

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement and the Pakistani State

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Introduction

On 17 September 2000 the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) held a meeting in Acton Town Hall, London. The event was outstanding in many ways as it brought together on one stage such diverse parties as the Balochistan National Party, the Pashtoonkha Milli Awami Party and Syed Imdad Mohammad Shah, the son of late G.M. Syed, the founding father of the concept of an independent Sindh. Twelve resolutions were made public. The most important demanded "a new liberal and democratic Constitution based on equality of nations"¹ which signalled that the conflict between the MQM and the Pakistani state had reached a new climax after the military take-over on 12 October 1999.

The place of the MQM within Pakistani society and the relationship between the party and the state, however, was not easy to establish. At one stage the MQM was accepted as a political partner, which led observers to believe that Pakistan was governed by the "principle of constitutional legitimacy"². Then it was rejected and opposed, which resulted in the death of approximately 3000 people at the height of the conflict between 1992 and 1997. This paper, therefore, attempts to characterise the party and raises the question whether the Pakistani state was capable of adjusting its demands or whether the relationship between the state and the MQM was such as to put them on a collision course. It also explores the implications and the potential of the 17 September 2000 resolution.

¹ Resolutions of 17 September 2000, In: <http://www.mqm.org/English-News/Sep-2000/resolution.htm>.

² For example, M. Waseem once maintained: "The state in Pakistan has demonstrated its potential to accommodate the mass dissent within its legal and constitutional framework. ... the state has opened its doors to sub-elite groups as well as underprivileged ethnic communities. ... The presence (of the MQM) in the government at various levels reflected the principle of constitutional legitimacy in the sense of rule by public representative." In: Waseem, M., *Politics and the State in Pakistan*, Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1994, p. 449-450.

Historical background of the foundation of the MQM

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (United National Movement) started as Mohajir Qaumi Movement (National Movement for Refugees) in 1984 and was preceded by the formation of its student wing during the 70s. The historical background of the whole process, however, can be traced back to the independence era and needs some explanation.

India gained independence from Great Britain in 1947. The cost, however, was high because at the same time the former one administrative unit was separated into two dominions – India and Pakistan. The separation was the outcome of many years of struggle led by the All-India Muslim League (AIML) since 1940 which demanded that those areas of British-India where Muslims were numerically in a majority should be grouped to constitute independent states. These areas comprised the North Western and Eastern parts. However, a large number of Muslims were spread over the Northern and Central regions of the subcontinent, the so-called minority areas of the Muslims. These groups of Muslims were one of the major proponents of this demand, and as a numerically strong group they also dominated the structure of the AIML. However, the territory of the newly formed Pakistan was far away from their homes, so, after 1947 a large number of Muslims, mostly of middle class background, migrated from the minority to the majority areas. Karachi, the capital of Sindh, became the capital of Pakistan and a federal area in the process. The town witnessed a large exchange of population. On the one hand, migrant Muslims settled and sought employment in the new government of Pakistan. On the other hand, Hindus who formed the majority population of the town, left for India as the structure of the state provided them with only limited opportunities.

The state of Pakistan was created with an imbalance of power. Migrants from Northern India dominated the state right from the beginning and filled the power vacuum within it. But a new structure which reflected the established power elite of the country emerged slowly when the first Prime Minister of the country, Liaquat Ali Khan, was assassinated in 1951. While the period of unstable rule continued, six Prime Ministers were installed within a seven year period. The illegitimacy was reflected in the fact that no elections were held at federal level. The first constitution of the country was finally introduced in 1956 but declared null and void by the country's first martial law administrator, Ayub Khan, two years later.

With Ayub Khan as administrator, the capital of the country was shifted from Karachi to the new town, Islamabad, which was situated near the army barracks of Rawalpindi in Punjab and not far away from Ayub Khan's home in North Western Frontier Province (NWFP). The power struggle

between the former and the new elite finally manifested itself during the presidential elections in 1965. The inhabitants of Karachi and Hyderabad in Sindh mainly supported the candidate of the opposition, Fatima Jinnah, against the candidate of the Punjabi-Pashtoo elite, Ayub Khan. Fatima Jinnah lost and a new power balance was established. Pakistan under Ayub Khan remained authoritarian and political demands were not reflected or represented. These deficits in governance were no longer manageable or solvable within the prevailing political system and at the end of the 60's a popular movement under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was formed for the establishment of democratic rule. However, the movement revealed, the fact that people now expressed their political opinions also in ethnic and cultural terms.

Pakistan's elite was mainly of Punjabi origin. This Punjabi elite tried to manage the art of governance by co-opting the elite of the other regions. However, in the case of East Pakistan it proved incapable. Here, the differences turned out to be unbridgeable and after a short war East Pakistan seceded. On 16 December 1971, the new state of Bangladesh was founded. West Pakistan under the leadership of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), was able to manage a balance of interests to a certain degree, at least for the time being. However, the PPP reflected more the interests of the Sindhi speaking population in the country's first democratic elections in 1970. Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was a Sindhi himself, appealed above all to the sentiments of these voters. Special interests of the urban population of Sindh started to emerge in turn. The well-educated Urdu-speaking population of the urban centres of Sindh felt that it had lost out compared to former times. Thus, a power struggle between the Sindhi- and the Urdu- speaking population arose.

