
Pakistan's Nationalism and Ethnic Pulls

Alok Bansal

The US Congressional hearing on Balochistan on February 8, 2012, convened by the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, followed by internecine warfare in Karachi and the recent reemergence of Sindhi nationalism in rural Sindh have highlighted the ethnic fault lines in Pakistan. To compound the problems, the demand for separate Hazara and Seraiki provinces is gaining ground and even the ruling coalition is divided on the demand. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), an important component of the ruling coalition, has introduced a resolution in the Parliament asking for the creation of Hazara and Seraiki provinces; however, another partner of the coalition, the Awami National Party (ANP) is firmly opposed to the creation of a separate Hazara province from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), where it is the ruling party. Across the political divide, the main opposition party, the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) feels that the demand for a Seraiki province is designed only to divide Punjab and its influence, as it rules Punjab, which till recently had more than half the population of Pakistan.¹

For long, Talibanisation has been considered as the biggest threat to the Pakistani state, but it is often forgotten that the Taliban only threaten the Pakistan government, whereas ethnic movements endanger the Pakistani state and erode the evolving Pakistani nationalism. The regional aspirations of various ethnic groups, the Punjabis, Pakhtuns, Baloch, Sindhis, Mohajirs, Seraikis and other small ethnic groups, which had started surfacing after the 2008 elections, have got a further fillip under the present democratic dispensation. As a result, with the exception of Punjabis, all other groups give preeminence to their ethnic identities over their national identity, suffer from a persecution complex and feel that they are being exploited by a state dominated by Punjabis. Contentious issues like the

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Kalabagh Dam, division of federal revenues, distribution of the Indus waters and frequent dismissal of elected state governments have worsened the situation. The problem has been further aggravated by the failure of the Pakistani state to build credible institutions during the 65 years of its existence.

Pakistan's relentless pursuit for strong nationalism has curbed any quest for a genuinely federal structure by the ethnic minorities, as it perceives federalism as a prelude to separatism. Pakistan's political elite, therefore, have discouraged sub-national identities, by negating their socio-cultural and linguistic identity and denying them a place in the state structure on the basis of ethnicity.² To overcome the ethnic aspirations of its population, the Pakistani state promoted an all-inclusive Islamic

identity to subsume the ethnic identities. The process was fairly successful in parts but, in due course, gave rise to radical Islam, which threatens the very existence of Pakistan.

Pakistan's basic character as an overcentralised administrative polity, which could not meet the demands of autonomy of its ethnically diverse population, was shaped during the first decade of its existence.³ The centralised polity with a dominant bureaucracy and a strong military prevented Pakistan from collapsing in its infancy. Two Constituent Assemblies (1947-54, 1955-56) spent eight years trying to decide the distribution of powers between the Centre and the provinces. The inordinate delay in formulating a Constitution created such a situation that by the time the Constitution was adopted in 1956, it did not have general support across the ethnic spectrum.⁴

The Pakistani nation-state project has its historical roots in the Two-Nation theory, the *raison d'être* of the state.⁵ Muhammed Ali Jinnah wanted to build a strong state relying on the three-fold principle "One Nation, One Culture, One Language". As Pakistan was intended to be the homeland of the Muslims of British India, its language could be nothing except Urdu, which was associated with Indian Muslims. Jinnah's ideological quest missed the social and geographical

realities of Pakistan, which had many languages and cultures within its frontiers. Only a miniscule minority used Urdu.⁶ Similarly, there was no single culture that had deep roots in Pakistan.

There has been an imbalance in the distribution of power among various sub-national groups in Pakistan. A few “sub-nations”, because of their early industrialisation, monopolised economic and political power and became dominant. In the case of Pakistan, the Punjabis and the migrants from India dominated the military and bureaucracy. This group rapidly became a strong economic, political and military power centre of Pakistan. According to veteran Pakistani journalist Khaled Ahmed, “Leadership in Pakistan will always be supplied by Punjab because it controls two-thirds of the seats in the National Assembly. Smaller provinces may produce intellectually superior leaders but they will not be able to assert themselves nationally”.⁷ This has caused resentment in other ethnic groups like the Sindhis, Baloch and Pakhtuns, who felt that the Punjabis and Mohajirs were dominating the power structure, like the Hindus and Sikhs before partition.

