

A Gospel!

As the Dawn Breaks: Nazeer Naji

The Dean of Binnauri University, Karachi, Maulana Mohammad Naeem has announced, after a meeting with Nazim Karachi, Syed Mustafa Kamal, that he and his associates will support Muttahida Quami Movement in the upcoming General Elections of Pakistan. Announcement of support for a political party from a religious institution is not a big deal, but under the present political scenario, it bears a high importance. MQM is a unique and only political party of Pakistan which does not exploit the religious sentiments and slogans in its politics. The other political parties which are into secular politics include ANP and several other parties from Balochistan but their circle of influence is very limited and by and large, in National Assembly, they are projected in single figure, while MQM claims a large number of seats in both National Assembly and Provincial Assembly, and as compared to other parties, it represents more forward stratum of the society. This party does not have feudal lords, tribal sardars, and elites on the basis of cast and clan-hoods. Its leadership has come from lower middle-class, and middle-class, and the leadership which is emerging now, also belongs to educated, skilled and hard-working bread earners. In the last five years, the two leaders from MQM, who have emerged out conspicuously, are the Governor of Sindh, Dr. Ishrat-ul-Ibad and The City Nazim of Karachi, Syed Mustafa Kamal. The way the veteran leadership of MQM paved the way for the emergence of these leaders also elaborates the class character of this party.

It is a common saying that the democracy is always run and strengthened by the middle-class. Wherever the middle-class will be in minority and weak, the democracy is weakened and unstable over there. The best example of this analogy is our own country. Over here the feudal lords, the capitalists, the tribal leaders, the seizure groups, and the authoritarians from the establishment are more powerful, whereas the middle-class is in minority and very weak, and, by virtue of which, democratic institution is also weak. Very recently this middle-class played a pivotal role in the movement by attorneys. Although the purpose and goals of this movements were related to the professional and constitutional rights, the voice for the restoration of the judicial rights, and judiciary was for the civil liberties and it did strengthen the democratic forces. The government of Gen. Pervaiz Musharraf, which never had faced any difficulties, and any challenges up until March 9, for the first time, was compelled for a retreat. This is due to the same recoil that today Ms. Bhutto and Mr. Sharif have returned back to the country and struggling for the complete restoration of democracy. However, this struggle belongs to the benefits of those who are part and parcel of the establishment, whereas MQM, despite of having huge impact and people's support in their circle of influence could not become a part of the power structure. Apparently, it seems unbelievable that a party, who has governorship of a province, several federal and provincial ministries, is not a part of the power structure? To prove this fact detailed reasoning is required which is not called for in this column, but, at least, I can tell this much that MQM, despite of having Governorship and federal and provincial ministries, was never included in basic policy making exercises. You might have frequently heard the leaders of MQM complaining that in such and such decision MQM was not taken into confidence. This party, despite of having the power of mandate, was never considered to be taken in the power structure of the establishment and the reason being that the ruler class is not ready to accept the people's right to rule.

MQM will be the part of the power only when the balance of power will be tilted in the favor of common men, which is remote from reality at this time. Democracy is not only an exercise of casting vote and mandate, this is a system, a type of government, in which the people and common men get their basic rights. They use their mandate to form the governments and remove the governments. Although, in class system, the public democracy has no place, and maybe it does exist anywhere in the world, this is only a whim. Wherever governments were formed in the name of public democracy, it turned out to be worst dictatorship. Democracy may not be an exemplary system of government, but, still, the human history was never able to project a system of government better than this. The democracy best thrives and survives in those societies where the middle-class is large and strong. This class, which is secular in its thoughts and functions, is the driving force for the economy. The secularism does not mean atheism; it is the discharging of the duties without prejudice to religious affiliations in the affairs of the state. And this is exactly what the Islamic teachings are, to let the people of all religions and beliefs live their own lives as per their beliefs. The state should not impose any religious beliefs on anyone and in the eyes of the law of the state the rights of every citizen should be equal. But, from the time when the benefits started being reaped in the name of religion and when the circle of these benefits expanded, religion was started being exploited in the cause of politics. And when politics intrudes in, the struggle for the achievement of benefits and the expansion in the circle of benefits starts, which emerged in Pakistan in the shape of sectarian clashes and it went up to the extent of extremism and terrorism for the sole purpose of political benefits. Today, Pakistan is encountering the grave challenges and facing grave difficulties due to these religious extremism and terrorism and the rest of the world is taking us as a threat to the world peace.

Now, the process of restoration of democracy in the country is once again going to start and the return of the heads of two large political parties with an election schedule detests the fervor of extremism. It is also a good omen that the problems pertaining to constitutional rights, democracy, and economics are surfacing and being pointed out during the political discussion and counter-discussions, which is a very healthy sign. In the backdrop of all these, pronouncement of support from a religious institution for a secular party like MQM is a positive advancement. The participation of religious institutions and religious scholars in secular politics had been a part of our tradition. Jamiat-Ulama-e-Hind supported Congress. The level of comprehension of Islam in the leaders of this party was endorsed by all. By participating in the secular politics, they proved that Islam and secular forces have been allies in the past. If, like Binnauri University, other religious institutions would join the mainstream of national politics, the monster of extremism could be tamed easily. I pay homage to the brave and encouraging decision of Maulana Mohammad Naeem and hope that the heads of other religious institutions would also join the liberal and democratic forces in an effort to saving the country from extremism which had been the virtue of our elders.

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