

## Refugee Review Tribunal

### AUSTRALIA

#### RRT RESEARCH RESPONSE

**Research Response Number:** PAK17477  
**Country:** Pakistan  
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Keywords: Pakistan – Sindh Provincial Government – PML(M) – MQM – Political Violence

This response was prepared by the Country Research Section of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RRT within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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#### Questions

1. When did the MQM join the coalition currently in power in Pakistan?
2. How many seats do the MQM have in the Sindh provincial government?
3. How many seats do the PML(N) have in the Sindh provincial government?
4. In 2004 the US Department of State reported that the MQM political leadership has renounced violence. When did it renounce violence?
5. Are there any reports of the activities of the MQM since it has denounced violence?
6. In 2004 the US Department of State reported that opposition parties charged that MQM kidnapped and tortured their activists during the March 28 local government by-elections and the May 12 provincial and national assembly by-elections in Karachi. Are further details available (eg what opposition parties' members were kidnapped)?
7. Did the PML(N) take part in the March 28 and May 12 elections?
8. What were the results in the local government by-elections in Karachi in March 28 and the May 12 provincial and national assembly by-elections?
9. Are there any other reports of the MQM kidnapping or torturing members of opposition political parties?
10. Is there any evidence to suggest that the present government and the MQM are working together to restrict political activity?
11. The PML(N) reportedly has 19 seats in the National Assembly. Are there any recent reports detailing any political activities of the PML(N) in particular in Karachi?
12. Research Response PAK16871 of July 2004 provides reports of action taken by the Musharraf government against political activists. Can you provide an update, covering the treatment of members of the PML(N) by the Musharraf government?
13. The MQM(H) reportedly claimed that security forces acting on behalf of the MQM routinely held its activists incommunicado. What is the relationship between the MQM and the Musharraf government?
14. Is there any evidence to suggest that the MQM and the Musharraf government are targeting members of political parties who oppose the present government?

#### RESPONSE

### **1. When did the MQM join the coalition currently in power in Pakistan?**

According to *BBC News* the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) joined the current government in December 2002 following the national elections in October ('Pakistan's final assembly sworn in' 2002, *BBC News* online, 12 December [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/2571037.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/2571037.stm) – Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 1).

### **2. How many seats do the MQM have in the Sindh provincial government?**

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan website, Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) has thirty-three seats in the Sindh provincial government ('Sindh Province' (undated), Election Commission of Pakistan website <http://www.ecp.gov.pk/docs/2002/sind.pdf> – Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 2).

A November 2002 article by *Newsline* also confirms that MQM gained thirty-three provincial assembly seats in Sindh (Abbas, M. 2002, 'The MQM's New Reality', *Newsline*, November <http://www.newsline.com.pk/NewsNov2002/cover6nov2002.htm> – Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 3).

For the Member's consideration, *BBC News* states that results from the first round of local elections held on Thursday 18 August 2005 indicate that "in the southern port city of Karachi, Pakistan's largest ethnic party, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), looks set for victory ('Pakistan ruling party poll boost' 2005, *BBC News* online, 19 August [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4165840.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4165840.stm) – Accessed 26 August 2005 – Attachment 4).

### **3. How many seats do the PML(N) have in the Sindh provincial government?**

According to the Election Commission of Pakistan website, Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) has no seats in the Sindh provincial government ('Sindh Province' (undated), Election Commission of Pakistan website <http://www.ecp.gov.pk/docs/2002/sind.pdf> – Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 2).

### **4. In 2004 the US Department of State reported that the MQM political leadership has renounced violence. When did it renounce violence?**

As stated by the US Department of State in its 2004 report, "[b]y year's end, the MQM political leadership had denounced violence and broken ties with its former militant wing". Apart from "[b]y year's end" – meaning 2004 – no other references were found in the sources consulted referring to the alleged denunciation of violence by MQM.

