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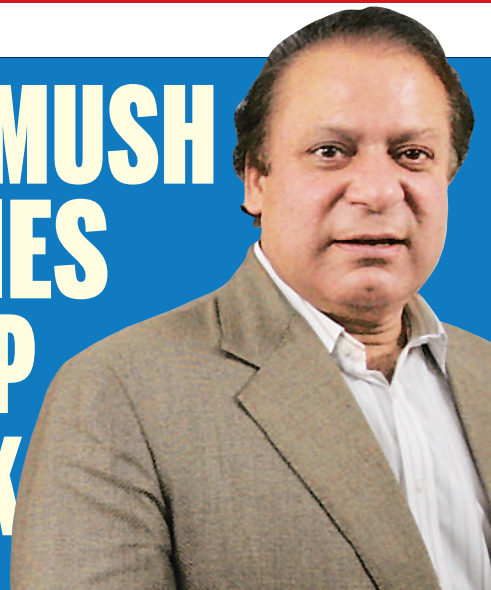
**INSIDE
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**ADOPT
THE
EASY
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ON TOP
IN PAK**

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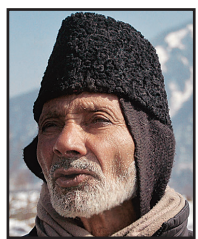


**Finally
Fidel
CASTRO
decides to
step down**

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Atta Mohd is the lonely custodian of 200 graves of the 'unidentified' in the Valley

TRAGEDIES BURIED IN KASHMIR GRAVES



ATTA MOHAMMAD has buried more than 200 bodies in a graveyard behind his house in Tchahal village of Jammu and Kashmir's Uri district in the last 20 years. None of those people he buried had a name. In police records they were described as 'unknown' or 'unidentified'. 'Pakistani militant', possibly the worst epithet, was reserved for many of them.

"I am always with the faces of the people I have buried here," says 67-year-old Mohammad. "But what is more painful is when I am called upon to

By **Parvaiz Bukhari** in Tchahal/Uri (Baramulla)

open the graves to retrieve the bodies."

The graves are of those who have died in 'encounters' with security forces and later handed over to local residents as bodies of Pakistanis or 'unidentified militants'.

Mohammad can remember prising open at least 20 graves so that the bodies could be exhumed to help people find relatives who had disappeared – from families from as far away as Shopian, 150 km from Tchahal, and even Srinagar 100 km away.

The tragic stories are not restricted to Uri alone. The search for missing people by desperate relatives has often ended in one of the unmarked graves located in the dozens of graveyards that lie across the frontier districts of Baramulla and Kupwara.

On numerous occasions people have exhumed bodies of their loved ones days, weeks and sometimes months

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**CAN LINDSAY
LOHAN LOOK
LIKE MARILYN?**

SEE PAGE THREE

She went into coma after teacher hit her



Rinki is a Class X student.

By **Garima Pant**
in New Delhi

IT HAS been three traumatic months for 15-year-old Rinki. The Class X student of Dinkar National Model Public School at Kondli is still battling for life after she went into coma over a month ago. But there is some hope now. She has started blinking her eyes.

After returning from school on November 10, Rinki had for days complained of headache. She would vomit often too.

Only five days later did she tell her parents that Dharendra Singh, her teacher, had hit her on her head with a wooden rod. The reason: she had decided to discontinue tuitions.

Rinki's friends confirmed the incident.

They said she was bolted in a room after she fainted due to the beating. Rinki regained consciousness after 45 minutes.

"Rinki decided to give up the English and Maths tuitions and go where her eldest sister studied as she was fed up with Dharendra's attitude," says Naresh Kaushik, her

Teacher hit Rinki on the head with a wooden rod

father. "He never kept separate time for tuitions and extra classes but used to teach during the free classes, which were very irregular. When Rinki refused to continue with this, she was hit brutally on the head." Naresh then spoke Upendra Singh, school

principal and Dharendra's father. Upendra refused to take any action and threatened Naresh with dire consequences. "He said I could do whatever I wanted — even go to the police and the courts — as he was not afraid of anyone," says Naresh. After much running around, he managed to get an FIR lodged on February 16.

Rinki was operated upon at Maharaja Agrasen Hospital on January 7.

Naresh remains worried about his daughter. "Rinki's career is at stake and an entire year, her board examination year, will go waste," he says. "I am a salesman at a pen agency at Sadar Bazar and don't earn much. But I have spent over Rs 2 lakh on her treatment. My only solace is that my daughter is out of coma and has regained consciousness."

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'It is painful when they ask me to exhume the bodies'



JAVED DAR

Continued from page 1

after they were buried in unmarked graves as aliens, stealing themselves as they confront the remains.

Others have allowed the bodies to remain as they are, returning home with the knowledge that they need look no further for their loved ones. On occasion, a family member has built a proper grave. Perhaps seeking to end the story there, villagers usually do not seek compensation from the security forces for the killing of a relative.

When Bashir Ahmed Dar was being buried in 2004 as an unidentified militant along with five others, Mohammad had no idea that the man watching from a few metres away was Dar's father Ghulam Mohi-u-Din. It took Mohi-u-Din two weeks to find out that his son had actually been buried in his presence as an unidentified militant.

"My son (Dar) had left home to fetch his wife from his in-laws' place, but never returned," says Dar's mother, Jana. "After searching for long, my husband found out what had befallen our son."

The family from Jalshiri village about 10 km from the graveyard in Tehahal, acquired an exhumation order from the district authorities to identify Dar's body. "When I opened the grave, his (Dar's) family members identified the body quickly but asked me to let it rest there," says Mohammad. Like most families who manage to find the body of a missing relative, Dar's family did not ask for compensation.

