

## Scenario 140

### LYARI GANG-WARS - I

#### KARACHI – HISTORY OF BLOODSHED:

In 2011's Karachi, 1723 people were killed in the city - 476 of those homicides were politically motivated. To understand Karachi's violence, analyse its politics – melting and bubbling in the crucible of ethnic issues, extortion, kidnapping and land grabbing sprees.

Asad Hashim's essay in Al-Jazeera dated 19<sup>th</sup> June 2012 described:

*"...When talking about politics in Karachi, two things are striking. First, how violence - or the threat of it (both as exercised by, and against, political parties) - is always lurking. It is thus that the MQM's frequent departures from Islamabad's coalition government are often accompanied by days of crippling violence."*

Zohra Yusuf, Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, told Al Jazeera then:

*"It was in the 1980s, with the entry of the MQM into politics, that one saw violence seriously becoming a fact of life in Karachi. The MQM armed its workers heavily, and they claimed that [they did so] because they were being attacked [by other parties – which was not true at all]."*

*"This switching on and off of violence in the case of the MQM is really an assertion of their power. They want to prove [only] that they have control over Karachi."*

Senior leaders of the MQM, while speaking to Al Jazeera, admitted that:

*"...the party engaged in violence when it was first formed, as a student organisation at Karachi University in the late 1970s. ....Yes, killings have happened in the past - but we were protecting ourselves....."*

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Almost every political leader Al Jazeera spoke to, in every major party, used a very particular phrase, when talking about political killings. Afaq Ahmed, the leader of a faction that violently split from the MQM in the 1990s, said that *"...every action will have a reaction."*

The phrase evokes an image of Karachi as some incredibly complex experiment in human physics, suspended precipitously above chaos, being constantly pulled this way and that, struggling to find equilibrium. The ANP's Shahi Syed told Al Jazeera that:

*"It isn't just every party in Karachi that has weapons - every person in the city has weapons.*

*There will be misuse of weapons in our party. There will be people [who use them] but it is not party policy."*

The fact remained that there was an atmosphere of violence in the city, and that local party activists could not always be controlled by their leaders. Members of the ANP were involved in extortion rackets and land grabs – but all without the consent of the party. However, Shahi Syed held the MQM responsible for Karachi's violence, calling the party a *'terrorist movement'* and alleging it maintained a *'militant wing'*.

Muhammad Hussain Mehanti, the Sindh Chief of the *Jamaat e Islami* [JI] agreed and told Al Jazeera that:

*"[The MQM] has captured Karachi since 1986, and ... as a result, this city has become like a river of fire and blood."*

The MQM's Farooq Sattar vehemently opposed that characterisation of his party while saying:

*"The MQM has not ever prescribed violence. The political killings in Karachi are being carried out by religious extremists, in a lethal nexus with the criminal mafia, having the patronage of some political leaders."*

In between the violent actions and reactions of Karachi's politics, no political or religious party placed itself as the prime mover. Observers, however, said all political parties kept their weapons drawn, ready to pull the trigger.

The law enforcement agencies and police confirmed that *"...very major political parties in this city are armed."*

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The fact remained that Karachi kept moving but the police, crippled by low numbers and political appointments, was in no position to fully enforce the law. One former Karachi police chief opined:

*"The police treat people differently, on the same crime, depending on who the suspect is linked to; whereas the militants and criminals have entered the rank and file of the political parties.*

*The parties use them for muscle, and the criminals use them for protection. It's a marriage of convenience."*

As the general elections of May 2013 were approaching nearer, the stakes went high and some deal was needed between the parties. It was going to turn violent without that. *'It would be seriously very difficult for the city to recover from what would be a de-legitimised election if there were a lot of bloodshed,'* the intelligentsia held.

In Lyari, Uzair Baloch, the alleged gangster turned local political leader was taking meetings with opposition leader Nawaz Sharif's PML[N], Imran Khan's Pakistan *Tehreek e Insaf* [PTI] and other parties. Even the PPP had sent unofficial emissaries to try and patch things up. For Karachiites - they carried on with their lives, as a virtual civil war was brewing around them.

And violence – *'...it stops, and then starts moving again as if nothing has happened.'*

LYARI – WHO OWNED ITS GANGS:

Lyari is one of the oldest towns in Karachi, with a population of over one million; previously known as *Kolachi-jo-Goth* it was inhabited mainly by fishermen of Baloch descent. Then bed of the Lyari River was reclaimed for housing and rehabilitation.

