

- Editor Note
- Cover Story
- Newsbeat
- Special Report
- Haute Line
- Music
- Newsliner
- Book

Newsbeat

**Will the Real Imran Please Stand Up**

By Amir Zia

Imran Khan's vote for the MMA candidate for PM leaves his admirers wondering if he is actually a mullah at heart.



[Back](#)

Political Correspondent  
Zahid Hussain

**YOUR**  
**HOTLINE**  
**TO**  
**PAKISTAN**  
**TODAY**

Imran Khan's choice of candidate for prime minister has left many of his ardent fans, especially women, dumbfounded. The cricketer-turned-politician voted for Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal's nominee for premier, against the advise of many liberal and progressive members within his Tehrik-e-Insaaf (TI).

Imran used his solitary vote in parliament in Rehman's favour,

forwarding the argument that the MMA is the only political force that is independent and does not take dictation from abroad. He maintained that he found himself ideologically and politically close to the MMA, which denounces President Pervez Musharraf's support to the international coalition in the war against terrorism, especially in neighbouring Afghanistan.

"Khan has more than a soft corner for the ousted Afghan Taliban," a senior leader of his party said on the condition of anonymity. "He thinks that the orthodox religious militia did a great service to Afghanistan and Islam before they became a target of the Americans."

Also, the MMA's firm stand against Musharraf, especially his series of controversial constitutional amendments, won the heart of Pakistan's former speedster, he added.

Imran's protracted bitterness towards the Pakistan Peoples' Party and anger against the Pakistan Muslim League left him with no alternative other than the MMA, which secured 86 votes, including those of the Pakistan Muslim League (N).

Khan's vote for the pro-Taliban cleric has added to the political confusion within his party, which performed poorly in the October 10 elections. "It would have been understandable, had Imran voted for a candidate that was nominated jointly by the opposition," said a senior Tehrik-e-Insaaf leader. "But by voting for the MMA, he most certainly has lost his standing among the liberal, democratic and progressive elements in society."

Human rights groups and the majority of the moderate and liberal Muslims have been extremely critical of the MMA's narrow interpretation of Islam and the conservative views of its leaders on women, education, fine arts, television and sports. By voting for the MMA, the Tehrik-e-Insaaf chief has, in effect, endorsed the religious alliance's stand on these issues as well.

Will the women's wing of the Tehrik-e-Insaaf, led by Jemima, Khan's British-born wife, endorse the Taliban-like interpretation of Islam? That remains a moot point.

Mairaj Mohammed Khan, the Tehrik-e-Insaaf's secretary general who has spent a lifetime advocating socialism and secular politics, finds it hard to defend the somersaults of the party leader, who has drifted from one extreme (of being pro-Musharraf) to the other extreme (of being anti-Musharraf) within a short span of time.

"Even we are finding it difficult to figure out the real Imran," quipped another of his Karachi-based leaders. "He dons the shalwar-kameez and preaches desi and religious values while in Pakistan, but transforms himself completely while rubbing shoulders with the elite in Britain and elsewhere in the west."

Many in the Tehrik-e-Insaaf would have preferred to see Imran abstain from the voting like the veteran Pakhtoonkhawa Milli Awami Party leader Mahmood Khan Achakzai.

"But such political maturity is perhaps too much to ask or expect of Imran," says a Karachi-based Tehrik-e-Insaaf leader and a close aide of Mairaj Mohammed Khan's. "It is understandable why people do not take Imran and his party seriously in politics," he said. "His self-righteousness and high-flying principles fail to explain the contradiction between his strange fondness for the maulanas and his passion for all the good things in life which have come from the west. ■"

E-mail: [newsline@cyber.net.pk](mailto:newsline@cyber.net.pk)

[Home](#) | [Archives](#) | [Advertisement](#) | [Subscription Form](#) | [About Us](#) | [Feedback](#)

Address: D-6 Block 9, Kehkashan, Clifton, Karachi-Pakistan.

Tel: (92-21) 5873947, 5873948, 5869611, 5869612 (Business) Fax: (92-21) 5869610

© Copyright 2002 Newsline Publications (Pvt.) Ltd. All rights reserved.