

International

US State Department report

China, 6 other Asian states committed human rights abuses last year

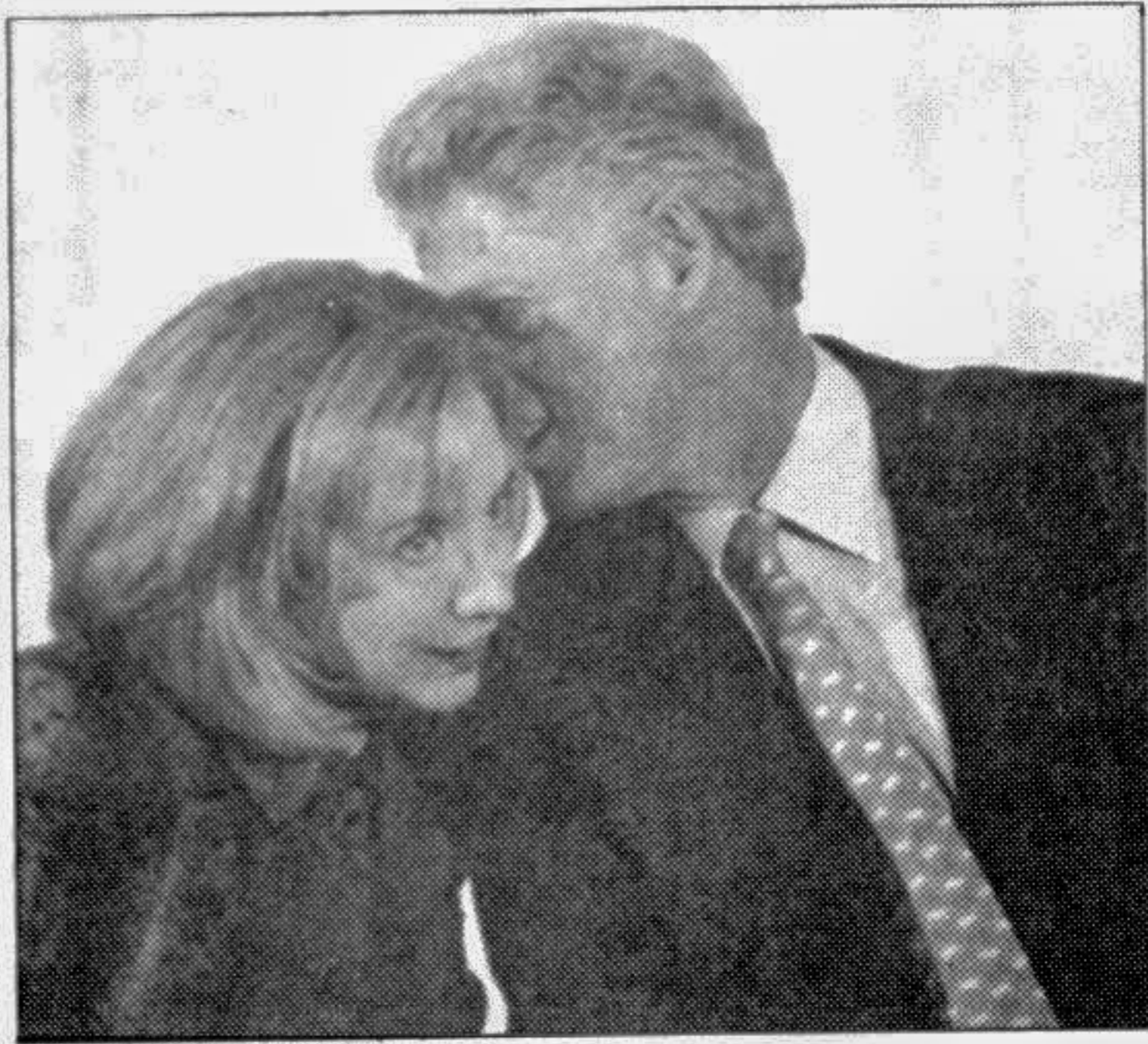
WASHINGTON, Jan 31: In addition to China, the region's most prominent violator, other Asian countries committed serious human rights abuses last year including Burma, Pakistan, India, North Korea, Indonesia and Cambodia, the US State Department has said, reports Reuters.

