



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Demand for New Provinces in Pakistan: A Source of Stability or Instability**

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**ABSTRACT**

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The subject of creating more administrative units for efficient administration and governance has become a hotly debated topic in national debates in many Asian countries and Pakistan is no exception in this regard. In the face of increasing population and subsequent complex nature of issues, the administrative setup of the country requires some changes to be made. This study explores the prospects of creation of new provinces in Pakistan. While exploring the possibilities and challenges for creating more provinces, it invites debate about the negative implications for the future of the country if these creations are, even slightly, based on ethnic lines. It investigates not only the factors that pose hurdles in the way of creating new provinces but also thrives on the benefits that are offered by additional provinces. Lastly, it makes comparative analysis whether the demand for new provinces brings further division in an already divided society or it helps redressing the grievances of various ethnic groups and strengthens national integration. This study is predominantly qualitative in nature and focuses both primary and secondary sources of data collection. Analyzing the challenges and negative implications associated with the creation of new provinces, consensus among the mainstream political parties of Pakistan is required, the possibility of which seems bleak in the near future.

**Introduction**

The countries that experienced disintegration on ethnic basis in the post-colonial era Pakistan is one of them. The debacle of East Pakistan is associated with the ethnic cleavages between East and West Pakistan that resulted into the creation of Bangladesh.

Pakistan, after its disintegration in 1971, looked more homogeneous and compact geographically. Yet, it again badly failed to accommodate the concerns of ethnic identities and still the voices of new provinces and separate independent status are heard across the country.

The issue of creating additional provinces in Pakistan is associated with the issue of national security as it is considered a source of political stability or instability. The demand for new provinces has long been the hot agenda of national political discourse which got further momentum after the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment.

On the issue of carving out additional provinces, two schools of thought exist in the country. First school of thought that stresses for a centralized administrative structure for the country argues that the demand of additional provinces will be a new Ping-Pong and unleash violent conflicts in the country. Pakistan, being an ideological state, is facing the issue of carving out of new provinces on ethnic identities and linguistics grounds that can not only be detrimental to political stability but also to the national integration (Ahmar, 1998).

Those who favor the later thought support the concept of decentralization. According to them, by reorganizing the sub-provincial identities, there will be a positive impact on the transformation of the country's age-old ethnic, lingual and cultural groups. The demand for additional provinces from almost all the existing provinces of Pakistan reflects the undercurrents in the society of Pakistan having grave consequences for intra-national security.

Another view prevails in Pakistan regarding the fallout of additional provinces. The proponents of this thought argue that, "administratively having 20-25 provinces will ensure decentralization and improve public services. In reality, it could increase decentralization. Most of the administrative benefits, from having more provinces, can be gained at lower cost by empowering the local governments which the provinces are avoiding" (Murtaza, 2014). It is further argued that "perhaps the strongest administrative reason for making new provinces relates not to the impact locally but to the incongruence of the overall federation where Punjab comprises 55% of the population and Balochistan 40% of the landmass. Dividing Punjab especially could reduce ethnic power disparities, but only if divided units vote differently. Otherwise, Punjab's proportion and clout in the senate will increase" (Murtaza, 2014).

The dilemma of Punjab as the most populous province of the country is two-fold. Punjab or more precisely Central Punjab, which is in control of the power structure of the country in general and Punjab in particular, will lose its control if voices of additional provinces from Punjab for 'Junobi (southern) Punjab' are materialized into reality. Secondly, the conflict is unavoidable between Punjai speaking and Seraiki speaking people dwelling in southern Punjab if the additional province is carved on ethnic and lingual basis.

### **Theoretical framework**

The issue of additional provinces is strongly interlinked with federation and not devoid of federalism debate. So, it is imperative to discuss different models of federalism to explore the prospects and possibilities of additional provinces. Elazer considered federation as “a comprehensive political system from the existing system of governance to maintain political integrity among the federating units by giving them constitutional privileges to accelerate their independent integrity” (Elazer, 1995).

Federalism is also considered a unique system for dealing with diverse and non-homogeneous states. It is being practiced in a score of developed and developing countries such as the USA, Australia, Belgium, Germany, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, Pakistan and India. All these countries have possessed a constitution which differs from one country to another (Bukhari & Faisal, 2013).

