

Demand of the Saraiki Province and the Role of Political Parties: A Comparative Study of Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (2008-2018)

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: June 03, 2024 Revised: June 27, 2024 Accepted: June 29, 2024	The sense of deprivation often leads towards ethnic conflicts in state. The lack of social, political and economic opportunities create tendencies of demanding new units within the state. The demand of the Saraiki province is also an example of the demand of the deprived people. The Saraiki province has been a long wish of local people of Saraiki belt. Almost all the past governments did not heed proper attention and any mechanism could not be emerged for the Saraiki province. The Saraiki belt (Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazi Khan), despite the promise of equal rights by giving new province to them, the people of Saraiki belt were not facilitated even with the basic rights of education and health. The South Punjab may be regarded as periphery of the core for the federal and the provincial governments of Pakistan where both the governments are manipulating its resources and manpower. The south Punjab, in turn, gets further decrease in development and funds as Punjab is a large province which may not address the issues of a common man at its doorstep. Moreover, display of poor governance is seen everywhere as the required funds and power are not given to the Saraiki belt. Pakistan people's Party remained in power from 2018 and Pakistan Muslim League N steered the government from 2013to 2018. Despite the promises and claims, both the parties could not even brought the Saraiki province issue to limelight. The objective of the paper is to find out the working of the political parties for the new Saraiki province. Applying descriptive and analytical method, this comparative study focused on the policies, performance and role of two major political parties, PPP and PMLN, regarding the formation of the Saraiki province in South Punjab.
Keywords <i>Saraiki province</i> <i>Role of Political Parties</i> <i>PPP</i> <i>PMLN</i> <i>South Punjab</i>	

1 Introduction

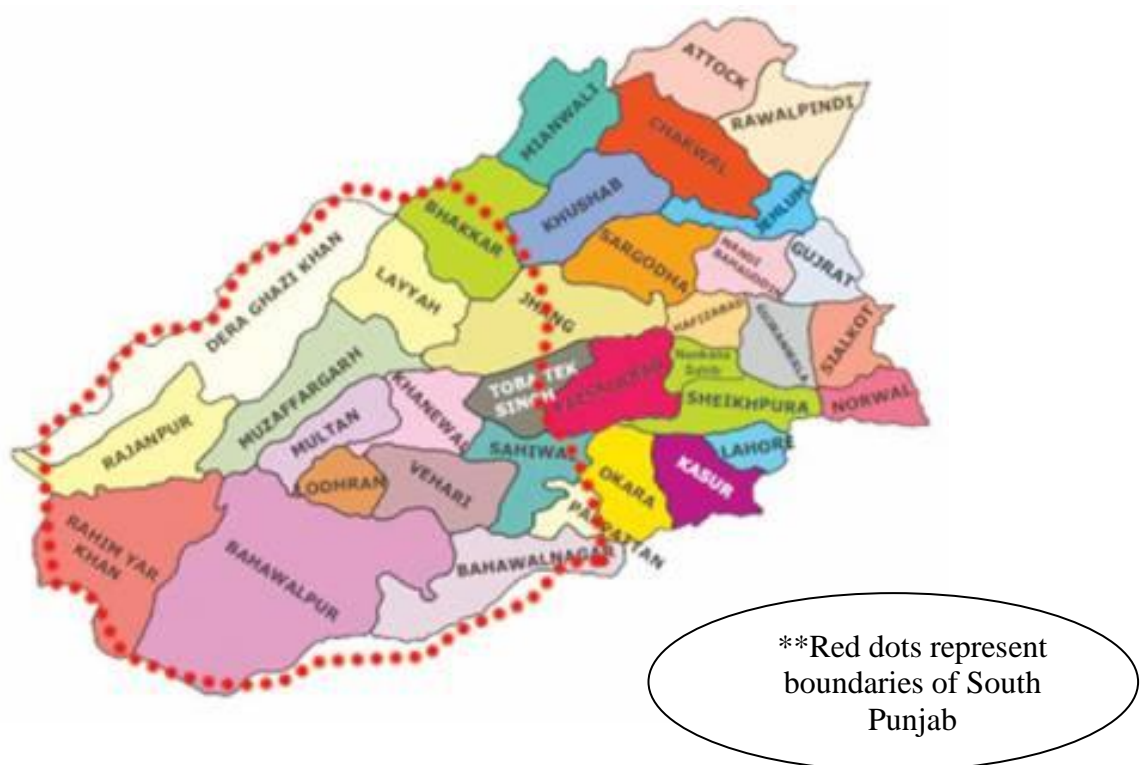
Punjab is the largest province of Pakistan. According to the census of 2023, the population of Punjab has increased to 127,688,922. The province is the largest in Pakistan for its population and there are multiple problems to run the large province with a huge population (Rasool,

