

Faisal Klasra Declaration



Siraiki Lok Saanjh

24 October 2026

The Name

Many decades ago, our foremothers and forefathers dreamt a future and gave it a name: Siraiki. Since the 1960s, generations have carried that name through melas, literary gatherings, conferences, political dialogues, marches and movements across Siraiki Wasaib. We gather today at Jaisal Klasra because that struggle over naming has returned in another form. Once again, others seek to describe our homeland from outside: as “South Punjab”, as a problem of governance, as an oversized province requiring administrative adjustment, and now as a possible “administrative unit”. We reject this language because the struggle over names is also a struggle over political existence.

The present debate tells us that provinces are too large, governments too distant and service delivery too weak, and that the solution lies in smaller administrative units. We know where this language comes from. Since the late twentieth century, governance has been the favourite word of the international financial institutions and the agencies allied to them. Their system is built on neo-colonial control, extraction and dependency. The language of governance has converted political questions into technical ones. Questions of who owns land and water are recast as questions of management; unequal power becomes institutional inefficiency; demands for autonomy become problems of administrative delivery. The colonial state had already learnt to treat living geographies as territories to be surveyed, classified, settled and made extractable. The neo-colonial state inherited much of that administrative gaze. A homeland becomes a file, a people becomes population, and political geography becomes a problem to be managed from above.



We refuse this reduction. A homeland does not lose its history because official language renames it. A people does not cease to exist because the state chooses not to recognise its political name. We have not gathered at Jaisal Klasra to ask for a smaller office nearer our villages. We have gathered to state who we are, to name the structure through which our land and people have been governed, and to make clear the political future we claim.



I. We Name Ourselves

What others call us does not decide who we are. We name ourselves. We are not the south of somebody else's centre. The term "South Punjab" describes us from Lahore and makes Lahore the natural centre from which our geography is measured. Siraiki Wasaib names the land from within. It expresses a relation between people, language, land, memory and collective life that cannot be reduced to administrative direction.

Siraiki Wasaib is a historical geography of the Middle Indus. The Indus and its tributaries flow through Rawa, Rohi, Thal and Damaan, through cultivated plains, riverine settlements, deserts, forests and pastures. These were never empty landscapes awaiting development. They sustained forms of agriculture, pastoral life, settlement, movement and exchange long before they entered colonial revenue records. Our language carries this material world within it: the earth enters its vocabulary, rivers its poetry, Rohi and Thal its memory. Water takes the taste and colour of the earth through which it passes; language too carries the landscape in which it grows.



From the 1960s onwards, writers, poets, intellectuals and cultural organisations brought speech traditions known through names such as Multani, Derawali, Riasti and others into a shared modern political and cultural consciousness under the name Siraiki. The recognition of Siraiki as a separate language in the 1981 Census was one achievement of that movement. But neither the census nor the movement invented the language, the land or the people. The movement gave a political name and organised expression to a consciousness that had already grown from the Wasaib itself.



II. The Map Is Not Eternal

Our history did not begin as the “south” of Punjab. Multan and Uch were political, cultural, intellectual and spiritual centres long before the present Lahore-centred provincial geography took shape. Multan existed at different times as a regional centre, kingdom and province; under the Mughals it was a separate Subah. Uch had already acquired great importance in the medieval period. Multan was subjugated by Ranjit Singh in 1818 and, after the British Siege of Multan 1849, annexed into British Punjab. The present provincial map therefore has a history: it was produced through subjugation, annexation, colonial administration and subsequent state-making. We reject the fiction that a map made through history should now be treated as though it were made by nature.

This is why we speak of restoration, not division. We are not asking for the mechanical restoration of some ancient administrative boundary. Political geographies change, and we recognise that. What we reject is the claim that Punjab in its present boundaries has always constituted one natural and indivisible political community, so that recognition of Siraiki Wasaib must necessarily be described as the “division of Punjab”. That formulation begins history from the present map and erases the processes through which the map itself was made. What we seek is restoration of political recognition and autonomy to a Wasaib that has been made peripheral within a Lahore-centred provincial order.



