

'Rape part of India's counter-insurgency operation in Kashmir'

NEW DELHI, May 9: The Kashmir administration on Saturday dismissed accusations by two US-based human rights groups that Indian security forces committed rape as part of their counter-insurgency operations, reports AFP.

The charges by Asia Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, in a report to be released in Washington today, were not borne out by facts, the Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted a spokesman for the Kashmir government as saying here.

The Indian government took action if it found complaints against security forces to be true, the spokesman said.

Since 1990, the government had acted against 97 army and paramilitary person-

nel, jailing 38 of them and dismissing 10, he added. Two of the army officers were sentenced to nine and 10 years in prison.

But most human rights violations are being committed by militants themselves, the spokesman said.

The Muslim guerillas resorted to a deliberate disinformation campaign to demoralise the (Indian security) forces and deflect the thrust of (anti-militancy) operations if and when they came under pressure, he said.

The two human rights groups had obviously been overwhelmed by massive disinformation campaign of the militants and had not cross-checked its so-called documented proof with authorities, the spokesman said.

Indian govt plan to rebuild Babri Mosque in jeopardy

NEW DELHI, May 9: Hindu and Muslim hardliners are flexing their muscles over the ancient Babri Mosque, putting a government plan to rebuild the razed Islamic shrine in jeopardy, reports AFP.

Muslims want the mosque reconstructed at the same place in Ayodhya where Hindu zealots turned it into a rubble in a fit of frenzy December 6 and quickly raised a makeshift Hindu temple on its ruins.

Hindu militants and politicians say they will never let the razed mosque, built by Moghul King Babar in 1528, come up again at the spot, which they claim is the birthplace of their Lord Rama.

The temple-mosque row has sparked scores of communal riots since 1986, the worst in the aftermath of December which simmered on for two

months, leaving an estimated 2,000 people dead.

The government of premier PV Narasimha Rao, who after the sacrilege vowed to have the mosque rebuilt in Ayodhya, is in a fix, knowing that any unilateral decision could again trigger terrible Hindu-Muslim violence.

There are hardly any takers for the two separate trusts announced by Rao to construct a new Babri Mosque and a grand Rama temple at Ayodhya, a tiny town in northern India.

The temple trust has received lukewarm response, with a few Hindu holy men willing to take official support for a Rama shrine. But there are no takers for a government-sponsored mosque.

"We shall not accept any substitute mosque or alternate site for the mosque," said Syed

Shahabuddin, a Muslim MP. "We want the mosque reconstructed on the original site as promised by the Prime Minister."

It is a demand backed by Islamic countries. Ahmed Bukhari, Deputy Imam of the historic Jama Masjid (mosque) here, said: "Indian Muslims will neither be deprived of their claim over the Babri Mosque nor will they accept any other place for the building of the mosque."

Hindu militants are equally intransigent.

"We want to construct our (Rama) temple at that very site with the bricks sent by our own people," said Swami Vandev, a Hindu holy leader who has been at the forefront of an emotive temple construction campaign.

"We will never let the gov-

ernment construct a temple," he added.

Hindu leaders who initially went on the defensive after the destruction of the mosque now openly brag about the feat, describing the Babri shrine as "a black spot of slavery" built by Moghuls at a Hindu holy site.

Hindu moderates are willing to take government help to construct a Rama temple at Ayodhya. However not only are they outnumbered by the extremists, but they are also opposed to raising the Babri Mosque where it earlier stood.

Muslim moderates on the other hand want their 100-million-strong community to give up its claim over the Babri Mosque site, saying no government will be able to rebuild the fallen shrine after dismantling the makeshift temple.

BRIEFLY

Mulgaokar dead: S Mulgaokar, former Editor-in-Chief of the Indian Express, died in Delhi yesterday morning after prolonged illness, aged 83, reports PTI from New Delhi.

One of India's most distinguished journalists, Mulgaokar was also Editor of The Hindustan Times for about ten years. Mulgaokar was a member of the Board of Directors of The Indian Express since his retirement as the newspaper's Editor-in-Chief in April, 1981.

