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New Provinces...

Introduction:

In Pakistan, there is an important and ongoing debate about the creation of new provinces. This issue is not just about changing borders on the map. It is connected to the historical grievances, ethnic identity, economic disparity, and political power struggle. These issues have created a movement arguing that the current four-province structure is no longer viable, and a new framework is needed. However, there are many hurdles in the way of creating new provinces. Therefore, overcoming these challenges requires unprecedented political will and a national consensus.

Historical Context:

Pakistan's current provincial structure is a colonial legacy, designed by the British for centralized control. This

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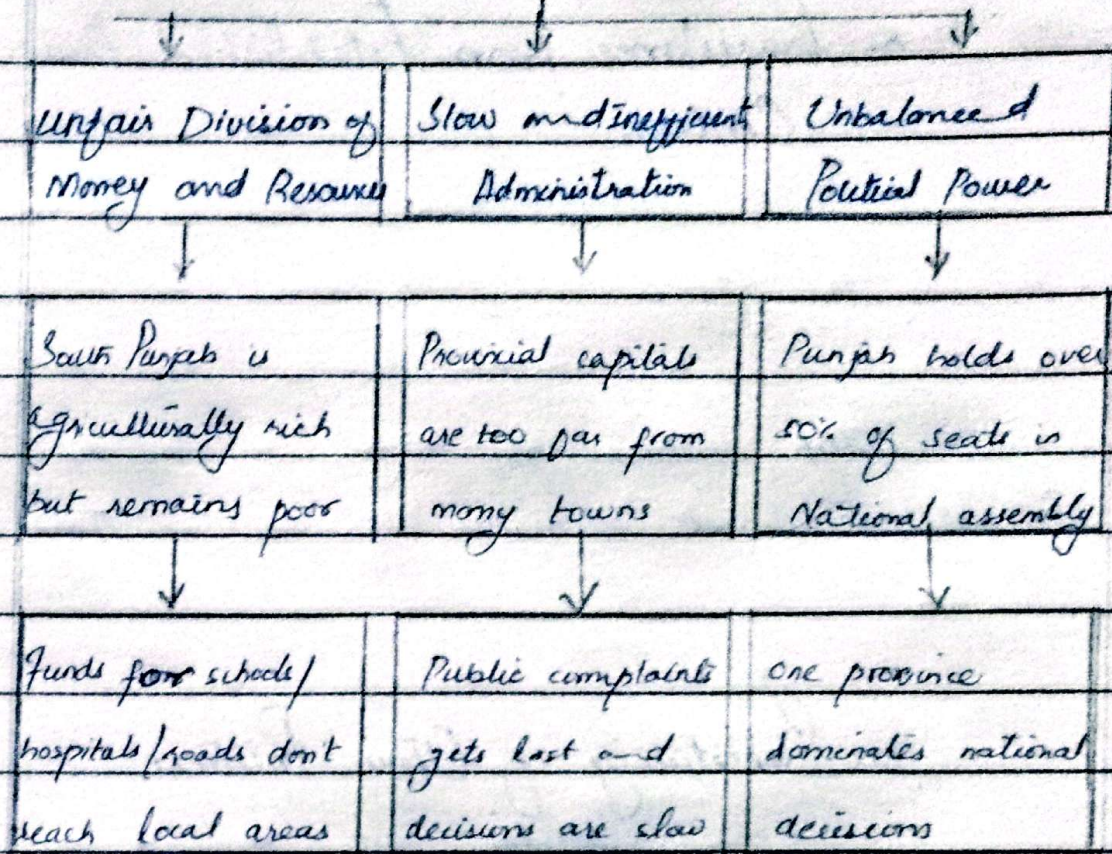
approach was replicated after independence with "One Unit" scheme in 1955, which merged West Pakistan into a single province. The policy was deeply unpopular for suppressing regional identities and was dissolved in 1970. However, the return to the four original provinces failed to address the internal disparities and sense of political marginalization within them, planting the seeds for today's demands for new provinces.

Why Pakistan Needs New Provinces?

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Current Provinces are too Large and
Powerful



Challenges to Provincial Creation.

1. Political Hurdles: The Contest for
Influence and Control:

a. Lack of Sustained Political will.

Political parties often champion
new provinces in opposition but abandon
the cause when in power, fearing

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-the loss of support in existing provincial strongholds.

b- Resistance from Established Power Centers:

Elites in current provinces oppose division to retain their influence. For example, creating a "South Punjab" province would significantly reduce the land, population, and financial resources of the existing Punjab.

c- Sensitivity of Ethnic Politics:

In Sindh, the demand for a separate province is viewed as an attack on the Sindhi homeland, making it a highly volatile issue.

2. Constitutional and Legal Hurdles:

The Procedural Deadlock:

a- Constitutional Barriers:

Article 239 of the Constitution requires a two-thirds majority in both

houses of Parliament and the approval of the provincial assembly being divided

3. Administrative and Economic Hurdle:

a- Complex Division and Assets and Liabilities:

Splitting the massive infrastructure, civil service, and debt of a province like Punjab would lead to protracted and continuous disputes.

b- Prohibitive Start-up Costs:

Establishing a new province necessitates a new capital, a full secretariat, and an entire administrative machinery, requiring billions of rupees - the national exchequer can ill-afford, as seen with the creation of Telangana in India.

4. Socio-Cultural and Security Hurdles:

It is feared that if new provinces are created on the basis of language

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or ethnicity, such as Siraiki-speaking province, it will encourage other small groups to demand their own provinces or even independence.

5. Bureaucratic Hurdles:

Furthermore, the creation of new provinces would divert the attention from more urgent matters such as, from looming security threats to climate change induced worsening natural disasters and extreme weather phenomena that Pakistan is confronting at present.

Strategic Framework for Action:

1- Prioritize the Most Viable Case: the South Punjab Pilot Project:

Begin with the demand that has the broadest political and administrative consensus. The creation of a 'South Punjab' province can serve as a national pilot project. A successful creation would

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demonstrate the benefits of smaller provinces and build public and political confidence.

2: Forge a Multi-Party Constitutional Consensus:

Instead of a single party, all major political parties should negotiate and sign a 'Charter of Federation'. This charter would be a public commitment to mutually agreed-upon process for creating new provinces. This depoliticises the issue and builds essential trust.

3. Establish a National Commission on Provincial Reorganization:

Form an independent, technocratic commission comprising retired judges, economists, geographers, hydrologists, and senior civil servants. Its mandate would be to - delineate boundaries, devise asset division formula, and develop transitional roadmap, and roadmap.

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4. Learn from Successful International Models:

Pakistan can draw valuable lessons from other federations.

India has created several new states like Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Telangana, based on administrative and developmental needs.

Nigeria: Moved from a three-region structure to 36 states to mitigate ethnic conflict and bring government closer to the people.

5. Frame the Discourse Around Good Governance and Development:

Shift the public narrative away from emotionally charged ethnic arguments.

The primary advocacy for new provinces should focus on tangible outcomes:

improved service delivery, faster justice, better schools and hospitals and enhanced local accountability.

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6. Implement Planned Devolution Within Existing Provinces.

Provincial governments should enact meaningful devolution, empowering divisions and districts with greater administrative and financial authority.

Conclusion:

Creating new provinces is not about breaking Pakistan. It is about fixing it. The current system makes millions of people feel left out and ignored. While the challenges are real, they can be overcome with strong political will and a clear plan.