Modernizing Pakistani Society:  
The Devolution of Power Plan*

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Abstract: When the devolution of power plan was designed the authors meant to achieve three main goals with it: First, to replace the century-old bureaucratic system introduced by the British colonial powers and which was meant to serve their interests and was not delivering satisfactory results in managing problems at the grass root level any more; secondly to evolve a system which would allow the people at the grass root level at the grass root level to interact in the solution of their immediate problems and to improve the delivery of social services by devolving powers from the central and the provincial levels to them through their elected representatives and thirdly, by actively involving a broad section of the people to create new political forces from a middle class and lower middle class background who in the long run may replace the domination of the traditional political families.

1. The philosophy of the devolution of power project

Devolution of power is one of the major projects of the Musharraf government. With this plan announced in 2000 and implemented after local bodies elections in 2000 and 2001 two different objectives which had been formulated soon after the take-over by a bloodless coup within a seven-point agenda were targeted: namely, reorganization of the federal structure of Pakistan and improvement of governance. Both objectives were formulated on the basis of experiences made in the course of the last ten years preceding the coup: a detoriation in governance of the country and a mounting critique and unrest among the smaller provinces of Pakistan because of the highly centralized
type of federal structure of the country leaving no real space for autonomous decision-making to the provinces. But there was a third objective also which was formulated not in the seven point agenda, but when the devolution plan was presented to the public in 2000. That third objective was the modernization of Pakistani society.

What does modernization of the society mean? One of the reasons which is blamed for the failure of the Pakistani state to provide good governance, to fight corruption and personalized politics is the “feudal” set-up of society. What is meant by this is not only the domination of politics, of political parties and of the political institutions like the parliament by big landowning families of the Punjab and Sindh, but also by tribal sardars and maliks from the tribal areas of Balochistan and the NWFP. In addition to this, a feudal or aristocratic mindset is prevalent even among the leading political families who technically are not “feudals” because their main income does not come from big landholding. Still the spirit of using offices for personal gains, bribery and nepotism instead of merit oriented decision making are connected to the pre-modern lifestyle and mode of thinking of these ruling political elites.

In Europe, modern society with modern social set-up came into existence in the wake of a whole set of developments including industrialization, scientific revolution, Enlightenment and the English and French Revolutions. The transition from pre-modern to modern society took Western Europe about two hundred years, from the middle of the 17th century to the middle of the 19th century. Those developments concerned not only changes in the society, the coming up of new social classes, it was also connected with a basic economic transition from a feudal landholding economy to an industrialized urban economy and even an industrialized agricultural production. In addition, the ideas of the French Revolution of equality and fraternity made it possible to design a new type of political and administrative system based on election and merit.
For historical reasons which can not be explained in detail here, this development did not take place in the subcontinent. The modernization of India by British colonial rulers again, was not aimed at modernizing India in the fist place but at modernizing it in those fields and in such a way as it suited the British for upholding and stabilizing their rule. They even found it in some cases more convenient to rather stabilize the old, pre-modern forces of Indian society like the Indian Princes, tribal sardars and maliks and those big landlords who were loyal to the British rule and backed it. In that way, a kind of conservation of pre-modern social structures had been taking place during British rule. After independence, most of the British structures stabilizing pre-modern forces (sardari and maliki systems) in Pakistan were continued; land reforms did not take place which prevented basically the modernization of Pakistani society. Middle classes and lower middle classes developed hesitantly and had no access to political power.

Hence, one major objective of the devolution of power plan was meant to change this. It tries to provide a “short-cut” for underprivileged middle classes to join Pakistani politics from the grass root level. It is meant to be a kind of a “short-cut”, because it tries in a top-down manner to substitute a bottom-up socio-economic process which took centuries in Europe. Besides, the local government reform aims at providing access to political representation only. So far it is not supplemented by any economic reforms like land reforms or changes in the support system of tribal elders. Therefore, the long-term success of the reform in the field of modernization of society remains to be seen.

