

# Revamped MQM vows to reshape politics in Pakistan

KARACHI, July 29: The revamped main political force in Karachi has vowed to reshape the country's politics, reports AFP.

The Mohajir Qaumi Movement (United National Movement MQM) has changed its name to the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (United National Movement MQM).

Its exiled leader Altaf Hussain said in a broadcast message from London to a Karachi rally late Sunday: "We pledge under the banner of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement that we will not sit idle until we eliminate the feudal system."

The party has dominated Karachi politics but also been accused of involvement in factional strife that has contributed many of the 2,000 political and religious and ethnic killings in the city over the past three years.

It has traditionally represented Urdu-speaking immigrants from India since the

splitting up of the sub-continent 50 years ago.

But Hussain said all communities, sects, religions and nationalities were welcome in the new MQM.

Hussain urged people not to listen to those who in the past have exploited the masses in the name of Islam, democracy or socialism.

Calling for religious tolerance to foster sectarian harmony, he said everybody should have the right to perform his religious duties.

"People should embrace each other instead of fanning sectarianism," he said in a reference to more than 100 deaths reported this year in rivalry between extremist Shi'ite and Sunni groups in Punjab province.

Stressing that he would struggle for a liberal democracy, Hussain invited ethnic Sindhi, Baluchi, Pushtun and Kashmiri communities as well as non-Muslim minorities to join the party.

The rights of women and religious minorities including Hindu, Parsi, Christian and Ahmadis should be safeguarded, he added.

Hussain, whose party was at loggerheads with former premier Benazir Bhutto during her three years rule up to last November, said "Our war is not against army, police or paramilitary forces. Our war is against the corrupt elements who looted Pakistan."

He said his party would work for freedom of expression, a free market economy and improving education and the literacy rate among the poor.

Observers said Hussain's changes were aimed at entering mainstream national politics after remaining confined to southern Sindh for 12 years.

Party leaders termed the move an "historic gift" to mark the 50th anniversary of Pakistan's independence next month.

The MQM rose to prominence soon after its formation in 1985, promising to fight for the Mohajirs, Urdu-speaking settlers from India.

One MQM leader, Nasreen Jallil, said it was a new beginning for the party. Leaders of other political parties also welcomed the changes.

The MQM coming into mainstream politics will have a "positive effect," said Yusuf Reza Gilani, a former Speaker of the National Assembly and a member of Benazir's Pakistan People's Party.

The decision is good for Pakistan politics," said Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, a former interim premier.

MQM won 12 National Assembly seats in the last election, with 27 deputies in the Sindh Provincial Assembly. It shares power with the party of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

## Plot to assassinate Chandrika Five Tamil Tigers held

COLOMBO, July 29: Police in the capital have arrested five suspected Tamil separatist guerrillas who were allegedly plotting to assassinate President Chandrika Kumaratunga, and are hunting for three others, officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

Among those detained are two trained as suicide bombers, said police officials, who asked not to be identified.

Another suspect in custody is a security guard at a state-owned grocery chain who was allegedly helping the rebels gather information on the president's movements, officials said.

The remaining two were low ranking government officials who brought the bombers to Colombo from the rebel hideout in the jungle of eastern Sri Lanka, officials said.

Police arrested the three at a hotel in Colombo.

The arrests were made on July 21, but detectives would not give details for more than a week while they hunted for the

accomplices.

Detectives have discovered four plots to assassinate Kumaratunga since negotiations between the rebels and the government broke down in April 1995.

Since then, Kumaratunga has ordered large military operations to drive the separatists out of the major cities and into the northern jungles.

Guerrilla suicide bombers have assassinated politicians and government officials and blown up key military targets.

Among those allegedly killed by the guerrillas were Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991, Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1993, and Gamini Dissanayake, Sri Lanka's opposition presidential candidate, who was blown up in 1994.

The rebels are fighting for a separate homeland for the minority Tamils, claiming they are discriminated against by the majority Sinhalese who control the government and the military.



Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat salutes a honour guard upon his arrival in the West Bank city of Habron Monday. The Palestinians announced on Monday that they were "reassured" by the Israeli decision to temporarily prevent the construction of a new Jewish settlement in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Ras el-Amoud in the heart of Arab East Jerusalem.

— AFP/UNB photo

## BRIEFLY

**Albright arrives in Singapore:** US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright arrived in Singapore yesterday on a two-day trip aimed at strengthening bilateral ties with Singapore, a strong supporter of the US military presence in Asia, AFP reports from Singapore.

Albright was greeted on arrival at Singapore's Changi Airport by Singapore's Ambassador in the United States, Chan Heng Chee, and US Ambassador here Timothy Chhorba. She is scheduled to tour the local manufacturing facility of US computer disk-drive maker Seagate Technology and hold talks with Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Foreign Minister S Jayakumar later Thursday.

**Greece gets 4 F-16 jets:** The first four F-16 fighter planes of a batch of 40 ordered by the Greek Air Force in 1992 arrived in Greece from the United States Monday, Xinhua says from Athens.

According to the semi-official Athens News Agency (ANA) yesterday, the new aircraft, two twin-seater and two single-seater jets, were flown to Greece by US pilots via Ramstein, Germany. The planes are reportedly equipped with improved radar systems, a more powerful engine and an enhanced weapons platform as compared to the F-16s already in service with the Greek Air Force.

**Philippines, Australia to boost ties:** The Philippines and Australia have agreed to begin a series of expanded contacts to strengthen ties, their foreign ministers announced Tuesday, AP says from Kuala Lumpur.

The two countries will hold regular security talks and begin a series of dialogues between business people, academics and politicians, they said. "As important partners in the Asia-Pacific region, we feel it is time for us to have such a bilateral security dialogue," Philippine Foreign Secretary Domingo Siazon Jr. said.

**Explosion claims 15 in Russia:** A powerful explosion destroyed an oil company building in central Russia on Monday, killing at least 15 people and injuring 15, officials said, AP reports from Moscow.

As many as three people remained trapped under the rubble of the two-story building late Monday despite day-long efforts by rescue workers and specially trained dogs, the Ministry for Emergency Situations said. Officials said a natural gas cylinder exploded in the kitchen of the Lukoil-Permeft company building in the Ural Mountains. Investigators couldn't immediately say what caused the tank to blow up, said a ministry spokesman who declined to give his name.

**Blast in club kills 9 in Mexico:** A gas explosion tore through a nearly completed office park in northern Mexico on Monday afternoon, killing nine people and injuring at least 21, AP reports from San Pedro Garza Garcia.

The explosion occurred after workers had been testing the gas system of the office park in this posh suburb of the northern industrial city of Monterrey. At least nine people were killed, and others were trapped in the rubble, said Yadira Soltero, a spokeswoman for the Nuevo Leon state government. She said 20 were injured. Osvaldo Flores Gomez, director of civil protection for Nuevo Leon, said at least 21 were injured.

**Road mishap claims 13 in Philippines:** Thirteen people died and 12 were seriously injured when a truck carrying construction workers plunged off a bridge near this central city, police said yesterday, AFP reports from Cebu.

The construction workers, who were working on a road project, had hitched a ride on a company dump truck heading for Cebu late Monday. When the truck reached a bridge in Naga town it hit a concrete railing and plunged over the side and into a ravine.

## 50 killed as rebels attack Algerian town

ALGIERS, Algeria, July 29: Suspected Muslim militants killed 50 people and wounded 90 after slitting some victims' throats and blowing up the houses of others in Algeria, hospital officials said early Tuesday, reports AP.

No one claimed responsibility for the massacre overnight Saturday in a town 35 kilometers (20 miles) south of the capital, Algiers.

Survivors said the attackers were members of an armed Muslim group involved in the five-year fight to overthrow the government in this North African country.

Hospital officials said a district in the town of Larba was besieged by a group of armed

men. They spoke on condition of anonymity.

The attackers placed land mines around the district to prevent people from fleeing, then started firing machine guns in the air.