In India, there also continued to be significant human rights abuses, despite constitutional and statutory safeguards, the report concluded. Abuses include extra-judicial executions, excessive use of force by security forces...

times brutal dictates of the military dictatorship. The report faulted the SLORC for restricting the democratic opposition, the National League for Democracy, and its leader, Aung Suu Kyi and cited credible reports of brutality and killings of civilians by the military...

human rights situation in Pakistan to be poor despite a public government pledge to address problems, especially those of women and children. It said members of the (Pakistani) security forces committed numerous human rights abuses and there was no serious government effort to reform the police, judicial systems or to prosecute those responsible for abuse.

BRIEFLY



US President Bill Clinton (R) speaks to his wife Hillary (L) during the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Microenterprise Development at the White House in Washington Thursday. The awards reflect an ongoing commitment by Clinton to advance the role of microenterprise, or companies of five or fewer employees, in the US economy.

'Yeltsin in good health': Russian President Boris Yeltsin is in good enough health to work on government decisions, and "he is doing so," Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin said in Davos Thursday, AFP reports from Davos, Switzerland.

If there had been any doubts or difficulties, I would not have come to Davos," he told reporters at the World Economic Forum. Yeltsin went to the Kremlin earlier Thursday for the third time in just over a week, the Presidential Press Service in Moscow told Russia's Itar-Tass news agency.

Fergie in India for treatment: The Duchess of York is on her first visit to India to "battle the stress of celebrity," the Times of India said Friday, AFP reports from New Delhi.

Sarah Ferguson was staying in a hotel in the southern city of Bangalore to be treated by Isaac Mathai, a practitioner of "holistic" therapy who has treated former Beatle George Harrison and rock stars Tina Turner and Sting. Mathai said he had earlier treated the duchess in Britain for about a total of 70 hours in the past eight months.

Albania to reimburse people's savings: Albania's Parliament voted unanimously Thursday to reimburse people who lost their life savings in collapsed savings schemes, AFP reports from Tirana.

The collapse of the schemes has led to a series of riots in the capital and other cities.

Lanka upgrading telecom network: Sri Lanka is laying cables under the sea at a cost of two million dollars to improve its telecommunication network with 39 countries, an official said Friday, AP reports from Colombo.

The overall upgrading cost will be 15 million dollars. The project is being jointly handled by US-based TTT company, Alcatel of France and Fujitsu of Japan, said A Manicavasagar.

Iraqi spiritual leader dies: The spiritual leader of Iraqi Kurdish Muslims, Sheikh Osman, died in an Istanbul hospital on Thursday after being hit by a bullet in a Kurdish group announced on Friday, AFP reports from Ankara.

Sheikh Osman was born in Biara in northern Iraq and was a member of a prominent religious family, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) said in a statement. A philosopher, poet and physician, Sheikh Osman was one of the leaders of the Naqshbandi sect, which has millions of followers from India to Turkey.

Tribal rebels kill 7 in Tripura: Unidentified tribal militants killed seven persons, injured several others and set on fire houses at Taidu Bazar under Taidu Police station in south Tripura district in the early hours yesterday, PTI reports from Agartala.

According to preliminary reports received in Agartala, the militants attacked the villagers killing six persons on the spot. One person died on the way to hospital, the reports said. The militants also set ablaze several houses, the reports added.

Troops patrol Indonesian town after riot

JAKARTA, Jan 31: Hundreds of troops Friday enforced a tense calm in an Indonesian town where thousands of Muslims went on the rampage against ethnic Chinese ransacking and burning churches, homes, shops and cars, reports AP.

the violence was sparked when a Chinese trader complained he was being disturbed by loud evening prayers at a mosque. The two versions could not be immediately reconciled. Antara quoted West Java police chief Maj. Gen. Nana Permana as saying 76 houses and 72 shops were destroyed. Another 19 cars were damaged and seven other vehicles burned. He did not say how much of the damaged property belonged to Chinese.