Formation of the "Mohajirs" as a political entity

Under the new arrangement, differences between both interest groups manifested themselves for the first time during the so-called "language riots" in 1972. The composition of the newly elected Provincial Assembly favoured the Sindhi-speaking population as most of its constituencies were the rural areas of Sindh. The assembly passed an act promoting the usage of the Sindhi language in summer 1972.³ A number of migrant Urdu speakers

³ It laid down an "introduction of the Sindhi language as a compulsory subject by stages, ... (and) the progressive use of the Sindhi language in, inter alia, the offices and departments of Government Assembly, Courts and Institutions." In: In the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Original Jurisdiction, Constitutional Petition, No.(46/1994), MQM vs. The Federation of Pakistan, Boston: Farooq Hassan Law Associates, Part I, Vol. 3, pp. 55-57.

regarded this act as an immediate threat to their position and only the assurance that no Urdu employee would be sacked avoided a more serious situation. Sindhi as a language, however, was promoted by various means and the Sindhi Institute at the University of Jamshoro/Hyderabad expanded. But the introduction of the quota system for jobs in the public sector had the strongest long-term impact on the political relations in the province and showed the dimension of the "struggle for employment."⁴ Under the quota system the Sindhi elite secured 60% of the jobs on the provincial level. Accordingly, the Mohajir strongholds in the urban centres were entitled to 40% on the provincial and 7,6% of the jobs on the federal level. With the growing scarcity of means, this regulation contributed to a deepening of the gap within the Pakistani society.

This first manifested itself on 11 June 1978. On this day, several students of the Faculty of Pharmacy of Karachi University formed the All-Pakistan Mohajir Students Organisation (APMSO) under the leadership of Altaf Hussain. This event marked a new quality in Pakistani politics because the migrant population from Northern India defined itself as a separate ethnic community with a distinct political concept for the first time. The term "Mohajir" itself, which is equivalent to "refugees", had a religious connotation as it was used for all those converts to Islam who fled with Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina.⁵ The official formation of APMSO, however, shed an interesting light on the concept of ethnicity. As a matter of fact the concept of Mohajir was not clear to many observers for a long time. The difficulty of defining a Mohajir was highlighted by the very fact that the students of Karachi University were not migrants in the actual sense. They were born in Pakistan. Their parents, who were migrants, however, had not pressed for a special political representation as Mohajir. Furthermore, the APMSO did not represent all those migrants who had come from India to Pakistan in the 40's and 50's. People living in Punjab or other migrants from Afghanistan, for example, were not included.

Therefore, Altaf Hussain had to explain his understanding of the term in a number of interviews. First, a Mohajir was used to denote a person whose parents and grand-parents had come from India in 1947 to Pakistan. Later, the term used to refer only to those living in the Province Sindh. Thus, it reflected the prevailing political conditions of this province. In order to make his point clear, Altaf Hussain often referred to his own biography and took it as an example. According to him, he was a student of pharmacy at

⁴ Pattanaik, S.S., *Ethnic Aspirations and Political Power: Defining Mohajirs' Grievances in Sindh*, *Strategic Analysis*, 23(1999/00)3, pp.459-482.

⁵ Hughes, T.P., *Dictionary of Islam*, Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1992 (first published 1885), p.67.

Karachi University. Here, he often had to face maltreatment because of his birth.⁶ Altaf Hussain regarded the emergence of Mohajir ethnicity as a final point in a long development and as a circumstance imposed upon him from the outside: "There was the Pakhtoon Students' Federation, Jiye Sind Students' Federation, Punjabi Students' Federation, Baluch Students' Organisation, Kashmiri Students' Federation, Gilgit Students' Federation, Qabaili Students' Federation etc. We did not fit into any of these groups. We were only Pakistanis. (...) It was not we who had branded ourselves as Mohajirs. They were others who called us Mohajirs."⁷ Mohajirs had, so Hussain, "many common demonstrations of common psychology, language, culture, interests, economic, and psychology"⁸. Therefore, they were a "nationality".

Summing up, Mohajirs were those:

(1) "who have migrated from the Muslim Minority areas (and) whose geographical territories have not been included in Pakistan, i.e. U.P., C.P., Bihar"⁹;

(2) who lived in Sindh, which excluded those Punjabi migrants who had gone to the Pakistani part of Punjab, because they remained in their cultural circle and "suffered no cultural shock after migrating";

(3) who regarded Karachi not as "an additional Dubai (...) as it is for other groups, who earn here to take back home and eventually do so". This definition, in turn, separated Mohajirs from Punjabi, Pashtoo, Afghan migrants etc. and led to a basic conflictive situation between the APMISO/MQM and these groups.

In many ways, the APMISO created a problem for the established school of thought on ethnicity. Mohajirs had migrated from "ethnically" different parts from India. Thus, they differed very much from one another and had

⁶ At this point, Altaf Husaain usually began to tell the following story: "I remember I scored the highest marks for a job examination and when I went for the interview the panels of interviewers put my academic card aside and asked me about my identity. I said a Pakistani, they said no, I said a Muslim, they said no and then again they asked me. I said what do you mean? They said where do you belong and I said Karachi. But they insisted that was not enough and further asked where my fathers belonged. When I finally told them that they belonged to India, they said oh so you are a Mohajir. They tore my application, threw it away and asked me to leave." In: "Gulf with Punjabis and Pukhtoons bridged", Interview with Altaf Hussain, *The Nation*, 19.1.1990.

⁷ In: Jamil, N., The rise of the MQM, *The News*, 16.9.1988; "Altaf slates PPP policies", *Dawn*, 13.12.1989.

⁸ In: "Altaf on genesis of Muhajir nationality", Interview with Altaf Hussain, *The Star*, 12.2.1987.