Most of the 50 people killed had their throats cut, hospital workers said.

The group of about 40 armed men also set off explosives, destroying houses and trapping the occupants inside.

Emergency personnel worked throughout the day Monday to free survivors from the debris.

Many of the wounded suffered head injuries. There was no indication of whether the death toll would rise.

## Mideast peace stalemate ignites anti-Israel sentiment

AMMAN, Jordan, July 29: Shopkeeper Nassir Deibis put up a Hebrew sign in his window in a spirit of hope after Jordan's 1994 peace accord with Israel. It urged Israelis to visit Jordan. "It feels like home," reports AP.

Now, the sign is gone from the Amman toy store window. Deibis says Israeli customers are no longer welcome.

"They don't want peace and are making things tough for the Palestinians and the Arabs," he said. "I don't like them anymore."

Israeli and Palestinian leaders agreed Monday to return to the negotiating table, ending an often violent four-month stalemate.

Sari Nassir, a University of Jordan sociologist, warned that unless the Israeli-Palestinian peace process begins to move again, Israel will risk ending the so-called "warm peace" it enjoys with neighbouring Jordan. More than half of Jordan's 3.8 million people are Palestinians.

## Myanmar FM dismisses allegations of human rights abuses in his country

KUALA LUMPUR, July 29: Myanmar Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaaw today dismissed allegations of human rights abuses in his country, saying "wrong reports" in the press were responsible for misconceptions, reports AFP.

Asked to respond to US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's charges of officially-sanctioned drug trafficking and money-laundering in Myanmar, Ohn Gyaaw said: "We do have law. We do have the process on how to eliminate the suspicion of money-laundering."

He was speaking at a joint news conference concluding the annual meeting between the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) and its main Western and regional trading partners.

Myanmar was admitted to ASEAN last week, along with Laos, despite Western criticism of its record on political and human rights.

"As far as the question of

human rights is concerned, I have to say that the press have been making wrong reports," Ohn Gyaaw told reporters.

"But when the press is picking up certain information from a source which is against the government, then of course there are some misunderstandings and misconceptions," he said.

He said Myanmar had been cooperating with the United Nations and with the Human Rights Commission in Geneva "in a manner that is responsible."

Philippines Foreign Minister Domingo Siazon was the first ASEAN minister to publicly take up Myanmar's defence, saying today that Myanmar's membership would provide "the appropriate forum" for ASEAN's partners to convey their opinions.

Siazon dismissed Albright's criticism of Myanmar in meetings here as "expected, coming from where Secretary of State

Albright comes from."

"Despite the rather high level of decibels with which some of the statements have been made, economic sanctions on a country that has very little external trade and that has been used to being closed from the outside market will not really work," Siazon said.

"I can assure you that if economic sanctions are imposed by so many countries on Myanmar, you will have its neighbouring countries to trade with it. So there will be no real impact on it," he added.

Earlier, in an interview with CNN, Ohn Gyaaw dismissed allegations of human rights abuses in Myanmar as untrue, saying they came from insurgents and dissidents.

"From the opposition, from the dissidents, from insurgents, when actually you come to visit our country, you'll see that we treat our people much more fairly than they treat them in the West," he said.



Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral (L) and Congress president Sitaram Kesri (C) with Indian vice-president nominee Krishna Kant at Parliament house in New Delhi yesterday after filling the nomination for his candidature for August 16 polls.

—AFP/UNB photo

## Lebanon files complaint against Israeli violation of ceasefire

JERUSALEM, July 29: Lebanon filed a complaint Monday night with the committee overseeing the ceasefire in south Lebanon after Israel filed three complaints of its own about violations, officials said, reports AP.

The Lebanese move came after Israel bombed a residential section of the village of Habboush in the north of the central section of the Israeli "security" zone in south Lebanon, Lebanese police said.

Several Habboush homes were damaged, but there were no casualties, the police added.