### **5. Are there any reports of the activities of the MQM since it has denounced violence?**

According to a 2004 report by Freedom House:

Violence among rival factions of the Karachi-based Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM), which represents Urdu-speaking migrants from India, and between the police and the MQM, killed several thousand people in the 1990s, but has abated in recent years, although harassment of their activists continues. Press reports indicate that there may be as many as 200,000 armed militants currently active in Pakistan (Freedom House 2004, *Pakistan*, 24 August <http://freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/countryratings/pakistan.htm> – Accessed 26 August 2005 – Attachment 5).

Since the end of 2004, the sources consulted suggest that MQM maintains strong rivalries with other political parties – primarily in the city of Karachi where it holds the most power – which often generate episodes of violence. In addition, during 2005, MQM have been actively persuading the national government not to use force against Baloch rebels, instead favouring negotiations. In January 2005 MQM threatened to withdraw from the pro-Musharraf ruling coalition if the government decided to “launch a full-scale military operation” in Balochistan (‘Rebels step up attacks, MQM threatens to withdraw support’ 2005, *The Press Trust of India Limited*, 29 January – Attachment 6).

The following reports from various news sources highlight the activities of MQM since the end of 2004 to present day:

- On 10 November 2004 *Associated Press* reported the exchange of gunfire between MQM supporters and the Sunni Muslim group, Tehreek. The clash allegedly resulted in “three people dead and five injured” (‘Three people killed in shootout between rival political groups in southern Pakistan’ 2004, *Associated Press*, 10 November – Attachment 7).
- In March 2005 the *Hindustan Times* reported that MQM had “demanded maximum autonomy to the provinces, leaving only defence, foreign affairs and currency to the centre” (‘MQM demands maximum autonomy for provinces’ 2005, *Hindustan Times*, 11 March – Attachment 8).
- On 3 June 2005 Pakistan’s financial daily, the *Business Recorder*, reported the recent accusations of violence between the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) and MQM in Sindh province, especially Karachi (‘MMA-MQM row forces early adjournment of National Assembly sitting’ 2005, *Business Recorder*, 3 June – Attachment 9).
- On 17 June 2005 Bangladesh-web published an article describing the murder of three activists from the Sunni Muslim group, Tehrik (or Tehreek). Tehrik leaders reportedly accused MQM of “intimidating rivals before local government elections to be held in July. The MQM denied the charges and blamed the killings on factional fighting within Sunni Tehrik” (‘3 Sunni activists gunned down in Pakistan’ 2005, Bangladesh-web website, 17 June <http://www.bangladesh-web.com/view.php?hidRecord=48916> – Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 10).
- A 5 July article by *Dawn* discusses the recent political rivalry between MQM and Jamaat-i-Islami. The article highlights the murder of a JI activist and the alleged harassment of a female MQM leader by JI supporters the day before (‘LB polls and violence’ 2005, *Dawn* Internet Edition, 5 July <http://www.dawn.com/2005/07/05/ed.htm#2> – Accessed 26 August 2005 – Attachment 11).

- An August 2005 article by the *Frontier Star* alleges that MQM have used illegal electioneering tactics in the first phase of local body elections in Karachi. The article asserts that “(MQM) activists took control of many polling stations in various parts of the city on [sic] gunpoint to get the elections rigged for success of their favourite candidates” (‘MQM Forcibly Takes Control of Polling Stations in Karachi’ 2005, *Frontier Star*, 18 August – Attachment 12).

**6. In 2004 the US Department of State reported that opposition parties charged that MQM kidnapped and tortured their activists during the March 28 local government by-elections and the May 12 provincial and national assembly by-elections in Karachi. Are further details available (eg what opposition parties’ members were kidnapped)?**

According to a May 2005 article by the *Frontier Star*, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) workers accused MQM “armed activists” of kidnapping an MMA worker during the May by-elections. MMA reportedly released a press statement discussing the kidnapping amongst other accusations as follows:

“The MQM terrorists resorted to violence and manhandled several MMA workers including Salah ud Din, Saleem Siraj, Abdullah, Muhammad Junaid and several other workers. The injured MMA workers including Fawad Sherwani had moved to police station to lodge report over attacks at their election camps by MQM leadership and persecution of their workers”, the statement alleged.

