

Political and Administrative Crisis in Sindh during Musharraf Era

Irfan Ahmed Shaikh*
Bashir Ahmed Jatoi**

ABSTRACT

This study traces the causes of political and administrative instability in the provincial administration of Sindh which lead to a complex administrative crisis including miss-management, corruption, favoritism, nepotism, and feudalism. The problem began with the replacement of the commissionerate system on local government or nazimate system of 2001. The bill (restoration of an old commissionerate system) was moved in Sindh assembly and passed in July 2011 by the ruling Pakistan People's party (PPP). It would address the question that why rural political elites of Sindh were opposing the local government system while urban political elites supported it. This paper is divided into three parts, the first part discusses the changes that the Local Government System brought about in 2001, the second part discusses the stakes of rural politicians and the third part deals with stakes of urban politicians in the local governance of Sindh.

* Assistant Professor, Department of General History, University of Sindh, Jamshoro. shaikhirfanahmed@hotmail.com. 03003043553

** Lecturer, Department of General History, University of Sindh, Jamshoro. Jatobashir@usindh.edu.pk. 03009856122

Introduction

Karachi is the provincial capital of Sindh that plays a great influence over the political atmosphere of the state. The political instability in Karachi resulted in a greater administrative crisis that engulfed the province of Sindh. There is difference of opinion between rural political elites who are supporting the old commissionerate system and the urban political elites support the local government system. The political parties like Pakistan Peoples party (PPP), *Awami National Party* (ANP), *Jeay Sindh Mahaz* (JSM), *Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz* (JSQM), *Jeay Sindh Tarki Pasand Party* (JSTP), *Jeay Sindh Mahaz Shafi Barfat group* (JSM-S), *Jamat-i-Islami* (JI) and *Mutaheda Qaumi Movement* (MQM) are either supporting the new administrative system or opposing it. The lack of consensus and sincerity among these parties have further deteriorated the administrative set-up of Sindh. Furthermore, arbitrary transfers of the bureaucrats on the political grounds have contributed a profound impact into the crisis.

Local Government Ordinance 2000 was introduced in order to minimize the powers of a deputy commissioner and a superintendent of police who run that state on their will. This was considered to be a silent revolution while decentralizing the power from bureaucracy to local elected people's representatives.¹ The local government ordinance was promulgated on 14 August 2001 under which the *nazim* was elected as the head of the district with powers of over-all control on the district bureaucracy.² Basic democracy (BD) was similar sort of system which was introduced by Ayub Khan in 1960s. Similar to the BD, the objective of LGO was to decentralize power and democracy at the grass root level

1 Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (London: Simon & Schuster 2006), 172.

2 Ilhan Niaz, *The Culture of Power and Governance of Pakistan 1947-2008* (Karachi: Oxford University Press 2010), 125.

in order to empower common people.³ Under the local government ordinance election was held on non-party basis. Therefore, panels were formed by political parties for example *Awami Dost* panel (PPP) and *Khushal* Pakistan (PML-Q). Ironically, all *nazims* elected under the local government election of 2001 were the traditional power wielders, *wadera* (feudals) in case of Sindh. For instance, *nazim* of Nawabshah was Faryal Talpur (MNA) sister of the former President and co-chairperson of the PPP Asif Ali Zardari, *Nazim* of Hyderabad was Makhdoom Rafique Zaman brother of Makhdoom Amin Fahim renowned Sindhi landowner politician and core member of the PPP, *Nazim* of Khairpur was Nafisa Shah (MNA) daughter of the former Chief Minister Sindh Qaim Ali Shah and *Nazim* of Dadu was son of Liaquat Jaoti ex minister of water and power and *Nazim* of Ghotki was Ali Ghur Mehar. However, this picture shows the decentralization of *wadera* power at grass root level, all enjoyed the power as district *Nazims* and many *taluka nazims* were also *wedaras*.⁴

The Sindh local government ordinance was promulgated on 26 August, 2001.⁵ Under this ordinance District Coordination Officer (DCO) replaced the deputy commissioner and *Nazim* became the administrative head of a district that is why grass root level system was in chaos and confusion.⁶ The objective of LGO was to decentralize the political, administrative and financial powers to the district, *taluka* and Union Council level in order to make sure the effective delivery of services, transparency and participation of

3 "Local Government System (2001)" on Story of Pakistan <http://www.storyofpakistan.com/articletext.asp?artid=A144> accessed (12/12/2011).