Regarding paradigms of federalism, there is hardly any one specific theory that can be overwhelmingly employed or expounded. However, scholars of federalism have different ideas about federalism. To Burgess and Gagnon, federalism is all about the management of human associations in the country and it tries to balance and maintain unity and diversity (Burgess, 1993). Federalism, for Stevenson, is nothing but protection of minorities (Stevenson, 2000). As far as La Forest ideas about federalism are concerned, it is a kind of partnership and friendship between the federal government and its federating units (La Forest & Gibbins, 1998). To Tully, it is basically an expression of democratic practices and it also encourages autonomy within federating units (Tully & Alain, 2001). Keeping all these definitions in view, it is crystal clear that these are quite ambiguous in nature. Hence, there is consensus among scholars that no specific theory can be employed for all federal studies. Keeping this very context in view, Rekha Saxena argued that every country opts for a theory or system that best fits to its own perspectives and demands. She further argues that it is the social fabric, culture, geographic location and history of the country that determines whether the country should have executive, parliament or judiciary-centered federation (Saxena, 2011).

Burgess supports Saxena’s view by stating that the ideas of federalism vary from one country to another. Interestingly, they vary from people to political actors living in the same country. It is actually the concrete reality out of which the conception of federalism develops (Burgess, 1993). The framers of Indian Constitution conceived of a federal structure ensuring accountability and effectiveness by honoring the diversity and heterogeneity of the society of India. Thus, the features of both the presidential and parliamentary system were incorporated into the Indian Constitution. However, the society that changes constantly plays a key role in shaping federalism. It is very interesting to see how the countries around the globe in general and India in particular cope with the demands of federating units. The cases of the US and Indian federalism are presented in the figures below:



Figure I: Coming Together Federalism

The “Coming Together Federalism” has been witnessed in the US along with many European countries as represented in the Figure I. The federating units, known as states in the US, seek protection from Federal government from all the possible overseas aggressions for realizing their autonomy or security. Thus, the US states come together to form a federal government by transferring their powers to the center. This whole process is known as “Coming Together Federalism.”

Due to the diverse socio-economic, political and cultural values in addition of the aspirations of the people, the Indian political structure is neither unitary nor purely federal. Due to the inclusion of both unitary and federal system’s features some scholars argued that India is a quasi-federal state instead of unitary or pure federal state. Although, at the time of partition in 1947, both of the infant countries opted the “Westminster Model” through which the federation holds different administrative units together irrespective of their culture and identity. But Indian politician and policy-makers brought many changings in the process of federalization. These were due to the several demands of self-recognition and identity politics.

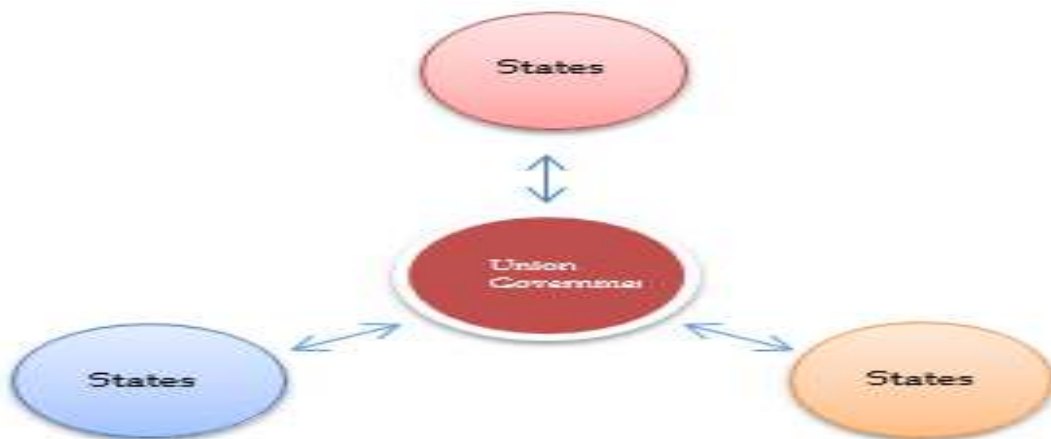


Figure II: Holding Together Federalism

The Indian government dealt with the demand for new states which were mostly raised in the name of autonomy, regional imbalance, economic disparity, development discrepancies and lack of political representations and grievances of the underdeveloped regions. The concept of holding together federalism dealt efficiently with the separatist movements.

