**Respect provincial autonomy Mr. Prime Minister:**

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The controversy over provincial autonomy more than any national issue has been responsible for our utter failure in the most important task of nation building. The over-obsession of our leaders for concentration of powers in Islamabad than devolution to the provincial capitals was at the root of the imposition of the infamous One-Unit; the parity against the wishes of the majority Bengal; the division of the economic and financial resources from the central pool on the basis of territory instead of population. The majority Bengal and the small provinces were grossly discriminated against in the allocation of resources, federal and provincial jobs, postings and promotions causing disharmony in the federation. The result of these myopic decisions for the Jinnah’s Pakistan was perilous.

The provincial autonomy was half addressed in the 1973 Constitution giving greater latitude to the dominant Punjab to manipulate the division of economic and financial resources and the allocation of federal jobs, postings and promotions. The federal authority has always been involved in the political and economic exploitation of the small provinces through ubiquitous establishment.

The provincial administrations were controlled by the powerful Chief Secretaries, Inspectors General of Police and the central superior officers, and the elected provincial dispensations harassed by threats of Governor rule and institution of cases of corruption and malfeasance against the leaders or division of the provincial populations on ethnic basis in the colonial tradition of ‘divide and rule’. Sindh and Balochistan have had enough of this political manipulation.

The mega cities of Pakistan should have separate local government systems as prevalent in big cities the world over. In all these provincial matters, the elected provincial leadership could not be sidetracked without any grave harm to the federal harmony

For the first time in the short history of the country this chronic controversy was addressed by the 18 th Amendment in the 1973 Constitution. This was the second most important constitutional achievement of the PPP leadership after the unanimous adoption of the 1973 constitution. The credit of this goes to the most disputed and most maligned Asif Ali Zardari. The Amendment, inter alia, demarcated the federal and provincial jurisdictions for legislation, and transferred almost all the concurrent subjects to the federating units. By this constitutional master stroke, all matters relative to education, admission, teaching and training; health including control and management of hospitals and health care centers; local government institutions; water, economic and financial resources; lands and properties, law and order etc. have come under the legislative and administrative purview of the provinces. This actually reduced the financial and administrative liabilities of the federal authority which should have been welcomed by our leaders given the over-burdened exchequer of the country.

It seems that our federal regimes have an irredeemable predilection for interfering in the provincial matters. The PTI federal regime has shown a particular itch to tinker with the legislative and administrative powers of the provincial government of Sindh. This has resulted in a number of unnecessary disputes and long spells of ridiculous accusatory campaign. Within the past two years, there has been irritating controversies on the implementation of the 18 th Amendment in letter and spirit; the allocation of jobs in the federal departments and corporations; the management and distribution of oil and gas resources; the control of certain hospitals within the province and the privatization or rightsizing of certain public sector enterprises without consulting the province or transfer of federally managed corporations like PIA to Islamabad in which a large number of Sindhis are employed.

The widespread unrest within the province over the Pakistan Island Development Authority has not moved the federal regime to dispense with this controversial ordinance or workout the terms and conditions of the coastal development projects with the provincial government. Similarly, the overenthusiasm of the federal regime to address the woes of Karachi sparked another dispute. The Prime Minister’s concern for Karachi is appreciable. But there is always a more democratic way of undertaking any responsibility. The democracy tends to take into confidence all stakeholders. The biggest stakeholder in Karachi development project is the provincial government apart from the residents of the mega city.

The federal regime should allocate funds and leave the implementation of the project to the broad-based committee under the Chief Minister.

The better parts of Karachi fall within the jurisdiction of Defence Housing Authority and the Cantonment Boards which unjustifiably remain outside the purview of the provincial local government institutions. There are suggestions that these exclusive neighborhoods and boards should be included in the jurisdiction of the Karachi Municipal Corporation. The mega cities of Pakistan should have separate local government systems as prevalent in big cities the world over. In all these provincial matters, the elected provincial leadership could not be sidetracked without any grave harm to the federal harmony.

One fails to understand when the education has entirely devolved to the provinces, why this new controversy of Pakistan Medical Commission and other regulatory bodies to control and micromanage the admission of students in the medical universities within the provinces. What is the fun of holding a centralized test for admission in medical universities under the federal education Ministry?

The uniformity of syllabus in federations is rare. It is alleged that no representation of Sindh has been appointed to the PMC or any of its ancillary agency. Sindhis have lot of complaints about the test papers – to be out of syllabus. They are also apprehensive that a substantial number of seats in their universities would go to outsiders.

The federal regime has been reluctant in opening the Khokharopar and other roots in Sindh for trade with India. Sindh can have flourishing export of agriculture produces to the neighboring markets on the other side of the border. It was not so profitable for Sindh to do trade through the Wagah border because of overland transportation. The demand of Sindh could be given a serious thought if no security compulsions are involved. A lot of finances are being generated from the toll taxes on motorways and national highways. Normally, the control and management of roads and routes should have been with the provincial governments. Sindh has serious reservations on this question which need to be addressed.