

PAKISTAN : Devastating violence in Karachi

Facts:

- Unidentified gunmen killed at least 48 rival political activists in three days of violence in Karachi, the economic capital of Pakistan. The series of murders was sparked off last 7 January by the discovery of the decapitated body of an activist working for Mutahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), the most dominant political party in Karachi.
- On 8 January, Rehman Malik, the Interior Minister ordered the police and the paramilitary forces to organise joint patrols to control this outburst of violence. A dozen people were arrested on 10 January in the Lyari area, the bastion of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and known for its drug-trafficking activities.

Comments:

1/ Target killings have become an almost daily part of life in Karachi. Perpetrated by killers on motorbikes and targeting activists of the main political parties, these target killings have found more than 250 victims over the last 6 months in the economic capital of Pakistan, amongst which 69 activists were from the MQM (nationalist Mohajir, in power in Karachi), 60 from the MQM Haqiqi (dissent faction of the MQM), 28 from the PPP (mainly Sindhi) and 23 from the Awami National Party (ANP, Pashtun nationalist).

The areas that are the most affected by these acts of violence are those in New Karachi (31 target killings since 1st July 2009) namely, Shah Faisal (27), Malir (26), North Nazimabad (18), Liaquatabad (14), Gulshan-e-Iqbal (14), Gaddap (14), Korangi (12), Gulberg (11), Landhi (11), Baldia (11) and Saddar (10)

2/ While the various political forces are, as usual, busy passing the buck for these attacks, the MQM is now threatening to withdraw from the coalition in power in the country, lead by the PPP of President Zardari.

In order to ease people's minds, an inquiry commission has been appointed by the central power to shed light on these acts of violence. However, the tone of the report of this commission has already been set by the Interior minister, who accused perpetrators from outside the political parties trying to destabilise the governmental coalition. The responsibility of criminal or extremist groups is also included.

3/ While violence rages between the criminal organisations and parties who fight over control of the city or of some of its parts, the jihadi and sectarian groups associated with the Taliban seem busy preparing for violent attacks. On 8 January, 6 jihadi militants died while making explosive devices. It appears that these militants, suspected of belonging to the Sunni sectarian group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (Army of Jhangvi – LeJ), were making jacket bombs when the explosion occurred.

Outlook:

- **There is no hope of any improvement in the security situation.**
- **Karachi could yet again get caught in a new spiral of intercommunity, terrorist and criminal violence. The attempts against the West are the ones to be particularly dreaded.**
- **These acts of violence will further weaken the government, which is already in a mess since these last months through its inability to put an end to this armed rebellion, the jihadi influence and the economic crisis affecting the country.**