He was a close associate and adviser to the founder of Indian Express, the late Ramnath Goenka.

Landslide claims 6 in Tripura: At least six persons were killed in a landslide Saturday at Kalkhola village in West Tripura district following incessant rains since Monday, a delayed police report said in Agartala yesterday, reports PTI from Agartala.

The sources said that the persons, all of whom were members of the same family, were killed on the spot when the landslide destroyed their hut at the foot of a hillock.

9 Kurdish rebels killed in Turkey: Security forces killed nine Kurdish rebels and wounded another in two clashes in southeastern Turkey, the emergency law authorities announced Saturday, reports Xinhua from Ankara.

Eight Kurdish rebels, who were believed to be members of the outlawed Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), were killed when they were attempting to cross into Turkey from northern Iraq near the Turkish town of Silopi in Sirnak province.

Turkish security forces killed another PKK rebel and arrested a wounded one in a separate clash in the Degerli village near the town of Dargecit in Mardin province, the announcement said.

Two PKK rebels have surrendered to security forces in Hakkari province while 11 others arrested in Mardin, Hakkari, Batman and Van provinces, said the authorities.

NZ PM in South Korea: New Zealand Prime Minister Jim Bolger arrived in South Korea yesterday for a four-day official visit aimed at boosting economic and strategic ties, reports AFP from Seoul.

Bolger was welcomed by South Korea's Foreign Minister Hansung-Joo at the airport, heading straight to the Shilla Hotel where he will stay. Bolger is scheduled to hold talks with President Kim Young-Sam on Monday, at which Kim is expected to ask for New Zealand's support for UN attempts to deal with North Korea's alleged nuclear weapons programme. New Zealand currently has a UN Security Council seat.

Mozambique appeals for aid: Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano has called on the international community to give aid to his government and the opposition parties as well, reports Xinhua from Maputo.

In an interview with reporters of the newspapers on Thursday, Chissano said his government will help all opposition parties carry out their activities, but his government cannot ensure rear service for the opposition parties because of its financial difficulties.

He added the government at present can only provide housing for the parties, and such work is under way.

The implementation of the Mozambican peace accord was deadlocked following RENAMO's refusal to attend peace meetings of various UN-monitored committees. RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance) did so on the ground of the government failing to provide living and working conditions in the capital Maputo.

15 hurt in London clashes: Fifteen people including two policemen were slightly injured in London Saturday in violent clashes between riot police and more than 2,000 anti-racist demonstrators protesting at the death of a young black, police said, AFP reports from London.

Violence flared when marching demonstrators reached a bookshop in the south east suburbs which anti-racists claim is a regular haunt of the extreme right-wing British National Party.

Sections of the crowd threw bricks and other projectiles at the bookshop before clashing with police, including some on horseback called in as reinforcements.

Two police cars were damaged by projectiles and several shop windows were broken. Police said two or three shops had been looted.

Palestinian shot dead: Israeli troops on Saturday shot dead a Palestinian teenager and wounded nine others, including two baby girls, in the occupied territories, the army and Palestinians said, AFP reports from Jerusalem.

Troops first fired warning shots and then opened fire on stone-throwers in Kfar Dir Dibwan, near Ramallah on the West Bank, killing Wazen Elgawad Khalameh Sarmemeh, 16, they said.

King Hussein's reform plan a beacon of hope for Arab world

AMMAN, May 9: Political change in the volatile Arab world has invariably come through coups and assassinations. But in Jordan, King Hussein is introducing democratic reforms he believes will herald peaceful transitions, reports AP.

He considers the programme he initiated in 1989 as the greatest achievement of his 40-year reign and believes it will become a beacon of hope for a region where absolute monarchies and one-party rule are the norm.

Not everyone in Jordan is convinced the reforms, among the most far-reaching in the Arab world, will go far enough to immunize the kingdom and maintain its hard-won stability.

Hussein recently declared unequivocally that anyone who dares to threaten democracy or exploit freedom with the aim of subverting it, will be stopped.