KNU Condemns attacks on refugee camps in Thailand

BANGKOK, Jan 31: Myanmar Karen National Union (KNU) today condemned "atrocities" committed by an offshoot of the rebel group against refugee camps in Thailand and accused Yangon of being behind the attacks.

Karen refugees, border sources said. An attack on a third camp housing more than 25,000 refugees, was turned back by Thai troops before dawn Wednesday, the sources said. We strongly and unequivocally condemn these atrocities by the DKBA against the innocent and the weak," the KNU statement said.

Phoolan Devi to surrender to court

NEW DELHI, Jan 31: India's "bandit queen" turned politician, Phoolan Devi, today said she would surrender to a court to face justice over the alleged massacre of 22 men accused of gang-raping her, reports AFP.



The Prince of Wales (L) chats with Hollywood actor Al Pacino (R), co-star Kevin Spacey (C) and Lyndall Hobbs (2ndR) at the Royal Film Premiere of Pacino's film, "Looking For Richard," at the Odeon Leicester Square Thursday.

Pakistani singer honoured

GWALIOR, Jan 31: Noted Pakistani singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Thumri Queen Shobha Gurtu were honoured with the Hafiz Ali Khan Award at an impressive ceremony here, reports AFP.

Three Malaysian leaders fined

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 31: Three members of Malaysia's ruling coalition were fined Friday for rioting and disrupting a conference last year on the human rights situation in the Indonesian-controlled East Timor, reports AP.

ing it would embarrass neighbouring Indonesia. More than 100 delegates were arrested from the conference in a Kuala Lumpur hotel after some 50 pro-Indonesian youths ransacked the meeting room. Some foreign delegates who also were arrested were deported.

Iran-Iraq accord on jt searches for missing troops

TEHRAN, Jan 31: Iran said Thursday it had reached an agreement with Iraq to conduct joint searches for the remains of soldiers killed during their 1980-1988 war, reports AFP.

Iran-Iraq accord on jt searches for missing troops. The agreement was reached after a meeting between foreign ministry officials of the two countries. Bagherzadeh, quoted by Iran's official Irna news agency, did not specify where or when the talks took place or at what level, but promised more details in the "near future."



Russian President Boris Yeltsin (L) shakes hands with the chairman of the Constitutional Court, Vladimir Tumanov, Thursday. Yeltsin suggested for the first time that Russia's presidential constitution could be changed, referring to an "evolution" of the basic law during his meeting with Tumanov.

Fujimori assures hostages' relatives of seeking peaceful solution

LIMA, Jan 31: President Alberto Fujimori heads for Canada as part of an intense campaign to persuade Japan that he is doing everything possible to find a peaceful solution to the hostage crisis, reports AP.

"I wanted to call you together to share moments of anguish, anxiety and suffering, which you have lived through," he said. Fujimori, whose younger brother Pedro is among the captives, told the family members that he was committed to seeking a peaceful solution to the standoff.

hostages. They released most within the first two weeks of the crisis. Fujimori is also scheduled to stop in Washington, where he is to address the permanent council of the Organization of American States on Monday. He will speak on terrorism and the hostages in Lima.

handling of the hostage situation. Hashimoto was concerned about militarized police maneuvers outside the diplomatic residence that led to shots being fired by the rebels on Monday. A police troop carrier was nicked by the gunfire and Japan urged Peru not to take any unnecessary risks. Peru has since toned down the police activity, which had been escalating for more than a week.

Congress won't join UF govt: Pawar

JAIPUR, Jan 31: The Congress Parliamentary Party leader, Shreed Pawar, today said his party would not join the United Front government, would support it from outside only and not shoulder any responsibility for its performance, reports PTI.

ing it and taking a clear stand on the issue of corruption," Pawar said justifying the expulsion of Sukh Ram. He said Congress had to pay very dearly because of its stand on the controversial Babri-Masjid and temple issue. But now we are rectifying our past mistakes to gain the faith of the minority.