It said, “MQM terrorists opened firing at MMA election camps and took them under their control by use of force. Several workers of religious alliance were critically injured”.

MMA blamed that MQM provincial minister, Shoaib Bokhari, entered alongwith [sic] armed terrorists into polling station numbers 165-167 and 161-64 in NA-246. They forced the MMA polling agents to leave the stations under threat. MMA workers were held hostage at gun point and were locked up in a room by the MQM terrorists.

Police played the role of glum spectator. In the presence of police, they stamped the election symbol of MQM candidates (‘MMA Accuses MQM of Rigging Bye-Polls’ 2005, *Frontier Star*, 12 May – Attachment 13).

No other references to kidnapping and torturing conducted by MQM during either by-election were located in the sources consulted.

**7. Did the PML(N) take part in the March 28 and May 12 elections?**

The sources consulted suggest that PML-N did take part in both the March and May by-elections. The *Pakistan Times* reported that “PML-N got third position in the by-poll in Karachi” in March 2004 (Syed, A. 2004, ‘LB by-elections held across Pakistan’, *Pakistan Times*, 29 March <http://www.pakistantimes.net/2004/03/29/top5.htm> – Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 14).

A document sourced from MQM’s website indicates that members of PML-N took part in the May provincial and national assembly by-elections. However, they did not win any seats (‘By-Elections – 12 May 2004’ 2004, Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) website

<http://www.mqm.org/English-News/May-2004/byele040512.htm> – Accessed 26 August 2005 – Attachment 15).

## **8. What were the results in the local government by-elections in Karachi in March 28 and the May 12 provincial and national assembly by-elections?**

On 29 March 2004, the *Pakistan Times* reported that unofficial results of the local government by-elections revealed “MQM was on the top, PML-Q second and PML-N got third position in the by-poll in Karachi” (Syed, A. 2004, ‘LB by-elections held across Pakistan’, *Pakistan Times*, 29 March <http://www.pakistantimes.net/2004/03/29/top5.htm> – Accessed 23 August 2005 – Attachment 14).

MQM published the results of the 12 May provincial and national assembly elections on their official website (‘By-Elections – 12 May 2004’ 2004, Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) website <http://www.mqm.org/English-News/May-2004/byele040512.htm> – Accessed 26 August 2005 – Attachment 15). These results were substantiated by a *Reuters* article, which states that MQM “won the three National Assembly seats and the one provincial assembly seat by a wide margin” (‘Government ally wins violent Karachi by-elections’ 2004, *Reuters*, 13 May – Attachment 16).

## **9. Are there any other reports of the MQM kidnapping or torturing members of opposition political parties?**

The sources consulted indicate that retaliatory accusations seem to dominate local politics in Pakistan, particularly in Karachi. MQM and MMA leaders accused each other of violence and kidnapping during elections in May (Ali, M. and Hussain, S. 2004, ‘Gulf News: Battle of words escalates in Sindh’, *Gulf News*, 19 May – Attachment 17).

An August 2005 article by *Dawn* discusses the Al-Khadim (backed by Jamiat Ulema-i-Pakistan) group’s “complaints of abduction of their candidates, polling agents, workers, attacks on election camps, snatching of ballot papers, bogus voting and occupation of polling stations by armed activists of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement”. The complaints came as the groups contested the recent local government elections in Karachi (‘Al-Khadim demands re-elections’ (2005), *Dawn* Internet Edition, 19 August <http://www.dawn.com/2005/08/19/local7.htm> – Accessed 30 August 2005 – Attachment 18).

## **10. Is there any evidence to suggest that the present government and the MQM are working together to restrict political activity?**

Information from the sources consulted suggests that restriction of political activity is primarily carried out by the Musharraf government. However, as a result of MQM leaders holding significant positions in the Sindh provincial government and their membership of Musharraf’s coalition, they have been associated with political manipulation in Sindh.

