

International

House to house search in Kashmir

50 militants held ahead of India's Republic Day

SRINAGAR, Jan 25: Indian troops arrested 50 suspected Muslim militants on Tuesday during a house to house sweep of this (Kashmir) summer capital ahead of India's Republic Day, police said, reports AFP.

Hundreds of soldiers in battle fatigues, paramilitary border guard police began a search of residential neighbourhoods for Muslim guerrillas who have threatened to disrupt Republic Day celebrations on Thursday, police said.

The sweep was concentrated on areas around the Bakshi Sports Stadium, where senior Kashmir government officials are to watch a parade by units of the army, paramilitary forces and police, police said.

Muslim separatist groups fighting to end Indian rule

over Kashmir have targeted the Republic Day celebrations during the past few years and a rocket was fired at the stadium late Monday but fell short and caused no damage.

Armoured vehicles were stationed around the stadium on Tuesday as troops fanned out in the heart of Srinagar, a bastion of Muslim militants fighting for the secession of Kashmir, India's only Muslim majority state.

Police sources said 50 suspected Muslim militants were taken into custody on Tuesday and several hundred have been detained in Srinagar since Friday.

Although no-one has ever been killed in militant rocket attacks on the Bakshi Stadium officials fear experienced Afghan mercenaries may do

the targeting this year.

Scores of Afghan Mujahideen, veterans of the war against the former Soviet Union have thrown in their lot with Muslim separatist in this northern state.

Few of them are known to be active in Srinagar but security forces sources said there were reports some Afghans may have sneaked into the city of 700,000 people.

Residents said scores of young Muslim men residing near the Bakshi Stadium had left their homes to avoid the dragnet.

They said the security forces were being assisted in their search by "spotters", former militants now have become informers.

Police sources said the hunt for suspected militants had

been extended to other towns and villages in the Kashmir valley, where nine soldiers have been killed in attacks by Muslim guerrillas since the weekend.

The All India Huriyat (freedom) Conference, an umbrella group of some 30 Muslim groups campaign for an end to Indian rule has called for a strike on Republic Day.

More than 10,000 people have died in Kashmir since 1989, when Muslim guerrillas launched a violent separatist campaign.

India accuses Pakistan, which disputes Kashmir's ownership of arming and training the militants. Islamabad denies the charge but supports what it calls a legitimate Kashmiri Muslim struggle for self-determination.

BRIEFLY

Rose Kennedy buried:

In a symbolic end of an epoch, Rose Kennedy, mother of an American President, wife of an ambassador and daughter of a Boston Mayor, was buried Tuesday after a funeral in the church where she was baptised more than a century ago.



Reuter reports from Boston. Over 100 Kennedy family members and some 800 invited guests attended the funeral at St. Stephens Roman Catholic church in Boston's historic north end, where Rose Kennedy was born on July 22, 1890. She died at her home in Hyannisport, Massachusetts on Sunday of complications from pneumonia, she was 104.

A funeral cortege under police escort carried her body to Boston from Hyannisport on Cape Cod for the funeral mass.

Pope against use of sex in cinema:

Pope John Paul warned on Tuesday against the harmful effects of sex and violence in cinema and called on the film industry not to titillate audiences with degraded human behaviour. Reuter reports from Rome.

"The cinema can oppress freedom when it distorts the truth, and when it presents itself as the mirror of negative types of behaviour, using scenes of violence and sex offensive to human dignity," the Pope said in a speech addressed to the media.

Taiwan SC upholds death of 4:

Taiwan's High Court on Wednesday upheld the death penalty imposed on three Chinese defectors for killing a Taiwanese businessman four years ago. AP reports from Taipei.

Zhuo Changren, 48, and Jiang Hongjun, 35, and Shi Xiaoning, 34, were sentenced in 1992 for murdering Wang Chun-chief in Taipei a year earlier. Zhuo and Jiang hijacked a Chinese airliner to Seoul with four other Chinese in 1983. They were welcomed as heroes in Taiwan, which gave them political asylum.

Six rebels killed in Lebanon:

Six Muslim guerrillas were killed and two Israeli soldiers were wounded in fighting in South Lebanon early yesterday, security sources said. Reuter reports from Marjayoun, Lebanon.

They said the casualties occurred after guerrillas of the Hizbollah led Islamic Resistance ambushed Israeli troops in the western sectors of Israel's 15-km (nine mile) wide South Lebanon occupation zone.

Japan's quake death toll 5072:

The death toll from the earthquake in western Japan reached 5,072 on Wednesday, eight days after the disaster, with 69 people still missing, the national police agency said. AFP reports from Tokyo.

As many as 26,509 people had been injured and 74,365 houses and buildings had been destroyed in the quake measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale.