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2018). The South Punjab region comprises over a vast area including Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan, Jhang, Lodhran, Khushab, Bhakkar, Layyah with many other cities and towns. According the census of 2023, population of South Punjab has been increased at a large scale. The census shows that Multan Division, Bahawalpur, and Dera Ghazi Khan Divisions make a huge population of 39.14 million in the south Punjab (Ali A. , 2023).

Despite the huge fertile lands and other important output for the country, the South Punjab presents pathetic condition of governance throughout the area. A heavy budget has also been allocated for the people of South Punjab, yet the development of the Saraiki belt is far behind as compared to other parts of the Punjab province. Creating a vast differences with the upper Punjab, South Punjab is mainly regressive, underdeveloped and most of the land of the South Punjab comprises of rural areas providing different valuable agricultural items to the whole country.

Map of South Punjab



Source: (<https://nation.com.pk/06-May-2012/south-punjab-larger-in-size-less-in-population>, 2018)

Possible Proposed Districts of Saraiki Province



Source: (<https://nation.com.pk/06-May-2018/south-punjab-larger-in-size-less-in-population, 2018>)

After passing of the 18th amendment, the people and Saraiki nationalists took this constitutional step as a remarkable opportunity to save their ethnic recognition and economic prosperity (Faisal, 2021). It is noteworthy that the provincial authorities have not reserved any of the quota in services for the people of the South Punjab. This has resulted the area's lesser number of share in both civil and military bureaucracy. Rest of the basic facilities as education and health, this region keeps lower standard of all the basic needs and lacks in advanced facilities. There is a clear difference in the proportional circumstances of the people of different districts of Punjab as there is a huge difference on social and economic gauges. In South Punjab districts of Rahim Yaar Khan and Rajan Pur, issues of education, students enrollment in schools, child's mortality rate, and the graph of the employment indicate huge difference between the districts of Central and North districts of the province of Punjab (Siddiq, 2015). To attract the people of South Punjab, one of the most adorable slogans is to give rights to the people of Saraiki areas with a new province well. The people of South Punjab, more or less, has also been a victim of this slogan and gave chances to every party who raised voice for the separate province for the people of South Punjab and for the preservation of the Saraiki language (M.Shaheen, 2015).

The conventional national political parties took numerous steps for the making of Saraiki province However, there is a diversion in the direction of these political parties after coming to power in the Centre and in the Province as well. Although the major political parties talk about forming a new province in the Saraiki belt, they did not move further in creating the province or bringing amendments in the constitution for this purpose. There is a perception among the politicians that forming new province in South Punjab may flicker out the demands of further units in other parts of the province and even to other federal units as well.

Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League (N) remained in powers for ten years. PPP ruled over the country from 2008 -2013. The Prime Minister of that regime also belonged to Saraiki belt - Multan. But unfortunately, PPP could not form a new province in the South Punjab. Although the Federal Government took initiatives in this regard, but the steps were labeled as a stunt to win the elections by the opposition parties of the tenure.

On the other hand, PMLN steered the state for next five years 2013 to 2018. The party announced before elections that it would work for the separate province of Saraiki Belt. But like its predecessor PPP, PMLN also remained unsuccessful to give a shape to the idea of a new Saraiki province. Unlike PPP, PMLN had got the provincial Government as well to implement the separate province scheme for the Southern Punjab people. But Saraiki province remained in process as the constitutional tenure ended of the PMLN.

The current article evaluates the policies, performance and proceedings of two major political parties of Pakistan PPP and PMLN for the new Saraiki province. The study presents the outcome of the work of the two major political parties of Pakistan for new province. There are many local parties as Pakistan Saraiki Party, Saraiki Qaumi Party, Saraiki National Party, Saraiki Qaumi Itehad, Saraikistan Qaumi Movement, and Saraiki Sooba Movement who are working for the Saraiki province (Nazeer, 2019). But the role of major political parties are of great importance in this regard as they are representing the local voices of the Saraiki people at the central level.