A 2004 report by International Crisis Group (ICG) discusses the “military’s political manipulation” in Sindh province as follows:

In Sindh, local rivalries aggravated by the military's political manipulation mar provincial-local government relations. **The military's decision to cobble together a fractious coalition that includes the PML-Q, the MQM and the Sindh Democratic Alliance rather than allow the PPP, which has the most seats in the assembly, to form the provincial government is largely responsible for heightened ethnic, regional and factional infighting [Researcher emphasis].**

As pro-PPP district nazims pay the price for their political affiliation, Sindhi resentment against the Punjabi-dominated military is on the rise. With memories of the execution of a Sindhi Prime Minister by a military ruler still fresh, the Sindhis have little faith in the legitimacy of the state and its institutions, least of all in the local government scheme.<sup>209</sup>

In the Muhajir-dominated urban centres of Sindh, which have repeatedly witnessed violent ethnic conflict, local rivalries are already assuming a dangerous shape. The MQM, which boycotted local elections, opposes control of the city district and several town governments by its archrival, the Jamaat-i-Islami. Senior MQM leaders, who hold important posts in the provincial government, including that of governor, say it is only a matter of time before they bring no-confidence motions against JI nazims. According to JI city district council members, "the provincial governor and the local government minister have left no stone unturned to undermine the city nazim by blocking the devolution of municipal bodies, slashing budgets and transferring officials".<sup>210</sup>

While the federal government has acted to ease tensions by removing the local government minister, informed observers fear that the JI-MQM dispute could intensify to engulf Karachi in yet another cycle of violence and instability.<sup>211</sup> Armed clashes between activists have already claimed several lives (International Crisis Group (ICG) 2004, *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression?*, ICG Asia Report No.77, 22 March – Attachment 19).

## **11. The PML(N) reportedly has 19 seats in the National Assembly. Are there any recent reports detailing any political activities of the PML(N) in particular in Karachi?**

The PML-N has been politically active over the past year. The following articles, appearing in chronological order, provide information on the activities of the party and its leaders/members:

- On 22 September 2004 Pakistan Press International Information Services reported that Siddiqui Farooq, PML-N Information Secretary, stated that "General Pervez Musharraf should keep his word and leave his Army Chief post by December 31, 2004" while addressing the Karachi Press Club ('PML (N) to continue struggle for restoring democracy' 2004, Pakistan Press International Information Services, 22 September – Attachment 20).
- On 7 December 2005 Pakistan Press International Information Services reported the condemnation by PML-N of an attempt to "harass and kidnap a local Youth Wing leader Tariq Khan by a group of armed men in Lyari". The perpetrators were not identified ('PML-N condemns harassing political activist' 2004, Pakistan Press International Information Services, 7 December – Attachment 21).
- On 26 March 2005 Pakistan Press International Information Services reported the "assured support to Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) for its strike on April 2, 2005 [against government policies]". The report states that "PML-N would participate from all

over the country besides Karachi and Sindh” (‘PML-N to fully participate in MMA’s strike: Mamnoon’ 2005, Pakistan Press International Information Services, 26 March – Attachment 22).

- In a June 2005 article, Pakistan Press International Information Services reported that the acting President of PML-N, Mamnoon Hussain, intended to “make seat to seat adjustment with ARD and other opposition parties, so that the government could be refrained from rigging the polls [in the upcoming local elections in Karachi]” (‘PML-N to field candidates for LB polls on UC level’ 2005, Pakistan Press International Information Services, 29 June – Attachment 23).
- On 7 July 2005 *Karachi News* reported that PML-N acting president, Mamnoon Hussain, announced “that there will be no election alliance with those parties who supported the October 12, 1999 action”. Hussain continued, apparently stating that “there was no room for those party men who changed their loyalty after October 1999 military action. The party will never accommodate them in coming local bodies election” (‘No alliance with anti-PML(N) parties’ 2005, *Karachi News*, 7 July <http://www.jang.com.pk/thenews/jul2005-daily/07-07-2005/metro/k7.htm> – Accessed 30 August 2005 – Attachment 24).