⁹ See footnote 8; U.P. = United Provinces (presently Uttar Pradesh); C.P. = Central Provinces (presently Madhya Pradesh).

very little in common. Altaf Hussain revealed, however, that an ethnic identity was not linked to courses of development lasting for centuries. This usual definition of ethnicity was rejected. Instead, the example displayed that ethnicity was a modern concept and had a political meaning at its core. Mohajirs had only discovered a common ground in the face of the political realities of the prevailing system of governance.

The above-mentioned features separated Mohajirs from the rest of society and constituted their identity. The concept, however, was based per definition on distinctiveness and commonness. Mohajirs were not only distinct which led to frictions but, at the same time, their identity was inevitably linked to the province of Sindh. This circumstance provided a common ground with Sindhi nationalists "to fight for our rights from big brother Punjab". According to party ideologists, "Sindhis and Mohajirs (were) permanent settlers. They live and die here, and whatever money they earn, is spent on its betterment." Thus, the alliance with Sindhis became an objective possibility which could be revived from time to time. In this context, the political representation of the Mohajirs in the APMSO/MQM brought them closer to Sindhi nationalists than their former representation in the fundamentalist party of the Jama'at. A basic contradictory relationship between APMSO/MQM and Sindhi nationalists, however, remained, because the line between a Mohajir and a Sindhi was clearly drawn at the same time.

The evolution of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM)

The Mohajir Qaumi Movement was formed from the students' movement APMSO as a party on 18 March 1984. The foundation of the MQM as an ethnic party of the Mohajirs marked the beginning of a new era in Pakistani politics. It was a sign of a deep political and social imbalance in the structure of the Pakistani state, since its ethnic polarisation became manifest. The historical background for this formal step was the extension of the quota system for another 10 years which had been ordered by the then military dictator Zia-ul-Haq. The first big demonstration of the MQM took place two years later on the 8 August 1986. On this day, about 150,000 people gathered in Karachi's Nishtar Park. The influence of the party increased and started to challenge the prevailing power balance. Subsequently, violent clashes broke out in October and November of the same year.¹⁰ Functionaries of the party explicitly spoke out against the "dangerous style of the bus

¹⁰ See for instance: Shaheed, F., *The Pathan-Muhajir Conflicts, 1985-86: A National Perspective*, in: Das, V. (ed.), *Mirrors of Violence. Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, pp. 194-214.

and taxi drivers" and the "drug Mafia". These remarks filtered out the ethnic groups of the Pashtoons and Afghans and subsequently led to violence. The violence revealed the actual social situation in Pakistan and her state of nation-building. The commission set up by the government to investigate the affairs in Karachi revealed, for example, that the ethnic grouping persisted in the absence of a sustained political process due to bureaucratic and military intervention. "Instead of diminishing, the lines of distinction between the ethnic communities have become sharpened."¹¹ But the state authorities seemed to have misjudged the situation. The MQM was said to have played a certain part in the strategy of the military rulers in opposing the PPP-led "Movement for the Restoration of Democracy." Due to the lack of any actual political base, they manoeuvred and manipulated the politics of the country and contributed to the initial formation of the MQM.¹²

1987 finally signified the actual influence of the MQM. During the local government elections in the same year, the party achieved a first victory. This support by the electorate continued in principle right into the 90's and upheld the mandate of the party¹³ as the major representative of the Mohajirs. And as the Mohajirs were the strongest group in the urban centres of Karachi and Hyderabad, we may assume that the MQM was, proportionally, the majority party there.

The MQM in power

Pakistan's first party-based general elections were held after 11 years of military dictatorship in autumn 1988. On 16 October of that year, the MQM presented its first comprehensive programme, the "Charter of Resolution". The Charter showed that the party's ideology was based on ethnicity and the urban centres of Sindh. In the introductory remarks it emphasised that "Mohajirs ... have by now become the part and parcel of Sind by snapping relation from the place they have migrated from. ... The miseries of Sindhis and Mohajirs are of the same nature and same in magnitude."¹⁴ This approach had been reflected in contacts between Altaf Hussain and the father

¹¹ Government of Pakistan, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Karachi Affairs, March 1986, p. 12.

¹² The facts of this plot were never established, but see for example the following reconstruction: Tariq, A., *Panic in Karachi: Altaf Hussain, MQM and Underground Mafia*, Islamabad: Daily Hot News International, 1999, pp. 50–51, 61–64.

¹³ Elections were held in 1988, 1990, 1993, 1997.

¹⁴ MQM, Charter of Resolution, 16.10.1988 (typed copy, MQM file at the library of *Dawn*, Karachi).

figure of the Sindhi nationalist movement, G.M. Syed. In the aftermath of the 1988 elections, it led to the signing of an agreement between MQM and PPP. Keeping the history of later years in mind, this agreement can be regarded as truly historic when it stated that the "destiny of Pakistan rests on united and unstratified society and Pakistan Peoples Party and Mohajir Qaumi Movement will reunite the rural [and] urban population through a process of representative Government which makes provision for redressal of legitimate grievances and political adjustments in a sense of accommodation. (...) Only an effective and democratic government can mobilise the will of the people to correct the imbalances in our economic and political structure."¹⁵

However, letter and spirit of that agreement never materialised. The MQM complained that the agreed points were never implemented. The first co-operation with the PPP government could only be maintained after signing a memorandum in June 1989. However, in October of the same year, it was called off and the MQM signed an agreement with Nawaz Sharif's opposition party, the then Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI), about the formation of a coalition government. Nawaz Sharif eventually got elected as Prime minister in 1990 and the MQM obtained a certain access to power.