Pakistan’s political and administrative system: a historical overview

Pakistan came into existence on the 14th August 1947 as a result of the withdrawal of British colonial rulers from their crown colony and the partition of the erstwhile colony British-India into to two independent states: India and Pakistan. Both successor states started their independent existence with a heavy
This colonial heritage in the constitutional field turns out to be quite a difficult legacy, because the British had installed the type of strongly centralized federalism in India that Great Britain herself practiced at home in the United Kingdom and that seemed to serve the aim of British rule in India best: at the one hand - to appease the Indian national movement that was struggling for participation in the policy making process of their motherland by giving to them limited and controlled political power in the provinces, -and on the other hand, to assure that real power remained at the center in British hands. This tightly centralized type of federal structure that was causing and is causing until today quite some problems for the British in their own country also, disregarded the vast geographic extension and the diversity of cultures, social structures and religions in the Indian subcontinent and their drive for autonomous development. Never in the history of the subcontinent before the establishment of British rule had such a strongly centralized and unified state structure existed in India. By introducing it the traditional modes of accommodation and compromise in government that had been in existence before were totally disregarded. The efforts of the Cripps Mission 1942 and the Cabinet Mission 1946 both were directed towards a de-centralized model of post-colonial settlement. This model, however, did not find support with the main political stakeholders of the Indian National Congress or even the rest of the political spectrum. Indian politicians educated by British schools and universities had absorbed the idea of a strong centre which was indispensable for a strong country which after independence was planning to convert British imperialist ideals into the Indian national might of a regional if not global power. It was only Jinnah who for a short while was ready to accept regional autonomy as a possible solution for a “Pakistan within India” as the Cabinet Mission
plan was proposing it. After the Congress withdrawal from the Cabinet Mission plan partition was the only way left; it produced two highly centralized independent states struggling until today with the consequences of this centralization.

Although the Government of India Act was a federal Constitution, its federal part was never implemented during British rule. After 1947 the princely states were absorbed into the respective successor states India and Pakistan. The idea of a highly centralized federal set-up as incorporated in the Government of India Act was never revised. Actually, after the partition it suited the central governments of both India and Pakistan. Therefore, the design of the Government of India Act was taken as the basis on which the first and all following Pakistani constitutions were going to be designed. Accordingly, until today Pakistan is a highly centralized federation with most of the functions kept at the center with the provinces controlled through a system of highly empowered and appointed by the center governors. According to the constitution it has a two tiers set-up: the central and the provincial levels. The local levels though implemented before independence never got any practical political importance or constitutional cover.

Likewise, the administrative system of Pakistan is basically a British heritage. It consists of four provinces, with Punjab being the Western half of the divided British-time Punjab province, Sindh being an independent province since 1935 detached from the British Bombay province, NWFP and Balochistan more or less new creations containing huge parts of tribal areas which did not come under British-Indian administration and do not come under Pakistani law either; they have special administrative settlements. Other than in neighbouring India the administrative division of Pakistan has never been revised and adapted to new necessities after independence. A re-arrangement of the provinces along linguistic guidelines for instance has never been attempted because it was feared that regional nationalisms would be encouraged through such a measure and this was regarded from the very first day of Pakistan’s existence as a disintegrative force.
and a threat to the country’s unity which had to be discouraged. The provinces until today have relatively limited powers and are dominated by a strong and hierarchical bureaucracy.

As another colonial hang-over from British times the role of the bureaucracy in the administration of Pakistan has been very strong. The colonial Indian Civil Service (ICS) in 1947 was transferred straight into the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP). Though a reorganization of the administrative service was attempted by Z.A. Bhutto in the seventies until today the bureaucracy has never been “decolonized” and is displaying rather an attitude of “master” than of “servant” to the people. At the federal, provincial and local levels bureaucrats and their bureaucratic institutions are dominating the running of the state. On all levels the politicians and elected representatives have a hard time to implement any policy against the resistance or without an active cooperation of the bureaucracy which has to be paid for. The failure to implement many of the political decisions of successive governments is at least partly due to this resistance and self-willed attitude of the bureaucracy. Long periods of military rule without or with only weak political representation have aggravated this problem.

The attitude of bureaucrats so far has been: “governments and politicians come and go; we stay.” This has been especially visible at the local level, where the power of the supreme local bureaucrat, the District Commissioner (DC), has been almost unchallenged and unchecked for the last one hundred years until recently. He was something like a local king who was not only the head of the administration and the police, but being the District Magistrate at the same time he had the power of a prosecutor as well. His decisions could be challenged only by the Commissioner of the next higher administrative unit, the division and by a court, which was a theoretical possibility rather than a practical one. Given this situation over the years, at the local level there was a union of convenience between the DC, the district administration and the local feudal families to be found which dominated the scene and which made sure that they cooperated in a way which suited both: Money and other goodies
for the bureaucrats from the ruling families would give those free hand in the running of their estates and in dealing with their peasants. No questions were asked, be it with regard to missing or closed schools, missing health facilities, private prisons and armies. Even the manipulation of elections to secure for the members of the ruling families seats in the provincial and federal parliaments was not a real problem.