"We will not hesitate in criticising the UF government for its shortcomings on the floor of the parliament and outside," Pawar told reporters here today. He said since Sitaran Kesri became the president of party, there were further instances of killings, disappearances, torture and excessive use of force by the military and insurgents, it said.

1,500 troops revolt in Guatemala

GUATEMALA City, Jan 31: As many as 1,500 army troops have rebelled here and remain quartered in their barracks just north of the capital, defense ministry officials said Thursday, reports AFP.

Yugoslav president hints at recognition of opposition victories

BELGRADE, Jan 31: A senior official close to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic hinted Thursday that a compromise was possible over disputed local election results which have caused more than two months of street protests here, reports AFP.

prises Serbia and its tiny neighbour Montenegro. Street demonstrations continued in Belgrade Thursday for the 72nd day. Opposition leader, Vuk Draskovic, reacting to Lillo's comments, told a rally of 30,000 that he hoped Lillo was speaking for Milosevic.

Yugoslav President Zoran Lillo on Thursday hinted at the recognition of opposition victories in the disputed local elections but rejected some points from an OSCE report which called for all annulled opposition gains in last November's polls to be recognised.

"Up to today, he (Lillo) has been Milosevic's spokesman. It would be a good thing if he was speaking for him today," Draskovic said. "It would be a bad thing, however, if he had suddenly become independent and started thinking for himself," he added.

Netanyahu, Assad must decide on agenda for peace talks

WASHINGTON, Jan 31: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and President Hafez Assad of Syria — not the United States will choose the agenda if they decide to reopen peace talks, the State Department said Thursday, reports AP.

partment spokesman Nicholas Burns said: "If they do wish to talk to each other, they've got to decide the basis of those talks." This week, Syria's chief negotiator, Walid Moualem, said Israel and Syria had reached agreement on a land-for-peace settlement — including a withdrawal by Israel to its 1967 border — before the breakdown. In reply, Israeli Ambassador Eliahu Ben-Eliassir accused Syria of spreading false reports, trying to make it appear Israel had reneged.

Off the Record

Twins' festival

MOSCOW: Moscow will play host to more than 4,000 sets of twins from nine different countries at a six-day festival in March. Itar-Tass news agency reported Friday, says AFP.

Organiser Marina Parusnikova said the aim was "to try to penetrate the difficult spiritual world of twins and demonstrate their psychological peculiarities." Russia which has two million of the world's estimated population of 60 million twins staged similar festivals in 1990 and 1991.

Love for liquor

SINGAPORE: A Singapore businessman's love for liquor is so great that he happily agreed to be permanently banned from driving, saying he wanted to "drink and drink and drink," reports AP.

Events will include two "mirror-image", football matches between the separate halves of the same sets of twins, while prizes will be awarded to achievers in the fields of science, culture, art, sport and business, Parusnikova said. Among those expected are twins from France, Germany, Japan and the United States, she said.

Love for liquor

Although first time offenders usually get off with fines, Lek 47, told the court: "I am a habitual drinker and I ask your honour to disqualify me for life as I want to drink and don't want to drive." Later he told the Straits Times: "I just want to drink and drink and drink — brandy, XO (cognac) beer and any kind of alcohol. I want to be able to drink with my friends every night."

Two mediators — Canadian Ambassador Anthony Vincent and Catholic archbishop Juan Luis Cipriani — will accompany Fujimori on his trip. Meanwhile, police Thursday hunted for a small band of leftist rebels. The band is thought to be acting as a liaison between guerrillas holed up in the Japanese residence and their comrades in the remote jungle. While the rebels and the government have agreed in principle to talks to end the hostage crisis, no meetings have yet been scheduled. The impasse is the rebels' demand that talks include discussion of freedom for at least 300 imprisoned guerrillas. Fujimori says the issue is out of the question.