In 1964, one Dad Muhammad alias Dadal, formed a gang with his brother Sheru and started selling Hashish openly. Dadal was the father of Rehman Baloch later known as Rehman Dakait. Together, Dadal and Sheru took on the biggest drug peddler in Karachi, known as *Kala Nag* [a nick name means black cobra].

Nag's son Fazlu (or Kala Nag II) and Iqbal Dakait aka Babu competed with rival Haji Lal Mohammad aka Lalu, who was Rehman Dakait's godfather. In

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the 1990s, Rehman consolidated his power in Karachi with the support of PPP-backed Khalid Shahanshah and others. In the mid-1990s, Rehman Dakait abducted one Saleem Memon, a trader from the Kharadar area, for ransom. Lalu asked Rehman to release the man for free, but secretly took the ransom himself. That was the parting of their ways.

Later, Lalu's son Arshad Pappu abducted a transporter Faiz Muhammad – who was Rehman's cousin – and killed him. Rehman Dakait's name and legacy survived though in a controversial police encounter in August 2009 ended Rehman's ambitions of taking a plunge into electoral politics. Faiz's son Uzair Baloch eventually became Rehman Baloch's successor.

Lyari's political wisdom remained intact through all periods of turmoil. Twenty-four years after Nabil Gabol first won a provincial assembly seat from Lyari, thousands took to the streets in January 2011 to demand Gabol resign for his alleged neglect of the constituency. Despite their anger at Gabol and their MPs, they supported the PPP.

Benazir Bhutto held her wedding celebrations in Lyari, and won her National Assembly seat in 1988 from the area. Her husband, Asif Zardari, was elected an MNA from Lyari two years later. Lyari had supporters from other political parties, but their candidates received a few thousand votes.

*[The stage for Benazir Bhutto and Asif Ali Zardari's marriage ceremony had been arranged in Lyari and Benazir had opted to give birth to Bilawal in the same Lyari because, as she claimed in her autobiography, she hoped to prove to the people that their local hospital was as good as fancier ones in richer neighbourhoods.]*

Whether the Lyari people and the PACs supported the PPP or the Benazir's charismatic personality – the historians would feel difficulty to define.

In the 1990s, Mir Murtaza Bhutto fielded a candidate and the PPP admitted that it did take away some of their votes. When Murtaza came back, Lyari wanted to support him - '*Bhutto ka waaris Bhutto*', since he was the son of big Bhutto. But Lyari's old lot held that Benazir was the one who made the sacrifices. Most of the Lyari's folk vote went to Benazir and Murtaza could not get that many votes from there.

The police first arrested Rehman Dakait in 1996, but he managed to escape from the court. And since then, the hide-and-seek with the police continued – till the fateful day when he was assassinated by police in cold blood after the arrest. Police, however, denied the charge.

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Rehman's bloody enmity with the Arshad Pappu gang started when the latter kidnapped and killed one of the Rehman's uncles named Faiz – Uzair's father. Politicians played off one gang against the other to make a breach in the PPP stronghold; residents of the area alleged. Uzair once told:

*"We have been PPP supporters all along; the Pappu group was backed by the MQM. When the PPP government came...we all were happy but its representatives here disappointed us. They did nothing for the people. They were always found wanting. That's why the committee [PAC] started its work.*

*These representatives were found missing even when Rangers clamped down in the area, entered houses and misbehaved with women. This crackdown stopped only when we protested and came out on the streets.*

*There was a time when PPP could pit a donkey from Lyari and he would win the elections. But now we don't need donkeys...we need lions to represent the people of Lyari."*

PPP government announced a medical college and a university for Lyari which the locals opposed. Habib Hasan, a former union council Nazim, told that in a neighbourhood where the drop-out rate from primary schools was around 70%, it was wrong to open a university and medical college especially when the existing Lyari Degree College and the local hospital were just being given a face-lift. Habib held the opinion:

*"They should have concentrated on the basics, including school, employment opportunities, water and sanitation...but they [PPP leadership] don't know what the people of Lyari want.*

*Lyari's population is booming. While the city is expanding horizontally, in Lyari we expand vertically – by constructing more floors on our small houses, which multiply our problems – from air pollution to a dearth of clean water to the worsening of sewerage and sanitation facilities – you can keep on counting."*

But the most pressing issue for the *Amn* committee members perhaps remained its rivalry with the MQM, which was sitting on the outer fringes of the PPP stronghold. Once the popular talk in Lyari was that MQM wanted to expand its tentacles – a charge MQM leaders denied. Dozens of supporters belonging both to the MQM and the peace committee were killed in tit-for-tat killings, which were once halted in the second week of January 2010 after President Zardari himself, intervened.