**12. The Research Response PAK16871 of July 2004 provides reports of action taken by the Musharraf government against political activists. Can you provide an update, covering the treatment of members of the PML(N) by the Musharraf government?**

Little information was found in the sources consulted relating to the treatment of PML-N members by the current government since July 2004. The majority of information sourced discusses the political activity of PML-N, as outlined above in question 11.

**13. The MQM(H) reportedly claimed that security forces acting on behalf of the MQM routinely held its activists incommunicado. What is the relationship between the MQM and the Musharraf government?**

The relationship between the MQM and the Musharraf government appears to be a fractious one. During the past two years both parties have remained reliant on each other in order to maintain power in the Sindh provincial government. The Musharraf government regularly agree to MQM’s demands in the province in return for their support to ensure Sindh remains a PML-Q stronghold, and exclude the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) from gaining power.

A June 2004 report, authored by Zahid Hussain for *Newsline*, describes the fractious political situation in Sindh province, together with the MQM’s relationship with the government.

The degenerating law and order situation and Karachi’s return to a bloody cycle of violence not only indicates the failure of the security agencies but is also symptomatic of a wider political problem. There is virtually no government in Sindh. The loose and fractious coalition, cobbled together by the army and the ISI, could hardly provide effective governance to the country’s most problematic province. The cross-dresser chief minister is no more than a figurehead. Significantly, Sindh is the only province where the governor belongs to a political party and is an important partner in the coalition. There is a huge confusion on the issue of

who really rules the province. With its man as the governor, the MQM seems to dominate the government.

The MQM found its way back into the establishment's favour after 10 years. Political expediency brought the erstwhile foes together, in a bid to keep the Pakistan People's Party out of the battle for power in the province. The return of the MQM has sparked off a turf battle between it and the Jamaat-i-Islami which now controls Karachi's local government. It is quite evident that the JI's success in the local elections was the result of the MQM boycott of the polls. With its hold over the provincial government, the MQM now wants to show who is the master of the city. That has sparked a direct confrontation between the Karachi city government and the provincial administration. The bloody clashes between the two groups during the bye-elections, leaving more than 12 people dead, was an outcome of the deadly strife between the two parties.

Predictably, the turf war has further weakened the effectiveness of the provincial government in dealing with the law and order situation. The virtual collapse of the provincial administration has also created a highly conducive atmosphere for the return of the crime mafia and sectarian terrorist groups. The helplessness of the administration was quite evident as mobs rampaged through the city in past weeks. In a predictable move, the administration has sacked the city police chief and some other officials, thus absolving itself of any responsibility in the matter. Rumours were rife that, in response to the crisis, President Musharraf would remove the provincial government and impose governor's rule in the troubled province. But the options are severely limited in the present circumstances. The MQM has already warned that it would resist any such measure. Can the federal government afford to take on a direct confrontation with a major ally when things are not going well for it? In desperation, the establishment has offered the PPP the lead in a new coalition government in Sindh. But, predictably, Benazir Bhutto is not prepared to bail Musharraf out of the Sindh mess (Hussain, Z. 2004, 'No Way Out?', *Newsline*, June <http://www.newsline.com.pk/newsJun2004/cover2jun2004.htm> – Accessed 30 August 2005 – Attachment 25).

In the July 2004 issue of *Newsline*, the 'editor's note' section discusses MQM's apparent demanding relationship with the government. The pertinent extract follows in detail.

The General's other "trusted ally," the MQM, is given to presenting a list of demands at short intervals, with threats to quit if they are not met.

Musharraf has wedged himself between a rock and a hard place and can no longer recognise friend from foe. The political machinations of his establishment are distorting the democratic structure and creating more enemies and anomalies than ever before. But the experiments continue, leaving a nation bewildered ('editor's note' 2004, *Newsline*, July <http://www.newsline.com.pk/NewsJul2004/editornotejul2004.htm> – Accessed 30 August 2005 – Attachment 26).