2 Literature Review

Muhammad Mushtaq and Misbah Shaheen write in the article "The Saraiki Province Movement in Punjab, Pakistan: Prospects and Challenges" that there has been a movement in process for many year for the Saraiki province in the South Punjab. But the movement is lacking management and proceedings. The relevant political parties are not paying attention towards the issue .Now and then the demonstrations seen but then a complete silence prevails which hampers the Government's attention towards the issue. If the regional parties want to get result of the movement they have to bring rapid changes in the policy of the agitation and demands for the new province (Mushtaq, 2017).

H. M. Hafeez writes in the article "Constitutional framework for formation of new provinces in Pakistan" that it is not easy to alter the boundaries of the province. Any government who wants to make new province within the present provinces, needs two third majority. The constitutional changes are prior to the rest of the arrangements and proceedings for the creation of new provinces (Hafeez, 2014).

S.A Zafar writes in his article "Is South Punjab Possible?" that PPP wants to make new province in South Punjab for many reasons. The PMLN has a large vote bank in Punjab and has been ruling the province for many years. PPP wants to increase its vote bank in South Punjab. Moreover, PPP also wants to get the rule back from PPP so that the population wise largest province may be a way forward for the federal government in the center (Zafar, 2018).

In a speech, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani Prime Minister of Pakistan (2008-2012) said that PPP is taking serious steps to make Saraiki province. He said that who would be more sincere to make new province in South Punjab as he himself belongs to the same area. He said that Punjab is large province which may be divided for so that small unit may work better for the people. The people of Saraiki belt raised their voice for their rights in 1970. Riaz Hashmi

leader of anti-One Unit movement, reached out to the Supreme Court with a writ petition. It was demanded from the federation to take steps for the restoration of Bahawalpur province. as it existed on the eve of 'One Unit' and had not restored like other provinces. It was argued there was a mutual understanding between the rulers of the state of Bahawalpur and Pakistan Bahawalpur would be given autonomous status by the federation if the one unit came to end in the years ahead (A.Katherine, 2015).

In the article "Saraiki Province Movement in Punjab: Causes, Prospects and Challenges" Muhmmad Asif, Manzoor Ahmad Nazir and Riaz Ahmad are of the view that Saraiki belt has the true grievances as they are being deprived of their rights for long time. The people of South Punjab has to travel to Lahore or Islamabad even for the ordinary matters of routine life. Such irritants have forced Saraiki people to raise the voice for the separate province.

3 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are,

- To get insight the role of major political parties for the Saraiki province.
- To get knowledge about the steps of the work of Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz for the Saraiki province.
- To study about the constitutional steps of two major parties towards establishing new Saraiki Province by PPP and PMLN.

4 Research Questions

The study has been conducted on the following the research question:

1. What steps were taken by the two major political parties PPP and PMLN for the Saraiki Province?
2. What are the results of these steps for the new Saraiki province?

5 Significance of the Study

The current era has given political awareness to the people through different forums. The demand of the Saraiki province has long been wish of the South Punjab people. To form the future opinion for the political parties, the current study is important to get the knowledge about role of two major political parties in this regard. People may assess the resolutions of these two major parties The study may be helpful in establishing opinion about the performance of two major political parties for the new province.

6 Research Methodology

Descriptive and analytical methodology has been implemented to conduct this research. Data has been collected through secondary resources as articles, books, interviews and press briefings. Official websites of the PMLN, PPP and Election Commission of Pakistan have also been used to collect data. The researcher has tried his best to collect the data has through authentic resources.

6.1 Variables

i)Independent Variable

In the present research, role, policies and performance of two major political parties PPP PMLN for the Saraiki province has been interpreted as independent variable.

ii) Dependent Variables

The outcome of the role of two major political parties PPP PMLN for the Saraiki province has been used as the dependent variable.