**History of Devolution of power to the local level**

This missing or inadequate local tier in the representative system of Pakistan had be the target of previous “devolutions of power”. The most important has been the introduction of a system of “basic democrats” under the first military ruler of Pakistan General Ayub Khan in 1959. General Ayub did not believe that the European type of parliamentary democracy could be successful in a country with a largely illiterate population like Pakistan. Probably relying on “expert advice” he decided to adapt western parliamentary democracy to Pakistani conditions. For that he set up a multi-tiered system of legislative councils from the village to the provincial level. The most important level was the union council level with one union council comprising of several villages. The union councils were responsible for all concerns of local government including agricultural and community development.\(^7\) So far that was acceptable. At the same time Ayub Khan was introducing a limited franchise by using the basic democrats as an electoral college for the election of representatives for the provincial and national assemblies and for the presidential election in 1965. This is the part of Ayub’s reform which has been severely criticized by political forces inside and outside Pakistan. He used the basic democrats who were a creation of his rule to uphold his rule.\(^8\) Apart from that, the newly created local tier did not get any substantial decision making power or financial independence. Therefore, its effectiveness was to be limited.

The system of basic democrats did not have the time to take deeper roots. It was abolished after the retirement of Ayub Khan in 1969. Because of this and for its other limitations, its
aim to educate the population at the grass root level politically, to develop a new class of political leadership and to create a better link between politicians and population at the grass root level was not achieved. Zia ul Haq reintroduced the system in 1979 but it remained meaningless under his military rule which did not invest the local bodies with any financial independence or real political power which would have had to be devolved from the central or provincial levels. It was abandoned soon after his death in 1988.

Finally, it should be mentioned that local bodies and the idea of creating a third tier of political power was never popular with any of the elected governments because it meant that power had to be decentralized, given away. It was lingering on at best and abolished at worst like in the period of 1993-2000. The initiative for creating local governments has interestingly, always been with the military rulers of Pakistan.

Devolution of power and the federal problem of Pakistan

For a full appreciation of the context of the local government reforms of 2001 the need for devolution of power has to be examined in the light of the federal problem that exists in Pakistan.

Constitutionally speaking, Pakistan continues to be a highly centralized federation. Successive elected and unelected Pakistani governments found it necessary to maintain a strong central power over all the territories for several reasons, among them the military threat from India, but also the wish of the dominating Punjabi elite to maintain their dominance at the center within the newly founded state. By interfering into the political process from day one they manipulated the constitutional process to the detriment of provincial autonomy. Even the existence of provinces in Pakistan was prevented for a long time in order to keep political power with West-Pakistan while East-Pakistan (today’s Bangladesh) from the very
beginning had a population majority and was ethnically much more unified than the western half of the country. The “One Unit” system putting all west-Pakistani provinces together into one administrational unit was introduced in 1955 and lasted until 1969. Therefore, all Pakistani constitutions provided for a strong center trying to submerge the linguistically and culturally diverse regions under a strongly unifying rule. Under the traumatic impression of the breaking-away of the eastern part of Pakistan the new constitution of 1973 was the first which restored the four provinces of Pakistan and tried to assign certain autonomy to them. The problem was that this was never implemented and that constitutional amendments soon overrode this intention of the lawgivers.\textsuperscript{11} Until today, the provinces have only limited power and the constitution provides only for two tiers of government, the central government and the provincial governments. Therefore, both problems –the missing of local governments and the quest for provincial autonomy- are interrelated and have a common solution: devolution of power from an overly strong center to the provinces and to the local level within a reformed constitutional set-up.