Pakhtuns

At its inception, Pakhtun nationalism led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Frontier Gandhi) posed the biggest challenge to the nascent Pakistani nationalism. In the 1946 elections, held under the British, the Pakhtun majority in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), now renamed as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), had rejected the Muslim League and its two-nation theory. It was only in mid-1947, when Pakistan seemed imminent, that the people of NWFP voted for it in a referendum. At that time, Ghaffar Khan asked for an independent Pakhtunistan, which was rejected by the British. Consequently, the referendum was boycotted by Ghaffar Khan and his followers. Out of a total population of 3.5 million, only 5,72,799 had voting rights and out of these only 2,89,244 voted to join Pakistan. Most others boycotted the referendum at the behest of Ghaffar Khan.⁸ In 1947, Afghanistan formally staked its claim to all Pakhtun inhabited territories up to the Indus.⁹ However, when the British refused the Afghan claims, the Afghan government went on to oppose Pakistan's entry into the United Nations.

To curb Pakhtun nationalism, the provincial government in NWFP was dismissed and the supporters of the Khan brothers were crushed with brute force. To counter Ghaffar Khan's secular Pakhtun nationalism, the Pakistani establishment encouraged religious political parties like the Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) to spread their influence amongst the Pakhtuns.

Notwithstanding the strong moorings of Pakhtun nationalism, the Pakistani state has succeeded in diffusing it.

Simultaneously, to prevent Pakhtun consolidation, the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) was not merged with the NWFP, although the troops from this heavily militarised region were withdrawn. Subsequently, after the Bangladesh War, when the National Awami Party (NAP) government in Balochistan passed a resolution to merge the Pakhtun dominated Northern Balochistan with the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), it was not agreed to by the federal government, so as to keep Pakhtuns fragmented in different provinces, thereby diluting their identity. Similarly, the attempts to rename the province as Pakhtunkhwa, despite repeated resolutions in the Provincial Assembly, were rejected by the Government of Pakistan, as it was perceived that it could provide legitimacy to Pakhtun sub-nationalism. The name could only be changed on April 15, 2010, more than two years after the ANP came to power in the province and that too after it agreed to prefix Khyber to Pakhtunkhwa, even though Khyber is in FATA and not a part of the province.

However, notwithstanding the strong moorings of Pakhtun nationalism, the Pakistani state has succeeded in diffusing it and besides Islamisation and fragmentation of the Pakhtuns in three separate political entities, the large scale presence of Pakhtuns in the armed forces has contributed to this. As Pakistan has been under the direct or indirect control of the army for most part of its existence, the Pakhtuns derived a disproportionately higher share of benefits from the military dominated state.

The ongoing Pakistani agenda of Islamisation of the Pakhtun population received enormous support from the US and Saudi Arabia during the Communist rule in Afghanistan. The Mujahideen were trained in the Pakhtun belt of Pakistan. In due course, the Mujahideen were replaced by the Talibs and extreme radicalisation of society came to be termed as Talibanisation. Refugees from Afghanistan were largely welcomed in the NWFP and FATA due to the ethnic linkages and speeded up the process of Talibanisation of the Pakhtun population, as many pro-Taliban elements infiltrated the society. The electoral victory of the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) in the NWFP in the 2002 elections represented this phenomenon. However, consequent to the US operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan and the rise of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) in Pakistan, an attempt was made on the eve of the 2008 elections, to support Pakhtun nationalism led by the ANP as a counter to radical Islam. Despite its electoral victory, the ANP has

not been able to promote Pakhtun nationalism as an alternative to Islamic radicalism. Notwithstanding, renaming of the province and getting a larger share from the federal kitty, Pakhtun nationalism, despite some growth, has not really enamoured the Pakhtun youth. Meanwhile, the Taliban continues to grow and espouse an alternative ideology in the region. May be consolidation of the Pakhtun areas within Pakistan into a single political entity could change that. As of now, however, Pakhtun nationalism does not pose any significant threat to the Pakistani state.

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Sindhis

Sindh, second to Punjab in population and wealth, had opted for Pakistan at partition, but ran into problems immediately. The partition brought in a large number of Muslim migrants from areas that remained in India, but opted for Pakistan—the Mohajirs—to Karachi, the capital of Pakistan. The Sindhis have ever since resented their marginalisation by the Punjabis and Mohajirs. The Sindhi population is less than half the population of the province and they own only a quarter of 2,000 industrial units in Sindh. They constitute only 2 percent of Pakistan's armed forces and 5 percent of federal civil servants.¹⁰ The Sindhis have a strong socio-cultural identity and their language has a distinctive script and a rich literature. The Sindhis had a written script even before the Arabs set foot on Sindh.

