

Inter-provincial rivalries and national security

THIRTY-THREE YEARS AGO, INTER-PROVINCIAL rivalry led to the secession of East Pakistan. Even today, no other problem engenders as much controversy among Pakistanis, whether resident or expatriate.

Four viewpoints are commonly expressed. First, that the problem does not exist. Second, that it is not caused by Punjab's dominance. Third, that it can be remedied by reorganising the provinces. Fourth, that the problem is beyond remedy. I lean toward the third.

The problem is real. Tensions surfaced in Balochistan and Frontier during the tenure of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in Sindh under Zia ul Haq, and in all three provinces under Nawaz Sharif. They are there today, with the controversy over the Kalabagh Dam being their most visible manifestation.

Admittedly, Punjab is not a monolith — frayed as it is with sub-cultural and sub-ethnic rivalries. However, it is the perception of its dominance — demographic, economic, political and even linguistic — that triggers insecurities in the other provinces. Moreover, a disproportionately large share of federal spending appears to benefit the residents of Punjab.

This problem can be solved, as has been the experience of other countries. With a population of a billion people, India has continued to divide the nine states it inherited at independence to retain a balance. To accommodate inter-regional conflicts, it created a States Reorganization Commission that suggested the creation of additional states along linguistic lines.

Initially, the proposal was met with apprehension by the leaders in the centre, who feared it would lead to the break-up of the Indian Union. Ultimately they realised that not dividing the provinces posed an even bigger threat. In 1956, most of the states were re-drawn along linguistic lines. This has been an ongoing process and the Indian Union now consists of 28 states.

Bombay was reorganised in 1960 to create Maharashtra and Gujarat for Marathi and Gujarati speakers respectively. Not all Gujaratis were happy since they lost Bombay to Maharashtra. Punjab was split in 1966 to create a smaller Punjab and Haryana. In the smaller Punjab,

lation. It is followed by Bihar with 10 percent, and West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh with about 8 percent each. There is continued talk of further subdividing the states in order to accommodate regional aspirations. In one scenario, put forward in 1992, India would consist of 52 states.

Other nations too have found ways to deal with ethnic domination. For example, to deal with the domination of Germans who account for 70 percent of the population, Switzerland, with a population of only 7 million, is divided into 26 administrative cantons, each with its own constitution.

Iran, with a population of 69 million, consists of 28 provinces. Tehran is the largest province, accounting for 17 percent of the population. Like in most countries, the number of provinces remains flexible. A law was passed in the parliament in May this year to divide the province of Khorasan into three new provinces.

Turkey, also with a population of 69 million, consists of 81 provinces. The largest, Istanbul, accounts for 13 percent of the population. Afghanistan, with a much smaller population of 29 million, has 34 provinces.

The US is a federation of 50 states. While some states like California, New York and Texas are much larger than others like North Dakota and Rhode Island, no single state accounts for more than 10 percent of the national population. In addition, the states are given significant political and financial rights relative to the federation, as part of the US constitution.

To operate successfully a federation needs a mechanism to regulate ethnic conflict. Failure to do this resulted in the break-up of federations in Central Africa, Czechoslovakia, Malaysia, Mali, Nigeria and Pakistan. As Katharine Adeney puts it, inter-provincial problems arise when there are substantial differences in size between provinces, a small number of provinces and a dominant elite in the federation.

Provincial boundaries in Pakistan are outdated and do not reflect the geographical and strategic diversity of the country. Even the Pakistan army has divided itself into nine corps, of which five are located in Punjab, two in Sindh and one each in Frontier and Balochistan.

Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz should establish

a Provincial Reorganisation Commission to examine the issue. This commission may wish to take a phased approach to the division of provinces, based on linguistic, ethnic, demographic and administrative criteria.

According to Tariq Rahman, there are six major languages in Pakistan and 57 minor languages. Punjabi is spoken by 44 percent of the people, followed by Pashtu (15 percent), Sindhi (14 percent), Siraiki (11 percent), Urdu (8 percent) and Balochi (4 percent). This suggests that a point of departure for reorganising the provinces would be to review the administrative districts within each province. For example, the most populous Hazara district in the NWFP is dominated by Punjabi speakers while Dera Ismail Khan includes Siraiki speakers.

It may make sense to reorganise Punjab into five provinces, centred on Bhawalpur, Faisalabad, Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi. Punjabi is the primary language in the second, third and fifth provinces and Siraiki in the first and fourth. Sindh could be reorganised into four provinces, centred on Hyderabad, Karachi, Khairpur/Nawabshah and Sukkur. In the first and fourth, Sindhi is the primary language, in the third a good percentage of the population speaks Siraiki while Urdu dominates in the second. At a later stage, following the same principles, Balochistan could be reorganised into two provinces, centred on Quetta and Khuzdar and the Frontier into three provinces, centred on Dera Ismail Khan, Mardan and Peshawar.

As Yunas Samad points out, there would still be a need to ensure that new provinces do not recreate a problem of local domination, since none would be ethnically homogeneous. This problem may be avoided by promoting consociational decision making rules that rely on consensus building, pluralism and bargaining rather than majoritarian rule making.

Re-organising the provinces would not solve all Pakistan's security problems but by bringing harmony to inter-provincial ties, it would resolve a very important and obdurate one.

Dr Ahmad Faruqi is an economist and author of *Rethinking the National Security of Pakistan*. He can be reached at faruqi@pacbell.net

VIEW



AHMAD FARUQI

To operate successfully a federation needs a mechanism to regulate ethnic conflict. Failure to provide that resulted in the break-up of federations in Central Africa, Czechoslovakia, Malaysia, Mali, Nigeria and Pakistan. Inter-provincial problems arise when there are substantial differences between provinces and a dominant elite in the federation

Punjabi speakers have a slender majority. Haryana is also a Punjabi speaking state but one dominated by Hindus while the Sikhs dominate Punjab. Assam was divided a few times to create Nagaland and Manipur, effectively reigning in the separatist tendencies in those regions. In the year 2000, three new states were created from parts of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Today, the largest state in the Indian Union, Uttar Pradesh, accounts for 16 percent of the popu-