

September 2008

Herald

The Curtain Closes

The general bows out amid fears that his departure will not usher in stability

A Requiem for
Children's Urdu
Literature



With the exit of General (ret'd) Pervez Musharraf and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement's decision to ensconce itself comfortably alongside the Pakistan Peoples Party, it seems as if the fears about the Talibanisation of Karachi have vanished. This is not surprising as it is difficult to imagine that the cosmopolitan and commercial centre could face a fate similar to that of the country's tribal agencies. However, what seems to be escaping the attention of many is that some areas of the city are undergoing a transformation under the influence of migrants from the north.

Three years ago, few houses

could be seen on both sides of Manghopir Road beyond the shrine of Hazrat Khawaja Hasan, roughly 18 kilometres west of downtown Saddar. Bungalows nestled in small hills dotting the landscape rendered it scenic. The only planned neighbourhoods were Sultanabad and Pakhtunabad.

However, these sleepy townships have undergone a drastic change since 2005 with the influx of migrants from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Waziristan, Swat, Bajaur and the settled districts of the North West Frontier Province once the conflict in the north intensified. Since many of their tribesmen were already settled in Sultanabad and Pakhtunabad, these new settlers naturally gravitated towards those localities. There was an additional reason as well. The marble-cutting factories located in Manghopir offered employment opportunities aplenty for the untrained men.

Today, the large hilly area around Sultanabad is sprinkled with slums. These slums are not only populated by the displaced, homeless and hapless victims who arrive in such tidal waves of migration but also with Taliban sympathisers who are colloquially identified as Mehsuds, irrespective of their allegiance and links to the Mehsud tribe.

No wonder that on a recent visit to Sultanabad one could see that a large number of the men in the public area were bearded. Though this in itself is