Referring to the magazine 'Newslime' dated 28<sup>th</sup> February 2010:

*"...But the basis of the truce remained fragile - the fact remained that there was a tussle for power – a turf war. And in that war there were no rules of the game – especially when the rule of law had given way to the rule of armed bands, peace committees and militants of rival political parties.*

*The writ of the state has receded and the vacuum is filled by the local tough guys. Welcome to the brave old world of Lyari."*

In Lyari, 1,831 people were killed in violence during 2011-13, most of which was sponsored by a gangster Baba Ladla while parting his ways with Uzair Jan Baloch, the head of the ironically named Lyari *Amn* Committee.

The problem was that the local police had been siding with one group or another; there were extrajudicial killings too. Uzair Baloch was openly accused of killing his friends and relatives. Lately, he had been fighting turf wars against his rival's aide Shiraz Comrade over control of Lyari.

Karachi's successive police-chiefs always complained that they were unable to control 1.8 million people with few hundred policemen. In a high-level security meeting with PM Nawaz Sharif, the DG Rangers Rizwan Akhtar once said there was "*political interference*" in the locality and some gangsters were being backed by the PPP itself, the sitting government.

Since the founding days of PPP, its supporters remained united as a political clout had kept peace between various groups in Lyari but the policy changed under former Sindh home minister Dr Zulfiqar Mirza and his aides. *People's Amn Committee*, was formally announced to act as the PPP's armed wing and a deterrent against the MQM. However, the strategy backfired. Uzair Baloch had once said in 2012:

*"The idea was to pitch us against MQM and to take on the MQM. We were initially given the task to take over four or five National Assembly constituencies. In return we were promised perks, which were never delivered."*

'The Friday Times' dated 4<sup>th</sup> April 2014 is referred.

PPP's key political liaison in the *Amn* Committee was Zafar Baloch, who was close to Uzair Baloch and was known to have political ambitions of his own. In the first phase, the committee banned PPP legislator Nabeel Gabol [who later joined MQM] and MPA Rafique Engineer from entering Lyari.

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Arshad Papu and his brother were brutally beheaded in 2013, likely in a revenge killing by Uzair Baloch and Baba Ladla together. Uzair also helped federal agencies cleanse Lyari of Baloch nationalists and separatists, winning their support in return.

Then, Zafar Baloch was killed mysteriously in 2013 in a murder now claimed by Baba Ladla. Soon Baba Ladla also fled from Lyari to reside near the Iranian border in Balochistan where he was killed by Iranian Border Security in May 2014.

Uzair Baloch left for Oman and then to UK because of worsening ties with his former ally PPP but continued trying to control Lyari from London like MQM's Altaf Hussain but could not go effective.

Bilawal House then chose Abdul Qadir Patel to act as liaison with the defunct Lyari *Amn* Committee.

REHMAN DAKAIT 'POLICE – ENCOUNTERED':

Local residents and police tried to stay safe as criminals fought it out.

The gangs of Lyari were brutal – men were shot dead on the streets in broad daylight. At the height of the gang wars in the past decade, more than 800 died in one year.

In around 1974, one Abdul Rehman was born in a multi-storey residential block at narrow Rexer Lane of Lyari's neighbourhood. He stabbed someone at the age of thirteen. By 1991, he was a known assassin operating on the behalf of a famous gangster — Lal Muhammad alias Lalu. Thus was born the myth of Rehman Dakait, the legendary gangster of Lyari.

In the mid-1990s, he killed his own mother; the opponents described usual filthy stories being the cause of that dirty act.

Between 1996 and 2006, Rehman managed to escape from the police custody more than once. Only a daredevil and wily man like him could do that.

The people then felt a change in Lyari's general perspective; transformation of Rehman Dakait into a godfather - unfolding script of a Bollywood mafia movie; with charismatic don who went generous to friends, mean to foes, he robbed the rich and fed the poor.