More than 300,000 people are still living in makeshift shelters in the city of Kobe and surrounding areas.

7 to die in Algeria:

A special anti-terrorism court on Tuesday issued death sentences to seven Islamic militants — six of them still at large — for the 1993 kidnapping of three French consular employees. AP reports from Algiers.

Five other defendants received prison terms ranging from six months to life, and five more were acquitted.

Of the seven men sentenced to death, the only one in the courtroom was Mohamed Ali-Bellouk, accused of driving the car which carried off the hostages on October 24, 1993.

15000 Iranian POWs in Iraq:

Iraq is still holding more than 15,000 Iranian Prisoners of War (POWs) captured in their 1980-1988 conflict, an Iranian official said quoted by the official news agency IRNA on Tuesday. AFP reports from Tehran.

The head of the Iranian POW Commission Abdollah Najafi told IRNA that the figure had been determined based on the latest studies of the situation.



File picture dated October 10, 1993 of Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu kissing his wife Dimitra (C) after he won the general elections and completed a political comeback. A luxury villa acquired by Greece's aging Premier Andreas Papandreu for his young wife Dimitra Liani Papandreu, which was reportedly financed with the aid of cash put up by ministers and 'friends' has become a national joke. "Guess what is large, pink and hidden in the woods?" began one newspaper article devoted to the 'Villa-Liani' affair which has amused the country for the past ten days and been a boon to cartoonists. —AFP photo

Russian jets bomb Afghan village: 4 killed

ISLAMABAD, Jan 25: Russian jets based in the Central Asian republic of Tajikistan bombed a northern Afghan border village, killing four people and wounding nine others, the official Kabul Radio said on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Monday's raid on Maymay village in Badakhshan province's Darwaz district also destroyed five houses, said the broadcast monitored in Islamabad.

Badakhshan borders with Tajikistan where Russia has deployed about 15,000 troops to help fight anti-government Islamic guerrillas suspected of having bases in Afghanistan.

India's beauty pageant craze outrages feminist groups

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: India's stunning sweep of the world's top two beauty crowns last year has set off a beauty pageant craze in the country outraging a number of women's groups, reports AFP.

Feminist groups and women MPs say the glorification of the beauty business and the money and glamour that goes with it are alien to Indian culture and have no connection with the lifestyle of the vast majority of Indian women.

"Beauty pageants are marginal to the lives of most Indian women," Indrani Majumdar of the Democratic Women's Association said after three New Delhi women swept the top slots in a Miss India contest in Bombay this month.

"In fact they are an insult to the majority of Indian women whose skins are unprotected, whose hands are calloused, who do back-breaking labour each day to survive."

"All this beauty business is a cruel joke to millions of women," she said.

On January 21, when the three women returned from Bombay and addressed a news conference, some women activists staged a protest outside the office of the newspaper which sponsored the contest.

It was the first demonstration since Sushmita Sen, 18, won the Miss Universe title in Manila in May and fellow Indian Aishwarya Rai, 21, was crowned Miss World in South Africa's Sun City in November.

The victories were hailed by newspapers as the coming of age of Indian women and the beauty queens returned home to tumultuous welcomes.

Sen and Rai were both received by Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao, and are considered role models by scores of young Indian girls eager to be seen in the same glamorous light.

Indian women's groups, however, have a different view.

"What have they achieved?" asked Joya Chatterjee, an activist. "They are just parading what they were bestowed with at birth. They have achieved nothing, and there is nothing for an Indian to be proud of."

Sushma Swaraj, a legislator

from the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party, said Sushmita Sen's Miss Universe victory, the first title for an Indian in an international pageant, had at first seemed welcome.

"Many of us thought this was a one-time event," she said. "Now organisers are giving us an overdose. Miss short hair, long hair, blue eyes... this is simply vulgar."

"It is time all this is stopped right now," she said. "Society has gone berserk... women who achieve more important things are ignored while these girls hog the lime-light."

"We are not against beauty," said another activist. "Our objection is to women being pa-

rated as commodities, to women being seen just as sex objects."

Most contestants in Indian beauty contests come from the middle-class and are attracted by the glamour and money that come from modelling, fashion shows and movie roles which accompany success.

As in other countries, many ambitious parents push their daughters onto the catwalk. Although fashion shows are not unknown in largely conservative India, the victories of Sen and Rai have brought a new respectability to beauty pageants. Now there are many more, and newspapers give them plenty of space.

"It has become respectable

Off the Record

Cory to forgive Kris

MANILA: Former President Corazon Aquino said Wednesday she was open to reconciliation with her estranged daughter, Kris, but will not accept her daughter's lover, reports AP.

Kris, 23, the youngest and most outspoken of Corazon's five children, left the family home in November after she became pregnant by actor Philip Salvador, 41.

