

BRIEFLY



BJP to try to pursue CBI to file charges of graft against Rao

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: Leaders of India's main opposition party and other top politicians have turned up the heat under Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao to respond to charges of involvement in a giant bribery scandal, reports AFP.

"There is a prime face case that the Jain brothers (key suspects in the scandal) made payments to the prime minister to win favours," said Sushma Swaraj, spokeswoman of the Bharatiya Janata Party (India People's Party, BJP).

Swaraj, in comments published today in the Times of India daily, said her party would try to have federal investigators file charges of graft against Rao.

Her accusations were echoed by veteran communist leader Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister of West Bengal state since June 1977, who said Rao had lost the moral right to continue in power.

GCC ready to help Bahrain face unrest

MANAMA, Bahrain, Jan 22: Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members have indicated they are ready to help Bahrain as it tries to quell a wave of political unrest, reports AP.

The support by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar was contained in a GCC statement issued on Saturday and carried by the Saudi Press Agency on Sunday. The GCC is a security and political alliance with headquarters in Riyadh, the Saudi capital.

The statement noted member's determination "to collectively confront all acts of violence and crimes of terrorism."

The army in Bahrain, a key financial hub in the Gulf, warned earlier Saturday that it was prepared to intervene to crush the unrest. Over the weekend, protesters clashed with police and burned homes and cars in villages around Manama.

Rival Karen factions clashes leave 20 dead

MAE SOT, Thailand, Jan 22: Twenty people were killed in clashes between rival factions of Karen in southeastern Myanmar at the weekend. The border police said today, reports Reuter.

About 150 Karen National Union (KNU) troops launched a surprise attack on a camp belonging to the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) on Saturday, police said.

Thai border police, monitoring field radio communications from the area, said 15 DKBA members were killed and more than two dozen were wounded in the attack.

Five KNU guerrillas were killed, police said.

The DKBA was formed by Karen rebels who broke away from the anti-Rangoon KNU in December 1994.

Fighting rages in Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, Jan 22: Heavy fighting was raging between Cambodian government troops and rebel Khmer Rouge guerrillas in the northwestern province of Banteay Meanchey, a government source said today.

"There is a lot of fighting going on between the two armies. It has been very heavy, there is a lot of shelling at the Poipet Market," the source told Reuters.

Government troops launched a "mopping-up operation" last week to stop Khmer Rouge shelling of Poipet which has already killed several civilians, the source added.

The troops prevented from advancing by landmines laid by the rebels.

This operation was just launched last week. The army want to chase the Khmer Rouge out of artillery range because in the last few weeks their artillery attacks on Poipet have killed and wounded a lot of Cambodian civilians," the source said.

Rama Rao's second wife Lakshmi Parvati, elected on Sunday, was the cause of a split that made a majority of the southern state's legislators defy strongman Rama Rao and form a rival Telugu Desam party, a former folk drama performer and Rama Rao's biographer.

Rama Rao used his numerous screen roles in which he played Hindu gods to win power for the party he founded, and ruled the state in the early 1980s before the Congress party ousted him.

He swept back to power in 1994 as the state's chief minister, and would have been the key challenger to Prime Minister Rao's Congress,

leaders ruled out a patch-up with chief minister Chandrababu Naidu, another of Rama Rao's sons-in-law, who founded the rival party.

The widow's party hopes to strike back at their rivals and the ruling Congress party in the general elections. Party officials announced an elaborate programme beginning this week all over the state to mark Rama Rao's memory.

The step-sons of the late leader had objected to interference and the political ambitions of Lakshmi Parvati, a former folk drama performer and Rama Rao's biographer.

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