The MQM, on its part, substantiated the coalition by adopting the philosophy of "Realism and Practicalism", arguing in favour of a change of the political system. The system, in turn, was to be judged according to its benefits. One can argue about the flabbiness of this philosophy as it was open to too many interpretations. However, it revealed that if the party obtained access to power it would also take the opportunity as a calculable force in political coalitions. At the same time, the new philosophy provided the party with an opportunity to maintain its identity, while retain up its critique of the prevailing political system. It was seen by the party as a "cruel and oppressive feudal system ... inconsistent with the demands of modern age". The struggle for economic resources would continue because the "privileged (people belonging to this unjust and cruel feudal system ...) are exercising full control on (them)".¹⁶ Here, the MQM provided a socio-economic explanation of its *raison d'être* in addition to its ethnic dimension. It differentiated its basis from the rural areas because "(it was) part and product of an industrial sector, not the feudal system"¹⁷. Emphasis was placed on its

¹⁵ Text of declaration made by PPP and MQM, *Dawn*, 3.12.1988.

¹⁶ "Altaf presents review of MQM philosophy", *The Muslim*, 20./21.5.1991.

¹⁷ "Treat us as brother", Interview with Altaf Hussain, *The Muslim*, 21.2.1987 (?) (MQM file at library of *Dawn*, Karachi).

urban middle class orientation. Before it finally changed the name in 1997 it had introduced itself as a representative of all middle classes.¹⁸

As already said, the party had formed an agreement with Nawaz Sharif's IJI in 1990. This agreement was in various respects different to that signed with the PPP. The agreement with Nawaz Sharif was on some issues more outspoken and, with its implementation, it would have made an impact on the political structure of the country. On the problem of the quota system, the agreement stated: "the present quota system in Sindh is unjust, biased and discriminatory. The quota system shall be revised (...)"¹⁹ Whereas the PPP agreement "accepted (it) upto 1993"²⁰. In this respect, the IJI also sanctioned the expression assuming the existence of a "Mohajir quota" and the demand of the MQM regarding the repatriation of Bihari refugees who lived in Bangladesh. The reason for this compromise on the part of the IJI was that the interests of the MQM and the IJI (later Pakistan Muslim League, PML) did not clash directly in Sindh. The PML had their strongholds in Punjab. Accordingly, the MQM was granted more access to state power in Sindh. Now, the parties agreed that the MQM "shall be taken into confidence in all important postings and transfers to and from the Province of Sindh."²¹ This in turn contributed to an uneven situation since major parts of the province were not represented and the MQM was favoured unilaterally.

The "Operation Clean-up" against the party

The basic power structure of Pakistani politics as a whole, remained nonetheless unchanged. Military and bureaucracy maintained their influence which could easily be revived. The judge, for example, who gave the verdict in Altaf Hussain's case clearly considered that the Army was "(superior and that ...) the Army personnel command (... was) more worthy people than ordinary witnesses"²². Any elected government was bound to fall into line with this power structure since it had derived its mandate by manipulation. In 1991/92, military and bureaucracy evaluated the MQM as being a criminal and terrorist organisation since it threatened the power balance of

¹⁸ See the ideology of the MQM, "Realism and Practicalism", *The Muslim*, 20./21.5.1991.

¹⁹ Text of IJI, MQM agreement, *Dawn*, 25.10.1989.

²⁰ Text of Declaration made by PPP and MQM, *Dawn*, 3.12.1988.

²¹ Text of IJI, MQM agreement, *Dawn*, 25.10.1989.

²² Special Court (STA)-III Karachi, Spl Case No. 49/93, The State v/s Muhammed Ashfaq and others, Judgement by Rafique Ahmed Awan, given on 9 June 1994.

the state. The judge stated that "a parallel Government was established in Karachi" (under the leadership of MQM chief Altaf Hussain).²³ From now onwards, the army targeted the power basis of the party by various means ranging from raiding town quarters and arresting party workers to providing a cover to the rival faction, Haqiqi, which had fallen out with Altaf Hussain on the question of sharing power and party funds when the party's influence was at its peak.

The leader of the MQM, Altaf Hussain, had already gone into exile in London in January 1992 and co-ordinated the party organisation from there when the army started the so-called "Operation Clean-up" in Sindh in June. Now, the MQM was excluded from state power. This situation led to the most violent phase in Pakistani politics. In 1993 general elections took place. The army operation, however, denied the MQM free access to the elections from the outset. Therefore, they lacked the popular mandate, which only aggravated the situation in Karachi during the following years because the operation against the MQM thereby assumed legitimacy. Even so, some observers regarded the elections as comparatively free. Any later attempt to come to terms with the new government of the PPP was bound to fail and Pakistani politics entered the phase in which virtually no dialogue could take place. Altaf Hussain only communicated through letters with the political elite of Pakistan, namely the chiefs of the armed forces. In the first letter sent on the 28 March 1994, he described the operation as "state terrorism"²⁴ against the MQM and he quoted instances of corrupt practices of the armed forces. In June, the MQM publicised a revised charter of its demands, mentioning the "inhuman and brutal treatment to Mohajirs"²⁵. Only a short time later, Altaf Hussain caused a deep conflict with Sindhi nationalist forces, especially when he seriously suggested creating a fifth province for Karachi and Hyderabad at a rally in London "if due to continuous injustice and repression their frustration and discontent reaches such a level that they are left with no option but to demand a province for their very survival"²⁶. In an interview he said that the MQM had asked its followers to bring forward proposals regarding the administrative structure of this province.²⁷

²³ Statement of Major Kallemuddin. In: Special Court, see footnote 22.

