

## From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

### The pot boils in Pakistan

*Ethnic riots persist amid political fragmentation in the state of Sind.*

Once again, Karachi, the capital city of the state of Sind, has been paralyzed by a week-long riot that has taken 36 lives. Curfew was imposed and the army called out, but sporadic violence continues in at least three districts of the city.

The riot started on Oct. 31 when the Pathans, Pushtoon-speaking settlers from the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), clashed with the Urdu-speaking Mohajirs, who migrated from India after 1947. The two ethnic groups have long been economic and social rivals, with the Mohajirs monopolizing the small trade in Karachi, and the Pathans dominating the transport system.

As thousands of Mohajirs were leaving Karachi on Oct. 31 to attend a rally organized by the Mohajir Quam Movement, a new Mohajir party, in Hyderabad, the two groups reportedly started shooting at each other in Sorab Goth, a predominantly Pathan suburb, notorious as a center for drugs and arms smuggling. According to police reports, more than 800 people have been arrested since the rioting broke out.

Sind has been in turmoil for some three years now, since the 1983 movement to dethrone President Zia ul-Haq was launched from the state by the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), a coalition of 11 opposition parties. The movement, which went out of control, saw hundreds die, and spun off numerous political factions, including a secessionist group that considerably strengthened the underground. In Sind today, two parallel underground forces dominate: one, the secessionist, and

the other, the more organized and militant gangsters who recruit from the ever-growing number of politically frustrated, unemployed Sindhi youth.

In September, the Zia government had made an effort to tackle the growing anarchy in Sind. Prime Minister Junejo, a son of Sind who heads the Sind-based Pagaro Muslim League (PML), toured the province with an entourage of federal ministers, members of parliament, and law-enforcement officials. In meetings with local politicians, Junejo and company hammered on the deteriorating law-and-order situation. A number of arrests of individuals suspected of harboring the gangsters—including one Chandio, the largest landlord in Pakistan—pointed to the government's determination. But, according to most reports, it will take much more to do the job.

Although the recent riot seems to have been confined to a strictly ethnic matter, it is worrisome against the backdrop of political fragmentation and volatility that characterizes Pakistan generally, and Sind in particular. For the underground activists—secessionist and gangster alike—maximization of chaos is ideal. At the same time, four major political leaders—Pir Pagaro of PML, Benazir Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Mumtaz Bhutto of the Sind-Baluch-Pakhtoon Front (SBPF), and Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi of the newly formed National People's Party (NPP)—all from Sind, are battling to rekindle a movement that can bring down the present government.

Mumtaz Bhutto and Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi are former PPPers who start-

ed new parties over differences with Benazir Bhutto. As of now, all four are acting independently. There is no indication of a coalition in the making.

In the recent period, Benazir's PPP, the party with the largest following in Sind, has begun to lose ground. Miss Bhutto's high profile following her April return from two years of self-exile in London has petered out, and she is facing a split in the party and growing lack of interest in the population. The PPP has enjoyed the support of the majority of Sind's landlords, but is now losing chunks of them to both the SBPF and NPP. The NPP has also attracted the support of Punjabi settlers and some of the Urdu-speaking population in rural Sind.

Apart from Sind, the North-West Frontier Province, home of the Pathans, remains unstable. Millions of Afghan refugees, a hostile, neighboring Afghanistan, internal factions among the Pathans, and the pressure on 30,000 NWFP families *not* to grow poppies, has kept the province tense and jittery.

The instability was given a boost recently with the return of a red-flag-bedecked Abdul Wali Khan, Pakhtoon leader of the pro-Soviet National Awami Party, from Kabul through the Khyber Pass to Peshawar, capital of the NWFP. There, he held a meeting in which he argued that a constitutional opposition movement in Pakistan was impossible.

According to reports, Wali Khan brought with him "happy tidings" of a red revolution winding through the Khyber, and added pointedly that "no revolution coming through that historic pass has ever stopped short of Somnath." Somnath is a temple town in the western Indian state of Gujarat, which was devastated by an invading Central Asian warlord in the early 11th century.