By Maqbool Ahmed

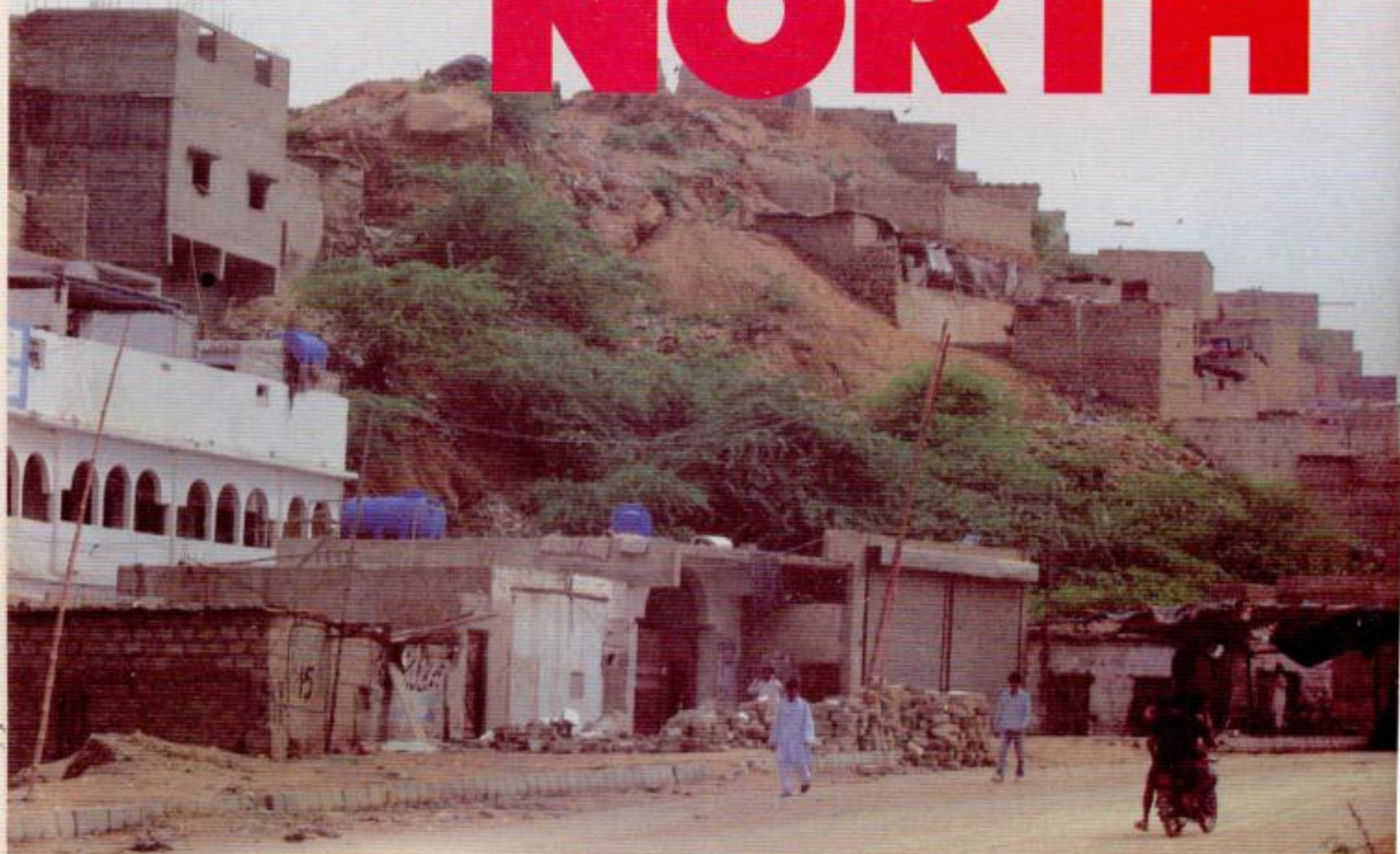
THE LONG SHADOW

Although on a limited scale, the migrant Mehsuds in Karachi's two localities are attempting to enforce Taliban mores

OF THE NORTH

The Herald, September 2008

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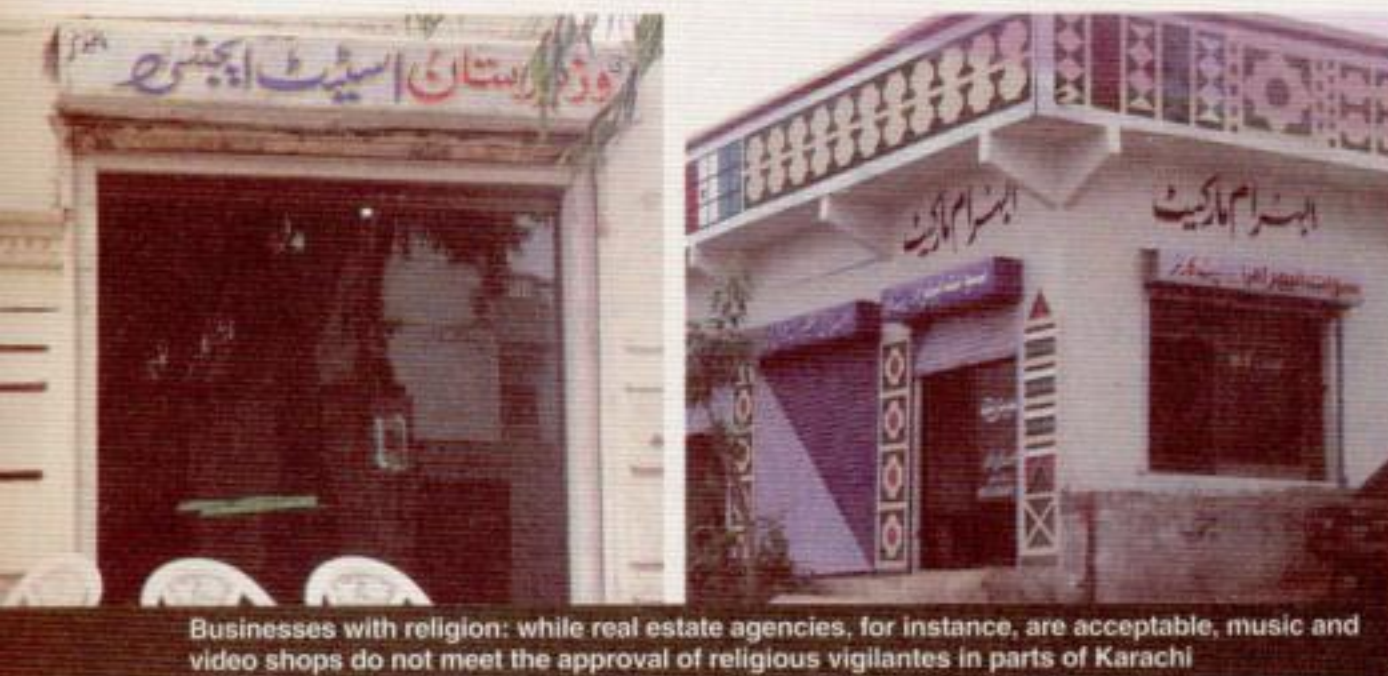
not unusual in predominantly Pashtun localities, it was evident that many of those in Sultanabad were Wazirs and Mehsuds.