#### **14. Is there any evidence to suggest that the MQM and the Musharraf government are targeting members of political parties who oppose the present government?**

No definitive evidence was located in the sources consulted stating that MQM and the Musharraf government are targeting members of political parties who oppose the present government. However, there are reports which describe the tit-for-tat accusations by various political parties against each other and the claims that MQM routinely used violence to secure



a win in provincial elections, as outlined in Attachment 9, Attachment 10, Attachment 11 and Attachment 12.

### List of Sources Consulted

#### Internet Sources:

Google search engine

UNHCR      *REFWORLD*      UNHCR Refugee Information Online

#### Databases:

|             |                |   |
|-------------|----------------|---|
| Public      | <i>FACTIVA</i> | Reuters Business Briefing   |
| DIMIA       | <i>BACIS</i>   | Country Information   |
|             | <i>REFINFO</i> | IRBDC Research Responses (Canada)   |
| RRT         | <i>ISYS</i>    | RRT Country Research database, including<br>Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch,<br>US Department of State <i>Country Reports on Human<br/>Rights Practices</i> . |
| RRT Library | <i>FIRST</i>   | RRT Library Catalogue   |

### List of Attachments

1. 'Pakistan's final assembly sworn in' 2002, *BBC News* online, 12 December  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/2571037.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/2571037.stm) – Accessed 23 August 2005
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6. 'Rebels step up attacks, MQM threatens to withdraw support' 2005, *The Press Trust of India Limited*, 29 January. (FACTIVA)
7. Three people killed in shootout between rival political groups in southern Pakistan' 2004, *Associated Press*, 10 November. (FACTIVA)
8. 'MQM demands maximum autonomy for provinces' 2005, *Hindustan Times*, 11 March. (FACTIVA)
9. 'MMA-MQM row forces early adjournment of National Assembly sitting' 2005, *Business Recorder*, 3 June. (FACTIVA)

10. '3 Sunni activists gunned down in Pakistan' 2005, Bangladesh-web website, 17 June. (<http://www.bangladesh-web.com/view.php?hidRecord=48916> – Accessed 23 August 2005)
11. 'LB polls and violence' 2005, *Dawn* Internet Edition, 5 July. (<http://www.dawn.com/2005/07/05/ed.htm#2> – Accessed 26 August 2005)
12. 'MQM Forcibly Takes Control of Polling Stations in Karachi' 2005, *Frontier Star*, 18 August. (FACTIVA)
13. 'MMA Accuses MQM of Rigging Bye-Polls' 2005, *Frontier Star*, 12 May. (FACTIVA)
14. Syed, A. 2004, 'LB by-elections held across Pakistan', *Pakistan Times*, 29 March. (<http://www.pakistantimes.net/2004/03/29/top5.htm> – Accessed 23 August 2005)
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16. 'Government ally wins violent Karachi by-elections' 2004, *Reuters*, 13 May. (FACTIVA)
17. Ali, M. and Hussain, S. 2004, 'Gulf News: Battle of words escalates in Sindh', *Gulf News*, 19 May. (FACTIVA)
18. 'Al-Khadim demands re-elections' (2005), *Dawn* Internet Edition, 19 August. (<http://www.dawn.com/2005/08/19/local7.htm> – Accessed 30 August 2005)
19. International Crisis Group (ICG) 2004, *Devolution in Pakistan: Reform or Regression?*, ICG Asia Report No.77, 22 March.
20. 'PML (N) to continue struggle for restoring democracy' 2004, Pakistan Press International Information Services, 22 September. (FACTIVA)
21. 'PML-N condemns harassing political activist' 2004, Pakistan Press International Information Services, 7 December. (FACTIVA)
22. 'PML-N to fully participate in MMA's strike: Mamnoon' 2005, Pakistan Press International Information Services, 26 March. (FACTIVA)
23. 'PML-N to field candidates for LB polls on UC level' 2005, Pakistan Press International Information Services, 29 June. (FACTIVA)
24. 'No alliance with anti-PML(N) parties' 2005, *Karachi News*, 7 July. (<http://www.jang.com.pk/thenews/jul2005-daily/07-07-2005/metro/k7.htm> – Accessed 30 August 2005)
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