Pakistan has already lived through attempts to administratively erase political geographies. One Unit dissolved Sindh, Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Bahawalpur and the political territories of Balochistan into a single West Pakistani unit under the language of parity, national integration and administrative simplicity. The resistance to One Unit became a struggle for restoration of provincial identity, status and autonomy because people refused the proposition that administrative uniformity could substitute for political recognition.

Later, under martial law, the Ansari Commission again entertained proposals for smaller provinces detached from language and historically rooted political communities. The forms were different, but the underlying temptation was familiar: if historical peoples and nationalities complicate the centralised state, redraw the geography until political communities become administratively neutral populations. The history of Pakistan has already shown the limits of this imagination. Both believed that a people could be administered out of existence. Both were wrong. The present proposal comes from the same thinking. It will fail in the same way.



III. The Record Cannot Be Erased

The demand for a Siraiki province is also routinely presented as if it were a new fashion produced by the latest debate on smaller provinces. The parliamentary record says otherwise. Siraiki was recognised separately in the 1981 Census. On 3 May 2012, the National Assembly adopted a resolution supporting the creation of a new province in Punjab. On 9 May 2012, the Punjab Assembly passed resolutions concerning Janubi Punjab and Bahawalpur. A twelve-member multi-party Parliamentary Commission was constituted in December 2012, and in January 2013 it recommended a Bahawalpur-Janubi Punjab Province comprising the Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan divisions together with Bhakkar and Mianwali. On 6 March 2013, the Senate passed the relevant Constitutional Amendment Bill, although the constitutional process was never completed.

The question returned repeatedly. In 2019, PML-N, PPP and PTI each placed constitutional proposals concerning new provinces before Parliament, while the matter again entered the Senate in 2022. Different governments and political parties have used different names, boundaries and formulas, and we do not accept every formulation through which they have attempted to manage or contain the Siraiki demand. But the political record destroys the claim that the question itself is new. For decades the federation has acknowledged the existence of the demand through resolutions, bills, commissions and manifestos while refusing to complete the act of constitutional recognition. Siraiki Wasaib has been endlessly recognised in political speech while remaining absent from the federal map.



IV. Counted in Extraction, Erased in Distribution

The relationship becomes even clearer when we leave political rhetoric and follow the movement of money. Siraiki Wasaib is visible whenever Punjab counts population, land, labour, agricultural production and votes. It becomes difficult to locate when institutions, public money and authority are distributed. We describe this structure as fiscal colonialism: Wasaib is made present as a productive territory and political constituency while remaining structurally weak as a claimant over the resources generated and allocated in its name.

Our analysis of the Punjab Development Programme for 2026–27 places the total programme at approximately Rs752 billion. Only around Rs76.2 billion is directly traceable to the fifteen districts of Siraiki Wasaib, while Lahore alone carries around Rs113 billion in directly tagged allocations. The issue is not simply that one region receives less money than another. The issue is that the structure of the budget itself determines who appears clearly as an entitled territory and who remains dependent upon provincial discretion.

Under the existing NFC formula, our calculation suggests that if Siraiki Wasaib stood in the federation as a province, its share would be approximately Rs1,597 billion. Provincehood therefore changes more than a boundary. It changes the constitutional position from which resources are claimed. Today the Wasaib must petition Lahore for its share within Punjab; as a province it would enter fiscal distribution as a constitutional claimant before the federation. This is the difference between allocation by another centre and political entitlement in one's own name.



But fiscal extraction is only the most recent layer of a longer history. The older archive is written into land and water. From the Sidhnai Canal Colony of the nineteenth century, through the Sutlej Valley Project, the Thal Development Authority and canal system, the Greater Thal Canal, and now the expansion of corporate farming in Thal and Cholistan, the Wasaib has repeatedly been treated as a geography available for settlement, commercial agriculture and accumulation conceived from elsewhere. Across different periods, the language changes but a recurring assumption remains: Rohi is empty, Thal is waste, pasture is unused, the river is merely water to be allocated, and land acquires value only when transformed by an authority standing outside the communities already living through it.

We reject that imagination of development. The question has never been whether canals can grow crops or whether agriculture can produce wealth. The political question is who possessed the authority to transform the land, whose rights over water, pasture and commons were displaced, who received newly valued land, whose social world was reorganised, and who continues to carry the ecological costs. Development is never only an intervention into soil and water. It redistributes power.