It seems as if these men are not averse to imposing their norms in their current abode. Consider the fact that while private or government schools are non-existent in the slums of the area, seminaries and mosques seem to proliferate: while some of them are in use already, others are nearing completion. However, there are far more ominous changes being brought about.

"By next week I will be selling vegetables in this shop instead of renting out films as the deadline given by the Mehsuds to close all DVD and music shops is expiring tomorrow [Friday, August 14]," laments Nur Khan a DVD shop owner to the *Herald* in Pakhtunabad's main bazaar. On August 15 all 12 DVD and music shops were shut down.

Sherbaz Khan tells the *Herald* that his brother Sarfaraz Khan, who was the sole cable operator in Pakhtunabad was forced to shut his business down by the Mehsuds. Only a little while earlier he had spent about five lakh rupees on an office and purchasing technical equipment. "All that investment has gone down the drain," complains Sherbaz Khan.

Nur Khan, who is a member of the Afridi tribe from Peshawar, tells the *Herald* that a couple of months ago the Mehsuds had forced cable operators



Businesses with religion: while real estate agencies, for instance, are acceptable, music and video shops do not meet the approval of religious vigilantes in parts of Karachi

to stop transmission altogether in Sultanabad and Pakhtunabad. Yet due to the pressure exerted by the wealthy Tanoli and Yusufzai tribes of Swat, who dominate the area, this decision was soon reversed in Sultanabad. "The Tanolis and Yusufzais who are mostly traders and businessmen have bought many bungalows in different housing schemes," reveals Shah Makeen, a Sultanabad real estate agent.

While the citizens of Sultanabad could defy the Mehsuds, Pakhtunabad proved to be different. Not only are there no powerful and rich residents to confront the Mehsuds, a number of people in Pakhtunabad share the beliefs of the latter. With support from their surrounding society, the Mehsuds were successful in their campaign.

This is not surprising considering the inroads the Mehsuds are making in the area and their ability to mould people's outlooks. Citing their lack of resources, the new migrants have been able to convince the local residents to allow them accommodation in the area's mosques and madrasahs. "They have installed their men as prayer leaders in most mosques, who are now brainwashing mosque-goers by delivering fiery speeches against DVD and music shops," says Nur Khan.

What is equally worrying for some of the residents is that the Mehsuds are coming together to dispense a rough-and-ready jirga-style justice like their counterparts in the tribal agencies. For instance, Sher Zaman, who drives a taxi, tells the *Herald*, "A few days ago they forced three parties who were at loggerheads over a plot of land adjacent to the main bazaar to settle the dispute."

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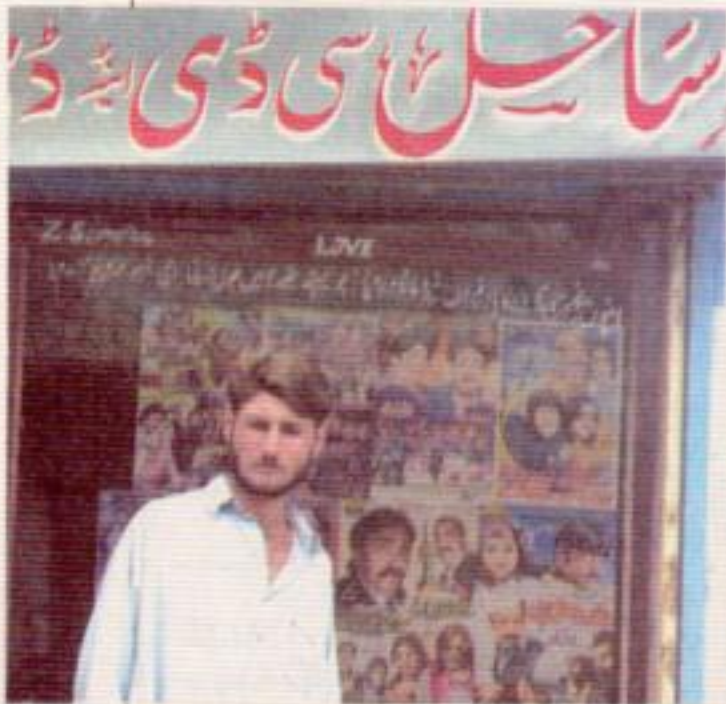
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ECONOMIC

