A devolution case study

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Dr. Farid A. Malik

There are over six million people in Lahore. With such a huge population it can be classified as a city-state. There have been several attempts to convert it into the Paris of the East. Unfortunately in the process it has suffered. Lahore has its own heritage and standing amongst the finest cities of the Sub-continent.

The senior players in its management are: Governor, Nazim and DCO, but the question remains, who is in charge? Has this great city now been orphaned?

The Devolution Plan as it stands is a bottom-up system. The Nazims are on their own and must deliver while the 'baboos' silently watch or misguide the elected members. The best course for them is to take charge of their areas. The Nazims and councillors should identify areas, allocate funds, make action plans and go into implementation. The new set-up must be insulated from the inertia of the existing 'baboo infested' agencies and their procedures.

The City Nazim should also take complete control and agree on an action plan with his councillors and then go into implementation. The current lack of clarity must not be allowed to fail the entire devolution exercise. In the absence of CM, the Governor is responsible for province. His office is located in his mansion while the Cabinet and Chief Secretary sit in the Secretariat. The Nazim has several offices: Mayor House, DC's office and Town Hall. The incumbent also has an office at his private residence.

The DCO's life is much simpler. He resides in the Commissioner's House and works out of the office commissioner's office. Imagine the movement of files from the four Nazim's offices to the DCO's office, then the Secretariat, finally making it the Governor's House and then come, back for implementation. The entire op is unmanageable and impossible to monitor. There are serious flaws. Governor

Who is running Lahore?

House is not geared to run the government. Officials are called to come with files and record. The provincial chief does not operate from the Secretariat where the set-up is located. The city chief's offices and his staff are also scattered, creating impediments.

The towering presence of the Governor in Lahore results in his involvement in city affairs. The Nazim is required to spend considerable time with the Governor, at the cost of city dwellers. Hoping to meet the city chief, people wait for him in all his offices while he is at a convocation with the Governor. Both the chiefs must stick to their own domains and should meet only to exchange notes after normal working hours. The Nazim has been elected to serve six million Lahorites burdened with problems. Multiple offices can provide hiding spots but cannot produce results. The search for the Nazim must be confined to a single office where he must keep specified hours including time for public contact.

Scores of letters remain unanswered and untraced. There is no system for public complaints or feedback. The Devolution Plan is not working in Lahore, as there are too many chiefs. The public-Nazim interface is at the core of devolution and must be strengthened. The Governor is supposed to monitor all Nazims' performance, and not interfere in running of cities, which negates the very basis of devolution.

The Nazims need help that can be made available. The NRB, the architect of the Devolution Plan, is the ultimate resource but unfortunately implementation was not deliberated in detail. Islamabad is infamous for producing lofty plans with poor implementation. NRB should have considered implementation obstacles when formulating the plan.

Lahore has been the national trendsetter for decades. Its mismanagement will harm the entire process of decentralization of power, while its success will establish it.

Mian Azhar became governor after successfully running Lahore as Mayor. Mian Nawaz Sharif rose to be Prime Minister after a stint as Punjab CM. Malik Meraj Khalid also ran the province before becoming caretaker PM. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto founded his PPP at Lahore. The Pakistan Resolution was also passed here. Mian Amir Mahmood as Nazim of Lahore has a major responsibility. He must take charge and create history or get overrun by events.