

# ISAS Brief

No. 39 – Date: 26 December 2007

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## **Forthcoming Pakistan Elections: A Profile on the Islamic Parties**

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It is important to note that the Islamic parties in Pakistan, unlike their mainstream moderate counterparts, are less prone to personality cult and are largely driven by ideology, though personalities do play an important role in ideological steering. They act as centripetal forces by monopolising Islam. Traditionally, there have been two types of Islamic organisations in Pakistan: one, participating in parliamentary politics and, the other, limited to socio-spiritual matters. However, a third type that has emerged is the violence-prone of *Jihadi* and sectarian outfits. These are a by-product of the Afghanistan *Jihad*. Nevertheless, all three are interlinked with each other in one way or another. This brief is confined to the two main parliamentary Islamic parties in Pakistan; Jama'at-e-Islami [Society for Muslim] (JI) and Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam [Council of Islamic Scholars] (JUI).

Abul ala Maududi (1903-1979) founded Jama'at-e-Islami (JI) in 1941 on neo-fascist lines to prepare the Muslims of India for an Islamic revolution. He initially opposed the idea of Pakistan arguing that “nationalism” was not reconcilable with “Islamic brotherhood” which spawns across all borders.

However, once the partition became a reality, he migrated to Pakistan and began campaigning to make Pakistan an Islamic state instead of a parliamentary democracy envisioned by its founders. He argued that Islam is a comprehensive code of life encompassing social, economic and political life. He argued that it is a divine obligation for every Muslim to establish an international Islamic order.

As a first step, in pursuit of this goal, Maududi and other clerics started a violent campaign to have the Ahmadiya declared non-Muslims in 1953. The violent episode claimed 2,000 lives. He was sentenced to death for instigating violence but later was pardoned. He carried on mobilising the clerics and other religious-minded Muslims on different issues and finally led the opposition to force Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to implement certain Islamic laws. Maududi died in 1979 after a year long illness.

The JI, popularly known as the Jama'at, is one of the oldest and largest Islamic parties in Pakistan. It draws its support mainly from the lower-middle classes of urban Punjab and

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Sindh provinces. It subscribes to the Deobandi school of thought in the Hanafi Islamic Jurisprudence. The party does not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, caste or sect as long as one remains adherent to its doctrine. It promotes a sort of pan Islamism. In that sense, it is the only internationalist Islamic party in Pakistan, which seeks state power through an organisation of “Mard-e-Saleh” (purified) as a step to establish Islamic order in and out-side the Pakistan borders. The comprehensive socio-economic and political doctrine that the Jama’at follows is based on Maududi’s interpretations of Quran. His interpretations are comparable to those of Syed Qutab (1906-1966) of the Egyptian Islamic Brotherhood. Both are widely known figures among all pan Islamist fundamentalist organisations.

Currently, Qazi Hussain Ahmed heads the party since 1987. The Jama’at follows strict hierarchy and structure. The *Ameer* (Head) is elected by a top committee based on seniority and efforts put forth in the struggle. Mr Ahmed is an ethnic Pushtun and hails from Noshehra, a central district of the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP), and was elected member National Assembly in 2002. He had worked as lecturer in geophysics for some time in his early career but then entered full time politics.

The Jama’at has never hesitated to use force and “other” means to achieve its socio-political objectives. Its youth wing, Islami-Jamiat-Taliba, known as Jami’at, not only provides cadres for it but is also an instrument to harass political opponents and suppress open debate on campuses. During the Ayub era, a Jama’at-e-Islami-military nexus started to shape.

The Jama’at also took part in the atrocities committed by the army in eastern Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh. It was at the forefronts of 1976 violent movement against Z. A. Bhutto, which resulted in a coup by General Zia-ul-Haq followed by his Islamisation programme. Throughout the 1980s, Jama’at’s network and links in the establishment strengthened further and reached their peak in the late 1990s. In this period the Jama’at launched its militant wing, *Hisbul Mujahidin*, to fight in Afghanistan and Kashmir. During this time, successive Pakistani governments supported the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban in Afghanistan and Islamic militancy in the Indian-administered Kashmir.

Despite all its linkages and resort to violence, the electorate has never responded to the Jama’at’s calls for an Islamic revolution. It was never able to secure more than four seats in the National Assembly in its entire history. The reason is that the power it wields through its connections in the military and civil establishment is far greater than its actual popular support on the ground. It has persistently formed, and re-formed, coalitions with other Islamic parties to participate in mainstream politics. One such party is Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam Fazal-ur-Rehman (JUI-F) group.

Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman hails from Dera Ismail Khan, a south eastern district of the NWFP and is an ethnic Pushtun. While Fazal-ur-Rehman himself is a recognised scholar of Deobandi school of thought in the Hanafi Islamic jurisprudence, he owes much of his name to his father Mufti Mehmood, former chief minister of the NWFP, who was a renowned leader and scholar of Jamiat-Ulema-Hind of pre partition India. Mufti Mehmood along with his other peers vehemently opposed the Muslim League in its demand for Pakistan and supported the Congress party. They argued that a separate country would weaken the position of Muslims in India. However, after partition, he changed the name of Jamiat-Ulema-e-Hind to JUI and became the first president. Initially, JUI did not participate in the mainstream politics but it gradually entered in politics, allegedly after the military’s meddling in politics during the Ayub era.

Fazal-ur-Rehman and his party, JUI, are hardliners and have ideological as well as tribal links with the Taliban. The Taliban took over Kabul in 1996 and were removed by United States' forces after the attack on Afghanistan in October 2001. The Taliban still remain a formidable force in the border regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Fazal-ur-Rehman and his links with the military and civil establishment are not a secret. He also played an important role to get Benazir Bhutto government's (1996) support for the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The Taliban are disciples of the two JUIs. The other is Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam Sami-ul Haq group, a smaller faction of JUI that is also a part of the Mutahida-Majlis-Amal [Collective Assembly for Action] (MMA). Maulana Sami-ul-Haq was a pioneer mobiliser and religious teacher of *Jihadis* in Peshawar coming from all over the world fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Both JUIs have their main support base in the NWFP and adjacent tribal areas, Pushtun and Baluch; beyond that, their political influence in other parts of Pakistan is scant. But since the Pakistan government's decision to revoke all support for the Islamic fundamentalism after the events of 9/11, their support within the establishment has been weakening.

One persistent pattern of Islamic parties has been to form alliances during elections and break up after that. The Jama'at always plays a protagonist role in forming such coalitions. One such example is the MMA. There are other small parties in the coalition representing minority sects in Pakistan.

The MMA is an alliance of the six largest Islamic parties formed to contest the last elections of 2002. This time around, ostensibly, they formed the coalition against the government's policy to ally with the United States in the "war on terror" and abandon support for Islamic fundamentalism. The alliance secured 58 seats in the house of 342 mainly from Pushtun in the NWFP and Baluchistan.

It was an unprecedented victory for any religious alliance in the history of Pakistan. However, opposition parties and national and international civil society circles alleged the ruling military government of General Musharraf of rigging the elections. That was also the general impression among the masses. It became known as the "*Mullah* (clerics) Military Alliance".

Nonetheless, the national and international environment at that time had also helped the MMA in winning sympathies of the large population in the tribal regions of the country. There was a strong resentment against the U.S. attack on Afghanistan, where many Pakistani Pushtun tribes trace their tribal links. The feelings were so inflamed that a local cleric Sufi Muhammad led more than 10,000 tribesmen into Afghanistan armed with guns, axes, swords, and sticks to fight with the United States and allied forces. The Musharraf government's complicity in the "war on terror" only exacerbated the situation. Further, the two largest mainstream political parties, Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and the Pakistan Peoples Party, were silent on that issue and their leaders were in exile. The MMA successfully exploited the situation to their favour by resorting to anti-American rhetoric.

The MMA also formed the government in the NWFP with a simple majority. However, it is interesting to note that while Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman, as the MMA's Secretary-General, was leader of the opposition in the Parliament, his party formed the government in coalition with the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (Qaid-e-Azam) in Baluchistan.

The MMA has split on the question of participating in the forthcoming elections. While JUI Fazal group has decided to participate in the elections, the Jama'at is boycotting the forthcoming elections along with other small opposition parties. The MMA has announced that it will not participate in the elections as an alliance. Actually the MMA could have fallen apart long ago, had not they secured an overwhelming victory in the last elections. The Islamic parties are divided along the doctrinal lines. Their differences are so great that they even do not pray together. The Islamic parties in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, with a 97 percent Muslim population and strict Islamic laws never enjoyed the popular support and were only able to secure 10 percent of the total votes cast in their historic victory in 2002.

In the forthcoming elections, it is unlikely that the JUI-F will be able to get as many seats as before unless the government massively rigs the election.

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