Only five days after coming to power in 1999, General Musharraf announced a seven-point political agenda which rightly named this problem as one of the most important ones to be solved and also interlinked the reorganization of the federation with the “reconstruction of the institutions of the state through the establishment of a democratically elected system of local governments”.\textsuperscript{12} Keeping in view the above mentioned interdependence at an early stage the task of bringing democracy to the grass root level was combined with the re-distribution of power over all the three tiers of government. However, this idea of such basic changes in the political power system of Pakistan is not very popular with the ruling political forces military and civilian alike. The reorganization of the federation would have required an amendment of the constitution of Pakistan, which needed a two-third majority in the parliament. This majority was not available at that time and therefore, the idea had to be postponed for the time being.\textsuperscript{13}
As a matter of fact the idea of devolving powers from the center to either the provincial or the local levels is disliked by all political stakeholders: by the army (for strategic reasons) and by the powerful central bureaucracy who is afraid to lose control and power; both are trying their best to avoid any such move. Also the political elite of the Punjab province is not interested in autonomy because of their strong representation at the central level. In order to do the possible General Musharraf decided to leave the provincial level out and to tackle the grass root level first by creating a new tier of local governments. The idea behind this was, by applying a bottom-up approach, to initiate changes at the grass root level by involving the people on the ground into the solution of their most burning problems. In order to develop this idea a National Reconstruction Bureau (NRB) under General Naqvi was created on 18th November, 1999; it was assigned the task to develop the devolution of power plan. Foreign expertise in the shape of the German Friedrich-Naumann Foundation and others was acquired in order to design the local bodies system according to international standards.\textsuperscript{14}

If we look at the reasons why this question was given so much priority as to figure among the seven most important points for a reconstruction in Pakistan, the main point to be made seems to be that these measures were aimed at providing for a real change in the lives of the people. And only a real change in the living conditions of the people on the ground would be a justification for the government change. This could not be achieved by cosmetic adjustments; it required basic rearrangement of power distribution. Therefore, the following objectives were formulated to be achieved by the devolution plan:

- Tackling the basic problems of the daily life of the people at the local levels in providing better governance, access to justice and social services at the ground: provision of water and sewage systems, garbage disposal, education and healthcare at the community level
This can be best achieved by including the people on the ground into the solution of their own problems so as to make them aware of their own responsibilities, to create something like a “civil society” and to encourage new people from a middle class background to join politics and in the long run make a difference in the political set-up of the country.

- Rearrangement of power at the grass root level by separating executive power and magistracy in the administration
- The separation of investigation and prosecution in the field of judiciary
- Provision of fiscal devolution

The drawback of the solution found is quite obvious: any devolution of power plan which is devised by the center but transfers power from the provinces to the local level without involving the provinces had to create a lot of resistance on the provincial level. The provincial governments feel that together with all the grievances they already maintain against the federal government they are now deprived of even more power by getting excluded from the process of devolution. Therefore, the local governments who did depend on the cooperation with the provinces had to face stiff resistance from them especially when the political forces ruling at the provincial and at the local level were different. Another source of stiff resistance was the bureaucracy which was refusing to give up their almighty power at the local level and who insisted that no layman can run the districts properly.

**Elections as a means to change the power structure of Pakistani society**

The most easily accessible way to join the politics is to participate in the elections either passively by getting registered in the voter’s list and vote on election day or actively as candidate in the election.
So far the elections in Pakistan have had many flaws and did not provide for an access of new social forces into politics. Pakistani politics, governments and parliaments have been heavily dominated by “political” families who are usually families with a landholding, tribal and/or bureaucratic background. Political parties in Pakistan are quite different from political parties in Europe: while in Europe their basis is a certain political ideology like liberal, conservative, social-democratic, exists, in Pakistan a political party is a private enterprise of a family or group of families meant to ensure their access to power. The party manifestos of the main political parties are documents without any practical relevance; ideologically speaking they are mixtures of eclectic ideas and wishful thinking. Most political parties have no democratic structure: they are jumping pads for the representatives of the powerful families who are also providing the financial basis for the party. Grass root-level party workers do have hardly any chance for upward moving within the party structure. Party elections are rare and are a formality rather than a real search for new leadership. Party presidents are sometime appointed for lifetime and parties are run sometimes in a dynastical way: Children inherit the place of the father/mother and secure the political dynasty of the family. Besides, the decisions within the party are mostly taken by a small inner circle or by the party boss alone and party members are not included into the decision making process. Another problem is the financing of the parties and the election campaigns. Candidates have to finance their own election campaigns and their party careers. This of course leaves lower income party members out and does not take into consideration the personal record of involvement into party work of the candidate. All these features have resulted in highly personalized politics and have ensured that lower income and social status groups were effectively excluded from entering the political arena.

Keeping in view this situation the LGO has provided for the local bodies’ elections to be partyless meaning that political parties should not be involved in the election process and candidates should not have any party affiliation. This change is
an outcome of the above described situation within political parties in Pakistan. It is also a direct outcome of the earlier mentioned “philosophy” of the devolution of power plan, namely that it aims at drawing new social groups and strata into politics and eventually create a new political class preferably with a middle class or lower middle class social background in Pakistan.