## Kabila will face isolation if fails to cooperate with UN: US

UNITED NATIONS, July 29: Major nations will withhold economic aid to Congo President Laurent Kabila if he "plays games" with a UN investigation into alleged massacres in his country, US Ambassador Bill Richardson said, reports AP.

"Well, the jury is still out on Kabila," Richardson told The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer on Monday. "The United States and the international community are prepared to help him but only if he pursues significant political, economic and social reforms."

Richardson said a major test for Kabila, who seized power last May, will be whether he cooperates with a UN team which plans to investigate allegations that Kabila's forces massacred

thousands of Rwandan Hutu refugees during their seven-month rebellion that deposed Mobutu Sese Seko.

"If he is reluctant to give them full access and plays games with the team, as he has in the past, ... he's going to be isolated and he's not going to get help."

In June, Richardson announced that he had won a pledge from Kabila to allow a UN team to investigate the allegations starting July 7. But Kabila refused to allow a team headed by UN investigator Roberto Garreton, claiming he was biased.

Annan then decided to appoint a new team and said its members would be announced shortly.

## Red, white, blue rocks on Mars!

BOSTON, July 29: Mars rocks are red, white and blue in photos taken by America's Pathfinder spacecraft, the blue perhaps showing where fierce storm scoured the rocks, reports AP.

Peter Smith of the University of Arizona said that Pathfinder pictures taken with different filters show a faint bluish tint on one side of exposed rocks, while the other side of the rocks is a typical Martian red.

Some partially buried rocks, he said, are a whitish colour and may actually be layers of a hard material called calcite, a calcium carbonate rock material common in Arizona.

Smith gave a report Monday on preliminary findings from the first three weeks of scientific studies by the Pathfinder at a meeting here of the American Astronomical Society. The spacecraft landed on Mars on July 4. It has taken hundreds of photographs and sent a rover creeping across the planet's surface.

In panorama photos taken by Pathfinder of its landing site, there is a striking two-colour appearance on dozens of rocks, Smith said.

"You divide the scene into two parts — the red part and the blue part," he said. "There is a very clear difference between the red side and the blue side."

Smith said that the blue side is on the east side of the rocks, suggesting that the sometimes-fierce wind storms on Mars may have scoured off a layer, uncovering the colour. The west side of the rocks, protected from the wind, are red, probably from layers of Martian soil, he said.

## Sihanouk won't recognise Ranariddh's nomination as PM

BEIJING, July 29: Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk will refuse to recognise the nomination of Foreign Minister Ung Huot as first Prime Minister to replace ousted Prince Norodom Ranariddh, an interview released today said, reports AP.

While maintaining my affection towards him, I will refrain from giving His Excellency Ung Huot the new title of 'first Prime Minister,' King Sihanouk said in an interview in Beijing with a group of pro-royal exiled Cambodians.

"Unless he is formally condemned by an independent Khmer tribunal, his Royal Highness Norodom Ranariddh has the right to retain this title," he added.

Prince Ranariddh was ousted in early July by second Prime Minister Hun Sen, and the National Assembly convened Monday to examine the situation and consider his replacement.

Foreign Minister Ung Huot was nominated by remaining members of the Royalist FUNCINPEC Party to be the new premier. The move was endorsed by Hun Sen, but slammed by opposition figures and some foreign governments, including the United States.

Prince Ranariddh, who remains in exile, expelled Ung Huot from his party on Sunday.

## Sinn Fein leaders to meet British minister next week

BELFAST, Northern Ireland, July 29: Allies of the Irish Republican Army said Monday that they will meet next week with Mo Mowlam, the British Cabinet minister responsible for Northern Ireland, says AP.

The meeting with Sinn Fein party officials had been expected to follow the IRA's latest ceasefire, which began a week ago.

A Sinn Fein delegation headed by Gerry Kelly, who served a prison term in connection with IRA bombings in London, met Monday with British civil servants to lay the ground for the meeting with Mowlam.

Sinn Fein's vice president, Pat Doherty, said his party had sought assurances that negotiations on future political arrangements for Northern Ireland would go ahead on September 15 with or without pro-British "unionist" parties.