4 Interview by author with Aijaz Mehar, Correspondent at the BBC, 09/12/201, Islamabad.

5 Government of Sindh, The Sindh Local Government Ordinance 2001 http://www.sindh.gov.pk/dpt/services/RULES/SLGO%202001%20_February03_.pdf (accessed 10/12/2011)

6 Niaz, The Culture of Power, 125.

common people in decision making while institutionalized it at gross root level.⁷

Administratively Sindh was divided into Union Council, *Taluka (Tahsil)*, Town, Districts and City districts were formed.⁸ The role and responsibilities of *Nazims* were to visualize direct district wise development, to make strategies for the projects, maintain law and order, decentralize district government, present proposals to the *Zila* (district) council, look after the delivery and services, maintain financial and administrative discipline in the district government, present tax proposals in the districts, and manage the relief activity (see Figure 1).

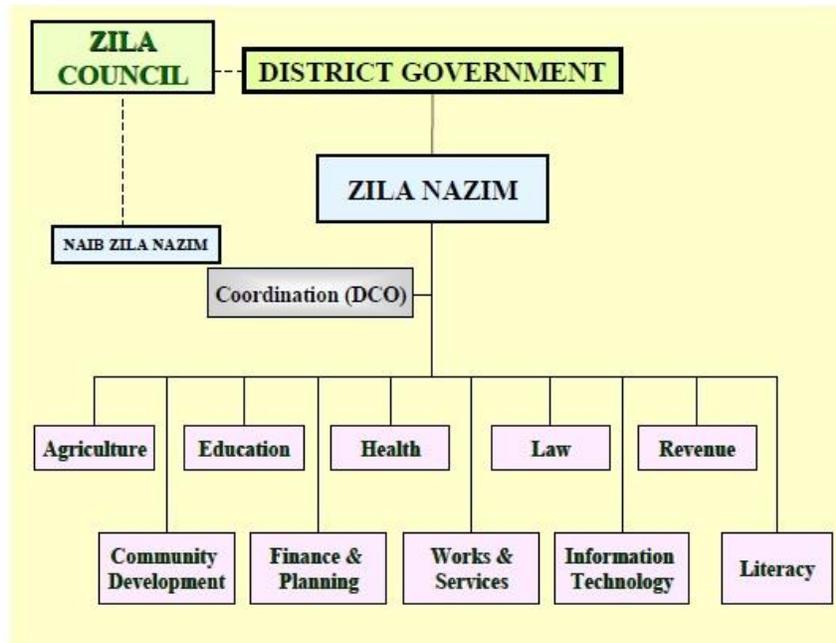


Figure 1: Responsibilities of *Zilla* (District) *Nazim*

Source: “Local Government System in Pakistan and the Aberdeen Agenda” in Symposium on Strengthening Decentralization in Pakistan and the Commonwealth

⁷ Government of Sindh, The Sindh Local Government Ordinance, 3.

⁸ Government of Sindh, The Sindh Local Government Ordinance, 13.

organized by National Reconstruction Bureau in collaboration with Commonwealth Local Government Forum & Commonwealth Secretariat Held in Islamabad, 24-25 July, 2006. p.34.

http://www.nrb.gov.pk/publications/TOC_LG_System_Final_Book.pdf (accessed 10/11/11)

Moreover, *Nazim* had to inspect *Taluka*, municipal, town and union council administration, supervise the working of internal audit office and issue executive orders to the District Coordination Officer (DCO) and Executive District Officer (EDO).⁹