Dar's grave is one of just seven at Tehahal graveyard with a gravestone. The rest are just a mass of indistinguishable little mounds.

Are the dead men really foreign militants? Security forces are acknowledging the truth may be different, though in a circuitous way. "It is very rare that people are identified after burial as locals," S M Sahai, Kashmir's police chief, told MAIL TODAY adding: "If it turns out to be a Pakistani operating with just a code name, we can't do anything about the identification."

When assured that their identity would not be revealed, police officers are more forthcoming. "Thirty-two bodies have been exhumed so far on court orders from various graveyards. All were buried as foreign militants killed during encounters with different security forces, but later turned out to be locals who had disappeared," a police officer said.

As insurgency is taking its toll, there is a

'My son went to fetch his wife. He never returned'

space crunch at the Tehahal graveyard. It already has a second layer. In the early 1990s, it was topped with a thick layer of soil from the surrounding areas to allow for a second layer of graves.

The grave digger is illiterate but trusts his memory. When the police bring bodies to him for burial, he puts a thumb impression on the paper shown to him. "If you show me the paper anytime later, I will show you the grave where I have buried the person," he claims.

Some time ago, as Mohammad began to worry about what he would do if he had to

bury more bodies, engineers from a power project started dumping excavated earth from a nearby site on a part of the graveyard. It has been two months since he buried two bodies in one corner of the graveyard. Says Mohammad, "If more bodies are brought here, I will have to start digging a third layer of graves. There is just no more land available."

The stories of the unmarked graves in the border areas have spread, and families of missing people dread making a trip to one of the graves, aware that a long lost relative could be found under a crude mound of earth. The circumstances of such a search can be cruel.

Nineteen-year-old Riyaz Ahmed Bhat left his Srinagar home in April last year after a scuffle with his brother-in-law over mistreatment of his pregnant sister. A few days later the local police started asking his family about his whereabouts, saying Bhat was a militant. Three months later Bhat's family received two anonymous telephone calls informing them he had been killed in Kupawara. In shock, Bhat's brother Javed Ahmed, informed the police and went from one officer to another for details of his whereabouts.

Seven months of desperate search took Ahmed to a police station in Kupwara. He saw his brother's photograph there. Police records said Bhat was killed in an encounter with security forces in Kandi (Kupwara) along with three others on April 29, 2007. All four were branded as 'unidentified Pakistani militants' and buried in a local graveyard with 375 unidentified graves. Three of them, including Bhat, have since been identified as locals from



Atta Mohammad (top) at Uri in Baramullah and Jana, Dar's mother.

Shopian, Pulwama and Srinagar.

"Since seven months had passed, I accepted the advice of the district authorities not to exhume my brother's body," says Ahmed, still unable to understand why his brother had to be killed. "But the police showed me his grave and I erected a gravestone for my brother there."

That was as far as the police went to cooperate with him. Despite Ahmed's persistent efforts, he has not succeeded in getting a copy of the FIR for the so-called encounter in which his brother was killed.

Human rights groups estimate that about 8,000 people have disappeared in the state since the application of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in 1990. The government has at various times acknowledged many of them. But its figures have fluctuated between 1,017 and 3,931 during the last five years.

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CRPF doesn't back Orissa claim on Naxal casualties

DOUBTS have again been raised over the Orissa government's claim that security forces killed 20 Naxalites on Sunday.

On Tuesday, CRPF officials did not mention any rebel casualty in their report on the attack.

The joint security operation had involved the CRPF, the Orissa Police and Greyhounds of the Andhra Police.

Not a single body of a Naxalite has been recovered so far.

The CRPF report also puts a question mark on the state government's version of arms recovery from the 'encounter' site.

By **Aman Sharma**
in New Delhi

It says most of the arms and landmines recovered were found burnt and has no mention of any recovery of the more important cache of arms stolen from the Nayagarh armoury — AK47s and INSAS rifles — on Friday.

It seems the Naxals set fire to the 'less sophisticated' weapons to ensure they would be of no use for the police.

MAIL TODAY has a list of recoveries made from the encounter site in the Gillery forests under the area of Bhanj Nagar police station in

Ganjam district.

Among them, 150-200 weapons, 30 claymore mines weighing 20 kg each, five mini-trucks, two motorcycles, a mini-van and 12 mortars had been burnt.

Four musketry rifles, two GF

State govt said 20 Naxals were killed

rifles, two sten guns, four SLRs, two carbines, two detonators and few live grenades were found in good condition. Also found were 150 boxes of ammunition, tear-smoke shells, smoke-gas shells, five

police uniforms and 50 police commando caps.

The list is part of a report sent to the CRPF headquarters in Delhi from its command centre in Bhubaneswar regarding recoveries made by the joint team of the CRPF, Orissa Police Special Operations Group (SOG) and Greyhounds.

"We can claim 13 Naxalite deaths in an encounter in Chhattisgarh on Monday by our 31st Battalion as we have recovered all these 13 bodies, including those of four woman Naxalites," said A.P. Maheshwari, IG (operations), CRPF. "Six CRPF men died in the encounter."

Combing operations are still on in Orissa's forests with the help of army helicopters and sniffer dogs, as the presence of landmines is suspected.

The Orissa government has said that over 1,000 weapons and nearly two lakh cartridges were stolen from the Nayagarh armoury.

On Monday, chief minister Naveen Patnaik said 40 per cent of the weapons looted from Nayagarh had been recovered.

Gopal Nanda, DGP, Orissa, said over 400 guns had been recovered but did not confirm if AK47s and INSAS rifles were among them.

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