The largest unionist party, the Ulster Unionists, has sought assurances that the IRA would begin disarming during negotiations as recommended by

George Mitchell, the former US senator who is chairing the talks.

Mowlam announced Monday that routine military patrols in parts of Belfast would cease because of the reduced threat. She made the announcement after meeting Ronnie Flanagan, Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Northern Ireland's police force, and the province's British army commander, Lt Gen. Sir Rupert Smith.

## Train collision in India: Driver was drunk

NEW DELHI, July 29: An Indian train driver involved in a high-speed collision which killed 12 and injured 82 was drunk, a newspaper reported today, says AFP.

His assistant told railway officials that the express driver had been drinking before Sunday's accident near the Indian capital, the Times of India said.

## Fighting, looting cause \$49m worth of damage in Phnom Penh

PHNOM PENH, July 29: Pitched street battles between the forces of Cambodia's feuding co-premiers and an orgy of looting in Phnom Penh this month caused at least 49 million dollars worth of damage, reports said today, says AFP.

The tally by a committee set up to assess the cost of the factional clashes which saw the ouster of first prime minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh is nearly five times higher than earlier official estimates and is expected to rise further.

The largest portion of the damages occurred in an area where 18 factories and warehouses are claiming about 38 million dollars in damages," the Cambodia Daily quoted a statement from the committee as saying.

In addition, damage and theft from companies, stolen vehicles and destruction

wrought on private homes totalling 10 million dollars in another area in the west of the city, it said.

A further one million dollars of havoc was wreaked in a third area in the west of the city, where the worst of the clashes between the warring forces took place on July 5 and 6.

But the level of damage caused to a garment factory which was gutted, and to nearby Pochentong International Airport which was shelled, shot and looted, was not included in the committee's latest total, it said.

The totals revealed by the committee, set up by victorious Second Prime Minister Hun Sen, far exceeded his own estimate earlier in the month of around 10 million dollars in damage to war-weary Phnom Penh.

## State-wide strikes illegal, says Indian court

NEW DELHI, July 29: A court in southern India has said that state-wide shutdowns enforced by political parties and powerful groups are unconstitutional and that they must compensate the government for loss of production, reports AP.

The judgement came in response to a petition filed by the Ernakulam Chamber of Commerce in the southern state of Kerala. The Hindu newspaper reported Tuesday.

The ruling of three judges of the High Court can be challenged in the Supreme Court in New Delhi.

Unlike in the past, organisations in Kerala have begun to enforce state-wide strikes — sometimes once a week — halting traffic, shutting down shops

and schools and ordering all factories to close. Those who resist are beaten up or their shops and factories are damaged. Similar strikes are also held nationwide, but they are rare.

"Organised bodies, political parties and associations by calling strikes, trample upon the rights of citizens," the court said in its ruling Monday.

"No political party or organisation can claim that it is entitled to paralyse industry and commerce and prevent citizens not sympathetic to its viewpoint from exercising their fundamental rights," it said.

The court said the groups can hold strikes peacefully, without intimidating people to support them.

## Mystery surrounds death of Labour party MP

LONDON, July 29: Mystery surrounded the death of a 37-year-old Labour Member of Parliament whose body was found in the garage at his home on Monday, reports AP.

Friends said 18-stone (113-kilo) Gordon McMaster, MP for Paisley South in Glasgow, had been suffering from ME, the chronic fatigue syndrome, and had been depressed for some time.

McMaster, a keen gardener, had complained to friends that his illness might have been caused by the organo-phosphates which he used as a pesticide and which have been linked with ME.

His death reduces the government House of Commons majority to 178, and will spark a by-election in the safe Labour seat which he held with a majority of 12,750 at the May 1 general election.



Some of the 44 girls run for the '97 China Top Ten Models Contest in Shanghai pose for pictures Monday. These girls have an average height of 1.77m and an average age of 19.8 years old. They competed and succeeded out of hundreds of girls all around the country.

— AP/UNB photo