²⁴ Open Letter (first) by MQM leader Altaf Hussain to the Chiefs of Pakistan Armed Forces, 28.3.1994. In: In the Supreme Court, footnote 3, Part II, Vol. 4, pp. 60–75. The other three letters were written on 3.8.1994, 16.8.1994, 5.12.1994.

²⁵ MQM Demands Fundamental & Constitutional Rights for Mohajirs, 4 June 1994, Karachi, Azizabad: Mohajir Qaumi Movement, 31 pages.

²⁶ No demand for Mohajir province yet, says Altaf, *Dawn*, 11.9.1994, p. 16.

²⁷ "Creation of new province not part of MQM policy, says Altaf", *News on Friday*, 23.9.1994, p. 12.

And years later, he even confirmed that "Mohajirs (had) voted in favour of a separate province"²⁸. In this particular phase of Pakistani politics, the nationalist movement of the Mohajirs entered the territorial arena as well. Interestingly, the MQM always drew parallels in this respect to the state crisis of 1971 when East Pakistan seceded from Pakistan.²⁹ The party warned that the elite had learned no lessons from those events and that they could be repeated. The MQM made its position on the present political structure of Pakistan clear with a petition to the Supreme Court of Pakistan for the restoration of its constitutional rights at the end of 1994. The petition revealed in detail the dimension of the problems regarding the MQM, the crisis of the Pakistani state and its conflicts. The MQM criticised that "the scheme envisaged to operate a successful and viable parliamentary democracy has been utterly destroyed" and it denied the "present National Assembly legitimacy (as it had been) unconstitutionally constituted".³⁰ Another climax in this round of conflicts was an interview given by Altaf Hussain to the Indian news magazine *India Today* in summer 1995. Here, he questioned the very idea of Pakistan for the first time by describing it as a joke: "Today the (two-nation) theory has become the butt of jokes. ... And the Mohajirs have been victimised politically and economically. Are you surprised that people laugh at the theory?"³¹ Five years later, he went further and considered that "the division of the Subcontinent (as) the biggest blun-

²⁸ And: "... But the MQM convinced them that a further division of Sindh would not be in anyone's interest under the existing system." In: "Let there be a crackdown. We will stand by our demands", Interview with Altaf Hussain, *Herald*, November 2000.

²⁹ Regarding this question, the following statements were made: "It is the system we want to change. ... What people in power fail to realise is that this is not something that has happened overnight. It is a logical result of our basic rights. A situation similar to that of East Pakistan is once again being created." In: "I have never even ordered that a person be slapped", Interview with Altaf Hussain, *The News*, 29.7.1994; "Don't push the Mohajirs completely to the wall. Otherwise 1971 will be repeated. ... When the one in authority does not give people their rights, then Nature intervenes. And when Nature intervenes, it doesn't bother about anybody's power." In: "Don't push the Mohajirs to the wall. Or else 1971 will be repeated", Interview with Altaf Hussain, *India Today*, 15.7.1995, pp.42-45; "Pakistan's history already exhibits the tragedy of the creation of Bangladesh when the inability of the regime in power ... to negotiate and settle ..." In: In the Supreme Court, footnote 3, Part I, Vol. I, p. 55.

³⁰ In the Supreme Court, footnote 3, Part I, Vol. I: "it has resulted in rendering the very foundations of representative Government in Pakistan moribund, substanceless and of a farcical nature" (p. 3); "The membership of MQM and its leadership have been consistent victim of State enforced brutalities and humiliation which is in violation of the aforesaid constitutional mandate" (p. 30).

³¹ "Don't push the Mohajirs to the wall. Or else 1971 will be repeated", Interview with Altaf Hussain, *India Today*, 15.7.1995, pp.42-45.

der of the history"³² and that "the justification for the existence of Pakistan ceased in 1971"³³.

The MQM as a partner of Nawaz Sharif's second government

Pakistan's illegitimate rule and immanent structural crisis of governance erupted once again in 1996. Now, however, the situation turned out to be more advantageous for the party. On the 5 November, President Farooq Leghari, dismissed the elected government of Benazir Bhutto. From the start a somewhat paradoxical situation arose for the MQM. The power of the state which had been exercised against the party before now turned against the PPP. The President's main argument against the PPP government was its handling of the Karachi situation over the past years: "no meaningful steps have been taken ... to put an end to the crime of extra-judicial killings"³⁴, so the President said. The state admitted, for the first time, that crimes had taken place in the name of "the fight against terrorism." Some months later the Supreme Court also found that "sufficient material has been produced ... on the ground of extra-judicial killings."³⁵ These observations gave support to arguments of the MQM filed in the Constitutional Petition in 1994.

The elections in February 1997, however, were conducted in the same manner as Benazir Bhutto's dismissal. Formerly, the whole machinery of the Presidency had been mobilised to ensure the defeat of the PPP and to deny the PPP any return to the power. Now the MQM was needed because in the province of Sindh the PML under Nawaz Sharif was too weak to challenge the PPP. Therefore, it was in the interest of the Muslim League to form a coalition with the MQM. The MQM got back onto the political scene in return and the MQM and Muslim League signed a Memorandum of Understanding and Agreement on 19 February 1997. This new arrangement lasted only one and a half years. This time it was not made public at the beginning. However, it was doomed to fail because of its lack of precision. It mentioned only the terms and conditions of the power sharing formula in regard to the "disputed points and resolution of problems faced

³² A New Pakistan Should Be Rebuilt Based on 1940 Lahore Resolution – Altaf Hussain on 17 September 2000 at Acton Town Hall, In: <http://www.mqm.org/English-News/Sep-2000/17sep-ah-speech.htm>.