As a matter of fact, the two local bodies elections which have been held in 2001 and 2005 have shown that the attempt to keep out political parties has not succeeded. While during the first local bodies elections the party influence was weak probably owning to the fact that local bodies were looked at as a vain exercise which might even collapse in the course of time and with no real power attached to the local governments by 2005 in became clear that firstly, the plan did not collapse and secondly that there was considerable political power and influence at least in the offices of Nazim (head of the local government) and Naib Nazim (deputy head). That is why the political parties in 2005 took a keen interest in the elections and made sure that their representatives (though without the party label on them) would stand as candidates and get elected. During the elections and now the population is quite clear about the party affiliation of the respective member of the local government. Therefore, the idea of partyless elections has not worked out in practice.

But even in theory, it seems a right proposition that really partyless candidates would have no or only scant political support and lack in many cases the financial means to run even a limited election campaign. If not with money, but parties do provide their candidates considerable support as workers, by providing transportation, in printing and distributing election material, organizing corner meetings. The connection between the provincial level which is party-based and the local level would also be more difficult with local representatives lacking any party affiliation. The way towards “new faces” probably still goes through existing parties. There are plenty of them and not all are dominated by feudals. New parties can come up though the problem of financing is of course there.
With regard to financing the election campaign the LGO has provided strict limits to expenditures which are allowed under the scheme. The idea was of course to allow less financially potent candidates to stand for elections and thus join politics. Unfortunately, the problem with this provision especially during the second election of 2005 has been the failure to implement it.

Besides, the LGO has provided for a new and innovative election mode consisting of a combination of direct and indirect election elements. The base of the system is the lowest administrative level, the union council. The members of the union council are elected directly on adult franchise. The nazim and the naib anzim of the union council are elected separately on a joint ticket also directly on adult franchise. As a major innovation the scheme provides for reserved seats for minorities, women and workers/peasants at all three tiers including the union council level. They are elected indirectly by the directly elected councilors including the nazim/naib nazim from a separate list of candidates.

One third of the seats general councilor seats and the peasant/workers seats are again reserved for women. This is a major innovation which is going to give women a secured direct access to all tiers of the local government. They are directly elected at the union council level and indirectly at the taluka/town and district levels. Keeping in mind the fact that women can also stand as candidates for the general seats at the union council level a scenario is quite possible when their number exceeds that of the males. The possibility is contained in this electoral arrangement. But even without this extreme case coming true the LGO secures a place of substantial presence and influence to women. At the same time, the reservation of seats for disadvantaged social groups like peasants/ workers tries to implement the spirit of the reforms: to draw new forces and “faces” into local level politics. It should be noticed though that the provision of a minimum educational qualification of matriculation as it is demanded in the LGO could be a hindrance
especially for candidates from this group. The same can be said about the financial obligations involved in an election campaign.

A word about the electoral process in Pakistan.\textsuperscript{18} Elections in Pakistan have always been “flawed” if we are looking at them with European eyes. Given the fact that there is no proper registration of births and deaths in Pakistan and that no system of registering the citizens at their respective places of living exists the electoral rolls for any poll in Pakistan have been inadequate containing people who are not alive any more, who do not live at the place of birth or whose names have not been added to the register after their attainment of voting age. Until recently no identity cards were asked for when voters turned up in the polling station or any handwritten, hardly readable copy of any card was accepted. Given the high rate of illiteracy in the country most people are not in a position to fill in the forms for obtaining an identity card or for getting themselves registered as voters. Even any census so far has been incomplete and/or incorrect. These facts of course open a large space for all kinds of intended and unintended inaccuracies in the polling of votes. Women identity cards many a time did not have a photo so that anybody could use it. As we have learned recently about “ghost schools” and “ghost dispensaries” in the polls of 1997 and 2001 I have met with “ghost polling stations” also. This applies in the first place to rural areas, not to polling stations in towns and cities. I found it extremely difficult to decide how much of the inaccuracy in the polling process was intentional and how much just casual and an expression of “normal chaos”. The counting of the votes in the polling stations in all cases observed by me has been without any flaw. Of course, many of the accusations of rigging are not confined to the polling process on the election day, but to the preliminaries of the elections such as access to media, transfers of bureaucrats before the elections, rearrangement of constituencies etc. It seems quite clear that many of them do have a point. The idea of impartiality and evenhandedness is not very well established in a mainly pre-modern society with highly personalized politics and systems of patronage. Still I think the elections do serve the purpose and are the best way for choosing representatives of the people.
First Local bodies election 2000/2001