DCO was a new officer of Grade 20 created to replace the DC. All the DCOs were from the district management group (DMG)¹⁰ or provincial management groups. Under this system DCO has to coordinate between the district officers, general supervision over the projects, assist the district nazim; prepare reports on development projects/ plans and give presentation on the annual budget of the district.¹¹

The office of DCO decreased the power of the DMG. In the commissionerate system DC had powers of collecting land revenue, magisterial, and police supervisory, through which politicians exercised powers in their constituencies.¹² However, politicians had to look forward to DC because he had both powers of magistracy and authority over police that authority eroded from DMG under the local government ordinance. Hence, in Sindh, *wadera* himself became the executive head of the district while holding the office of *Nazim* which has proved to be the disaster for the rural Sindh.¹³

9 Government of Sindh, The Sindh Local Government Ordinance, 21

10 Niaz, The Culture of Power, 125.

11 Government of Sindh, The Sindh Local Government Ordinance, 28-29.

12 Niaz, The Culture of Power, 124.

13 Interview with Aijaz Mehar.

Increasing power of *Wadera* Strengthening Feudal System

Theoretically, LGO scheme was good in its objective and agenda; but practically it was designed for the army-friendly families. No doubt funds were distributed at the *taluka* and union council level but there were evidences of rampant corruption and miss-management in the funds. Hence, People and rural political elite of Sindh are opposing the local government system because there are two groups of rural political elite. One who were part of the LGO scheme and got benefits form it another group who were not a part of the scheme and could not get benefit from it. Consequently, those who fall in the second category were opposing it. Besides the conflict of *waderas* with each other on the LGO scheme there also a believe in common people of rural Sindh that this scheme has strengthened either the existing old *wadera* families or emerged new *wadera* class owing to corruption and miss-management of funds. The fact is that prior to the scheme *wadera* culture of Sindh was dying down in natural process because their land had been distributed among their children and grand children. Therefore, they were not as much influential anymore as supposed to be in the past.¹⁴

Under the LG scheme broad level administrative changes had taken place merely on political grounds. Instantatly, new district were formed by virtue of strengthening the *wadera* and certain political parties. For example, Karachi, Hyderabad city, Nawabshah taluka, Mirpurkhas taluka and Sukkur taulka *nazims* belong to MQM.¹⁵ And remaining *zilla* and *taluka nazims* were from the king's party that PML-Q.¹⁶ The classical example of favoring *waderas* is Qambar at Shadad kot newly declared district where many people were killed in the dispute related to the nomination of its

14 Interview with Aijaz Mehar.

15 Interview by author with Altaf Rahemo.

16 Interview by author with Altaf Rahemo.

head quarter. After making new district it was handed over to Nawab Shabbir Ahmed Chandio who left PPP to join the then kings party PML (Q) and became district *nazim*. Similarly, Kashmore at Kandhkot was formed for Saleem Jan Mazari who became its district *nazim*. Hyderabad was divided into four districts in order to strengthen MQM which had great alliance with the ruling party, other wise it was impossible to elect *nazim* of MQM from undivided Hyderabad. When Hyderabad was not divided its district *nazim* was Makhdoom Amin Fahim's brother Makhdoom Rafiq uz Zaman.

Besides districts new *talukas* were formed like Dokri was divided and new *taluka* Bakrani came into existence formerly which was town of Altaf Unar ex-minister without portfolio.¹⁷ The majority of *nazims* were *waderas* who were not well educated.¹⁸ Some of them had never been to school after middle school (8th grade). There is culture in Sindh that *wadera* has not to appear for examination, it is responsibility of their servants or managers to arrange person who appear in the examination in their name that can be impersonation. Consequently, *nazims* were incompetent and unable to deliver the services. During the natural calamities either flood or any other, *nazims* have to make sure service delivery to the community of the district but they were hopelessly failed. Needless to say they ask help from NGOs to provide them shelter and food. Further they were trying to provide facilities to their voters and relatives. They did not consider it their responsibility to work for other community except their voters that had become norm in the politics of Sindh.