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Sometimes, he was seen as a Robin Hood. He ran schools and hospitals, while his gang sold drugs and alcohol and was involved in kidnapping and prostitution rackets. In Lyari alone, he had 33 dens for illegal activities such as peddling drugs, gambling and trafficking in local beer. Rehman Dakait used his wealth to win over Lyari and tighten his grip on the area. The true picture thus developed, however, was:

*"There is an entire subculture that is very charming for teenagers who want to join the gangs. They get a stipend from the boss; they get a new bike, a gun. They have their own set of codes as well as a particular dress code such as six-pocket cargo pants and chequered shirts. It is the glamour of the mafia which sucks them in."*

[Herald of March 2015 is referred]

On 18<sup>th</sup> October 2007; Rehman escorted Benazir Bhutto to safety when her caravan was hit by a massive bomb blast at Karachi's Karsaz area in which 153 persons were killed and about 200 seriously injured at the spot. *Rehman Dakait the gangster was transformed that day into Sardar Abdul Rehman Baloch, the brave political activist of Lyari who could do anything to protect the PPP leader.*

At one time gangster Arshad Pappu's father and Rehman Dakait's father were partners. Things were different then in Lyari. Haji Lalu was the overlord of Lyari and Dadal was his associate. But Dadal broke away after a row over ransom collected from kidnapping a Memon businessman. That was when the gang split and multiplied into factions.

Gangsters had not parted ways only over money - there was power politics at play too. Rehman Dakait had the backing of the PPP while Arshad Pappu was allegedly supported by Karachi's main political party, the MQM.

Once Arshad Pappu had desecrated the grave of Dadal, the father of Rehman Dakait; till then had gone the most powerful gangsters of his times. Challenging Rehman Dakait meant inviting swift retribution and many said it was a wonder Pappu survived so long.

Lyari had long been a stronghold of the PPP. The PPP took under its wing this one gangster named Abdul-Rehman Baloch, alias Rehman Dakait, to keep the Lyari vote bank in check by not allowing other parties access to

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Lyari. In exchange Rehman Dakait was allowed a free rein to extort local businesses, smuggle drugs, arms and ammunition.

Allegedly, that agreement was the brainchild of Dr Zulfiqar Mirza and President Asif Ali Zardari who placed Rehman Dakait as the leader of a newly formed *Peoples' Amn Committee* [PAC] in June 2008 to look after the affairs of Lyari and to tackle crime in his territory. He brought down petty crime and became a local hero. Despite his enhanced reputation he went on his own crime spree unchecked and became the undisputed crime boss in Lyari.

The *Peoples Amn Committee* [PAC] had another cause. Rehman Dakait while following a truce with his rival, Arshad Pappu, helped end the protracted Lyari gang war, which claimed more than 300 lives during 2008-09. But after the February 2008 general elections, the formation of the PPP-led governments both at the centre and Sindh province enabled Rehman and his men to try to change their image. In people's opinion, they worked hard for this transformation.

Soon the disgruntled PPP activists and jobless youngsters joined the peace committee; they were not just Rehman's gang members, but they took upon themselves the task of serving the people and doing social work. Firstly, the encroachments in the Gabol Park were demolished and its status as a football ground was restored.

The PAC was not, however, just a group of gangsters gone straight. It was also an instrument for the PPP in Lyari, and the two worked closely. Zafar Baloch, for example, was elected General Secretary of the PPP's local chapter till 2011. In essence, as well as in spirit, the PAC was the PPP in Lyari.

*"Lyari and the Pakistan People's Party are lost without each other ... there should be no doubt about this. But as matters have progressed, the PAC became a people's movement, and people demanded that our representatives in the government should have some accountability.*

*We have been giving votes to the PPP for 40 years. We have been committed to them."*

Under the *AMN* Committee banner, a small medical centre was established; several places, including some key educational institutions were cleaned and given a face-lift. People were encouraged to donate to local seminaries and educational institutions; Rehman himself took the lead in collection of donations.

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Rehman even donated some of his family property for the use of the general public use. From the dreaded Rehman Dakait, who eluded the police for years, he earned himself the honour of being called Sardar Abdul Rehman Baloch in no time. Some key PPP leaders and elected representatives acknowledged Rehman's street and muscle power and started to give him due respect. PPP's one minister held:

*"He [Rehman] was controversial. People dreaded him, but he seemed to be a rising star of Lyari. He was both a helping hand for the party [PPP] as well as a challenge. Owning him was a problem as was disowning him. Even during the last elections [of Feb 2008], his support proved a blessing for the PPP candidates in Lyari.*

*Unlike other parts of Karachi, you won't find any mobile phone snatching incident in Lyari or any other street crime. He even managed to ban the sale of heroin and other lethal drugs."*

On 9<sup>th</sup> August 2009; Rehman Dakait was killed in what is widely believed to be a stage-managed encounter with SSP Chaudhry Aslam. *"I have never staged fake encounters in my career,"* SSP Aslam told a newspaper interviewer later that month.