³³ Resolutions of 17 September 2000, see footnote 1.

³⁴ Text of Presidential order, *The Nation*, 6.11.1996, p. 9.

³⁵ Text of Supreme Court short order, *The News*, 30.1.1997, p. 9.

by the people living in the urban areas of Sindh.”³⁶ National or provincial interests were worded in broad and vague terms. The agreement provided the party with substantial political influence and it mentioned its basic issues. The MQM, however, was only able to secure its interest for a limited purpose and the problems mentioned in the agreement were never tackled. The federal Muslim League in turn was not able to control the power of the MQM which was now guaranteed under the agreement. A coup was launched in the Sindh province which bore similarities to that against the federal government of Nawaz Sharif one year later. The government of Sindh was dismissed and the administration was placed under the rule of the Governor of the province. At the same time, an operation against the MQM was launched and on top of this the civil administration was replaced by the military in the judicial sphere. This step was temporarily stopped by a ruling of the Supreme Court on 17 February 1999 but revived again with the military ouster of Nawaz Sharif’s government in October of the same year.

The MQM and its demands

The MQM was re-named as the Muttahida (United) Qaumi Movement in July 1997. By so doing, it tried to enlarge its area of influence as a representative of all urban middle classes as it had already done theoretically. However, the substance of the MQM remained unchanged, i.e. based on ethnic politics. In response to a question by the author, functionaries of the party still referred to their classical statement: “Basically (it) is a party which represents Mohajirs. (...) If you want to do something for the betterment of the people, you will first start from your home, your own locality, and where you live.”³⁷ The MQM did not take up national issues and development themes as the coalition agreement in 1997 had once again shown. Observers usually blamed the party for this.³⁸ But it ought to be recalled that the *raison-d’être* of the party was ethnicity, i.e. the promotion of Mohajir interests. The MQM was not tempted into saying goodbye to this ethnic base because the political circumstances of the state so provided. They forced the party only to present demands of the Mohajirs as they realised “a sense of deprivation”, which were as follows:

³⁶ Text of PML-MQM agreement, *Dawn*, 14.1.1999, p. 5.

³⁷ “Gulf with Punjabis and Pukhtoons bridged”, Interview with Altaf Hussain, *The Nation*, 19.1.1990.

³⁸ Read the treatise of a Sindhi who grouped the demands of the MQM in unacceptable and acceptable ones. See: Shah, Sayed M.A., Ethnic tensions in Sindh and their possible solution, *Contemporary South Asia*, London, 6(1997)3, pp. 259–272.

The core of the demands was related to the formation of the Mohajir people and their identity. It included demands to secure resources and to expand access to them (for people living in the urban centres of Sindh). The MQM asked for a stop of migration to these centres and a reversal of previous migration. Further, it demanded a stop to land distribution and its acquisition by others, preferential allocation of jobs in government services and industries and of housing facilities, greater access to educational institutions, as well as restrictions to the right to vote for groups which migrated later to Karachi. Sometimes these demands were not placed exclusively in a Mohajir context but in that of the "locals and non-locals". This was especially aimed at those groups of people who migrated in the 70's, 80's and 90's to Karachi, a concern shared also by Sindhi nationalists as the party tried to make a compromise with them. Nevertheless, a conflict with Sindhi nationalists was always present with respect to the quota system. For the MQM, "it was specifically done to bolster up the people of rural Sindh"³⁹. The quota system was regarded as one of the main problems. At times, as in 1988, it also "accepted the reality of the quota system (... and demanded) its review and rationalization". This stance changed when the party emphasised the Mohajir identity. Then the MQM demanded alteration of the quota system altogether. The attitude on holding the census and on revising the demarcation of electoral boundaries was on the same line.

The second group of demands was subordinated to the first and not object of an immediate conflict: for example, regarding the development of the transport system, construction of roads, repatriation of refugees from Bangladesh (East Pakistan) to Sindh, lower postal charges to India, opening of the border crossing to India at Khokhrapar, a public holiday and a monument honouring Liaqat Ali Khan.

The third group of demands was added during the political process. It was linked to actions conducted by political opponents against the party such as the operation "clean-up". The MQM demanded the end of the operation, the release of MQM detainees and the withdrawal of cases against MQM workers, compensation for victims of killings and looting, the constitution of commissions of enquiry investigating atrocities and extra-judicial killings. The suppression of the activities of the rival faction, Haqiqi, became one of the most important issues when both parties struggled for access to state power. This struggle turned violent and dominated the situation in Karachi during the 90's as one faction or the other got cover by the state.

In fact, only demands of the second group had any potential for a compromise. The same could not be said about the first and third group, where the party was not able to give in because these demands formed the essence

³⁹ In the Supreme Court, footnote 3, Part I, Vol. I, p. 35.

of the party's ideology under the prevailing political situation. Here, only a compromise in degree, but not in substance, was imaginable. In reality, however, the MQM here hardened its stand. Several other political groups classified them as "unacceptable."⁴⁰ But this in turn contributed to the conflictive situation. In this respect, the MQM was often criticised for not developing other political programmes.⁴¹ However, as I see it, this criticism did not delegitimise the above-mentioned demands of the party, but only revealed the deficits of the political system which could not accommodate even "simple demands". At the same time, the MQM tried to raise its standing and established ties with the community of the Mohajirs adopting various populist measures. The party organised so-called "free markets" which distributed grants to poorer sections and sold some foods at a cheaper price. It also ran a campaign to end smoking and to clean up Karachi. The MQM members of the Provincial Assembly declared their willingness to offer away some telephone facilities to the public. The MQM also took upon itself to build some roads in Karachi. However, the party was known first and foremost for its undemocratic character. Irregularities and corruption, for example, were common in some industrial enterprises during the times when the MQM had the majority in the Municipal Council of Karachi.