The first local bodies elections took place in several stages; the main reason being security concerns. The devolution of power plan had not been met with too much of enthusiasm by the people who had not been involved in its designing and who just did not understand the details and were not able to appreciate the full dimension of the plan. Mainly the bureaucracy who were going to lose a large part of their power to the new local governments opposed the plan fiercely and gave lengthy arguments about why it was impossible that the plan would ever work. The established parties and political families also underestimated the importance of the new level of government and did not care to send their candidates into the race.

In the first round of the elections enthusiasm was still kept back. The overall turn-out was well below 50% and about 30% of the seats went uncontested. Especially from the districts in Sindh a lack of interest was reported and during the election campaign a general exploitation of tribal and caste bondages was observed. Major parties like the MQM boycotted the elections. Minorities mostly also boycotted thus protesting against the provision of separate electorate. Accordingly, the results were quite unusual and unexpected in a way. The idea of bringing in “new faces” seemed to work. For instance, in the Punjab district of DG Khan in some places over 50% of “new faces” were elected. Also in the women’s participation major steps forward were recorded at least in some districts: For the first time in the history of Dera Ismail Khan 342 women filed their nomination papers for various seats; in one union council a woman nazim got elected. While the turn-out during the first phase was still low a slightly improved picture came out during the second phase of the elections starting from 21st March 2001.

The turn-out of votes went up to almost 55%. Women’s participation showed an encouraging level in many places. Of course, the problems of preventing women from casting votes in the tribal areas of NWFP and the dominance of tribal and caste bondages in many places was clearly visible at the same time.
But keeping in mind our analysis of the structure of Pakistani society any result different from this would have been unnatural. Nevertheless, positive signs in many fields were visible and the expectations for the remaining phases of the local bodies elections and those to come in future years were encouraging. Just to illustrate this with the women’s issue: For the third phase of elections taking place in 20 districts on 31\textsuperscript{st} May the number of women contesting was with 15,788 above all expectations. Some 50,000 women were likely to be inducted in different tiers of local councils on the completion of the election process on 14\textsuperscript{th} August this year. This was an impressive number, even if some of them might have been elected unopposed or others may have been elected as being the wife or sister of a prominent husband. The same can be said about the “new faces” that had come up. Those newcomers had a good chance to establish their credits regardless if they had won uncontested.\textsuperscript{21}

**Local bodies’ elections 2005**

By 2005 the pre-election situation had changed basically. By then it had become clear that the local bodies did work and had not collapsed; that there was a considerable power and influence attached to the position of the Nazim and Naib Nazim and that the new structure though working with draw-backs and a number of constraints it still was an important field for gaining political profile for individuals and parties. For instance, in Karachi Naimatullah of the Jamaat- Islami ) was elected nazim together with a Naib Nazim from the ruling PML(Q) during the first phase. The performance of Naimatullah and his counterpart Naib Nazim Tariq Hassan PML(Q) was quite a relief for the Karachi population who had been facing countless difficulties in their daily lives which were for the first time addressed if not removed. A growing popularity of the JI and the experience that smooth cooperation with a representative of that party is possible were the most important results of the first four years of local government in Karachi.

Therefore, the stage for the second local bodies elections was set differently: The political parties in general and especially
the PML(Q) and MQM realized that they can not afford to keep out from the local level and leave the space to their political rivals. As a result, about 28 members of the National Assembly including federal ministers were contesting the local bodies elections. In addition, the local bodies’ elections were increasingly regarded as an early indicator for the outcome of the forthcoming general elections in 2007 by the public. This explains the centrality of the question if or if not the local bodies elections were to be held and under which circumstances they would be conducted.