It is believed that to save its own reputation and obeying the coalition demands in the government set-ups, the PPP got him killed in that police encounter. By killing Rehman, SSP Chaudhry Aslam got known amongst the residents of Lyari: encounter specialist. *"I have no idea why people in Lyari call me 'encounter specialist' even though most of the criminals I have arrested are alive and in prison,"* he insisted.

The fact remained that the biggest achievement of Rehman and his men, according to his admirers, was their success in beating crime in Lyari. As far as drugs were concerned, they remained available, but no longer openly. It was being done in a very discreet manner - a big change. A ban was put on aerial firing at weddings, which used to claim several lives each year. Violators of this ban were fined Rs:200,000 and committee members ensured that it was paid.

However, Waseem Ahmed, the then CCPO Karachi, said that the killing of Rehman, who carried head money of five million rupees, along with his three accomplices, was a major achievement and underlined the resolve of the police to fight crime. *'He was wanted in around 80 criminal cases including murder and kidnappings for ransom.'*

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Notwithstanding the police version, thousands of people attended Rehman's funeral, giving him a hero's farewell.

PEOPLE'S AMN COMMITTEE:

Politics has always played a dirty role in Lyari's crime scene. In the 1970s, Benazir Bhutto's father, then Premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, gave land rights to Lyari residents. They never forgot his generosity.

In the 1980s, the people of Lyari were most vocal against Gen Ziaul Haq's armed regime. The military punished Lyari by patronising drug and crime. *"A whole generation was lost as education was denied to residents and drugs were sold freely,"* old local residents could re-call.

When Benazir Bhutto returned to power again in 1993, her government worked on the uplift of Lyari. But other political forces had encroached on its turf, most notably the MQM, which flexed its muscles through Arshad Pappu's gang and other miscreant gangs.

During Gen Musharraf's military regime; the Baloch - dominated Lyari started gaining high reputation for criminality. Between 2003 and 2008, gangs headed by Sardar Rehman alias Dakait and Arshad Pappu had divided its neighbourhoods virtually street by street.

As their clashes raged, residents often remained confined to their homes for weeks, sometimes managing to move around through holes in the walls — passages that linked one house to the next, one street to the other. After Benazir Bhutto's death in December 2007, it was her husband Asif Ali Zardari who out-rightly supported Rehman Dakait.

In July 2008, the newly installed PPP government in Sindh decided to launch an *'integrated operation in Lyari'*. It involved 700-strong police force with a similar number of Rangers personnel. The operation was successful. It ended the gang war in most parts of Lyari — but for a brief period of time. The operation could not finish the gangs and the gangsters.

The gangsters led by Arshad Pappu and his lieutenant Ghaffar Zikri were major losers in the operation. They lost a huge number of men and had to relinquish control of most parts of Lyari. Managing to escape the onslaught of law-enforcement agencies, Rehman Dakait saved his men and ammuni-

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tion and was right there to assert his control over large tracts of Lyari as the police and Rangers went back.

In 2008, Zardari approved formation of the '*People's Amn (peace) Committee* [PAC] to take on the MQM. The PAC was a paramilitary group tied to the Pakistan People's Party [PPP] in Karachi but mainly drew its strength from Lyari area; it was placed under the command of Rehman Dakait who was formally involved in organized crime and gang wars.

After Rehman Dakait's death *on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2009*, leadership of the group was taken over by various group members but the decision making rested with Dakait's cousin Uzair Baloch. This was contested by Baba Ladla, an ally of Rehman Dakait, who formed his own gang.

PAC, the organization initially served Lyari, but soon offices were set up in other Baloch populated areas of Karachi, such as *Dalmiya, Shantinagar, Malir, Gadap, Old Golimar* and a few more.

*[Rehman Dakait had self-styled himself as Sardar Abdur Rehman Baloch; his shadow still looms large over Lyari. PAC's members insist that they were 'always' part of the PPP but ignoring the reasons why they created a separate group.]*

The MQM's Farooq Sattar once criticized the cause of People's *Amn* Committee [PAC] in Lyari, a PPP-dominated part of the city. He was certain there were criminal groups sponsored by politicians that were also the real problem for Karachi; he commented:

*"This so-called Peace Committee and - [PAC chief] Uzair Baloch and [deputy] Zafar Baloch; [they] are notorious criminals; and implicated in the city's rampant heroin trade and extortion rackets."*

Zafar Baloch, however, disagreed with that assessment; see an interesting case study here.

The PAC emerged from bloodbath, turning what was once one of the city's most peaceful quarters into a virtual war-zone between 2002 and 2008. The PAC was raised, Zafar Baloch once said, as a means to settle issues through dialogue and communication, not bloodshed.