The classical example of corruption and making wealth is Ali Gohar Mehar district *nazim* of Ghotki who grabbed thousands of acres government land and got them registered from the revenue department to his name. When

17 Interview with Aijaz Mehar.

18 Niaz, The Culture of Power, 126.

Reni Canal was dug from there he claimed that land as land of archer land and got claim on it from government. Meanwhile gas and petrol found from the field for that he is taking royalty on it from the government; ultimately this case of corruption and grabbing land is under investigation by FIA. Similarly, thousands acres of land in Khairpur district on Nara canal is under the seize of Pir Pagaro and his *murids* (followers) that land has been utilized for hunting purposes.¹⁹

In LGO Police directly came under the jurisdiction of *nazim* who writes ACR of the District Police Officer (DPO); previously which was written by DC. In district there was the personal relationship between the *nazim* and the police chief was fine otherwise coordination has been broken down.²⁰ The *nazim* often seeks favour from the police and exercise his power against their opponent for personal gains. In the district it was difficult for an ordinary citizen to register FIR against any crime without kick back or support of ruling political party. It has been reported people rushed to court and get FIR registered from the session court according to CRPC 22A²¹ 22B²². Judge gives directive to register FIR. What happens is that SHO registers FIR owing to courts directive but practically after getting kick back form the party he disposes it off either in B Class or C class that ultimately gives benefit to the criminal.²³ Under local government system in Sindh, dharel²⁴ (dacoits) culture was deliberately

19 Interview of Aijaz Mehar.

20 Niaz, *The Culture of Power*, 201.

21 Bare Act, *The Code of Criminal Procedure: Act V of 1898* (Lahore: Khyber Law Publisher, 2011), 11.

22 Bare Act, *The Code of Criminal Procedure: Act V of 1898*, 12.

23 Gohar Ghanghro, "Sardar Zardari ji dil kiyen mutasir thi" (Sindhi: How Sardar Zardari was influenced?) in *Sindi Daily Kawaish*, [http://www.thekawish.com/Articl_column/writer\(C\).html](http://www.thekawish.com/Articl_column/writer(C).html) (accessed 10/12/011)

24 Dharel kidnap people for ransom and these groups are backed by feudal and police. Police and feudal provide them weapons and shelter. They always live in kacha area where forest is on the bank of Indus River.

promoted in order to victimize opponents and whosoever stood against *wadera*. *Dharel* culture is kind a force of *wadera* who can use them whenever he wants. Police and *wadera* are the great supporter of dharel, they are the people who provided shelter and weapons to them. Both police and *wadera* make money while taking *bhata* (illegal money) from them.

In the commissionerate system price control and magistracy powers resides in the hands of deputy commissioner.²⁵ It was bit better in that System because *Mukhtiarkar/ tahsildar* (first class magistrate) or deputy commissioner visited market and in order to check the prices of commodities. During the LGO price control became lax because everyone had approach to the city *nazim* through chamber of commerce and trade etc.²⁶ Furthermore, many *nazims* had thier own business for example Qurban Abbasi *taluka nazim* of Larkano was a businessman. Encroachment and price hike was very common phenomenon during the local government system. It was time for the emergence of business mafia who established their hegemony in the markets.²⁷ Somehow it had created open grounds for the business community to sell things on their own rates. It had caused misery in the rural Sindh.

Under the local government scheme magistracy powers were exercised by Judicial Magistrate. Before the LGO magistracy powers lay in the office of deputy commissioner. Judicial magistrate deals with cases of 13D, gives remand and price control that was basically jurisdiction of the deputy commissioner. While appearing before judicial magistrate one needs to seek help of lawyer and pay him fees that is minimum 5000. During commissionerate sytem one had to appear before *mukhtiarkar* or sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) without the help of lawyer. In the court of magistrate

25 Niaz, The Culture of Power, 126.

26 Interview with Altaf Rahemo.

27 Interview with Altaf Rahemo.

cases linger on and it takes long time unlike commissionerate system. In other words appearing at the court of judicial magistrate is very complicated, complex and panic for the poor people.