The party and its limits

The MQM took a very contradictory stand on two major issues: the relationship with other ethnic movements and the concept of democracy. The concept of a Mohajir identity constituted the pivotal point of a controversy that oscillated between two poles. On the one hand, the party itself was based on ethnicity and the leadership explained at length its definition of a Mohajir. This distinguished the MQM, for instance, from any pan-national party like the Jama'at-e-Islami, which had once represented the interests of the urban population in Sindh. On the other hand, the MQM presented itself as a guarantor of the interests of a supra-national but fictitious (Pakistani-) identity. One supporter of the MQM claimed: "I, for one, am greatly biased against 'regionalism' and 'provincialism'. I firmly believe that we are all 'one nation' and should live as such."⁴² The leadership of the party assured

⁴⁰ See Shah, Sayed M.A., *Ethnic tensions ...*, footnote 38.

⁴¹ "The MQM lacked any policy structure, reform programme or legislative proposals in the direction of alleviation of poverty." Waseem, M., *Ethnic Conflict in Pakistan: Case of MQM* (unpublished paper, held at 13th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Copenhagen, August 1996).

⁴² Haider, M.Y., *Equal rights for Mohajirs*, DW, 18.2.1988 (MQM file at the library of *Dawn*, Karachi).

that "till such time when even one Mohajir was alive the dream of Sindhu Desh (independent Sindh-M.S.) would not come true"⁴³. Further, "we are the force which can avert the threat of Sindhu-Desh and keep the province with Pakistan"⁴⁴. In this context, Altaf Hussain often said that "Pakistan had come into being for Mohajirs and they don't have any other place to go"⁴⁵. But he had also conceded that the substance of his politics was similar to the other movements and that "it (was) not the Mohajirs alone whose rights have been denied. The Sindhis, the Baluch and the Pakhtuns, too"⁴⁶. Not only once did Altaf Hussain warn that the happenings in Karachi could lead to a situation similar to that in former East Pakistan. But this placed the MQM in a big dilemma. In an interview given to the *Daily Jang*, Altaf Hussain tried to get out of it by weighing "reasonable" and "unreasonable demands prejudicial to the integrity of Pakistan"⁴⁷ against each other. He had to leave the question open as to what kind of institution would be authorised to do this.

This contradiction showed on the question of democracy as well. In 1987, Altaf Hussain was recorded as saying: "I am for central rule. It should remain as it is."⁴⁸ The statement in fact revealed the success of the initial support by the military for the party.⁴⁹ Historically, it reflected the fact that the unitary regimes of the 50's had also been the better option for the Mohajirs and that "(they) and the army had been natural allies and partners"⁵⁰. The electoral system also challenged the position of the MQM. Its appeal was confined to Karachi and Hyderabad, while the party could at that time expect at best to win 15 seats on the federal level. Therefore, the MQM did not claim to fight for the spread of democratic values in Pakistani society as such. The leadership of the party showed that it would also enter into agreements which would one-sidedly grant it special privileges. The party underlined that it would only support initiatives which included the word Mohajir.⁵¹ Questioning the conduct of elections it once asked: "But what

⁴³ "Altaf slates PPP policies", *Dawn*, 12.12.1989.

⁴⁴ "General Asif Nawaz became a party by commenting on MQM's popularity", Interview with Ishtiaq Azhar, *The News*, 29.4.1994.

⁴⁵ "Mohajirs not against Army, says Altaf", *Dawn*, 18.3.1993.

⁴⁶ "Why MQM? Altaf on rationale, objectives", Interview with Altaf Hussain, *Dawn*, 3.2.1987.

⁴⁷ "Mohajirs: A Disillusioned Lot", *Secular Democracy*, New Delhi, 23(1995)10, pp. 35-42.

⁴⁸ See also Hussain: "The condition of being a refugee", Interview with Altaf Hussain, *The Nation*, 14.2.1987.

⁴⁹ See Tariq, A., *Panic in Karachi ...*, footnote 12.

⁵⁰ Siddiqi, A.R., *Mohajirs, MQM and the army*, *The Nation*, 16.12.1998, p. 6.

⁵¹ "We don't support anything which doesn't include the word Mohajir", Interview with Altaf Hussain, *Herald*, September 1987, pp. 129-134.

have elections given to the Mohajirs? In the aftermath of elections, Governorships and 'DIG-ships' and 'SHO-ships' do not go to the local people."⁵² This negative attitude towards the electoral process and democracy was not restricted to society at large. The party regarded a highly centralised inner structure as essential for its success.⁵³ Therefore, no opposition to its leadership was allowed and disapproval was expressed only through violence. Yet the party had derived its legitimisation from elections. And as this mandate was denied, their leaders demanded the recognition of the same and claimed to work for "a strong, democratic Pakistan"⁵⁴.

The positions of the MQM seemed to move in circles. The MQM struggled for one thing at one time, denying it at the next moment. However, the author is of the opinion that this circumstance did not undermine the stand of the MQM. The party always found support in its present form and this was not the choice of its present leadership.⁵⁵ The reasons for the contradictory stand of the MQM are to be found first and foremost in the evolution of the political system and not in the party.

