-divisions*.) Each district administration is headed by a District Coordinating Officer (*DCO*] and a *Zila Nazim*.

The **District Coordination Officer** is the administrative head of the District Administration. They have wide-ranging responsibility for overseeing, improving and directing the approved plans of the District Government

The **Zila Nazim** is the executive head of the District Administration. Their role is similar to district governor or prefect, with responsibility for implementing government strategy and developing initiatives arising out of it.

PPP, ANP, SNF and other Sindhi nationalists still believe in the commissionerate system, but PPP did not make it a matter of ego for the sake of reconciliation or to stay in power at any cost; it admitted that the ordinance for reviving Gen Musharraf local bodies' system should have been promulgated throughout the province instead of just two cities.

But if we study the political history of these parties they always speak, at every forum, against the civil and military bureaucracy system. I do understand that rural Sindh was agitated over it and their concerns were justified as the dual system was wrong. Realizing the mistake, the government promulgated the LG ordinance on the same day to bring uniformity to the system in the province.

This should not a victory or defeat of any party and the reversal the system to start a dialogue process with the allies is a healthy sign. The LG system should be revived for the sake of law and order, PPP and allies should give every sacrifice for establishing peace. No political party wants political polarization at a time when the country is facing multifarious problems ranging from unemployment to internal security and external conspiracies, and the system should be revived in the larger interest of the province.

The past role of the nationalist parties in Sindh was never in the interest of Sindh or Sindhis. Let me ask the nationalists why they had not protested when this system was imposed during the government of Gen Musharraf. I must write here that when this law was passed a nationalist (Jalal Mehmood Shah) was deputy speaker of the Sindh Assembly. Since he was sitting in corridors of power he never opposed, but rather supported the bill. The nationalist parties' leadership has got no electoral mandate from the people of Sindh in the history of province. The real mandate holder of Sindh could be the PPP in rural Sindh and MQM in urban Sindh as per the mandate of the people. Now I raised this question where these nationalist parties stand and what kind of people mandate they are keeping in the province in which they are guarding the interest of the Sindhi peoples or Sindh Dharti (land).

The interesting point of the representation in the Sindh is not by Sindhis. The people who speak Sindhi as their mother language, and were born in Sindh are called "SAMATH"—the Sindhis, or the Samath, are in the minority now, in Sindh, as you see the other nationals, such as the Talpur, the Zardari, the Maksi, the Jatui, the Jamali, the Chandio, who are all actually Baloch, now claim to be Sindhi. They are bilinguals—they speak Balochi and Seraiki, when they are in Sindh they

Speak Sindhi, otherwise they speak their mother tongue. So the migrated people from India, who settled in Sindh, who either speak Urdu or Punjabi—are called Mahajir or Abadgar. The point I am making here is that when the abovementioned Balochis are considered Sindhi, why don't they consider Mahajirs and Abadgars Sindhi?

We should not forget the history of 1947 migration. If we leave Bengal out of the equation, there were two great waves of migration in northern India at the time of Partition: one from East Punjab to West Punjab, and vice versa; the other from Delhi, Lucknow and Bhopal in the north, and Hyderabad Deccan in the south, to Karachi. These migrations were dissimilar in character.

While Punjab suffered the most in terms of looting, plunder, killings and mass rape, when the dust settled and passions had time to cool, the process of assimilation was relatively quick because East and West Punjabis, minor differences of course apart, came from the same cultural stock. With minor variations of dialect, they spoke the same language and shared the same history.

This was not so with the southern migration to Karachi and Hyderabad. Karachi was a cosmopolitan city even then – a mini-Bombay, so to speak – but it was the capital of Sindh, the culture and language of whose native inhabitants was radically different from that of the people who were coming to it from India.

Pakistan would be the poorer without this infusion of Delhi, Lucknow and Hyderabad Deccan culture. True, there was a downside to it as well, in that the new migrants, culturally advanced and on the whole more educated than the natives of the parts which constitute Pakistan, brought with their culture also their own prejudices. Insecurity and fear were part of their migration baggage and these were infused into the thinking of the new state. But in cultural terms the arid wastes of Pakistan were enriched by that influx of talent and learning.

Punjabis being Punjabis, no new center of culture arose in Punjab. But in Karachi we saw the birth of a transplanted culture, its soul carrying the imprint of loss and nostalgia, the usual hallmarks of any migration.

The downside comes from this very circumstance. Sixty four years after the Partition we continue to live in the past, beset by old insecurities even though the times have changed and the old certitudes which gave birth to those insecurities no longer survive.