He underlined that last fall when two prominent fundamentalist legislators were sentenced 30 years in prison for plotting against the

monarchy. He pardoned them. But the message was loud and clear: the king gives and he can take away.

Some believe the trial was a signal that reforms will have their limits and will remain vulnerable to interference from the top.

Few entrenched Arab regimes are showing any inclination to follow Hussein's lead as they tackle collapsing economies and Islamic fundamentalists, who are waging terrorist campaigns in Egypt and Algeria.

Violent fundamentalism is likely to swell because of the regions grinding poverty, mushrooming populations and dwindling resources.

Veteran Middle East analyst Charles Snow noted that Hussein's experiment cannot but look bold in a regional context, in which the appointment of powerless consultative councils passes for liberalization.

Jordan is now virtually the only Arab country which is testing the idea that political pluralism, even if limited, can withstand the

rising tide of Islamic absolutism, he wrote in the Middle East Economic Survey.

Most Arab states are either absolute monarchies or one-party rule autocracies. However, Kuwait has an elected legislature and Yemen last month held its first parliamentary ballot since north and south merged in 1990. Israel also has a full parliamentary system.

Hussein's reform programme was triggered by riots in April 1989 against harsh austerity measures and official corruption.

The unrest centered in bedouin regions, traditionally the bedrock of support for the monarchy, and it jolted the regime badly.

Hussein first allowed parliamentary elections in November 1989, the first full ballot in 22 years. He then legalized political parties for the first time in 40 years, lifted martial law and produced a 1990 National Charter that guarantees political freedoms.

New elections are scheduled this year, although they may be postponed until the reform

process is completed. It will take time for pluralism to take root. After decades of political inactivity, personalities rather than parties dominate. Palestinians who make up 60 per cent of Jordan's 3.5 million population are also a wild card.

Former Prime Minister Taher Maari acknowledged the party system won't solidify until perhaps the election after next.

"But we're moving at the right pace — not too fast, not too slow. This is a small country, with a community based on tribalism and to change quickly is not healthy."

Hussein told The Associated Press last week: "Others still unfortunately look at us with suspicion and regard this as a luxury they cannot afford. But I believe it will have to come. Without this, the Arabs will remain a broken people."

Minister of State Ibrahim Izzeddine, largely responsible for charting the democracy programme, does not believe Jordan's fundamentalists will pose a threat.

DPRK wants talks with US to end N-dispute

TOKYO, May 9: North Korea wants to hold talks with the United States to settle differences over nuclear issues, the Pyongyang-based Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) said in a report monitored here Saturday, reports AFP.

The nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula must be settled peacefully through fruitful talks between North Korea and the United States, KCNA quoted an article as saying.

It was not clear whether the report was referring to a newspaper article.

The nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula can be resolved only through North Korea-U.S. talks, the article was quoted as saying, adding that this was because the United States is the very one which gave rise to the nuclear problem on the Korean peninsula.

North Korea announced March 12 it would withdraw from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty effective June 12.

Pyongyang accused western countries of using nuclear inspections as a pretext to spy on its military facilities.



Prince Norodom Ranariddh (L) and his wife Princess Marie stand at attention while the anthem of the National Front for a Peaceful and Independent Cambodia (FUNCINPEC) is played during a campaign rally Sunday. This is the first time FUNCINPEC, the leading opposition party, has gathered in Phnom Penh. —AFP/UNB photo

Rafsanjani's re-election certain

NICOSIA, Cyprus, May 9: Iran's Council of Guardians has approved the nominations of four relatively unknown candidates to run against President Hashemi Rafsanjani in the June 11 election, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported Saturday, says AP.

The agency, monitored in Cyprus, said Rafsanjani's nomination also was approved. It quoted an unidentified "informed source" and did not say when the council made its decisions.

Iranian observers so far have regarded Rafsanjani's re-election to another four-year presidential term as a virtual certainty, despite the country's runaway inflation, high unemployment and other economic problems.

