

# New districts and rotten boroughs!

BY AHMED SADIK

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whatsoever for being bifurcated. I have had the privilege of presiding over both these districts in the 1960s – as Deputy Commissioner Dadu (1963-65) and as Deputy Commissioner Jacobabad (1968-69) and I will recount below the reasons for my contention.

Dadu district is a longish district. It runs from north to south from the border of Larkana district to that of Karachi for more than 100 miles between the Indus River in the east and the Kirthar Range in the west. The railway line from Karachi to Quetta together with the Indus Highway running in tandem through the entire length of the district provide it with the compactness and mobility to make it possible to run the district smoothly despite its geographical length. Politically and administratively Dadu district is delicately balanced between the Jatois of the northern half of the district i.e. Dadu subdivision and the Syeds of the southern half of the district i.e. Kotri subdivision. It thus makes it so much the easier to administer the district with two nearly-equal forces to reckon with. Dadu district came into being in the 1930s around the time when Sindh broke out of the Hindu-majority province of Bombay Presidency. This was the time when Sindh had to have a capital for its seat of government and Karachi was earmarked for the purpose. In order to form Dadu district Dadu Subdivision was taken out of Larkana District and the Kotri subdivision was taken out of Karachi district.

Jacobabad district is square-shaped, compact and is flat canal-irrigated country. It is extremely well-endowed in facilities for crop irrigation. The Sukkur Barrage as well as the Guddu Barrage generously water the agriculture of this district. It is a very

pre-British period used to be Khangarh which was the Shikargah of the Khan of Kalat who historically was the supreme overlord of Balochistan. After British annexation it became the Upper Sindh Frontier (USF) and was the only Sindh district to be regulated through the use of the Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR). Later on in commemoration of the outstanding military and administrative work done by Brig-Gen Sir John Jacob in pacifying the Baloch tribes it was renamed as Jacobabad. Sir John Jacob till this day is remembered as the administrator who brought peace and tranquility to them. For that reason alone Jacobabad should not be bifurcated.

Similarly Larkana is a historical district in that it has dominated the politics of Sindh for almost a century. It has produced more outstanding leaders of the provincial as well as national levels than any other district. As recounted earlier it had already lost Dadu subdivision to Dadu district in the 1930s. Area-wise it is a medium-sized district and the proposed taking away of the Kambar and Shadadkot talukas will make it quite unviable and will amount to prima facie bias. From what I can make out it is just one of those futile attempts to pump artificial political life into the remnants of the Ghaibi Khan Chandio clan of Shadadkot that once upon a time ruled the roost in Upper Sindh. In any case Kambar and Shadadkot are so inextricably linked to Larkana that it is hard to visualise these talukas becoming a district all by themselves. The scheme appears ill-starred and doomed to failure.

As regards Tharparkar an earlier Chief Minister tried this same scheme out by trying to make a whole division out of a district by resorting to what can best be described as artifice. As soon as that Chief Minister left office his leftover dispensation for Tharparkar folded up along with him. A repeat attempt of the same by the current Chief Minister of Sindh is not going to do any better. The question that is bound to cross the minds of everybody will naturally be to ask whether all this is a genuine need that needs to be financed in these days of financial stringency. And if it is not, then is this scheme for new districts not another not-so-veiled attempt at creating pockets and rotten boroughs for favoured politicians who cannot stand the tests of free and unencumbered elections under adult franchise.

The long and short of the whole story is that

Some months ago in the middle of 2004 the then Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali while on a tour of the province of Sindh made a statement to the effect that some new districts were going to be created in accordance with the local demands of the people. But before this proposal could gather momentum and make any progress there was a change of Prime Minister at the federal level and the said proposal fell into limbo. For quite some time nothing further was heard of it. One therefore assumed that such a preposterous proposal had been given up and that sanity had prevailed in the matter.

But this unfortunately was not to be the case. In the middle of December 2004 the government of Sindh one fine morning came out with a curt and somewhat abrupt announcement that four specific districts – those of Dadu, Jacobabad, Larkana and Tharparkar were being bifurcated. Simultaneous with this bifurcation announcement came yet another announcement that each of the four Nazims of these districts had been given 'the sack' by the provincial government. Consequently the net result of the exercise is that the matter has landed before the Sindh High Court for adjudication on the 'vires' of these actions of the provincial government.

To make matters even worse there was a rumour circulating that Hyderabad district was also heading for bifurcation but on an urban-rural configuration. Very promptly indeed this rumour was contradicted by the Revenue Minister of Sindh who issued a statement to the effect that no such move of bifurcation relating to Hyderabad district was being contemplated.

To worsen matters even more and further complicate things the Chief Minister of Sindh came out with a statement saying that the bifurcation of Hyderabad district was indeed likely. In elaboration thereof the Chief Minister confirmed that there was a demand for bifurcating Hyderabad district but all the pros and cons were being examined before taking any final decision because rural and urban population were involved. He also in reply to a question said that the district government of Hyderabad did not want the bifurcation of Hyderabad district and put a counter-question: 'Which district government would agree to such a proposal of bifurcation?'

With the facts thus appearing it is pretty obvious that nobody worth the name has been consulted by the government of Sindh before embarking on the precipitate action of ordering the bifurcation of the four districts. There has been no public inquiry into the matter and no cogent reasons have been cited in resorting to so drastic an action. It is indeed symptomatic of an autocratic attitude towards the people residing in those districts. It is even possible that the provincial government has been from behind the scenes been coerced into taking these actions. The likely source of such a move may well be emanating from the National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) which in the recent past has inflicted considerable damage to the body politic of this country.

From on the spot experience I can tell that the districts of Dadu and Jacobabad have no valid reason

important district mainly because it is strategically placed at the gateway of Balochistan and is also at the confluence point of the four federating units of Pakistan. It is Balochistan's cultural-racial salient into Sindh. All the tribes of Sindh and Balochistan are prominently placed in the economic and political life of the district. The main tribes are the Khosos, Jakhranis, Sunderanis, Dombkis, Mazaris, Bugtis, Bhuttos, Soomros and Hindus. The tribes are more or less evenly balanced and the shadow of Sir John Jacob the founder of this district remains the dominant feature of the peace that prevails in this district notwithstanding illiteracy and poverty among the peasants.

The sardari system is the fabric which enjoys informal primacy till this day and is the underlying balancing mechanism of the district. Jacobabad in the

The long and short of the whole story is that political problems cannot be solved by resorting to mere administrative ploys such as splitting historical districts or for that matter by trying to rearrange constituencies. The whole exercise of trying to create districts in places that do not prima facie deserve to be districts is indeed going to be an exercise in futility. It also increases public expenditure on unproductive sectors and goes on to raise the tax burden on the public. The whole matter regarding the new districts that are on the anvil for creation smacks of acute partisanship. It is no coincidence that all the four Nazims of the four districts on which the bifurcation axe is aimed at are from the same political party.

*The writer, retired civil servant, has served as Chief Secretary of Sindh*