The settlement of Mohajirs in urban Sindh in spaces vacated by Hindu Sindhis turned urban Sindh into a Mohajir citadel. The first prime minister of Pakistan, Liaqat Ali Khan, facilitated the ingress of refugees from UP into Karachi through Khokhrapar. The Sindhis, scattered in the barren and desolate countryside of Sindh, were virtually driven out of Karachi and Hyderabad by the Mohajirs and the subsequent migration of a large numbers of Pakhtuns and Punjabis further compounded the problem. The main cities of Sindh—Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur—are totally dominated by the Mohajirs and the fertile land of Northern Sindh is under the control of the Punjabis, including many former military personnel. In 1983, violence erupted against Zia's rule and thousands of Sindhi nationalists defied the army in rural Sindh to fight for the elusive '*Sindhudesh*'.¹¹ The movement petered off in due course.

The construction of various dams and barrages on the Indus has reduced the irrigated land in Sindh and the salinity levels have been rising in the lower reaches

of Sindh, turning fertile farms into barren tracts. The proposed construction of Kalabagh Dam, therefore, evokes strong emotions, as it is perceived that it could further reduce the availability of water. However, Sindhi nationalism, despite genuine grievances, has not been able to create a self-sustaining viable movement. A plausible reason could be the fractured and feudal nature of Sindhi society, where sectional interests have often eclipsed Sindhi nationalism. Internal dissent has further weakened the cause of Sindhi nationalism and has splintered the JSQM (Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz) into various factions.¹²

During the 2008 elections, there was a resurgence of Sindhi nationalism and many anti-Pakistan slogans were raised, after the assassination of Benazir. However, the emergence of a Pakistan People's Party (PPP) government led by President Asif Ali Zardari, a Sindhi, at Islamabad has kept the Sindhi nationalism in check. With the position of Zardari weakening, the Sindhi nationalism has started raising its head. Although the attempts to unite various factions of the JSQM have failed, many believe that the problems of Sindh cannot be resolved within the framework of a parliamentary democracy.¹³ Subsequently, there was strong reaction to the movement of Pakhtun Internally Displaced People (IDPs) to Sindh consequent to the military operations in Swat. There were also incidents of violence against the Pakhtuns and their establishments.¹⁴ The Sindhis believe that earlier operations in Balochistan had also led to Baloch migration to Sindh and had deprived the Sindhis of most of the lower end jobs. JSQM members openly asserted, "We don't want autonomy. We want independence from Pakistan."¹⁵

The unprecedented floods faced by Sindh in 2010 and 2011 and the government's apathy to the large scale destruction there further infuriated the Sindhis. It is widely perceived that Sindh was flooded to minimise the losses in Punjab. The Sindhis believe that they suffered from the manipulations of the water courses upstream to benefit the Punjabis, who were also unconcerned about the consequent suffering of eight to nine million people.¹⁶ The report of the 2011 census shows that the population of Sindh increased by 81.5 percent between 1998 and 2011, against a national growth of 46.9 percent.¹⁷ The fact that there has been more than 100 percent growth in Jamshoro, Jacobabad, Hyderabad and Karachi districts indicates that there has been large scale migration to Sindh.¹⁸ The growing immigration into Sindh will further marginalise the Sindhis. An elusive organisation called the Sindh Liberation Army (SLA) has made its presence felt in Sindh and has carried out a number of blasts on the railway tracks. The JSQM, taking an ultra nationalist stance, has demanded independence of Sindh and Sindhi resources from "a Punjab-dominated, Punjab-ruled, and Punjab-

manipulated state.”¹⁹ The party has also declared that it will not participate in the next elections and has vowed to continue the “peaceful struggle for a separate Sindhu Desh” till they attain their target.²⁰ The death of its chief Bashir Khan Qureshi on April 7, 2012, under suspicious circumstances, and the apprehensions of state complicity have further hardened the position of Sindhi nationalists.²¹