In the commissionerate system revenue collection was prime responsibility of *mukhtiarkar* to make sure *dhal* (tax on agriculture) which was collected twice in a year from the land owners who possess land more than ten acre.²⁸ Small land owners who had land up to ten acre were exempted from it. During local government scheme almost all *nazims* were land owners therefore, they did not pay *dhal* at all. Thus, it was collected from the small land owners. Ironically, all the forest land was grabbed by *waderas* who cut trees and occupied government plots. For example when Shafqat Unar was *taluka* Dokri nazim he burned all the revenue record of taluka office and got new record for grabbing land.²⁹

Initially, local government system appeared to be an opportunity for the feudal system that was dying out. However, the MQM factor changed the dynamics of local governance in Sindh.

The MQM Factor- Urban political elite support LGO

The election of the local government scheme had taken place in 2001 and MQM boycotted it. Consequently, *nazims* were from PPP, PML (N) and JI. In second term MQM participated and got seat of city *nazim* Karachi. However, five districts of Karachi were merged into city government. Though, Karachi is multi-ethnic city where Pathan, Baloch, Sindhi, Punjabi, Bangali and Kashmiri are residing, The Mohajirs through MQM became the sole powerful community in Karachi by virtue of city *nazim* which is the most powerful post. The population of Karachi was over 9.8 million³⁰ in five

28 Interview with Altaf Rahemo.

29 Interview with Altaf Rahemo.

30 Population Census Organization, Population Size and Growth of Major Cities (Government of Pakistan, 1998) <http://www.census.gov.pk/MajorCities.htm> (accessed 12/12/2011).

districts which were merged into city government. On the contrary Hyderabad had population 1.1 million³¹; it was divided into four districts. The division of Hyderabad was made on the grounds of population; where as this principle was not applied to Karachi.

In fact Karachi and Hyderabad are big cities of Sindh and important economically and politically. Therefore, it was perceived that Sindh came directly under MQM power.

When, MQM became successful in getting city *nazim* Karachi and *nazims* in the other cities of the province, it started to open its political units all over the province in other words it had started its outreach from urban areas of Sindh to rural area of Sindh. By and large it was successful in its agenda. It had opened its unit offices and sub offices in the old Municipality offices.³² MQM got municipality offices on lease and opened its units which increased the outreach of MQM from Karachi to Kashmore, that is, all over Sindh.³³ However, its outreach was indigestible for the indigenous Sindhi people and *wadera* especially who belonged to PPP.

Since, power of MQM was increasing in political, economic, and social terms; Sindhis had great apprehension regarding its penetration to the interior Sindh. Poverty in rural Sindh created ground for MQM. Owing to drastic changes in the interior Sindh due to climate changes that caused floods, draughts and very poor situation of law and order, poverty had increased. Interior Sindh has an agrarian based economy. These climatic and social changes caused insecurity for the rural sindhis. Therefore, they rushed to Karachi in search of jobs for better future; while staying in Karachi, sindhi feel more insecure and alien to their own city which is capital of Sindh due to the immense power and hold of MQM in every walk of life. They felt the compulsion to join MQM in order to get job and survive in Karachi. Many sindhi

31 Population Census Organization, Population Size and Growth of Major Cities.

32 Interview with Altaf Rahemo.

33 Interview with Altaf Rahemo.

who went to Karachi for the better future. However, becoming a member of MQM to be considered high treason in rural Sindh. Furthermore, MQM started to create counter weight against other parties especially PPP in interior Sindh, ANP and JI in Karachi. For example, Ali Ahmed Brohi from Larkana who was from lower middle class became senator on the ticket of MQM. Now he is *wadera* and well known figure of his area. Many notorious lower middle class people joined the party who were involved in *qabzageri* (land-grabbing) and *batakhori/ gunda* tax from the business communities like Shaikh, Memon and Hindus.

