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PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari addresses a public gathering in Karachi. PHOTO: PPI

The people of Karachi have spoken

The emergence of the PPP as the largest party in Karachi is a testament to the changing political landscape.

Shazia Nizamani | June 15, 2023



The recent local body elections in Karachi stand as a shining example of democratic progress, granting the citizens of this vibrant city an unprecedented opportunity to cast their votes without fear or coercion. Gone are the days when Karachi would be held hostage during elections, robbing its residents of their freedom to choose.

In January, a historic moment unfolded before our eyes, as Karachites exercised their right to vote without any external influence. This election holds unique significance, as it witnessed the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) emerging as the largest party in Karachi, despite the traditionally anti-PPP sentiment among Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) voters. The boycott by MQM seemingly led their voters to support the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Jamaat-e-Islami (JI). However, it is misleading and intellectually dishonest for certain individuals in Karachi to draw comparisons between JI and the PPP, while claiming that Karachi has not voted for the latter since 1979.

Regrettably, these self-proclaimed intellectuals remain ignorant of Pakistan's electoral history. The truth is that transparent elections have been a rarity in Pakistan since 1970. Whenever transparent elections did take place, the powers-that-be consistently hindered the PPP from achieving a majority or conspired against it. Even in 1970, the PPP emerged as the largest party in Karachi, securing seven out of the 15 seats. The remaining seats were won by Muslim League Qayyum, Central Jamiat Ulema Pakistan, Pakistan Muslim League Qayyum, among others. The JI, on the other hand, could only secure a single seat. In constituencies where the PPP faced defeat, the margins were often slim, with only a few hundred votes separating the victors from the PPP candidates.

During the 1970s, the PPP candidates consistently ranked either first or second in nearly every constituency, while JI's candidates were not even competitive. Therefore, the claim that Karachi has not voted for the PPP since 1970 is unequivocally false. The recent local body elections in Karachi have further reinforced this fact, with PPP candidates representing diverse ethnic backgrounds prevailing across the board. The Karachi City Council, under the PPP's banner, will epitomise a miniature Pakistan, comprising representatives from all ethnicities and languages, including Urdu-speaking Sindhis, Punjabis, Sindhis, Baloch, Pathans, Hazara communities, and more. This unprecedented level of inclusivity is a testament to the PPP's commitment to representing every community residing in Karachi.

Critics often question the PPP's contributions to Karachi, but we must ask them: Isn't it a victory in itself that a city once rife with ethnic divisions now boasts elected representatives from every corner of Pakistan? These representatives possess an equal stake in the city's progress, cherishing it as much as the native-born residents. Who could have envisioned, just a few years ago, that Pathans, Kashmiris, Hazarawals, Siraikis, and Punjabis would become integral parts of Karachi's municipal council? It is thanks to the PPP's visionary leadership, which thoughtfully allocated tickets to representatives from every ethnic community in Karachi.

The development of Karachi has often been called into question, but we must redirect these queries to MQM and JI, who have held direct and indirect control over the city for the past four decades. These parties have played a pivotal role in eroding Karachi's social fabric through their politics of animosity. They have utterly failed to address the city's issues, despite having ample resources during Pervez Musharraf's tenure. Mustafa Kamal himself, in a candid moment on national media, admitted that Asif Ali Zardari, while serving as the president of Pakistan with the PPP in power, played a crucial role in providing funds to the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) during Kamal's tenure as city mayor.

Naimatullah Khan of JI, on the other hand, laid the foundation for the city's destruction by prioritising commercialisation along major roads. The misguided policies of JI bear 100% responsibility for the traffic congestion we witness today on Karachi's roads. Similarly, the MQM's rule over Karachi as mayor, particularly during the Musharraf era, granted the mayor of Karachi more power than the chief minister of Sindh.

However, this period also witnessed the rampant construction of residential plazas on Karachi water and sewerage lands, the illegal occupation of Karachi treatment plant's land, and the conversion of sports grounds into MQM sector and unit offices. These offices, plazas and buildings were erected on parks and sports grounds, while the sites designated for sewage treatment plants were transformed into residential colonies. All of this transpired under the tenure of the MQM mayor.