But the terror prevailed as such. PPP reaped full benefits out of the PAC formation, its working and way of control through terror and crime activities. One Salma Bibi, a 45-year-old housewife in Lyari told:

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*"I remember the election day [in February 2008]. Our hands got tired from [fraudulently] stamping ballots with both hands for Nabeel Gabol [a PPP member of parliament for the area]."*

Of course, the PAC delivered two things successfully for the PPP in Lyari: votes, and protection of Lyari gangs from law enforcement.

In 2011; Dr Zulfiqar Mirza, Sindh's home minister at the time, wanted to tackle the MQM-based violence in the city through strong-arm tactics after failing to do so through law enforcement agencies. In multiple media interviews given in 2011, he admitted to having issued thousands of arms licences to people in Lyari as well as other parts of Karachi so that they could protect themselves from alleged high-handedness of the MQM.

Lyari gangsters did not need those licensed guns, nor were they interested in self-defence. They had guns aplenty and their aim was to extend their criminal operations for extortion, kidnapping for ransom and drug dealing beyond Lyari.

As Rehman Dakait, till his death in August 2009, had consolidated his grip over most criminal activities within Lyari, he thought he was now powerful enough to expand and extend his network. The results of their cooperation were immediately obvious. The MQM saw its monopoly over violence severely challenged, and eroded, especially in older parts of Karachi such as Kharadar, Mithadar and Saddar; even far off Malir and Landhi.

The criminal groups and syndicates, legitimised by politics and ethnic hatred, started flowing from Lyari — the foremost visible impact was that Baloch youngsters from Lyari were usually seen as gangsters in non-Baloch areas and got involved in ethnicity-driven targeted killing. The young Balochis were both the subjects and objects of ever-expanding turf wars.

Herald of March 2015 and re-written in June 2016 described:

*"In one case, a 36-year-old college teacher from Lyari faced problems opening a bank account and getting a credit card because the bank felt he was a 'credit risk'.*

*In another instance, a resident of Khadda Market in Lyari registered his son's birth in Saddar Town, to prevent him from being ridiculed or discriminated against for being a Lyari resident."*

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Even within Lyari, the neighbourhood was divided between a Baloch - dominated central area, where the PAC had complete control, and non - Baloch areas on the periphery where the MQM-backed gangsters, allegedly under Arshad Pappu's command, were operating. The clashes between the two sides were frequent – and deadly – and were fought from behind heavily fortified border streets.

*"People living in one part of Lyari could not visit their relatives living in another part. There was a time when we couldn't even bury our dead in Mewashah graveyard because it too was taken over by a gang. They would not let people from a rival gang's territory bury their dead there."*

[Herald of March 2015 is again referred]

On 11<sup>th</sup> February 2011; violent clash erupted between two groups in a Lyari neighbourhood late night, leaving a *Kutchhi Rabita* Committee [KRC] member named Imran Singhar dead and seven people injured. The clash occurred on the issue of erecting barriers at the inner lanes of the *Kuchhi* - dominated area.

According to police, some gangsters had taken over the *Nayabad* area a few weeks earlier and started kidnapping and money extortion activities in the area. This situation compelled the *Kutchhi* community to erect barriers in the inner lanes. However, this development infuriated the other gangsters, who launched attacks on them and the KRC office that night.

The situation in Lyari was tense at the time of filing of two FIRs from both sides amongst day long protests and road blockades. The groups continued to exchange fire whole day during which a 15-year old Bilal Ahmed died on Shah Latif Bhattai Road. However, his father, Ali Ahmed, refused to go to Police Station for an FIR, perhaps due to terror of revengeful reaction from gangsters.

The PAC was generally considered [*and in fact known to all*] as opposite faction of MQM in Karachi. In March 2011, the PPP had agreed to disband the PACs after getting pressurized by its political ally, the MQM, but despite being officially defunct; the faction continued to operate the committee(s) from the underground.

Even otherwise; Lyari's gangsters had become too gigantic and too powerful to control. After two years of letting the Peoples *Amn* Committee [PAC] operate as its armed wing in and around Lyari, the Sindh government ultimately had to ban it.