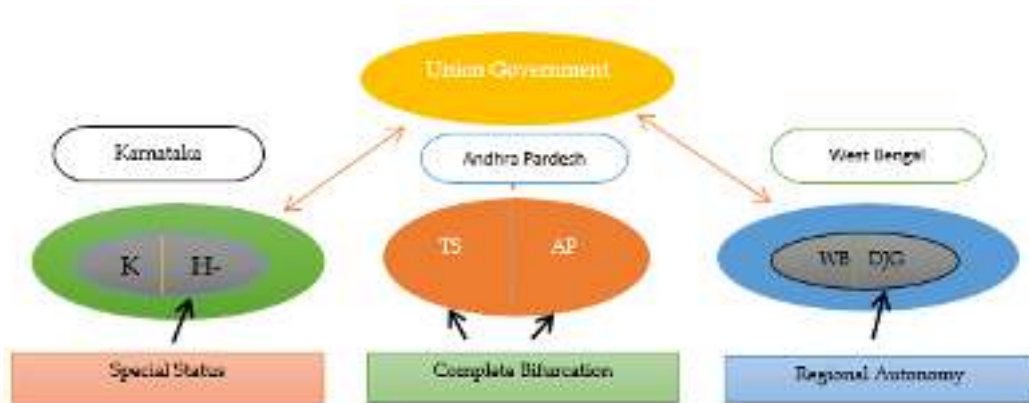


Figure III: Depiction of Indian Case: Demand for Provinces

Figure III reflects different instances of the process of the Indian federalization and the response of the Union Government. For instance, by granting special status to Hyderabad-Karnataka, the government discouraged and wore down the voices of separate state movement which was due to the lack of economic opportunities, low level of development, and poor health and education facilities. In case of Darjeeling, instead of dividing the state, India assigned regional autonomy to this region. Factors of regional political inequality and socio-economic backwardness were behind the separate state of Darjeeling. And to meet the long standing demand of new Telangana State, the Andhra Pradesh state was divided into Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. This demand was mainly due to weak socio-economic situation, development discrepancies and grievances. Thus, the Indian government dealt with these three different problems differently.

As far as Pakistan's political system is concerned, the framers of constitution have to opt the federal model of the US or Canada. In the former system the federation has nominated some powers for her and the residuary powers were delegated to the units while in the later model the administrative units nominated powers for her and residuary delegated to the federation.

Both of the models were rejected in the constituent assembly. A new model, based on 1935 Government of India Act, was adopted with three legislative lists. First was the federal list, which relates to the matter concerned with the federation. Second was provincial list that contain the provisions regarding the functions and powers of the provinces. The concurrent list was adopted as third, which overlapped the powers of federation and provinces in some peculiar matters. Unfortunately, the First Constitution of Pakistan was abrogated in 1958, after two years of its promulgation. Its Second

Constitution too was abrogated in 1969. The 1973 Constitution was suspended by the imposition of Martial Law in 1977.

Although, the Constitution of 1973 was restored again in 1988 with the revival of democracy but the only article which was exercised during these eleven years was 58-2b to dismiss the elected governments by the President of the state. Despite the quality improvements in the Constitution of 1973 through the 18<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment, a lot of fine improvements are required to ensure the true sense of federalism. In case of new provinces the weak federalism will further suffer. Only a pure sense of federalism can ensure the national integration. If new provinces have to be carved out then a lot of significant improvements need to be done in the existing federal structure of the state. The issue of additional provinces will further aggravate the already troubled federalism if proper arrangements are not done to accommodate all the stakeholders.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

### **Implications of New Provinces for National Integration**

Lately, the demand for the creation of new provinces in Pakistan has been gaining impetus due to the ever increasing promises of the political elites during their election campaigns for their political gains. The constitution provides a way to carve the administrative units out. However, the basic problem which warrants discussion while keeping in view the public demand for the creation of new provinces is: should the creation of new provinces be based on ethnic basis or administrative basis? Pakistan's four existing provinces are established on the basis of ethno-lingual lines. The creation of new provinces in Pakistan is not the only factor behind the demands for transformation of the federal structure of Pakistan. Rather the potential issues of conflicts and violence that might erupt after the creation of new provinces are when they are created without the due consideration for ethnic minorities and relevant stakeholders' interests (Ahmar, 2013).

The sense of deprivation in the underdeveloped regions, if rationally analyzed, is due to the lack of provisions of the rights granted by the constitution of the country. Most of the developmental budgets are consumed in the provincial capitals and its neighboring cities and nothing is left for the development of remote and underdeveloped areas. These developmental discrepancies and grievances of the underprivileged are further exploited politically. As per the underdevelopment and poverty index, Balochistan province is the poorest region of the country. Musakhel is the poorest district of the country located in Balochistan. Interestingly, all the poorest regions are located at the periphery of the provinces (Dawn, 2002). The global Human Development Index (HDI) of the country is not in a satisfactory slab (Najam, 2017).

