

Rival ethnic groups clash over love affair

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — It was a Shakespearean love story playing out Wednesday in Pakistan's largest city: A young couple from hostile ethnic communities apparently ran off together, leading to bloodshed and rioting.

Pathans went on a rampage in Karachi, claiming a Mohajir man kidnapped a Pathan woman. His family says the couple eloped. Two bystanders were killed, eight people were injured and the lovers went into hiding.

The mob violence that spread through the city raised fears of a revived blood feud among ethnic Pathans and Mohajirs.

The Romeo of this tale is Kanwar Ahson, a political activist of the Mohajir Qami Movement (MQM) and nephew of a Pakistani member of parliament.

Two years ago, Ahson took refuge for six months in the household of his Juliet, Rifat Afridi, to evade a police crackdown on the MQM, according to published reports.

Tensions between the two communities then were at a low ebb, despite their antagonistic history. In the mid-1980s, about 1,000 people were killed during months of violence that began when a bus driven by a Pathan struck and killed a Mohajir girl.

The Afridis reportedly refused to let Ahson marry their daughter, saying she already was betrothed. Backing out would disgrace the family.

The couple, both in their 20s, disappeared last week. Police, who believe she left her home, say they may have been seen 20 miles north of Karachi on Monday. The council on Monday said the government had ordered the couple and returned to the city.

Two senior police officers were fired Tuesday for the disappearance of the couple.

On Wednesday, a mob burst from shantytowns, middle-class areas and smashing car windows, lights, stoning passersby and looting luxury international hotels.

Stray gunfire killed a 55-year-old man, Habib Gul, a laborer passing by.

Six policemen were injured because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time — that is, on a general strike by the Pathans.

Stores were closed on the street and a smoke from burning tires over parts of Karachi.

Police fired tear gas and ammunition in the mobs on the run, and the violence had to be stopped by the army.

Pathans, a conservative group originally from northern Pakistan, are the third-largest group in Karachi's 13 million people.

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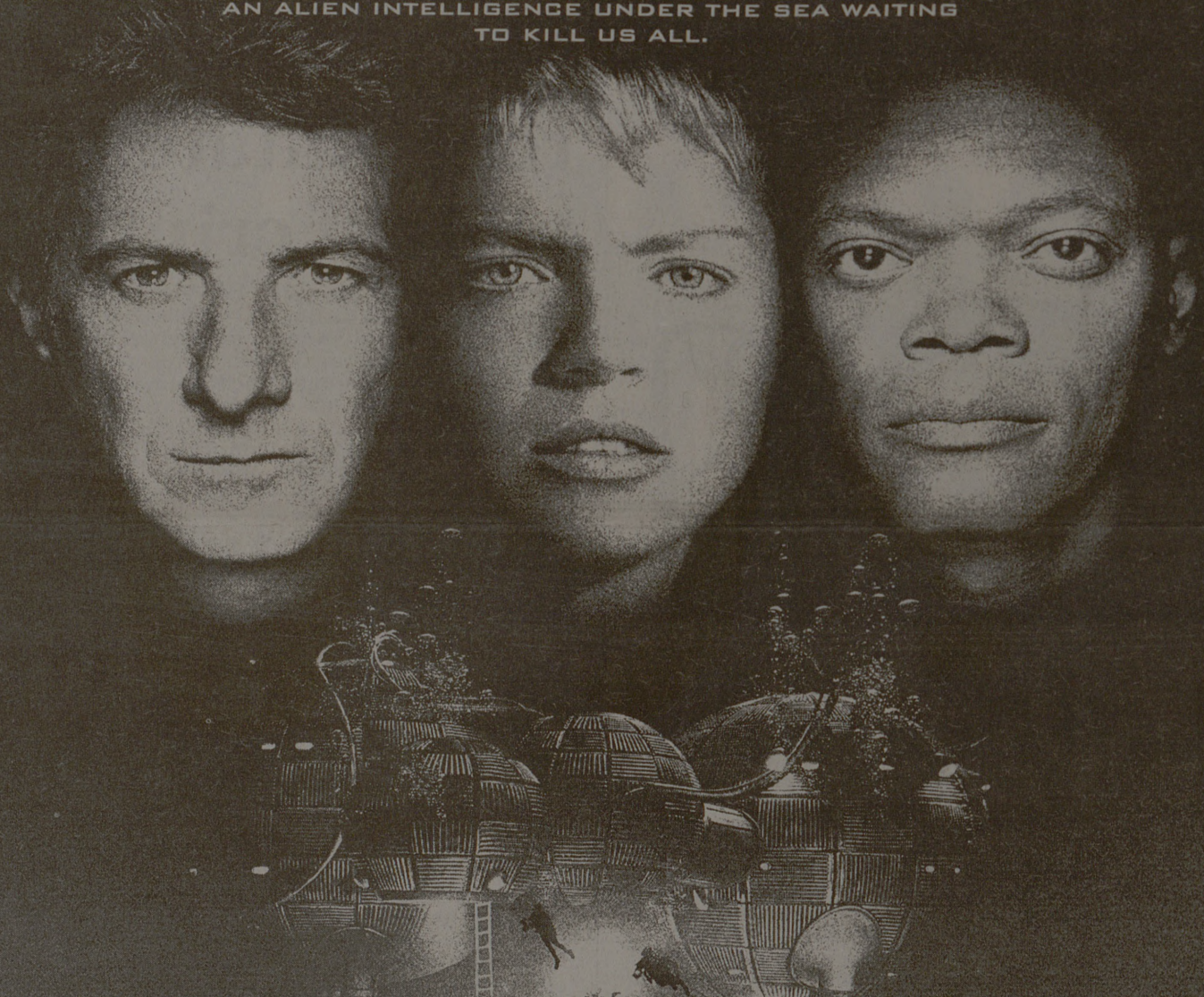
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OPENS FEBRUARY 13

