

Prominent people in the wrong roles

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BEING forty or a minister, it has been said, does not come naturally to most people. It takes some getting used to. It takes nearly 10 years.

The point, about being forty, probably is the style gap. You are not accustomed to behaving in the manner you are suddenly expected to. Unlike seven, when you start losing milk teeth and are too old to be spared for being tactless; 18, when you qualify for a driving licence and get to vote for the union council; or 21 when you can vote for the National Assembly and marry without a guardian's approval, no new capabilities or privileges are involved. Certainly nothing physical. And yet, you are expected to be a substantially different person.

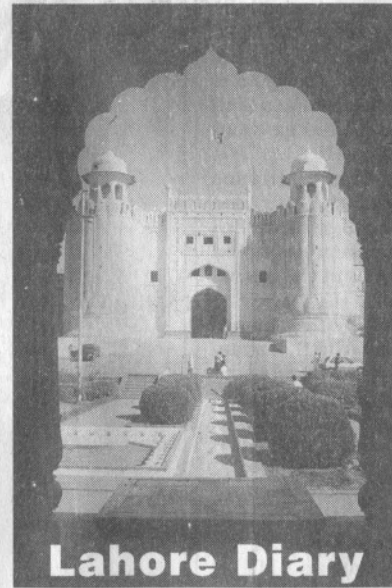
Adjusting to new roles is not easy. Some people will hastily dispute this, pointing out that most people settle rather quickly in jobs, marriage, and public office. Well, a distinction has to be made between the changes one had been working for and the ones to which he had no inkling.

Take Dr Khalid Ranjha. A lawyer by training and activist by temperament, he was destined for centre stage and knew that. Success as a professional and community leader came inevitably. Elevated to the Lahore High Court Bench by a caretaker government, he was a perceptive and enlightened judge. When a political government chose to ignore him for confirmation in the High Court job, his legal fraternity responded by electing him in a landslide vote that was seen as something of a peer referendum on his eligibility. Made a minister, the job he was not prepared for, Dr Ranjha is like fish out of water. And not for want

of trying, either. He has been attending all the cabinet, committee, technical, official, public meetings; receiving delegates and addressing seminars and defending the government with almost a bigoted zeal. The point is it cannot be done. While Dr Ranjha, the minister, must defend the government policy of courts including army officers, Dr Ranjha, the Bar leader, cannot do so without compromising an illustrious career. No wonder his pleadings on the necessity of such courts have been patently pathetic. His facts — remember, the defendant, not counsel is responsible for them — have been shown to be wrong and his arguments have been bizarre. A case of poor casting.

Take Mian Aamer Mahmood, the city Nazim, felicitated recently by the president himself for his performance. Arguably, the most powerful and high profile city administrator ever, he has devoted himself to the task of removing inefficiencies in city government, deregulating the construction industry, and handing over as much of the social service liabilities to the private sector as it would take. Whoever thought his business success had prepared him for a public role, however, was rudely reminded last week of the need for a second thought. Unaccustomed, like Chaudhry Muhammad Ali, the bureaucrat-made-prime minister to spite the politicians, to slogan chanting protesters, he met his Waterloo at his own District Courts office. Unwilling, like the illustrious Chaudhry to see the protesters, the Mian asked that the doors be bolted and started making distress calls to the police which, much to his annoyance, arrived too late to spare

him the indignity of being shouted in his face. An SP has since been charged with negligence, and the protesting lawyers with rowdiness. That the police are in any case poor protection for public leaders who choose to hide from the people, seems to have been lost on both



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the Nazim and the governor, who later talked of the incident as a security lapse. The Chaudhry had obviously seen the point, and realizing that he was ill matched to the new role by temperament, had resigned.

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THE District Courts incident was only the latest protest by city lawyers who have been campaigning

against the proposal to set up a school on the historic complex ever since the Nazim made the announcement. Several of them were earlier accused by the police of disorderly conduct when they took out a rally on The Mall to highlight their opposition to the project.

The governor last week described the would-be school as poor man's Aitchison and pledged support of his provincial government, adding, however, that he had asked the Nazim to settle the matter in consultation with the lawyers.

The lawyers say they are not opposed to the establishment of a quality school for the poor. The objection, so far, has been only to the choice of building. First, they say, a court complex is no less important to the city. The building, is also a Lahore landmark. Second, they point out, there is already a relatively large cluster of purpose built schools in the area. Some of them are even on the Nazim's list of 35 schools which are to introduce English-medium classes from next year.

The need for an Aitchison-like school, funded by the city government, seems to have been taken for granted, although it is hardly obvious. Consider, the cost. The Nazim announced only last week that his administration had already handed over 52 public schools in the city to individual philanthropists and non-government organizations. Asking for public support earlier, he was reported to have said the government was prepared to hand over all 1,500 public schools, including 300 secondary schools. While he did not supply the statistics, the tuition fee at the new community participation schools is known to be 10 to 20 times that in the

government schools. Assuming even that the poor man's Aitchison costs no more to maintain than the government's savings from handing over the 52 schools, the cost-benefit ratio makes one queasy. Also, should the government, decided at any point in time to pass some of the costs to the parents, the school will immediately be beyond the reach of the people it was supposed to benefit. On the other hand, if the government has the kind of unwavering commitment it claims to sending at least some of the poor to an Aitchison, what is stopping it from allowing them into Aitchison itself? Those studying at Aitchison can certainly afford other schools.

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NEWs from Karachi keeps reminding one that Lahore and the Punjab are nothing like the City of Lights and the Babul Islam. According to the latest report, 80 aliens (immigrants, not the extra-terrestrial) have been elected councillors and Nazims in last year's polls while the presiding officers disqualified even those who had failed to pay a measly electricity bill. One of the Nazims is a proclaimed offender. Now, in how many decades, can we expect to match that?

Another report says the Karachi Nazim has persuaded the Pakistan Steel management not to sack about 1,000 of its workers, even pay them a Rs2,000 Eid bonus each. A report from the Punjab Civil Secretariat says 15 of its 34 departments might be abolished and nearly half the staff sent to a surplus pool. Sounds like a different country? — **ONLOOKER**