Mohajirs

The Mohajirs, who were in the forefront of the struggle for Pakistan, consider themselves to be its creators and ideologues. They were also the ardent supporters of Pakistani nationalism, as opposed to the regional identities professed by various ethnic groups. The Mohajir elite and intelligentsia opted for a Pakistan where the past glory of Muslim rule could be resurrected under their leadership. The migrants from India, primarily from Uttar Pradesh, who went to live in Pakistan, were politically more enlightened and culturally more refined than those among whom they chose to go and live. Although most of the migrants (the majority being Punjabis) settled in Punjab, more than 20 percent relocated to Karachi and other urban centres of Sindh. The distinctive social habits and individualistic cultural outlook of the Sindhis kept them in ethnically segregated areas.²²

The genesis of ethnic conflicts in Karachi and other parts of urban Sindh, lies in the concentration of Mohajirs within Sindh where a common religion is too weak to bind locals with the migrants. A common language and culture could facilitate the assimilation of refugees from East Punjab into West Punjab. However, migrants from other parts of India did not find areas of cultural or linguistic similarity and moved to Karachi, which was the seat of power and, hence, the avenue for employment opportunities. They subsequently moved to other urban centres of Sindh, such as Hyderabad, Sukkur and Khairpur. Subsequent developments, like Jinnah's death, Liaqat's assassination, creation of the One Unit scheme, and shifting of the capital from Karachi to Islamabad, diminished the Mohajir hold on the Pakistani polity.²³ The army's growing salience in the national polity has enabled the Punjabis and Pakhtuns to move up and expand at the cost of the Mohajirs.²⁴

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With the ascendance of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a Sindhi, to the highest office in Pakistan, there was a growth in Sindhi assertiveness. The provincial government in Sindh made knowledge of Sindhi a must for provincial jobs. This brought the Mohajir protestors out on the streets. Subsequently, they, along with other political opponents, were condemned as anti-nationals by Bhutto and persecuted.²⁵ Meanwhile, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan brought a new set of immigrants to Karachi—the Pakhtuns, who were soon running Karachi's transport business and dealing in arms and narcotics. The Pakhtuns, unlike the Sindhis, were neither docile nor willing to accept the Mohajir supremacy in the metropolis. This resulted in the first violent ethnic clash between the Mohajirs and Pakhtuns in 1985.²⁶ Several bouts of ethnic violence have occurred after 1985, when Altaf Hussain first gave the call for a movement against the Punjabi dominated state.²⁷

It was during the tumultuous Eighties that the Mohajirs organised themselves into the Mohajir Quami Movement, which subsequently transformed itself into the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM). The rise of the MQM and the ensuing struggle for Mohajir rights led to a number of violent clashes in Karachi. During the past two and a half decades, thousands of Mohajirs have been killed but the movement has grown in strength and has spread to Hyderabad, Sukkur, Liaqatabad, Nizamabad and other urban centres. The government tried to break up the movement by creating, and then supporting, a rival 'Haqiqi' faction but the writ of the MQM continues to run unabated in the urban centres of Sindh.²⁸ Under the regime of Gen Musharraf, himself a Mohajir, the MQM succeeded in forcing Musharraf to eliminate Haqiqi bastions from Karachi, in return for its support to the government. Despite a change of government, it has retained its leverage on power and still has the capability to cripple life in Karachi—the economic hub of Pakistan.

Initially, the MQM propounded the idea of creating 'Jinnahpur', a new province by separating the urban conglomerates of Karachi and Hyderabad. However, once it realised that there was no support for the proposal either within Pakistan or outside, it has started projecting Mohajirs as urban Sindhis and has tried to make common cause with the Sindhi nationalist parties on issues concerning Sindh. It successfully forced Musharraf to shelve the Kalabagh Dam. The MQM also tried to incorporate other ethnic groups and emerge as a political force representing the entire middle class. It even espoused the cause of Baloch nationalists and took up cudgels on their behalf; however, its subsequent withdrawal on some of these issues disillusioned the Baloch. The MQM's frequent

protests against Punjabi domination have led the Pakistan establishment to sometimes brand them as Indian agents.²⁹

The MQM has been at the forefront in opposing the increasing influx of Pakhtuns into Karachi after the operations in KP and FATA, as continuing influx of Pakhtuns in urban Sindh in general and Karachi in particular is tilting the ethnic balance against the Mohajirs.³⁰ To compound the problem, the birth rate amongst the Mohajirs, who are better educated, has been falling consistently vis-à-vis the Sindhis, Pakhtuns and Baloch. Consequently, Karachi has become a hotbed of violence, where different ethnic groups are jostling for supremacy.