Salvador has three children with his wife and another child with a former model. He is not yet legally separated from his wife, who lives in New York.

"She is my daughter and I will continue to love her and pray for her," Corazon said. "Hopefully the day will come that she will agree with my principle that marriage is something permanent and something sacred."

Corazon appeared cheerful as she spoke with reporters at a church in suburban Quezon City where she attended Mass to celebrate her 62nd birthday. She was accompanied by two of three other daughters, Maria Elena and Pinky.

Corazon said she could still forgive her daughter. "In so far as Kris is concerned, it is more important that she seeks God's forgiveness," she said. "In so far as I am concerned... I told her she can always call on me when she needs me."

Asked what condition she has set for reconciliation, she replied: "She knows what I am asking for... I will accept her but only her."



Rao regrets Pak actions

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: The Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao yesterday regretted Pakistan's actions in continuing to spurn India's offer of goodwill and cooperation in establishing good neighbourly relations between the two countries, reports PTI.

"Our relations with our neighbours progressed well, except I regret to say, with Pakistan," Rao said in an interview to PTI, here.

Rao said the year 1994 saw many important steps forward in consolidating India's relations with all the major countries around the world.

The prime minister said India and the US were building up in the post-Cold War era relationship of understanding and of cooperation in various spheres, particularly in the economic and commercial fields.

Russia supports India's stand on Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: Russia has supported India's stand on Kashmir that the issue should be settled through bilateral negotiations, reports PTI.

The reiteration of the Russian stand was made to a visiting high-level six-member delegation of the Standing Committee on External Affairs of Parliament, headed by the leader of the opposition, in Lok Sabha, A B Vajpayee, in Moscow, the Lok Sabha secretary said in a press release yesterday.

The delegation had wide ranging discussions with the chairman and members of the state Duma Committee on International Affairs of the Russian federation. It also had discussions with the deputies group on relations with China.

Iran-Pak anti-drug campaign soon

NICOSIA, Jan 25: Iran and its eastern neighbour, Pakistan, are to launch a three-year campaign against drug smuggling across their common border, Tehran Radio reported on Tuesday, says AP.

Quoting an unidentified official of Iran's anti-narcotics agency, it said the two countries had signed an agreement to this effect after three days of talks held under U.N. auspices in Tehran.

The officials said Iran and Pakistan will strengthen their security forces along their frontier, carry out joint operations against narcotics smugglers, and build an initial 42 border posts along smuggling routes with more to follow later.

The radio, monitored in Nicosia, quoted the official as saying Iran intends to begin anti-drugs cooperation with the Central Asian republics in the future, but gave no details.

Goodbye for good

LONDON: A British singer gave a solo performance of a song called "goodbye" at his choir's annual dinner — then collapsed and died, reports Reuter.

Charles Davies, 67, collapsed as fellow diners applauded his rendition at the annual dinner of the Cotswold Male Voice Choir in Eckington, Western England, on Monday.

"Nothing could be done. He just slipped away," said Leslie Burgess, the choir's director of music. "He was real trouper who will be greatly missed."

First beating within 3 months of marriage

SEOUL: Nearly half of the South Korean women who have been beaten by their husbands say they experienced their first beating while they were newly-weds, a study showed Wednesday, reports Reuter.

An official at the South Korea's Women's Hotline said that in 1994, 1,680 phone calls, or about 30 per cent of all calls the Hotline received regarded wife beating.

A study of the reported cases showed 47.2 per cent of the women were first beaten by their husbands during the first three months of their marriage and 12.9 per cent said during the first three years.

Some 12.7 per cent said they were also beaten before they got married.

A little more than 50 per cent of the women said their husbands would punch them with their fists or throw things while almost 20 per cent said they were threatened with knives and other objects.

The official at the Hotline said wife beating was widespread in South Korea and estimated that last year at least 42 per cent of married women had been beaten and slapped by their husbands.

During our mothers' time, wife beating was very common.



A model wears a daffodil yellow ruzmir dress with a laced bustier of white cotton pique and multicoloured embroideries valorised by a magenta stole, during the Olivier Lapidus haute couture collection in Paris on Monday. — AFP photo

DPRK proposes talks with ROK

SEOUL, Jan 25: After a six-month hiatus since the death of North Korean President Kim Il Sung, Pyongyang has proposed resuming inter-Korean talks, but South Korean officials suspected the offer was a propaganda ploy, reports AFP.

Pyongyang on Tuesday proposed that the two Koreas and overseas Koreans hold a "grand national conference" around the 50th anniversary this year of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule to discuss ways of national unification.

But the South appeared set to reject the proposal, with officials here dismissing it as part of the North's old propaganda tactics.