7 Demand of Saraiki Province

There have been multiple inspirations about the protagonists of Saraiki province in South Punjab and antagonists of the new province based on ethnic grounds (Iqbal, 2021, p. 1). The comparison of development, opportunities and infrastructural advancement force the locals of South Punjab to advocate for the separate province for the people of South Punjab. There has been a solid response by the politicians in favour of the new unit in South Punjab but it could not be fulfilled for many grounds. Bahawalpur was also a province but gradually it was merged with the Punjab Province and could not be restored back on the provincial status (S.M.Abbasi, 1999).

The demand of the Saraiki province has been supported by the political parties. The local parties tried their best to get the favour of the major parties over the new Saraiki province. Due to some personal interests, the major political parties could not work properly for the creation of the new province in the South Punjab region. But the 21st century has witnessed some rapid changes in the movement of the Saraiki province. PPP remained in power from 2008 to 2013 and PMLN 2013-18. There have been significant steps for the creation of the new Saraiki province. The politicians know that the South Punjab has huge impact over the economy of the province with the high yield of agricultural items in Saraiki Punjab as compared than that in northern Punjab. Textile industry of Pakistan is supplied with fine cotton harvested in the fertile lands of the South Punjab. According to the estimation, wheat production of the South Punjab and the Saraiki belt provides wheat to the almost half of the region of Punjab (Butt, 2016). But despite these huge benefits as periphery to the core there are no such agricultural developments and industries as well in Saraiki Punjab. PPP and PMLN came to power but both it could not be reduced problems of the Saraiki region by creating separate province for them.

7.1 Role of Pakistan People's Party for the Saraiki Province 2008-2013

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has been playing important role in the country's politics since 1970's. The party has given two Prime ministers to Pakistan named Zulfikar Al Bhutto who was the party founder as well and his daughter Benazir Bhutto. After the death of Benazir Bhutto, in 2008 elections, Mr. Gilani became the Prime Minister of Pakistan as PPP formed Federal Government in Pakistan. PM Gilani belonged to the Saraiki belt main city Multan. PPP has been advocating new province in the South Punjab. It was a perception among the voters of South Punjab that PPP might take such steps which would pave way to new province in South Punjab.

7.1.1 Pre-Election 2008 Campaign

The Pakistan People's Party remained in power from 2008-2013. Before elections, PPP went to the public of the South Punjab with the promise of the provision of their rights at their doorstep. The best solution of the problems of the South Punjab is to make new Saraiki province and it was promised with them. Almost all the senior leaders of PPP has been of the

view that the people of South Punjab have the right to get the province for the protection of their rights. Asif Ali Zardari and prominent leaders addressed in Multan ahead of the elections claiming to work for the rights of the people of South Punjab. Benazir Bhutto also talked of the rights of the people of South Punjab. But after her death, the party flag was raised by Asif Ali Zardari who promised to work on the footprints of Benazir Bhutto. So the election campaign was run by PPP to increase the vote bank with the issue of Saraiki province. Almost in both the elections (2008 and 2013), PPP announced to work honestly for the new province. The 2013 election campaign was different than that of 2008 as PPP had already presented bill in the National Assembly to work on the new province in South Punjab. In 2013, PPP was demanding support of the Saraiki belt so that the remaining work might be completed towards the new Saraiki province in the Saraiki belt.

7.1.2 Manifesto of PPP

Pakistan people's Party Political came in 2008 with the manifesto encircling the issues as:

- Would establish Social Equality
 - No comprise over the Sovereignty of the Parliament,
 - Working for the Provincial Autonomy,
 - Making best Devolution and the Local Government System,
 - Bringing of solid policy for the Status of FATA,
 - Implementing new strategies to Counter Terrorism,
 - Making sure of the free Media
 - Wiping out Corruption and enforce durable Accountability.
- (<https://www.ppp.org.pk/manifestos/manifesto2008>)

It is clear from the manifesto that new province was not promised in the manifesto yet it was an important clause of the speeches of the leaders of PPP before elections. People of Saraiki belt chanted the slogans with the party (PPP) to get the Saraiki province. Many local leaders joined PPP so that the cause might be achieved. In its first tenure 2008-13, PPP did not work for the new province except Resolution in National Assembly. PPP leaders often repeat the statement that only their party would take initiatives for the Saraiki province. Despite these assurances, PPP had to lose seats in 2013 elections which might be a result of not creating province in South Punjab (M.Khan, 2013).