The federation, for variety of reasons, never let the provinces even to enjoy the constitutional rights ensured by the constitution. Regional politicians and officials further exploit the poor masses by playing with the sentiments of these aggrieved regions. Thus religious, ethnic and lingual divides, on many instances, have shaken this country. Due to different identity politics movements, Pakistan is passing through a very

volatile phase and if these movements remained unchecked, it would endanger the social fabric of the country.

It has been argued that if the lingual and ethnic identities were legitimized in the form of separate administrative units, it would threaten the existence of Pakistan. In 1955, the religious-feudal-military-bureaucratic nexus became the factor of establishment of the One Unit while dissolution of provinces in West Pakistan in order to counterbalance East Pakistan that had the demographic advantage over West Pakistan. Although, in 1970, the implementation of the legal framework order restored the provinces, since then Pakistan's federal map has not changed.

The issue of creating more provinces is complex. It has important ethnic, cultural and linguistic aspects. But at present, it has mainly emerged in the context of economic imbalance and development discrepancies that exists in different parts of the country. If the residents of remote areas are not provided with their (developmental) due share and constitutional rights, they would easily be influenced and exploited by the separatists, while the equitable developments keep the units together in harmony. For instance, in the United States, large-sized California which sends 53 representatives to the US Congress happily coexists with the Rhodes Island which elects only two representatives. Our own history is no less interesting. All that comprises the present Pakistan, at the time of inception was a colorful mosaic of two major units, physically separated by thousand miles of Indian Territory. Then we had One Unit in West Pakistan which broke the country up in 1970s- both its creation and unraveling done at public due to the economic, political and development disparity (Zuberi, 2009).

### **Justifications for the Demand for New Provinces**

The factors behind the demand of new administrative units vary from state to state. Although, they have some issues in common but largely issues vary. Following are some of the factors that became the cause of this emerging phenomenon:

Firstly, decentralization of the political, economic and administrative setup raises the need to carve out new provinces in the country. Political decentralization eliminates the issue of less contribution of the different regions. Fiscal decentralization improves the economic situation and creates the grounds for wealth creation. Administrative decentralization guarantees efficient public service delivery which solves the matters of public concerns at their thresh-holds. When these issues become highlighted and heated, this raises a sense of deprivation among the people of aggrieved regions and provokes them to demand for autonomy and separate status.

Another factor behind the demand for new provinces is the socio-economic backwardness. When a loin share of economic resources would be spent in few districts then how the social conditions of remote areas would be addressed. The sense of deprivation on the part of the underdeveloped regions, if rationally analyzed, is due to the lack of provisions of the rights granted by the Constitution of the country. Most of the development budget is consumed in the provincial capitals and their neighboring cities and nothing is left for the development of remote areas. These development

discrepancies and grievances of the underprivileged are further exploited politically. As per the underdevelopment and poverty index, Balochistan province is the poorest region of the country (Dawn, 2002). Musakhel is the poorest district of the country located in Balochistan. Interestingly, all the poorest regions are settled at the periphery of the provinces (Najam, 2017).

Thirdly, in a democratic country, Members of the National Assembly (MNA) raise the issues of their areas to seek their solution. With the exception of elective representation, the issues of the less representative regions mount to great tides. How the MNA or MPA can solve the issues of his/her concerned areas stretching on scores of kilometer? So, the presence of the more elective representatives will ensure the salvation of the aggrieved regions. For instance, the separate state of Telangana, in India, was carved out on the demand of less political representation in the constitutional house (Naik & Kumar, 2016).

Fourthly, the significant feature behind the creation of new provinces is the conception that admission of new provinces improves the governance system and ensures the state mandated services of law and order, justice, education and health facilities will be easily available.

The sense of majority and minority appeals minority groups for their separate identity is the fifth cause behind this concept. The rights of the majority are maintained properly while the rights of the minority are not delivered justly. For instance, the Saraiki belt of Punjab province and Hazara in KPK are the major ethnic groups of their concerned provinces and are demanding separate identity for them.

Demographic division is another strong justification in Pakistan for additional provinces. Population of Punjab is more than the accumulative of rest of the provinces of Pakistan. Its population is 58% of the entire population of the country. This provides a very strong justification for additional provinces in Pakistan.