One of the new regulations introduced into the LGO in 2005 was the provision that all current Nazims should resign 60 days before their turns are expiring and so-called caretakers were taking over the districts. Those caretakers were government officials who could ensure a neutral and evenhanded preparation for the forthcoming elections. Of course the same caretakers could also be used to create favourable conditions for the government parties. In a society where political loyalties have a prize and the neutrality of the bureaucracy is not ensured the options are there. In any case, the opposition parties who are asking for a caretaker government for the general elections in 2007 were up in arms against this caretaker regulation and threatened to mobilize the public against the provincial government if they are forced to resign before the forthcoming local bodies elections. In Sindh Chief Minister Arbab Rahim was accused of harassing the opposition Nazims and of interfering in the affairs of their local governments. This may well be right keeping in mind that most of the Nazims in Sindh belong to opposition parties especially PPP. In preparation for the second elections the president of the ruling PML(Q) Chaudhry Shujaat had gone as far as to create a task force for the local government elections headed by himself which clearly showed the importance given to the second election as against the earlier ones.

As a result, the outcome of the local bodies’ elections was a sweeping success for the ruling party PML(Q) and their political allies like the MQM in Karachi. This can be said safely
though theoretically the elections were supposed to be partyless. At all times the affiliation of any of the candidates with his or her political party was known to the public. New names for the party affiliations were created like “al Khidmat” for the Jamaat-I Islami. It is also right that in many cases the candidates of the government parties were promoted and opposition candidates prevented from running in the elections or disadvantaged during their election campaign. In Karachi for instance the pro-government MQM swept the polls wiping out the Jamaat-I Islami and the PML(Q) though those parties and their Nazim and Naib Nazim had done quite well during the first period of the local bodies. But it would be quite wrong to blame this solely on government interference.

The MQM has traditionally a strong hold in Karachi and the urban centers of Sindh. Their boycott of the 2001 election gave the JI and PML(Q) the chance to win. Equally, the basis of PPP support in Sindh and elsewhere is slowly eroding given the absence of the chairperson for the last so many years and the unimaginative policies of the secondary leadership in the country. The purpose here is to say that though irregularities and rigging did take place this is not the full truth about the election result. The loosing parties have to ask themselves about the efficiency of their policies and the loyalty of their candidates. Besides, the newly elected candidates to whatsoever party they belong will have to perform well and to produce results for the people at the ground. That this is possible within the new structure has been proven. If they can do that and the conditions in the districts are improving it was right to elect them. If they can’t they will not survive on the long run.

Local Governments in Karachi and Sindh: an analysis of the modernization aspect

It is of course too early to make a final analysis about the social changes which the devolution of power plan may have initiated. After a long period of negligence at the local level this change needs to be implemented fully in order to be able to unfold its capacity. The process of implementation is far from
complete. Especially the various committees at the neighbourhood level are still not created. But other parts in the fiscal field are also still missing. The reasons for the slow progress in implementation are various: sometimes there are no candidates available who are ready to work in those committees, sometimes the knowledge and training is lacking. The membership of bureaucrats in the committees has been resented and in most cases neither their agenda and powers are clear nor do they have enough financial support.

Though implementation is still well under way and no final judgment should be made at this point, it seems that there are still some first conclusions which can be drawn from the experience of the last five years.

There is some visible success with regard to the aim of bringing “new faces”, i.e. people from a non-feudal, middle class background without prior political experience into politics. This partial success is connected mainly with two facts: one, the introduction of a huge number of women seats and secondly, the sweeping success of the MQM in Karachi and some urban centers in Sindh.

Looking at all Pakistan this success of course turns out to be only a relative one. For the time being MQM is a regional party of urban Sindh and has no comparative hold in the rest of the country. It should still be kept in mind that it is the declared aim of MQM to develop into an all-Pakistan party. Though this is a long term aim the party is working on it and given the dedication its party workers to this goal it might well come true in the future.

With regard to the women seats we have to register that there is a mixed picture. In many places outside Karachi women seats are occupied by the wives, sisters and daughters of men from “political families”. Those families send their women in order to secure the interests of the family at that level. So in that case a woman in herself is not a “new face”. But, having a closer look at it in the long run this may still turn out to be a success for
the improvement of the situation and place of women in Pakistani society at least. It is not helpful with regard to breaking the rule of political dynasties.

The major lesson which can be drawn from the so far visible results of the devolution plan is that it works visibly better in urban areas where the hold of traditional feudal and tribal forces is less sweeping. But given the fact that Pakistan is mainly still an agricultural society, this will not be enough. *In the rural and backward tribal areas the devolution plan has so far resulted in a reinforcement of the traditional political forces.*

Therefore, opening up opportunities for political empowerment of alternative social groups at the grass root level is a step into the right direction, but it insufficient in itself for bringing about a major change in the political power structure of the rural part of the Sindhi society. There, the politics of political empowerment have to be supplemented by politics of economic empowerment. What does that mean? It means that for new faces in order to come in we need a stronger rural middle class, which is independent enough to challenge the power of the traditional political forces.