7.1.3 Resolution of Bahawalpur Janobi Punjab Province in Upper House

The most important step taken by the PPP Government was to table the bill for the creation of the new province in South Punjab (Khan, 2015). The PPP presented the bill just before months when the tenure was going to be ended soon. The political parties seemed surprised over the move of the PPP ahead of new elections of 2013. On 6th March 2013, the Law Minister of the Government presented the bill for the new Saraiki province in Punjab. Surprisingly, PMLN did not support PPP bill for new province. The Opposition Leader of Senate Ishaq Dar said that PPP has moved this bill to get the votes in the next elections. The bill proposed that new province BJP Bahawalpur Janobi Punjab province would be established to address the issue of Saraiki belt people. It was added by the Law Minister that PPP opted Syed Yousef Raza Gilani from South Punjab so that the region might be flourished the feelings of deprivations be relieved. The perception about the bill presented by PPP Government was the same as opposition Leader in senate and many other members spoke out. Nevertheless, this

was a strong step for the new province in Punjab by any Government in the history of Pakistan.

7.1.4 Other Steps by PPP Government

It may be said that to argue about the Saraiki and Bahawalpur province might be read as political stunt just to manipulate the movement for Bahawalpur province. The Pakistan People's Party's has always been an open supporter of Saraiki province keeping in view the election winning aspect almost in all the general elections since 1990's. As quoted earlier, The Prime Minister Syed Yousef Raza Gilani claimed that no stone would be left unturned to create a new province in South Punjab as a Saraiki province. President Asif Ali Zardari (2014-19) came to visit Multan. He announced in Public Meeting that following the tradition of other provinces, new Saraiki bank would also be set up in Multan and other Saraiki belt cities to promote Saraiki. Moreover, he addressed to the businessmen of the Saraiki region to make a proposal for the new Saraiki province.

7.2 Role of PMLN for the Saraiki Province 2008-2013

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz remained in power in Punjab from 2008 to 2018. The Federal Government was also formed by PMLN in the center after winning the election of 2013. In the Centre, PMLN was the successor of the PPP which already had moved a bill in the Senate in March 2013 for the Saraiki province in Punjab. Bahawalpur Janobi Punjab province was proposed in the bill by PPP. In the following, we have studied about the work of PMLN for the new Saraiki province in Punjab.

7.2.1 Punjab Government 2008-2013

In 2008, General Elections were held in Pakistan. PPP formed the government in the center while Pakistan Muslim League got the Provincial Government in Punjab. Shahbaz Sharif was the Chief Minister of Punjab as a result of vast majority in the province. PMLN leadership was also aware of the demand of the people of South Punjab. Keeping in view the people's desire, PMLN also raised voice for the Saraiki province in Punjab. Throughout the tenure of rule in Punjab 2008-13, PMLN did not proceed for the Saraiki province. But in response to the PPP bill, the provincial government also passed bills for the new units in South Punjab. It was a political settlement just ahead of the end of the government so PMLN performed speedy work for the bills in the assembly. It was a policy of PMLN to discuss publicly the Saraiki province during the election campaign.

7.2.2 Pre-Election 2013 Campaign

After the completion of constitutional period, PPP rule came to end in 2013. During the election campaign, both the parties once again came to South Punjab with the old slogan of creating new province for the Saraiki people. During campaign, both the parties backed their slogan with the proof of passing bill for the Saraiki province although it was assessed as political manoeuvre for the people of the Saraiki region (Ali, 2012). But interestingly, PMLN also did not incorporate the new province issue or the restoration of Bahawalpur Province likewise PPP. The main features of the PMLN manifesto were:

- Independence of the Judiciary
- Energy Sector
- Privatization
- Keeping cordial Civil-Military Relations
- Parliament would be made sovereign,
- All the provinces would be granted Provincial Autonomy,
- Powerful Local Government System for well-being of the public,
- FATA problems and issues would be addressed.
- New Policies to Counter Terrorism,
- Media would be free.
- Corruption would be wiped out.
- Accountability. (<https://www.pmo.gov.pk/documents/manifesto.pdf>, 2013)

7.2.3 Resolution in Punjab Assembly

In March 2013, when PPP moved a bill for the new Saraiki province in Punjab, PMLN was shocked over the sharp move of the PPP. It was named an election winning stunt so that people might vote for PPP with the slogan of new province. PMLN did not support PPP bill for Bahawalpur Janobi Punjab Province. In response of the PPP resolution in the center of making Saraiki province, PMLN also made its mind for the people of the South Punjab. Bahawalpur Janobi Punjab province was initiated by PPP. But PMLN came with the proposal of two provinces in South Punjab. It was assessed as counter policy against the step of PPP. Both the parties tried to please the people of South Punjab so that they might get votes in the upcoming elections Of 2013.