*On 11<sup>th</sup> October 2011; the official notification of ban was issued under Clause 11 / B of Anti-terrorism Act 1997 and the law enforcement agencies were directed to monitor its activities but how far; the PPP was in power.*

On that banning of PACs, see a script from foreign press:

*"The uniqueness of Lyari's gangs could be judged by the fact that when, the reigning PPP decided to turn against a group that it had been allied with in Lyari, the city's oldest slum; the People's Amn Committee fought back for a week with automatic weapons and rockets in Lyari's narrow streets, forcing the armoured vehicles of the police and paramilitary Rangers to a standstill outside of the slum.*

*In the end, the operation had to be called off."*

During his blistering speeches, the former Home Minister Sindh Dr Zulfiqar Mirza had threatened in a press conference that he was going to revive activities of PAC but it was all to tease the then Federal Interior Minister Rehman Malik nothing beyond. However, 'target killings', unemployment, fuelling the drug & land mafias and '*Bhatta Collection*' [extortion] continued as such; claimed MQM.

Despite years of neglect by the PPP and other governments, Lyari remained Bhutto's stronghold, over 40 years after it first swore allegiance to the party's founder. Even in the face of intense political pressure, the PPP kept its ties with the PAC intact.

The Lyari Development Project — focusing on education, health, roads and parks, worth hundreds of millions of rupees was about 70% complete in 2011. Development in Lyari had only happened during PPP governments; a medical college opened and there was finally funding for football clubs – as *Lyari is home to 162 football clubs.*

In earlier governments, there were projects for Lyari that only existed on papers.

MQM always described the PAC as criminal group while Dr Mirza publicly owned it but for all intents and purposes, its power structure remained intact in all times. Both MQM & PPP kept their versions; target killings continued to take place on both sides. The night after they decided to end PAC,

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two men from Lyari were shot dead without any rhyme or reason; the *Balochi* people went upset.

A hand grenade was tossed at Habib Jan Baloch's office a few weeks later. A spree of target killings followed, despite Habib Jan's insistence that they were calming workers down; the blame game continued. Uzair Baloch once said:

*"Weapons? Who doesn't have arms in Pakistan? We're Baloch... carrying arms is part of our tradition. We have licensed weapons. Look at the sophisticated arms that the MQM has. They received consignments which [naming a high-ranking official] has been authorised.*

*There are no cases against us, except over personal enmity from the years we battled Haji Lalu and Arshad Pappu's groups."*

PPP leaders associated with PAC believed that it had been unfairly associated with violence. MQM once claimed that Shershah scrap market carnage was not their job. It was blamed on the MQM and drug Mafioso Haji Lalu's syndicate, which lived behind Lyari.

*[On 19<sup>th</sup> October 2010 a group of assailants riding motorcycles had stormed the Shershah scrap market and killed 12 men, mostly shopkeepers.*

*On 14<sup>th</sup> February 2011, two office bearers of that market association were killed in the same way.]*

MQM's Farooq Sattar hails from constituency NA-249 which adjoins Lyari. Mr Sattar had once shown President Zardari the '*Bhatta*' receipts of extortion money issued by the PAC. He maintained that the PAC "*cannot defeat the MQM politically and which is why its members use violence.*"

The Sindh Home Department had set up a dedicated helpline for businessmen who wanted to report extortion cases. Sharifuddin Memon, a consultant with the department, once told that:

*"We have received cases in which people have named the PACs. However, this does not necessarily mean they are involved. We have also heard of groups using al Qaeda's name to terrorise families into paying up.*

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*Anyone can use someone's name including, in one case, from a Federal Investigation Agency official. The complaints of extortion threats are not restricted to one area such as Lyari."*

Astonishingly, in 2011, the reported crimes in Lyari Town were among the lowest in Karachi, as it ranked 15 from the 18 towns, according to Citizens - Police Liaison Committee [CPLC] Chief Ahmed Chinoy; but he refused to comment on the PAC's dissolution, terming it a political matter.

However, relations between the PPP and gangsters continued souring and the PAC was banned in October 2011. The PAC went out of control and kidnappings rose significantly in Lyari though not reported to police or registered by them. Uzair Baloch's biggest mistake appeared he refused to endorse Zardari's half-brother, Owais Muzaffar Tappi, as a candidate for MP from Lyari.

The fact remained that the people of Lyari were upset that the PPP's leadership, local and national both, they voted into power had ignored them; their MPAs and MNAs, who received tens of thousands of votes, had not come back to their constituency to accomplish their promises. One of the residents travelled into the past with comments:

*"MNA Nabeel Gabol only had one car when he first contested the elections. He sold his car and borrowed Rs:200,000 from his cousin for election campaign. We voted him in. Look at where he is now.*

*He has a palatial house in Defence, a number of cars, businesses in Oman. Where did that money come from? It is the money that should have gone to Lyari's development."*

Perhaps this was the void that the PAC helped fill – [*while they understand accountability*]; thousands came out in streets in January 2011 to demand Nabil Gabol's resign for his alleged neglect of the constituency.