Lastly, the territorial size of the provinces is considered another significant reason behind the demand for new or additional provinces. In order to provide citizens with easy access to the central political, economic, and administrative hubs of the province, it is considered imperative to redraw the boundaries of the provinces. Though it is not a very strong structural justification for additional provinces but it is deemed one of the many justifications for additional provinces. The people of remote areas face a lot of problems regarding their cumulative issues. They demand the provincial administration in their neighboring regions for the better service delivery.

### **Ethnicity and Administrative Division**

If the new provinces are carved out on ethno-lingual grounds, instead of administrative basis, it will induce further ethnic movements for their own ethnic identity. These ethno-linguistic administrative units will also endanger the sense of nationhood. If the admission of additional administrative units are anticipated to create more constitutional problems, that would require another 64 years to resolve them. So, the role



of maturity and sense of patriotism on the part of both the ruler and the ruled is mandatory to avoid any ethnic conflicts.

Saleem Safi argued that “provinces based on the criterion of ethnicity would cause further destabilization. Adopting this yardstick would push Balochistan to demand some regions currently under the administrative control of Sindh and Punjab to be declared its integral parts. KPK will scramble to obtain the western parts of Balochistan. Such reorganization will not get Hazara the status of a new province as most of the Hindko-speaking tribes there are ethnic Pashtuns. A linguistic division will also become problematic as no part of the country can be declared a single language unit” (Safi, 2010).

### **Inter-Provincial Harmony**

The main objective of the federalism is to maintain “unity in diversity”. Every tier of the government will know about its authorities and powers. Inter-provincial harmony could be best maintained through National Finance Commission (NFC) Award and mutual information sharing methods. For instance, if the Hazara province is created, they will blame the rest of the Khyber Pukhtun Khawa (KPK) for allocation of more resources. Same as the Saraiki province will treat the rest of the Punjab. So, the admission of new provinces on ethnic grounds will endangered the national integration of the country.

### **Strengthening of Local Government**

The bureaucrats and politicians in Pakistan are accused of depriving the people of Pakistan of their resources. For successful democratic process in Pakistan the power needs to tickle down to the local government bodies. The decision-makers of the provincial and federal governments compromise the electoral process, so that they can divert the resources to the voters of their own specific constituencies instead to the general masses. According to many experts, the solution to redress the grievances of the deprived and unprivileged sections of the society lies in the effective implementation and empowering of local governments rather than creating additional provinces in Pakistan.

### **Good Governance**

Bad governance is the main cause behind this demand. When the people of remote areas remain deprived even from the constitutional rights, they start the quest of separate province. When the governance system is efficient and masses are provided with public services properly, masses do not challenge the status quo and do not even bother to make demands for additional provinces. So, there is dire need to improve the civil service sector of the country by employing efficient and capable workforce.

### **Constitutional Debate**

The Constitution of 1973 declared the country a federal republic as the very first article of the country describes “Pakistan shall be a federal republic to be known as

Islamic republic of Pakistan” comprised of four provinces and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) along with the federally administered areas of the country.

Part IV of the Constitution deals with the federation of Pakistan consisting of a president (as head of the state and shall represent the unity of the republic), a parliament consisting of two houses (National Assembly and Senate) and a federal government. The constitutional article 90 clearly says that, “the executive authority of the federation shall be exercised in the name of the president by the federal government, consisting of Prime Minister and the federal ministers, which shall act through the prime minister, who shall be the chief executive of the federation.”

Article 141 reveals the distribution of legislative powers between federation and provinces. The parliament, Majlis-e-Shoora, may make laws for the whole or any part of Pakistan, while a provincial assembly may makes laws for the whole or any part of the concerned province. Further article 143 depicts that “if any provision of an act of a provincial assembly is repugnant to any provision of an act of Majlis-e-Shoora (parliament) which parliament is competent to enact, then the act of parliament, weather passed before or after the act of the provincial assembly, shall prevail and the act of the provincial assembly shall, to the extent of the repugnancy, be void.”

Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), in 2012, moved a resolution to carve out Saraiki province in the Punjab. Subsequently, a commission was constituted under the headship of Senator Farhat Ullah Babar in that regard but after 2013 general elections it was thoroughly left out (Mushtaq, 2017). Senator further raised this issue in the parliament by arguing that “Pakistan Tehreke Insaf (PTI) won 30 out of 50 parliamentary seats from the Saraiki belt on the promise of making it a separate province” but still no constitutional steps are taken in this regard (Khan I. , 2019). This also reflects on how the issue of additional provinces is utilized and exploited by the political parties for their political gains.