This violence is often slow. It appears in cancers for which treatment remains distant and underfunded, in floods whose destruction falls disproportionately upon already peripheral populations, and in administrative files through which land and water can be transferred without those who inhabit the landscape acquiring corresponding political authority. It also appears in the migration of workers who must leave Sirai Ki Wasaib because meaningful economic opportunities are not created at home. The archive of extraction therefore does not exist only in government files. It is carried in villages, in displaced communities, in journeys made for survival and, increasingly, in our bodies.



V. The Province We Seek

Our struggle is therefore not a demand for a larger share of the same development that has damaged our land. Nor do we seek simply to transfer Takht Lahore to another city. The Siraiki province we seek must mean autonomy for the people of the Wasaib.

Political power must therefore move downwards: from the federation to the province, and from the province to districts, towns, municipalities, villages and communities. People who live with the consequences of political decisions must have meaningful authority over those decisions. A Siraiki province must not reproduce within itself the very relation of centre and periphery against which the Wasaib has struggled.

The same principle shapes our understanding of development. Thal and Rohi are not empty lands waiting to be consumed by investment. Rivers are not simply allocations measured in numbers. Pastures, forests, desert ecologies and riverine settlements are not backward remnants obstructing progress. Development must answer to the people and ecologies of the Wasaib. It must not displace communities and then describe their displacement as modernisation. It must not enclose commons, exhaust rivers and destroy livelihoods in the name of productivity. The Wasaib cannot continue as a frontier from which land, crops, water and labour are extracted while political authority remains elsewhere.



A Siraiki province must also give Siraiki its rightful place in education, administration, public institutions and cultural life. Yet our struggle against linguistic erasure cannot become a licence to erase another language. Every language spoken within the Wasaib must enjoy dignity and protection. Our freedom cannot be built upon somebody else's silence.

The province we imagine must recognise women as equal political citizens and equal participants in determining the future of the Wasaib. The same applies to workers, peasants, tenants, pastoral communities, the landless and those whose lives are most directly shaped by decisions about land and water. Self-autonomy acquires meaning only when those who bear the consequences of political decisions also possess power over their making.

Our demand for recognition is equally incompatible with denying the historical existence of other peoples. We reject the arbitrary fragmentation of Sindh, Balochistan or Pakhtunkhwa in the name of administrative convenience. The principle we claim for ourselves—recognition of language, homeland, historical memory, democratic will and the right to self-government—we recognise for every people of the federation.



The Federation

The demand for a Siraiki province is not a demand to leave Pakistan. It is a demand that Pakistan finally take its own claim to federalism seriously. A federation cannot be built by treating its constituent peoples as populations to be administered from a permanent centre. Nor should Sindhi, Baloch, Pakhtun, Siraiki and other historical communities be required to abandon their political identities. A meaningful federation is produced when its peoples can enter it in their own names and with political institutions through which they participate in determining their collective future.

A state permanently afraid of its own plurality will remain permanently insecure. The way out is not greater administrative uniformity but deeper federalism. Recognition does not diminish Pakistan; it gives political form to the diversity from which Pakistan itself is made. The Siraiki demand therefore seeks not the multiplication of administrative units but the reconstruction of the federal relationship on the basis of recognition, political equality and self-autonomy.



We, the daughters and sons of Siraiki Wasaib, the people of the Middle Indus, renew at Jaisal Klasra the dream carried to us by earlier generations. We reject the erasure of our name and the reduction of our homeland to the “south” of another centre. We reject an order in which we are counted when land, crops, labour and votes are required but made invisible when fiscal resources, institutions and political authority are distributed. We reject a model of development that sees our deserts as empty, our rivers as allocations, our commons as unused land and our people as expendable labour.

We do not ask the state to create us. We already exist. What we demand is that this existence be given its political and constitutional form. We demand recognition of Siraiki Wasaib, the right to self-autonomy, and our place in the federation in our own name. We renew that claim here, on our own land, carrying the memory of those who named this future before us and the responsibility of those who must carry it forward.



Walking slowly, attentive to the path we tread

Siraiki Lok Saanjh

Jaisal Klasra Declaration • 24 October 2026