New migrants from the north stop in Karachi long enough to earn money before returning home to fight alongside the Taliban

Rehman Gul Khan arrived in Karachi only a month ago. Along with his family, he fled from Mingora, Swat, because of fighting in the region. All of them are now living with relatives in Mansehra Colony while Khan supports them by working as a watchman at a bungalow. His two elder sons, meanwhile, have returned to Swat — to fight with the Taliban.



In doing so, they are merely following in their father's footsteps: Khan tells the *Herald* that he fought with the Taliban against Pakistani troops for almost a year. "There is no justification for the army operation in Swat," he says. Not a Taliban supporter initially, Khan

Though one can only wonder at what will unfold in the coming days in the locality, it is evident that the authorities are oblivious to the situation. When asked about the Mehsuds' activities, Kambo Khan Mari, the station house officer (SHO) of the Manghopir police station, denies that people are being forced to close DVD and music shops or cable-television networks.

"I have 500 applications from the people of Pakhtunabad who want the cable transmission in their area to be blocked while about 150 people are against its closure," he

CEASEFIRE

joined the militia after the shelling on his neighbouring village by the Pakistan military.

Khan believes that there was peace in Swat when the military started the operation last year. "There were no Taliban in our area when the operation started: today thousands of people are fighting against the military. This is the result of an unprovoked war imposed on innocent people," says Khan.

He himself plans to go back and fight against the army once one of his sons can return to Karachi to take care of the family. "We will continue to fight until the military stops the operation, withdraws from Swat and our demand for the imposition of Shariah is met," he adds. Khan's views are not unusual among those from the country's north who make Karachi their temporary abode. Their stay in the city is simply transitory till they earn enough money to spare some time for the fight they feel is morally right and just.

Take, for example, Wazir Shah Mehsud who is a bus driver in Karachi. Nothing he does is different from the rest of his ilk: he abuses conductors and hurries along if passengers take too long to board or

alight from the bus. However, only six months ago he was fighting with the Taliban against the Pakistan military in North Waziristan.

"I was injured in a gunshot helicopter attack near Mir Ali," Mehsud tells the *Herald* at the bus terminal of route-5 bus at Afghan Basti near Sohrab Goth. He then moved to a refugee camp in Miramshah with his family as their house in Garyam was destroyed by army shelling.

After recovering from his injuries, Mehsud moved to Karachi to earn a living: his relatives in the city found him the bus driver's job. He does plan on returning to his home to fight once again because his mother was killed by army shelling in 2005.

Having fought with the Harkatul Ansar in Indian-administered Kashmir, Mehsud says that till his mother died, he had no plans to pick up arms again. "But when she died, my younger brother and I joined the local militants led by Abdullah Mehsud and Baitullah Mehsud."

His brother, Wazir Bad, is still fighting with the Taliban in North Waziristan. He came to Karachi only to leave his wife and two sons with Mehsud. ■ — M.A.

tells the *Herald*. He adds that not a single shopkeeper has complained to the police station that his shop has been forcibly shut down. "If the shopkeepers are voluntarily closing their businesses I cannot force them to keep the shops running," Mari says.

"What shall I report to my superiors? That people with religious leanings do not want to watch television or that they are closing their businesses voluntarily," the SHO says when the *Herald* asks whether he has brought recent events to the notice of higher officials.

At the same time, however, life goes on as usual in Sultanabad and economic activity flourishes. At every street, stores selling different items and offering services can be found. Boys can be seen surfing in internet cafes or frequenting video shops. "We are not afraid of the Mehsuds and will confront them as we did earlier on the cable-television issue," says a young salesman at a video store. His young colleague agrees. There is no reason to doubt their words but the fate of the neighbouring locality has sown doubt in my mind. I walk away from the shop quietly but not entirely convinced. ■