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) and Mutahida Qoumi Movement (MQM) also presented separate resolutions for the division of Punjab province. Rana Sana Ullah in 2019 suggested dividing the existing Punjab into three provinces, Bahawalpur, South Punjab and rest of the Punjab (Anees, 2019). The MQM moved a bill seeking the same three provinces in the existing boundary of Punjab province in December 13, 2019. The bill also highlighted the adjustments in senate to raise the existing 104 seats of senate to 188 (Tribune, 2019).

Despite the four resolutions in favor of the admission of South Punjab, three resolutions were also presented in the parliament for the creation of Hazara province. In March 25, 2014 first resolution was passed by single majority presented by Mr. Mushtaq Ghani, the incumbent speaker of KPK assembly (Ali, 2018). Second resolution was presented by PML-N in February 12, 2019. And third was proposed by MQM’s legislator, Kosher Zahra, on 13<sup>th</sup> of December 2019 (Tribune, 2019).

As far as the Karachi or Mohajjar Province is concerned, MQM legislator Khawaja Izhar ul Hassa, spoke out in favor of new Mohajjar province by merging of its urban area. The provincial government of Sindh resisted that strongly. Syed Sardar Ali Shah further

said, “urban and the rural divide in the province needs to be bridged instead of demanding a new province comprising the urban parts of Sindh. MQM’s demand for new province is the continuation of the past policies of Muttahida which stood for sowing seeds of hatred and division among the dwellers of the urban areas” (Samar, 2019).

### **Is it Opportune Time to Demand New Provinces?**

Despite the constitutional battle, there are more gigantic problems in the course of new provinces. Whether the country is able to carve out new provinces with the availability of current resources? Is the current socio-economic scenario viable for this exercise? There are some preliminary steps that have to be taken before the admission of additional provinces.

Firstly, National Finance Commission (NFC) award should be revisited. The allocation of national resources must be done with the consensus. Secondly, with the abolishing of the concurrent list, some authorities were bestowed to the provinces by the federation. If the provincial authorities granted rightly to the provinces, its trickle-down effect on the regions that are demanding new provinces will be quite positive.

Thirdly, the political, administrative and fiscal implications of this exercise must be analyzed exhaustively. Lastly, the proper function of local government system can address the issue of separate provinces. Because, when the issues of the public will be solved at their thresholds, the people will not go to different paths. Some survey reports explore that people have more gigantic and serious issues regarding the prices of edible articles than the cause of separate provinces. Without entertaining these issues, the creation of new provinces will cause further decay of this troubled federalism.

### **Conclusion**

The slogan of new provinces has been raised in Pakistan since the merging of western units of Pakistan into a single unit. Saraiki and Bahawalpur identity movements are from Punjab, the most populated administrative unit of the country. The demand of Hazara province has been raised in KPK. A separate province for Mohajjar or Urdu speaking community of Sindh by merging the urban parts of Sindh is demanded by the MQM-P.

Except the Pashtun province, several constitutional resolutions have been brought in the parliament and in the concerned provincial assembly for their acceptance. Although, some have been passed by single majority, making it ineffective, and some rejected by the assemblies. Interestingly, all the political parties have shown their consent to carve out additional provinces solemnly but till today not a single mutually coordinated resolution has been presented before any house of the parliament. They just raise this issue for their political benefits and after gaining of mandate, the issue is set aside.

Saraiki province is being demanded by Saraiki speaking community, Karachi province by Urdu speaking community, Hazara province by Hazara community of the KPK province and Pashtun province is being demanded by the Pashto speaking community of Balochistan. Despite the constitutionally admitted provinces are named of largest ethnic group, the voices of all the new demanded provinces too are ethnic in origin. If the demands of additional provinces are considered as per the ethno-lingual element, it will be a deadly weapon for the integration of the country.

If the creation of additional province (s) is/are imperative, then the creation must be administrative-oriented. Only a true sense of federalism can ensure this destiny by forging mutual consensus among all the stakeholders. Because only the administrative based creation of additional province can guarantee an efficient and effective government service delivery. In the times when we find Pakistan at the crossroads of history, it is the need of the time to think objectively. We must act like a nation. Otherwise, ethnic and territorial biases will lead the country towards nothing but crisis.

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