It was not clear whether any of the little-known candidates would be the standard-bearer of the hard-liners who oppose Rafsanjani's attempts to improve the ramshackle economy by trying to attract foreign investment.

Rafsanjani's supporters control the Council of Guardians, and the council approved only five candidates out of 128 names submitted.

Hema may claim party leadership

COLOMBO, May 9: The widow of slain President Ranasinghe Premadasa may stake a claim to Sri Lanka's leadership in a move that could see history repeating itself, political commentators said here today, reports AFP.

Hema Premadasa, 57, broke tradition to deliver an emotional vote of thanks at the state funeral for husband Thursday watched by dozens of foreign dignitaries and millions of television viewers across the country.

Political commentators of privately owned Sunday newspapers said the widow's public pledge to continue in the footsteps of her late husband was an indication that she may

want to take over his leadership of the ruling party.

Shri Lanka produced the world's first woman premier following the September 1959 assassination of Prime Minister Solomon Bandaranaike which propelled his politically inexperienced widow Sirima Bandaranaike to take over the country.

However, unlike Sirima who was merely a housewife at the time the leadership of the Shri Lanka Freedom Party was thrust upon her, Hema has developed a political high profile according to her official biography.

The biography described her as an "active political worker" and the leading light

in a women's organisation called Seva Vanitha. She had accompanied her husband on many foreign missions.

"Assisted the United National Party (UNP) particularly, her husband, in organising party activities during the last two decades and contributed in no small measure to the victories of the party," the biography said of her public life.

"Some opposition politicians also feel that Mrs Premadasa is not without charisma," the Sunday Times said adding that there were moves within the ruling party to bring her to the forefront.

"Please remember that I am determined to tread his same

path to the best of my ability, with your assistance, and be a shelter to you all," she said in her unprecedented speech at the funeral.

The English-language island newspaper said her unscheduled speech was a "clear message" that she would be entering politics soon. She had earlier wanted her student-son Sajith to enter politics, a move resisted by Premadasa.

Political analysts believe that the ruling party may watch the outcome of the May 17 provincial council election before deciding on a candidate to lead the party at the December 1994 presidential polls.

Russia celebrates Nazi defeat

MOSCOW, May 9: As thousands of conservative hardliners gathered in Moscow today to celebrate the 48th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany, Russian President Boris Yeltsin said his draft constitution had widespread regional support, reports AFP.

The presidential draft constitution has been welcomed in the regions, where people see that it provides all that is needed for the development of federalism, and it guarantees the rights and freedoms of the individual," Yeltsin said.

His remarks were quoted by Interfax news agency.

Yeltsin laid a wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldier by the Kremlin wall today, to

mark the victory anniversary, accompanied by Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and several other ministers.

The victory celebrations would be held "without untoward incidents," Yeltsin said. "All the necessary steps have been taken."

Moscow city center meanwhile was sealed off by security forces today as ITAR-Tass reported an estimated 10,000 people had gathered for a demonstration by conservative hardliners.

A good-natured crowd of monarchists, communists and nationalists started flocking to the Belarus Railway Station from around 10:00 am (0600 GMT), as patriotic songs were broadcast over loudspeakers.

Chants rang out such as "the facism of (Russian president) Boris Yeltsin will not reach Kuban" — the southern Russian region where the Cossack movement is re-emerging — and "Interior Ministry omon troops work for international zionism."

The riot of May 1 — when May Day marchers fought with paramilitary police, leaving one policeman fatally wounded and some 600 injured — fresh in the collective memory, Moscow's mayor had given the demonstrators permission to enter the city center, but along and agreed route.

The decision came in response to pressure from the conservative-dominated legislature.

Manila supports UN sanctions against Tripoli

MANILA, May 9: The Philippine government fully supports the United Nations sanctions against Libya for the Lockerbie incident, reports Xinhua.

President Fidel Ramos said in Diplog, some 700 km south of Manila, Saturday: "We support the U.N. sanctions."

But we have offered some suggestions to get the problem out of the way and resolve it somehow, he added.

