

Press Coverage of One day Conference

“Devolution of Power to Local Governments: Challenges and Reforms”

30th September, Islamabad Hotel, Islamabad.

DAWN

Local govt powers ‘a historic dispute’

A REPORTER — PUBLISHED ABOUT 5 HOURS AGO

ISLAMABAD: Local government has been practiced in our land since 21st Century BC but the politics behind the practice seems to have changed little.

That is what one gathered at a conference on the challenges the devolution of power to local government (LG) brought. The conference was held by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) here on Wednesday.

Professor Dr Ishtiaq Chaudhry, Head of the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at the National Defence University, held politicians more responsible than the bureaucracy for the third tier of the democratic system not taking root in Pakistan in its 68 year existence.

What else, except lack of political will, prevented the political parties which have ruled Punjab and Sindh for the last eight years, to hold LG elections. But he doubted those elections could be delayed any further.

To him the Basic Democracy System introduced by General Ayub Khan was “the best LG System”. Without offering an alternative, the major political parties agitated and buried that LGS in 1967, he said.

Similarly, politicians did not accept the LG system given by General Ziaul Haq in the 1980s. He said, "General Pervez Musharraf's 'Devolution of Power Plan of the year 2000' was real devolution but political parties did not accept that either."

Prof Dr Ishtiaq Chaudhry found it unfortunate the political parties do not understand that the local government system strengthens them. He suggested structural changes that will make local governments so strong political parties would find it impossible to abolish them.

Federal Minister for State and Frontier Regions retired Lt-Gen Abdul Qadir Baloch said the world recognised the local governments as the best system to solve people's problems but in Pakistan it failed because the democratic process could not continue uninterrupted.

"Police and District Administrations are against the LG system," he said, recalling that in 2001 "the Nazims tried to occupy the residences of Deputy Commissioners and use their powers".

Agreeing that legislation was the job of elected assemblies, he said issues like development, sewerage system, water supply etc should be handled by the local governments.

However, the retired general said "since local government system works well in educated societies, devolution of power to that level in Pakistan should occur in phases."

It was Mr Azhar Bashir Malik, Chief Operating Officer of the Devolution Trust for Community Empowerment, who wondered why the merits of local government were being discussed when it had been in practice in Harappa and Mohenjodaro societies in 2000 BC.

He said, "Invest and implement LG System with all powers and let it work without any interruption. Representatives elected to LGs should have control over their funds. Unfortunately they are not allowed to spend funds and without that power LGs will never be able to deliver."

He added, “The criteria for the federation to allocate financial resources to the provincial governments is based on the principle of poverty and underdevelopment and the provinces should apply the same principle in allocating funds to the district governments.”

Federal Secretary Inter Provincial and Local Governments Affairs, Muhammad Ejaz Chaudhary, noted that the idea of LGs is not embedded in the constitution.

“The rich and the mighty dominated LGs of the Ayub Khan and Ziaul Haq eras. The LG system introduced by Pervez Musharraf was very good but could not take off,” he said, “It is necessary to devolve power to people. The 18th Constitution Amendment dealt with all issues except the LGS.”

Participants of the conference agreed that the third tier of government has been neglected in the past. They said ‘concrete reforms’ were needed to introduce a vibrant LG System. That alone would open up participatory spaces for the citizens to access their social and political rights.

MNA Daniyal Aziz, an old warrior for LGs and moderator of the conference, concluded it by declaring that “decentralisation of power is the ultimate solution to uphold democracy”.

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THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE

WITH THE International New York Times

Challenges and reforms: Call for empowerment to local governments

By [Our Correspondent](#)

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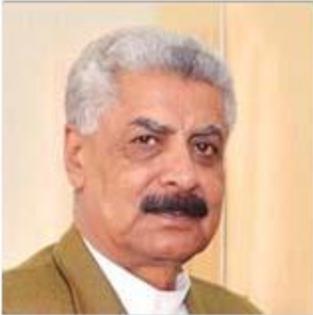


IPRI
Building Consensus

Conference discusses financial, policy issues facing the LG system. PHOTO: ipripak.org

ISLAMABAD: The need for grass-root level democracy, fiscal empowerment and balancing national, provincial and local priorities were stressed at an event focused on empowering the local government system on Wednesday.

The Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) hosted the event titled 'Devolution of power to local governments: challenges and reforms' at a local hotel on Wednesday.



” Provincial govts should deal with making laws and elected local governments should enforce them

Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions Lt Gen (retd) Abdul Qadir Baloch

IPRI President Ambassador Sohail Amin stressed on the importance of delegating power to local governments.

“We need to overcome the challenges of devolution of power and avoid factors that trigger controversy between local and provincial governments,” he said.

Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions Lt Gen (retd) Abdul Qadir Baloch, the chief guest at the event, said “Local government is the third tier of any nation. Unfortunately, there have been disruptions in our democratic system.”

“Provincial governments should deal with making laws and elected members of local governments should have control to enforce them,” he added.

Policy experts addressed various aspects of devolution of power to the local governments, such as local level democracy; fiscal empowerment of local governments; and balancing the responsibilities of national, provincial and local governments.

Dr Ishtiaq Choudhr, head of the peace and conflict studies department at the National Defence University, spoke on grass-root level democracy.

“A local government system is not just the base of democracy, but it is a crucial element in the proper functioning of government in a political system,” he said.



” There are pointless ministries such as the one for harmony. We cannot afford such ministries

MNA
Daniyal Aziz

“We need a ruthless and impartial analysis of why we have not been able to establish an effective local government system. One of the reasons why our country is not able to ensure power to local government is because every new government dismantles the previous government’s system,” he said.

Devolution Trust for Community Empowerment CEO Azhar Bashir Malik presented his argument on fiscal empowerment of local governments.

“Localisation is not a gamble, but a no-regret system,” he said.

He added that the criteria for financial allocation from federal to provincial governments are based on the principle of poverty and underdevelopment. He said the same notion should be applied to allocating resources from the provinces to district governments.

Ministry of Inter Provincial Coordination Secretary Muhammad Ejaz Chaudhry presented on balancing national, provincial and local responsibilities. He highlighted that the local governments are not embedded in the Constitution.

“It is rather unfortunate that not a single political party in the country has stressed on the need for a local government system or made efforts to empower them,” he said.

The conference was chaired by MNA Daniyal Aziz, who said that it is important to separate reality from perceptions.

“We have millions of organisations, departments and ministries, but the basic issues are still unaddressed. There are pointless ministries such as the one for harmony. We cannot afford such ministries,” he stressed.

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<http://tribune.com.pk/story/965291/challenges-and-reforms-call-for-empowerment-to-local-governments/>