How to achieve that? Probably it is easier to say it than to do it. Basically, the rural population of Sindh is depending economically as well as for all kinds of guidance in life on the landlord. A land reform would be a step in the right direction, giving peasants access to ownership of land which brings them out of this direct dependency. Besides, access to credits and micro credits and to modern land-tilling tools as well as agricultural know-how is required. For that of course the education of the peasants has to be improved. That means, there is no easy or quick solution. The new rural middle class will have to organize itself efficiently in order to counter the political influence of the traditional political families.

The case is even more complicated in the tribal areas of Balochistan and Fata where in addition to all other problems the volatile security situation is deeply affecting the daily life of the people and their potential to improve their situation. These areas
have mostly no big landholding and the arable land available is limited. So the need for land reforms may be so urgent. Here the tribal leaders are the traditional political leaders of the community. No specific research has so far been done in this respect. But there are indications that the devolution of power plan is creating certain problems in adjustment between the tribal and the settled areas\textsuperscript{27} which has to be looked into in future.

Finally it should be highlighted again that these are preliminary results of a social reconstruction taking place in the wake of the devolution of power plan. The first results in Karachi are encouraging, but full implementation takes more time. Still, the weak points could be taken care of in order to make its impact more effective.
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Mrs. Najma Saeed Chawla, UC Gulshan-e Iqbal, Karachi
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Mrs. Shamim Mumtaz Wasi, Saddar Town, women seat
Mr. Saeed Ghani, UC Chansasar Goth, Jamshed Town
Mr. Sher Afghan Khan, Gulshan-e Iqbal Town, labour seat
Mr. Muhammad Asif Siddiqi, Saddar Town, labour seat
Mrs. Nikhat Shakeel Khan, Liaqatabad Town, women seat,
Mr. Rafiq Ahmad, Malir Town, labour seat
Mr. Ramzan Awan UC Kehkashan, Jamshed Town
Ms. Sarwat Arif, Saddar Town, women seat
Mr. Arif Bhatti, Gulshan-e Iqbal Town, minority seat
Mr. Zafar Ali Rajput, Zila Naib Nazim Hyderabad
Habib-ur-Rehman, taluka city nazim Hyderabad
Ms. Rana Shah, Khairpur district council, women seat
Mr. Rizwan Ahmad Sheikh UC9 Hyderabad

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Modernizing Pakistani Society

References and Notes

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1. The idea of modernity and modern society in Europe is closely connected with the development of democracy and liberalism. Accordingly, also for Pakistani society modernization of society was perceived to be a precondition for democratization.

2. This is not right now not possible because of the precarious situation in Balochistan and FATA


5. The federation was planned to consist of the directly ruled British-Indian provinces and the indirectly ruled, semi-autonomous Indian princely states. Because the Indian princely states never joined the scheme, the federative part of the Act remained inactive.


8. The same intention is suspected for Gen. Musharraf though no indirect method of elections has been introduced by him. I have discussed the hazards of parliamentary Democracy for Pakistan in > B. Robotka, The Dilemma of Democracy….


10. See historical reasons above.

11. A growing protest against the suppression of especially the smaller provinces found its expression in the
formation of a “Pakistan Oppressed Nations Movement” (PONAM) in 1999 by representatives of nationalist parties of the three smaller provinces.

14. Interview with resident representative of FNS, Islamabad, in March 2001
15. Only after the Political Parties Ordinance was changed in preparation for the 2002 elections which demanded intra-party elections as a precondition for participation in the general election this situation changed at least formally.
17. There are only very few exceptions to this. The two most striking are the Jamaat-i Islami and the MQM which are middle class and even lower middle class dominated and have in the case of the JI a consistent political ideology.
18. The author has worked as a member of election observing groups in the 1997 general elections, the 2001 local bodies elections and the 2002 general elections. The following remarks are based on the experiences made therein.
21. for the province of Sindh Nafisa Shah is one of the success stories of the first local bodies elections.
22. The News, June 30, 2005
23. The News, May 16, 2005
24. The News, June 4, 2005
25. please refer to the general remarks made about elections in Pakistan above.
26. Dawn Monday October 9, 2006
27. This has not been subject to our study so far; but some hints amounting to that have been found in:
Dawn, March 29, 2007