Concluding remarks

The position of the MQM was a reflection of the situation in Pakistani society and the state as a whole. Pakistan never freed itself from its bureaucratic and authoritarian past. The political process was weak which merely reflected the weak political base of the state itself. The democratic process starting in 1988 did not strengthen the links between state and society. Military and bureaucracy still formed the major influences in the decision-making process of the state. They rendered the electoral process meaningless as they manipulated the same and distracted "in a fundamental way

⁵² "Why MQM? Altaf on rationale, objectives", Interview with Altaf Hussain, *Dawn*, 3.2.1987. Once the MQM also demanded the restriction of voting rights for other communities.

The rank of DIG denotes Deputy Inspector General of Police. There is one DIG for a range and there are 5 ranges or divisions in Sindh. The rank of SHO (Station House Officer) signifies an Inspector and he is in charge of a police station.

⁵³ Farooq, I., *Nazm-v-Zabt Ke Taqaze* (The demand for Order and Discipline), Karachi: Mohajir Qaumi Movement, 23 pp.

⁵⁴ "Mohajirs sacrificed most for Pakistan, but were systematically weeded out of power", Interview with MQM leaders, *The Hindustan Times*, 8.10.2000, p. 14; see also: In the Supreme Court, footnote 3.

⁵⁵ See "While it is true that Zia masterminded the birth of MQM, the choice of adhering to Pakistan ideology or embracing an ethnic identity rested with the Mohajirs, says M. Umer Shariq", in: "Where did MQM go wrong?", *The Nation*, 27.12.1998, p. 7.

from the representative character of the parliamentary system in Pakistan."⁵⁶ This contributed to its erosion and further widened the rifts within society. The emergence of the MQM was a consequence of this process. This situation was not a peripheral phenomenon in Pakistani politics but was embedded in the overall political development of the state.

The Pakistani state showed major deficits in its performance and was unable to fulfil demands and to balance the various segments of society and state. Thus, basic constitutional problems, the imbalances in its political structure and the superiority of the executive contributed to the rise of the MQM. The evolution of the MQM within the political system of Pakistan was a question of power which was not accommodated. It was the expression of the fact that large segments of society were excluded from the political process and were not represented in the prevailing system.

However, the MQM reflected not only a crisis of the Pakistani state but contributed to it as well. The implementation of even some of its demands had an immediate repercussion on other spheres of the society and communities in Pakistan. In the long term, the interests of the MQM were in direct conflict with Sindhi and Pashtoo interests. The limited potential of any relationship between both political forces⁵⁷ showed up in the passing of the 16th constitutional amendment in July 1999 which extended the quota system up to the year 2013. The overall picture was in fact one of a deeply polarised society which was divided along ethnic and communal lines⁵⁸ and which seemed to be held together only by repressive means, which only polarised the society.

Since the elections of 1997, the Pakistani state had continuously strengthened its authoritarian features, which led ultimately to the military coup under General Pervez Musharraf on 12 October 1999. In August 1997, the "Anti-Terrorism Act" was passed which provided measures to deal with "prevention and punishment of terrorist acts." The nuclear tests carried out in India in May 1998 provided the excuse to declare a state of emergency and to suspend fundamental rights for the first time. This measure found an ideological equivalent in the declaration of the "supremacy of the Quran

⁵⁶ Final Report of the European Union Election Observer Group on the National and Provincial Assembly Elections held in Pakistan on 3 February 1997, Islamabad, 5 February 1997.

⁵⁷ Altaf Hussain adjourned a decision on this matter to a future date: "Once Sindh attains full provincial autonomy, the people of urban and rural Sindh can sit together and amicably resolve the question of rights for the people of urban and rural areas." See footnote 28.

⁵⁸ See Report of the Commission ..., see footnote 11.

and Sunnah” in the 15th constitutional amendment and started a new phase of Islamising Pakistani society.⁵⁹

The resolutions of 17 September 2000 passed in Acton (England) were a reflection of this political process. On the one hand, MQM and state have moved away from each other further than ever before. On the other hand, the MQM has reached the same level as other sub-national movements. And although these were not able to state how a working relationship could be established between them it signified a substantial shift in Pakistani politics in that the MQM, a major political force, demanded that “all the present functions of the Federation with the exception of Defence, Foreign Affairs and Currency shall be transferred to the provinces.”⁶⁰

The existence of the MQM revealed a deep crisis of the state which needed to be addressed. Repression or providing access to power to one or other faction of the party was not a solution to the problem. The way out was a balanced strengthening of the various institutions of the state and their anchoring in society by means of fair electioneering, expanding the judicial system and freeing the press from surveillance. This basic process had however come to a halt altogether with the military take-over and needed first to be revived. The Local Government Plan presented in 2000, however, was contrary to this necessary development as it excluded the political segment of society from the start.⁶¹

⁵⁹ The 15th constitutional amendment did not pass through all parliamentary stages.

⁶⁰ Resolutions of 17 September 2000, see footnote 1.

⁶¹ Under the scheme the electoral system was laid down as follows “Elections will be held on non-party basis” and “... A person shall qualify to be elected ... of the local government ... if he/she ... (r) has not been and is not involved, whether individually or as a member of a group of persons, in activities directly or indirectly prejudicial to the ideology, interest, security, unity, solidarity, peace and integrity of Pakistan and its people, and the good order and harmony of society, (s) has not used for his/her election the platform, flag, symbol, and financial or material resources/support of a political, ethnic, religious and sectarian party, formation or organisation.” In: <http://www.pak.gov.pk>.