

Pakistan - MQM: A dream turned sour

Monday 31 October 2011, by [ALTAF Waseem](#) (Date first published: 28 September 2011).

The single most appropriate word describing MQM's manifesto today is 'opportunism.' Wikileaks reported that Farooq Sattar told a US diplomat that certain members of his party did cause violence on the 12th of May 2007 in which 48 people were killed.

The MQM, or Mohajir Quami Movement, was created on March 18, 1984 by Altaf Hussain. In 1997 the MQM replaced the term Mohajir with Mutahidda. Primarily, an ethno-nationalist party mostly comprising Urdu speaking immigrants who came to Pakistan from Northern India after 1947 and got settled mostly in the urban centers of Sindh province. Liaqat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan, who himself was a Mohajir encouraged and expedited the migration of Mohajirs to Sindh urban. Most likely he wanted to create Mohajir constituencies in the newly created State. Localities like Liaqatabad and Nazimabad at Karachi and Latifabad at Hyderabad were established to settle the immigrants. Mohajirs were also inducted in the civil service and businesses left over by the Hindus were allotted to them on a large scale.

The Mohajirs gradually established a strong foothold in the urban areas. The reason for immigration put forward by the followers of this party is that "unlike East Punjabis who felt threatened and thus migrated to Pakistan, the Mohajirs' migration was primarily due to love for Pakistan." The reason quoted by its founders for creation of the MQM was "to safeguard the interests of Mohajirs who were being discriminated against and repressed by other communities like Punjabis, Sindhis and Pathans."

Initially, the Mohajirs dominated the decision-making process in Pakistan but with the imposition of a martial law in 1958 and the subsequent Punjabi/Pathan ascendancy that ruled Pakistan, the Mohajirs began to feel a loss of political power. As the Sindhis were being outclassed by the Mohajirs in the public sector, local government and educational institutions, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, on assuming power in 1971, reserved special quota for Sindhis from rural Sindh. This action by Mr. Bhutto was deeply resented by the Mohajirs who preferred to have a special treatment. That resentment erupted in 1972 when language riots broke out in Sindh over the use of Sindhi and Urdu.

Presently, the MQM is the third largest party of Pakistan with 25 seats in the National Assembly and 38 in the Sindh legislature. The party is now trying hard to change its image from an ethnic outfit to a secular liberal political party spread across the country, however, barring two seats in AJK and one in Gilgit Baltistan, so far it has achieved little success.

The party is run in a mafia-style by its leader Altaf Hussain from his Secretariat in London. As if a saint he has mystified his personality and with the power of aggressive oratory is a kind of divine figure for the Mohajir youth. Enjoying unquestioned submission by his party cadres, Altaf Hussain supervises a Coordination Committee comprising 34 members which apparently formulates the party policy.

Although the Urdu-speaking Mohajirs comprise around 7.59% and 23% of Pakistan and Sindh's total population respectively, however, the MQM with its firm hold on Karachi, Pakistan's commercial

capital with a share of 53.38% in federal revenues, political clout and potential to affect law and order in the city, is fully geared to influence any political party in power. Hence what we find is perpetual wheeling and dealing on part of the MQM with whosoever is in-charge of Islamabad.

Day in and day out the MQM ministers resign and later rejoin the government in power, after their demands are met. Ishrat-ul-Ibad, the MQM nominee, is the governor of Sindh for the past eight years. President Zardari, has angered and alienated several of his hardcore leaders and workers, latest being Zulfiqar Mirza, simply to retain his partnership with MQM.

Wikileaks reported that Farooq Sattar, the parliamentary leader of MQM, told a US diplomat that certain members of his party did cause violence on the 12th of May 2007 in which 48 people were killed in Karachi and that the party should consider disarming its militant wing, thus verifying the allegation that MQM does have a militant wing. So far 3800 criminal cases have been withdrawn against the MQM under the NRO.

The MQM has a highly organised hierarchical structure down to the mohalla level, including armed gangs. The MQM is still feared in areas of its influence not only by people from other communities but also by Urdu-speaking Mohajirs.

The MQM leaders who would ride bicycles and motorbikes a few years back today possess BMW's and live in posh bungalows. Although they originally stood for the rights of middle and lower middle classes yet today they are part of the elite, amassing wealth and resources.

The single most appropriate word describing MQM's manifesto today is 'opportunism.' This political outfit considered by some as a terrorist party has paradoxical policies. It contests elections and is for democracy yet uses coercion and violence as a means to achieve political ends. It apparently detests corruption and financial irregularities yet its Ministers at the provincial and federal levels are known to have deep indulgence into financial malpractices. The Chief justice has accused MQM of collecting bhatta from the business community of Karachi. They apparently stand for principled politics yet are more than prepared to engage in any form of jor tor.

The MQM originated from a student organisation namely APMSO in March 1984. The first public meeting by MQM was held at Nishtar Park on August 8, 1984. The founder of the party was a 31 year old man from the lower middle class. He was avowedly against the feudal mindset and hereditary politics. The party he formed primarily consisted of middle class urbanites. Presumably the ideals and goals he had in mind were to transform the political economy of Pakistan and the genuine transfer of power to the lower echelons of the society. He was supposedly against feudal class and the concentration of wealth into the hands of a few, while the MQM manifesto primarily espouses the cause of the 98 percent poor and middle classes.

If those were his ideals and if only he could have named it Mutahidda Quami Movement at the outset, without being a proponent of the rights of Mohajirs but all Pakistanis who still are no more partners in the decision- making process. If only he could have resorted to a peaceful course of action, and have propagated a genuine intellectual discourse for the advancement of political ideals, whereby the poor and middle class of Pakistan could have accomplished a platform to realise their dreams of a just society and a peaceful state! If only the cause of those could be promoted who would create an equitable and effective system of governance; a system free from the clutches of interest groups dominating our political scene. If only alternate leadership was encouraged to flourish.

Unfortunately this did not happen. Today the image of the MQM is that of a fascist organisation involved in extortion, torture and summary killings. Not only ordinary people but even the all-

powerful media fears the MQM. It is widely seen as a party controlled by a coterie of Mafioso style individuals in the service of “one man” seeking rent and politico-economic power on the basis of support they derive out of ethnic origins. How unfortunate that those who entered into the political arena to fight tyranny themselves came to symbolise tyranny.

And how fortunate had been the poor and middle class of Pakistan had MQM addressed their issues at the national level providing alternate leadership against the feudal, the elitist-mercantilists and the mullah-military nexus.

Waseem Altaf

P.S.

* FROM VIEWPOINT ONLINE ISSUE NO. 74, OCTOBER 28, 2011 :
<http://www.viewpointonline.net/mqm-a-dream-turned-sour.html>

* Waseem Altaf is a social activist.