PMLN move also worked to change the mindset of the public in the elections as it got votes from the areas which were considered a strong hold of the PPP. PMLN took the matter to serious note and presented two new provinces bill in Punjab Assembly. This step was a reaction of a bill presented by PPP in the Upper House. The Punjab Assembly, where PMLN had more than one third majority, passed the bill. According to the bill which the PMLN ruling party as the amendment is completed through legal process, Bahawalpur would be a separate unit as a province. There would be 15 general and three women's seats, bringing the total count of seats to 18. The proposed bill also keeps the call to fix the budget for the new proposed province. Along with 38 seats to the South Punjab province would also be allocated (Baig, n.d.). The same political policy was seen by PPP to cash the new province issue in the General Elections. Shahbaz Sharif led Punjab Government did not work properly and presented the new Saraiki Province bill in a hurry. PPP stood for one province while PMLN took one step ahead and announced to work for the two provinces in Punjab. This step increased the popularity of the PMLN for the next elections of the country.

7.2.4 Other Steps by PMLN Government

There are no solid steps by the Government of PMLN either at Punjab or at the Central level which might be regarded as solid for the creation of Saraiki province. Both PM Nawaz Sharif and CM Shahbaz Sharif supported the new province in Punjab, but both provincial and the Federal Governments did not move ahead than that of the statements and press briefings over the issue of Saraiki province. It is notable that PMLN got maximum votes from the upper Punjab. PMLN did not want to lose the grip over the province. For this, it has to make Saraiki

region a special focus with the slogan of new province for the Saraiki people. But, during the tenure, the party could not transform the idea of province to reality.

8 CONCLUSION

Federation can be more strengthened through the devolution of power. Small units of the state may bring big positive changes in any federal state (Javed, 2018). socio-cultural and politico-economic deprivation of the people of South Punjab is seen everywhere in the region. South Punjab has the grievances for depriving of the rights. The planning of most of the mega projects for South Punjab has never been entered to the physical phase. There has been a lot of promises by the political parties and their representatives with the people of South Punjab but in post elections period, only limited steps are taken for the masses well-being.

The promise of the Saraiki province has become a day dream for the Saraiki belt. Both PPP and PMLN have been using the slogan of new province in their manifesto, public gatherings and press briefings. But, both the parties remained unsuccessful in shaping out new Saraiki province in South Punjab. PPP moved bills for the creation of new province in South Punjab. Claiming it a stunt to win the elections, PMLN also presented two bills in Punjab Assembly so that the vote bank of the South Punjab might be saved. Both the parties used this step as a gateway to new province before Elections of 2013. But having common consensus over many issues inside and outside of the Parliament, both the parties could not forward the final manuscript for the new province. The study concludes that Saraiki province may be called an election winning slogan for both the parties. Both PPP and PMLN remained in power from 2008 to 2018, yet Saraiki province remained in blue print stage. Both the parties claimed to take solid steps and blamed each other of non-cooperation for the issue in the parliament. Hence, the new Saraiki province plan could not be successful due to personal political interest of both PPP and PMLN.

The major parties of the country tried to win the election with the help of local parties and Saraiki representatives. Both the parties have used the mindset of the people who supported new province in South Punjab. The poor governance and less allocation of budget for the South Punjab has constantly provoking people of the region to demand for the separate province. Yet, the two major political parties have not given the desired province to the people of South Punjab despite the rule for 10 years respectively. It may be concluded that more or less both the parties are at the same grade in working for the new province in Punjab. The credit of presenting bill for one province goes with PPP while PMLN passes PPP in representing bill for two new provinces in Punjab. In due course, people of South Punjab have the same status of deprived region.

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