The President said the Philippine government suggested that further consultations and negotiations at the U.N. level to resolve the issue.

Off the Record

Such displays now not unsuited for China

SHENZHEN: Hemlines were short and the favoured lipstick was cherry red in what is being billed as China's first nationwide beauty pageant, reports AP.

Local beauty pageants have become increasingly popular in China over the last year. Organizers of the Miss Dong Fang (Miss East) pageant on Saturday said it was China's first with contestants from throughout the country.

The 44 women competing to become Miss Dong Fang 1993 were selected through local pageants in 12 provinces. The winner will be crowned in the final on Sunday.

The competition included swimsuit parading, dancing and singing. Some contestants showed off their calligraphy.

About 3,000 people in the audience, who paid 80 to 180 yuan (14 to 31 dollars clapped and whistled.

"I never expected to get this far. I am really excited," said Zhang Bei, 23, who teaches English to naval cadets in Nanjing.

Beauty contests have been controversial in communist China. In 1985 contestants in a pageant were banned from wearing swimsuits. In 1988 President Jiang Zemin, then mayor of Shanghai, cancelled a beauty pageant planned in the city, saying "such displays were unsuited for China where conditions are not right."

The nine judges included well-known actors, writers, artists and the wife of the Hong Kong businessman who gave 1 million Hong Kong dollars (dls 125,000) to sponsor the contest.

Mistaken house number!

BANGKOK: Viewers of a family-oriented television show were stunned last week when a hard-core love making session appeared on their screens. That newspapers reported Sunday, says AP.

Viewers deluged the military-run Channel 5 with complaints, the reports said.

Producers were "testing" the pornographic tape during the broadcast of the regular 'House Number Five' programme last Friday morning when one of them accidentally pressed a button that beamed the blue movie into thousands of homes, they added.

It was unclear how or why the pornographic movie appeared at the studio.

'House Number Five' that day included announcements of the reopening of schools after summer holidays, with scenes of parents doing back-to-school shopping for their children.

Mother-daughter classmates

CAMBRIDGE: Solveig Nilsen-Goodin walks to school with the same person every day, shares textbooks and takes some of the same course. But she couldn't decide what to call her classmate when they passed in the halls, reports AP.

Finally, she settled on Mom.

Nilsen-Goodin and her mother, Mary Vlisaker Nilsen, are the first mother-daughter students in the 175-year history of Harvard Divinity School.

"We've become each other's support and help," said Nilsen, who moved from a four-bedroom house in Iowa City, Iowa, to the crowded apartment she shares with her daughter and son-in-law, a graduate student at Boston University.

"It was my concern that I not enter her space," said Nilsen, 54. "I've tried to be very careful about making my own friends and living my own life." The idea of attending divinity school together "all made sense," said Nilsen-Goodin, 26.

The elder woman is the daughter, grand daughter and wife of ordained Lutheran ministers. She hopes to teach writing in a seminary.

Nilsen-Goodin is working toward ordination in the Lutheran church. Her two brothers already are pastors and one of her two sisters is a seminarian. Nilsen decided to apply to Harvard during a visit with her daughter last year.

"I have a very restless mind," she said. "I just need to keep learning. I always feel frustrated when I don't know things."



A little refugee girl from the embattled Bosnia-Herzegovina tries to walk in someone's shoes too large for her feet, which she has found abandoned in the Spanish Refugee Camp in the outskirts of Zagreb Saturday. Some 2000 mostly Muslim refugees, who fled their homes in Bosnia a year ago, are currently living in this camp. —AFP/UNB photo

He asked for a lift

KUALA LUMPUR: A hitchhiker has stolen Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba's official Mercedes Benz, Kuala Lumpur's police chief said Sunday, reports AP.

Chief Henry Chin said Ghafar's driver reported that when he was caught in a traffic jam last Friday, a man asked for a lift. The driver later stopped at a bank to cash a check, leaving the man in the car and the engine running, Chin said.

When the driver came out of the bank, the car had disappeared, the police chief said.