Sindhi *wadera* is against Local Government System because he is losing his influence owing to emergence of neo-feudal class. Middle and lower middle class is against LGO by virtue of insecurity of rising hegemony of certain groups. Nationalists groups are against it because they believe that LGO scheme only serve the interest of MQM and *waderas* therefore this system should be changed. During the local government many nationalist were sent behind the bar. For example, MQM workers attacked on Bashir Qureshi chairman of Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz (JSQM). Sindhi believe that LGO scheme was directly proportional to the power of MQM.³⁴

Therefore, not merely rural political elite was opposing the local government scheme but urban political elite also opposed it except MQM. ANP and JI which have power base in urban Sindh were strongly opposing the local government scheme. It had damaged and discouraged Pathan, Sindhi, Baloch, and Punjabi in Karachi. The existing system was commissionerate in Sindh which was not in completely in its previous shape because magistracy power had not given to them.

Sindhi Nationalists

Sindhi nationalist politics is issue oriented. When they observed that the local government system could not serve

³⁴ Interview with Altaf Rahemo.

their interests at large, they tried to mobilize and sensitize the Sindh masses against the scheme. Though nationalists have no vote-bank as such, they still have street power while mobilizing the masses. Nationalists also became the victims of the local government scheme hence strived hard to restore the commissionerate system in the province.

Opposition of LGO and Role of Sindhi media in rural Sindh

In the rural Sindh role of Sindhi media was very appalling. It served the interests of *wadera* and influential persons. Journalists at rural Sindh were nonprofessional and not well educated. Therefore, they had emerged as a mafia while black mailing police and other officers. Local newspapers and media channels do not pay salary to their journalist. Hence, they merely depend upon the mercy of *wadera* and influential persons in order to get tip for their work. While anyone who approaches the journalist for casting news after collecting report they make call to the *wadera* or *nazim* and tell him that there was news against you we would not publishing it which was a great proof of their allegiance to him. Sindhi media was protecting and serving the interests of *wadera* in Sindh for example *topi* day that was initiate by Ali Kazi who is owner of the one leading Sindhi newspaper *Daily Kawish* and channel KTN. He is a relative of Ex speaker of National Assembly Fahminda Mirza and ambitious to be Chief Minister of Sindh. The common trend in the rural Sindh is preferably people watch sindhi channels and read sindhi newspapers. All newspapers and channels are owned by *wadera* who always project their interest. Hence, majority of the channels were opposing the local government scheme because they knew that this system is not in favor of them.

Opposition of LG by educated class and rural population.

Local Government failed to receive popular support in the rural sindh. Ironically, during the local government system all appointments were not made on merit. Mostly appointments

were held either on kick back or favoritism basis. Many new schools were opened in the rural Sindh which became *autaq* (guest house) of *wadera*. *Wadera* voluntarily offered their land for the school because of not in the favour of villagers but for the sake of their own interest. Ultimately, these schools became ghost schools which are present in the out number at the rural Sindh even today. The appointments of the teachers were merely based on the services of a person as *Kamdar* (manager) of *wadera* therefore, educated youth was ignored. Consequently, educated youth had not been supporting the local government system.³⁵

Conclusion

The devolution of power which depended upon the military personals and their interference with the political and civil administration had weakened the state institutions. Hence it had strengthened the power base of MQM in urban Sindh and *wadera* culture in rural Sindh. It further weakened the state administration, for example Karachi which was comprised of five districts and multi-linguistic ethnic groups were handed over to DCO and district *nazim*. It was very difficult to control and address the problems of such big city by single office of DCO and the city *nazim*. While in the interior Sindh division of districts created misgivings among the people of Sindh. Even urban Sindhi were also confused to vote for whom. Urban and rural division had created more rifts between both ethnic groups in Sindh.

The political implications of LGO were also very significant. It interfered with the dynamics of local politics in Sindh. Not only it empowered the *wadera*, it also introduced a new factor of MQM into local political milieu. The result was a clash of interests. This conflict escalated so much that Sindh came to be ruled by two administrative systems. The local governance in Sindh has become messed up due to repeated experiments with administration. There is a need to look into the power dynamics of Sindh, reduce the rural urban divide and enforce a uniform administrative system that would ensure effective service delivery and maintenance of law and order.

35 Interview with Aijaz Mehar, on September 12, 2011, Islamabad.