Baloch

Amongst various ethnic movements threatening Pakistan's fragile nationhood, Baloch nationalism threatens it the most. Ever since Pakistan's creation, the Baloch have revolted four times, demanding greater autonomy, or even an independent state, which would reunite the Baloch in Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan under one flag.³¹ Unlike Pakhtun nationalism, Baloch nationalism has gathered momentum with the passage of time. Linguistically, the Baloch are not a homogenous group and speak two different strands of Balochi, a language of Persian origin and Brahui, a Dravidian language akin to Gondi in Central India. The Baloch have been united by a common narrative of history, which has evolved over the years and includes a strong perception of persecution and exploitation by the Pakistani state.³²

The Baloch joined Pakistan quite reluctantly and the predominant Baloch ruler—the Khan of Kalat—was pressurised to sign the instrument of accession by mobilisation of the Pakistani security forces, which triggered the first armed rebellion led by Prince Karim, the brother of the Khan, in 1948.³³ After that, the Baloch have risen in revolt thrice and have faced the armed forces in 1958, 1963-69 and 1973-77. Although the insurgencies were crushed with brute force, the alienation of the Baloch has increased with time and their organisational capabilities and the popular support have increased over the decades. At its peak, in 1973, 55,000 insurgents were pitted against 80,000 Pakistani troops supported by the Pakistan Air Force and Iranian Air Force. More than 5,000 insurgents and

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over 3,300 soldiers were killed in the insurgency that lingered on till 1977.³⁴ The current phase of insurgency started in 2004, but gained force after a lady doctor, Shazia Khalid, was allegedly raped by an army officer in Sui in January 2005.³⁵ Unlike the previous insurgencies, the current insurgency draws its support across the tribal divide and is led by educated Baloch youth, including women from Balochistan and Karachi, which is home to around 2.5 million Baloch.³⁶

A careful analysis of the events shows that ethnicity intertwined with a sense of political isolation and relative economic deprivation continues to be a potent force in evoking Baloch mobilisation. Even the chief minister expresses his helplessness on the conduct of the security forces within the province.³⁷ Like other smaller ethnic groups, perceived Punjabi hegemony is a very significant factor for Baloch alienation and for historical and economic reasons, this sense of alienation is far more pronounced amongst them vis-a-vis other ethnic groups.³⁸

It was hoped that the situation in Balochistan would improve under a democratic dispensation, but the hopes have largely been belied. It is widely perceived that all decisions concerning Balochistan are taken by the security establishment in Rawalpindi and Islamabad without even consulting the provincial establishment. As it is, the government in Quetta is not considered representative, as most nationalist parties had boycotted the elections in 2008. Since then, a large number of Baloch nationalists have disappeared and are believed to have been killed by the government agencies. The anger against Islamabad is at an all-time high and numerous security personnel and Punjabi settlers have been killed by different Baloch nationalist groups. As a result, thousands of Punjabis, including government servants are moving out of Balochistan.³⁹ The nationalists are also ensuring that the educational institutions in Balochistan neither hoist the Pakistani flag nor sing the Pakistani anthem.⁴⁰ The recent Congressional hearing in the US on Balochistan chaired by Dana Rohrabacher, who has co-authored an article with another Congressman, Louie Gohmert, supporting an independent Balochistan, has boosted the morale of the Baloch nationalists and has provided a fillip to the separatists.⁴¹

In 13 years since 1998, the population of Balochistan has more than doubled— it has increased by over 139 percent. This not only indicates that the Baloch have a higher birth rate, but also shows a large-scale migration to Balochistan and will aggravate Baloch apprehensions of being marginalised in their own land. As the population of Balochistan increases from 4.9 percent of Pakistan's population in 1998 to 6.85 percent in 2011, the capacity of Baloch nationalists to challenge the Pakistani state will increase correspondingly.⁴²