Up in smoke

Egyptian women challenge tradition

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) — Dice tumble over backgammon boards, cups slam on wooden tables and the thick smoke from a gurgling water pipe wafts into the nighttime air.

What's that peeking from behind the swelling smoke? Lipstick? Long hair? Painted nails?

To the chagrin of many Egyptian men, women have taken up the water pipe, long a tradition that was the most masculine of male habits, puffed in the thousands of cafes that serve as the hub of men's social life in the Arab world's biggest and most spirited city.

"In my opinion, it is sacrilege," declares Ahmed Sadiq, a waiter at a cafe coated with a generation of grime. "If women sit here, it's not natural. It goes against the nature of Egyptians."

In Cairo, there are cafes for the deaf, there are cafes for literati, and there are cafes for chess players. There are all-night cafes, and there are cafes where Cairenes run their daily affairs.

For centuries, in those cafes, it was a man's world.

And in that world was the smoke of the water pipe, known alternatively as the shisha, nerjilla, arkila, qalyan or hooka. All share the distinctive looping hose that draws the smoke of burning, syrupy tobacco through water and into waiting lungs.

But recently, the shisha and the style of smoking it has experienced a transformation, making it, well, more feminine.

Once one of the easier ways to catch hepatitis, the shisha now comes with a removable plastic mouthpiece known as a mabsam.

Even more striking is the explosion in flavored tobacco that has hit the upscale cafes. It's a frequent sight — a far cry from the days when honey-flavored tobacco was the most popular might sample.

"I have apple-flavored, strawberry and I even have licorice and mint," said Bahgat al-Dor at the neighborhood stall selling tobacco.

"Everyone has a mood," he adds.

And his customers are mostly women.

"There's no man who would smoke strawberry apple," he insists. "I would smoke these. The tobacco is lighter and is kind of fragile."

At an upscale cafe, a woman in black vestments sits idly on a shisha, puffing flavored tobacco. She knows the plume of smoke that rises from her mouth is anything but masculine.

"Shisha is beautiful mood," said Mona M. with her husband. "It's better than cigarettes."

Such a scene fires conservative elements in the city.

Many men still see it as indecent for women to smoke shisha, fit for ma'alima, the rough neighborhood woman who runs a shisha parlor through a back alleyway and a tasteless idation and gusto.

Al-Haqiqi, a well-known columnist, lamented the decline of the shisha came with young women smoking shisha.

"They smoke with consciousness every day from 10 a.m. until the newspaper intoned."

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