*{ That was why, in March 2013, Mr Gabol left PPP, joined MQM and got elected as MNA again with MQM's support }*

On 6<sup>th</sup> January 2012, protestors of the PAC, under command of Zafar Baloch, clashed with police in Karachi despite a legal ban on them. The rally was on its way to Bilawal House when it was stopped by the police.

Police baton-charged the protestors on I I Chundrigar Road and stopped them from proceeding further. Police and the protestors also exchanged

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fire during the clashes; about 30 protestors were arrested. A negotiation team later arrived from Bilawal House to speak to the protestors. Representatives of the protestors were taken to Bilawal House and their demands were registered.

Suddenly, a big change was seen in May 2012; the PPP-led government ordered a police operation in Lyari, to capture the PAC '*gangsters*'. Zafar Baloch and Uzair Baloch, among others, had bounties placed on their heads, as the police rolled in with armoured personnel carriers with other contingents under command of SSP Ch Aslam.

Ten days later, the police was forced to retreat. The PAC fought them off, using automatic weapons and, according to the government, rocket-propelled grenades. After days of pitched battles, at least 45 people had died - mostly unaffiliated civilians including several police officers.

Zafar Baloch, rattling off a list of unfulfilled demands and forgotten promises for progress and growth of the sadly underdeveloped area of the city - from a demand for more government schools to the need for more sports venues, roared before the media:

*"We have been committed [to the PPP] - but is the PPP committed to us? If they are, they should solve our problems. It is the PAC which now delivers these social services to Lyari's people."*

Uzair Baloch, the PAC Chief, told the media panel:

*"This [bounty] is my reward for loyalty to the PPP. Lyari has been casting votes for the PPP for so many years, and now if we are asking for jobs in Lyari suddenly we are criminals? When I sat with Sindh Chief Minister, then I was fine? And now I am a terrorist?"*

The general populace, however, maintained that violence had absolutely become systemic to the way that politics being practiced in Karachi; it was the '*the total criminalisation of politics*'. It was the characterisation that Zafar Baloch had concurred with while saying:

*"[Even non-political killings] become politicised. The stake-holder parties see their activists are being killed, and then it becomes a matter of revenge.*

*The thing is, if you don't do this sort of thing, no-one will respect you. So it's become mandatory for every political party."*

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A year later, in May 2013; Pakistan's general elections were over a week away, but PPP's candidate Shahjehan Baloch had not hit any street of his constituency in Lyari – because he was certain to win from the party's most famous political strongholds. Shahjehan was in police custody for more than a year and facing with two murder charges.

Shahjehan Baloch was a gangland kingpin directly associated with [banned] People's *Amn* Committee [PAC]; its mob had tortured Arshad Pappu, killed him, paraded his body around Lyari and played football with his head – just two months earlier in March 2013.

UK's Daily 'the guardian' dated 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013 noted;

*"Even by Pakistani standards, where politicians are routinely accused of graft and corruption, the selection of an alleged gangster facing murder charges is a startling choice for such a safe seat.*

*But the PPP was likely to be clobbered after five tumultuous years in government, during which the country has suffered terrorist violence, a weak economy and acute energy shortages."*

Shahjehan had told 'the guardian' openly:

*"Jail is a good place if you have money or clout; for those who don't have that, it's hell. I'll be released in a few months' time as witnesses have been gradually withdrawing their evidence."*

After April 2012's failed police operation in Lyari, the PPP's stalwarts preferred to tackle the Lyari situation through negotiations. The most important concession in those talks and dialogue, led by Zardari's sister Faryal Talpur, was that she had agreed the PAC would choose and decide national and provincial assembly candidates for Lyari – that was how Shahjehan Baloch was there. Zafar Baloch, a founding member of the PAC, said:

*"The PPP leadership has always thought the people of Lyari are uneducated, like how a feudal lord thinks of his serfs, but this time they had to accept our choice.*

*They had no choice. Lyari is a symbol of the PPP and if they go down in Lyari it will have an impact on the whole country."*

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Indeed, without compromise the PPP would have lost its seat in Lyari. The historic link with the Bhutto family appeared to have been severed for the time being. Uzair Baloch, head of the former PAC, whose house was raided by police just four days earlier, said:

*"[Bilawal] has no future here; he keeps weak Urdu skills and is unable to campaign publicly due to Taliban death threats.*

*The only people acceptable to us are people from Lyari itself - if you can't even be among your people, what is the point of politics then?"*