Today, those who stand against the PPP find themselves in a state of panic as their politics of hate no longer holds sway in Karachi. A new era of development-focused politics has dawned, and the PPP stands as the sole guarantor of progress for the city. Despite the MQM's presence in the federal government alongside PTI for the past four years, neither party has taken on any significant projects for Karachi. The promises made by Imran Khan to this city have proven to be nothing but empty words. It is abundantly clear that the only viable solution lies in electing a PPP mayor who will drive forward the agenda of development and prosperity.

Consider this: until a few years ago, Karachi had an MQM mayor, with the PTI in power at the centre. Despite this, the PPP did not hold a single councillor seat in Karachi's Korangi district, a stronghold of the MQM. However, regardless of lacking electoral representation, the PPP initiated flyovers, development schemes, and road projects in Korangi and other districts that were historically MQM strongholds. Today, the very same roads that were once plagued by traffic jams have been transformed, enabling swift travel in a matter of minutes. Korangi alone boasts overhead bridges and an extensive network of roads.

Where the MQM used to claim uncontested victories, we now witness PPP candidates triumphing. The PPP has invested in robust road networks, parks, transport systems, and infrastructure. Moreover, the establishment of institutions like the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (NICVD) and comprehensive emergency services throughout Karachi demonstrates the PPP's commitment to serving the people. The cries for authority and power were merely smoke and mirrors, as the PPP proved that progress is achievable through unwavering dedication.

Rather than lamenting the absence of authority, the PPP took charge of developing areas in Karachi that fall under the federal government's jurisdiction. The PPP-led Sindh government utilised its resources to effect change even in the cantonment areas. For instance, the expansion of Shahrae-Faisal and the transformation of Karachi's Cantt Station are prime examples of the Sindh government's initiatives. Billions worth of development projects have been undertaken by the Sindh government in DHA and Clifton Cantonment, such as the Punjab Chowrangi underpass and the Submarine overhead, among countless others. The PPP never hesitated, irrespective of whether these areas fell under federal administration. While others could have made excuses, the PPP remained steadfast in its commitment to the masses and initiated mega projects throughout Karachi.

In recent years, Karachi's roads have been widened, stormwater courses have been constructed, and a multitude of overhead bridges, underpasses, and parks have been built under the provincial government led by the PPP. While

it may not be claimed that a PPP mayor will transform Karachi into Paris overnight, one thing is certain: a PPP mayor will be actively engaged in the city, working tirelessly to restore it to its former glory. The performance of the mayor will be subject to scrutiny by the people of Karachi, not just the council of JI. The PPP recognises that the future of its political influence in Karachi hinges on the mayor's performance. Therefore, no stone will be left unturned in making Karachi a developed and prosperous city once again.

It is crucial to have a responsible opposition to ensure a vibrant and strong Karachi Metropolitan Corporation. In this regard, we hope that Hafiz Naeem of JI will step up to the task. As a party accustomed to facing challenges head-on, JI has the potential to fulfil the role of a tough and vigilant opposition.

In conclusion, the recent local body elections in Karachi have set an example of free and fair voting, empowering the citizens to exercise their democratic rights without fear. The emergence of the PPP as the largest party in Karachi is a testament to the changing political landscape of the city. Dismissing the historical support for the PPP in Karachi since 1970 is an oversight by self-proclaimed intellectuals. The diverse representation of various ethnic communities within the PPP's elected councillors reflects the party's commitment to inclusivity and unity. The development of Karachi cannot be solely attributed to one party or administration; it is a collective effort. However, it is the PPP that has consistently invested in the city's infrastructure, defying jurisdictional boundaries and prioritising progress.

Today, Karachi stands at a critical juncture. It requires a mayor who is dedicated to the city's development, who will work tirelessly to address its challenges and realise its potential. The PPP has proven time and again that it possesses the vision, determination, and track record to lead Karachi towards a brighter future. It is time to embrace the politics of development and elect a PPP mayor who will champion the cause of Karachi and transform it into a city that all its residents can be proud of.



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