Seraikis

The Seraiki dialect is spoken by a large population in southern Punjab, who consider themselves to be a separate ethno-linguistic group and have been demanding a separate state since the 1960s. Although, there are Seraiki speakers in parts of Sindh, Balochistan and NWFP, the former princely state of Bahawalpur, where most of the population speaks Seraiki, is the heartland of Seraiki culture. Like other ethnic minorities, the Seraikis argue that their culture is being suppressed and their economic resources are being exploited by Punjab. Many Punjabis, however, refuse to recognise the Seraikis as a distinct national group, and consider Seraiki to be a mere dialect of Punjabi.⁴³ By the 1970s, the demands of Seraiki speakers were increasingly becoming political and even maps of a proposed Seraikistan were produced.⁴⁴ This included not merely the Bahawalpur princely state but also the entire southern Punjab and the district of Dera Ismail Khan in the NWFP.⁴⁵

The Seraikis are demanding recognition as a separate nationality and use of their language in official documents, radio and television. They are also demanding employment quotas and the formation of a Seraiki regiment in the army. They believe that their fertile land produces a substantial proportion of cotton and wheat, the two main crops of Pakistan, but no industries have been set up there to compensate them for the loss of the waters of the Sutlej and Beas, which used to flow through the region and have been awarded to India by the Indus Water Treaty.

The Punjabi dominated civilian and military establishments of Pakistan have generally avoided addressing the Seraiki demands. The Seraikis believe that this is due to their underrepresentation in the Pakistani bureaucracy and army, which recruit primarily from northern Punjab.⁴⁶ The other smaller provinces, namely, Sindh, Balochistan and KP are quite keen on the creation of this new province, as it would drastically reduce the preeminence of Punjab in the body politic of Pakistan. The Seraiki movement has picked up momentum after the 2008 elections. Many Seraiki intellectuals merely want the restoration of the defunct Bahawalpur state, whilst others want a Seraiki speaking province to be carved out of Punjab and KP. They assert that the stark disparity between the Seraiki region and other parts of Punjab has made the province inevitable.⁴⁷ In July 2009, some district councils passed resolutions for the creation of a Seraiki province, whilst others passed a resolution for the revival of the Bahawalpur state. The proposal for a Bahawalpur state has even received support from the Punjabi speaking population of the region.⁴⁸ Of late, the MQM, PPP and many

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other parties have been supporting the demand of a Seraiki province to curtail the influence of the PML-N, which controls Punjab.

The Need to Accommodate Ethnic Aspirations

There are many smaller nationalities that keep voicing their concerns from time to time. After the renaming of the NWFP as KP and consequent identification of the province with the Pakhtuns, there has been a clamour for the creation of a separate Hazara province for the Hindko-speaking population, which remains heavily pocketed in the Hazara division. The demand has a strong political undertone and

draws support from political forces opposed to the ANP and Nawaz Sharif. Consequently, the demand is strongest in Abbottabad, Haripur and Mansehra districts, whereas Battargam district, dominated by the Pashto-speaking population, is lukewarm to the proposal.⁴⁹ The Pakhtuns' derision for the Hindko-speaking population that voted for Pakistan in the 1947 referendum is the main reason behind the demand for a new province.⁵⁰ Of late, the MQM has come out in support of the movement and has introduced a resolution to that effect in the National Assembly. Although the ANP government has opposed the creation of a separate Hazara province from KP, the merger of Pakhtun territories from FATA and Balochistan into KP, while removing the Hazara division, would meet the ethnic aspirations of both Pakhtuns and Hindkowans.

Pakistan today is at a crucial juncture and the ethnic identities will become more pronounced as the state deemphasises its Islamic identity. Different rates of growth for various ethnic groups are likely to further complicate the situation. The population of Punjab, which since 1971 was always more than half the population of Pakistan, has fallen below the crucial 50 percent mark and this will change the power dynamics within Pakistan and may increase the belligerence of the smaller provinces towards a Punjabi dominated federation. The provinces are also likely to demand restructuring of parliamentary constituencies, so as to reflect the ground situation more accurately. The fact that the population of the Punjabis and Mohajirs is growing at a much slower rate vis-à-vis the Baloch, Sindhis and Pakhtuns could exacerbate ethnic tensions.⁵¹

It would be appropriate to accommodate the ethnic aspirations in a genuinely federal structure rather than feel threatened by them. Use of force to crush the ethnic identities of the population only accentuates the alienation of various ethnic groups. The accommodation of provincial aspirations through genuine political decentralisation will reduce the growing support for separatist ethnic movements. As time passes, the challenge to Punjabi domination is only going to get more strident. However, bonding the four provinces in an acceptable and workable federal structure will demand a great deal of attitudinal readjustment by the Punjabi-dominated federal leadership.

Notes

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