

Amnesty call to probe Kashmir graves

INTERNATIONAL human rights group Amnesty International has urged India to probe into hundreds of graves of unidentified people recently discovered in Kashmir saying that they may be of innocent people killed by the armed forces.

The appeal comes a week after Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), a Srinagar-based human rights group, released its report detailing the existence of at least 940 nameless graves in Army-controlled Uri of Baramulla district.

"The grave sites are believed to contain the remains of victims of unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, torture and other abuses which occurred in the context of armed conflict persisting in the state since 1989," the Amnesty International said.

The government and the armed forces have maintained that the nameless graves are those of "unidentified foreign militants", and have given contradictory and varying numbers of those disap-

By **Parvaiz Bukhari**
in Srinagar

peared since 1989 when armed insurgency erupted in Kashmir.

More than a month before APDP released its report titled "Facts Under Ground", MAIL TODAY had come out with its investigation on one such graveyard in Tchahal in Uri that brought to light more than 200 nameless graves. At least six exhumations by families had found their disappeared members buried at Tchahal who according to officials were killed in encounters with the armed forces.

The Amnesty International has asked the Centre to allow international agencies and experts to help conduct a probe and "as an immediate step, the grave sites must be secured to preserve the evidence".

Human rights workers in Kashmir including members of APDP have been complaining for years that innocent

people have disappeared or have been killed by government forces in staged encounters. Numerous cases of suspected militants who have been arrested and never heard from again have been reported in the past.

The Amnesty in its statement has recommended to "create a single authoritative and comprehensive database of the names and details, including where possible DNA information, of all individuals who have gone missing, who have been subjected to enforced disappearance, or abducted in Jammu and Kashmir since 1989".

The statement urges India to "ratify without delay and without any reservations the UN Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance".

According to independent estimates, 8000 people have been subjected to enforced disappearance since 1989.

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PRICE CHECK

Commodity	April 6	April 7
Rice/kg	30-35	28-44
Wheat/kg	14-15	14-15
Eggs/dozen	24-25	24-26
Mustard oil	84-86	78-110
Flour/kg	14-17	12-14
Onion/kg	12-14	13-15
Pulses/kg	40-44	38-44

Figures are in Rs
* quantity in litre

Bird flu spreads to Tripura

AFTER creating a scare in West Bengal, the avian influenza virus has now reached Tripura with reports of over 3,000 birds dying there last week.

Animal husbandry department officials said the birds, including poultry, died in three villages bordering Bangladesh prompting the Tripura government to prohibit import of poultry from the neighbouring country.

Samples of the dead poultry have tested positive for bird flu. From Tuesday, the administration will cull 25,000 birds in eight gram panchayats that fall within five-km radius of the affected villages.

Mail Today

Yechuri meets Sonia on inflation

CPM LEADER Sitaram Yechuri met Congress chief Sonia Gandhi on Monday and apprised her about the urgent necessity of reining in inflation. The closed-door meeting that lasted 20 minutes was also attended by Congress leaders Pranab Mukherjee, Ahmed Patel and A.K. Antony, sources said.

Yechuri handed over to Gandhi the resolution on rising prices that was adopted in the recently held party congress of the CPM.

The meeting comes at a time when the Congress has begun to feel a storm of agitation over its failure to control rising prices.

Mail Today

Orissa NGOs can help riot victims

THE SUPREME Court on Monday allowed charitable organisations and NGOs to go ahead with providing relief to those affected by violence against Christians in Kandhamal in Orissa on the eve of Christmas last year.

A Bench comprising Justice H.K. Sema and Markandey Katju, in an interim order, stayed an order by the district administration restraining charitable, religious and non-government organisations from carrying out any relief work in the area.

The interim order was passed on an appeal by the Archbishop of Cuttack against a High Court judgment refusing to interfere with the collector's order.

Mail Today

BJP raises a stink over Gill inclusion

By **Santwana Bhattacharya**
in New Delhi

THE INCLUSION of the septuagenarian former Chief Election Commissioner, M.S. Gill, in the Union Cabinet as sports and youth affairs minister has the Opposition BJP frowning.

Not only has his inclusion been termed as "improper" politicisation of the constitutional position held by him, his appointment as minister of state (despite the independent charge tag) has also been seen as a "devaluation" of the institution itself. That he is already in politics by the virtue of his election to Rajya Sabha on a Congress ticket earlier, has been all but forgotten.

Discounting the fact that a not-so-moral precedence has been set which future CECs may follow, the Congress is flashing Gill's experience as an "able administrator" to justify his induction.

It is also being said that Aiyar has been "relieved" from the sports ministry as he has been "unhappy" and his *bête noir* Indian Olympic Association secretary, Suresh Kalmadi, made it no easier for him. The public sparring the two indulged in after India lost the bid to host the 2014 Asian Games to South Korea, was not forgotten. Nor the free-flow of unsavoury comments that came out of the sports minister's office that caused



GAIN AND LOSS: Jyotiraditya Scindia was keen on the sports ministry that went to M.S. Gill.

much embarrassment to the Congress high-command.

But what has raised curious eyebrows within the Congress over Gill's ministerial assignment was the fact Jyotiraditya Scindia was keen to take over from Aiyar. It took some persuasion from Congress president Sonia Gandhi to get Scindia to take on the mini portfolio of minister of state for IT and communications.

It is not being missed that Scindia's posting could be seen as challenge to the incumbent (T.R. Baalu) by a fusion candidate. It would be upon the Union minister from DMK, to nurture Scindia (that is give him work). The record set by another Cabinet minister from a southern party is certainly not quite encouraging.

As for Kanimozhi, it seems Manmohan-Sonia wanted to stay away from "family politics"

of DMK chief and Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi.

Much like Rahul Gandhi, the 40-year-old Rajya Sabha MP, turned down the offer because she "is still student in politics". But Congress leaders say Karunanidhi, under fire for promoting "dynasty politics", did not want to draw more flak. Karunanidhi's son M.K. Stalin is a Cabinet minister in the state government.

Manmohan and Sonia, however, had to carry out far trickier political balancing while reshuffling the Cabinet, in which Andhra Pradesh has gone under-represented. They had to by-pass Rahul's promote-the-youth line, in case of Rajasthan.

Three-time MP, Santosh Bagrodia, was inducted while Sachin Pilot was left out. It seems, there was much to gain from promoting Bagrodia's

Vaish-Vaniya community than Pilot's protesting-Gujjar friends.

Sources said, former Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot as also Rajasthan PCC advised the Congress brass against inducting a young Gujjar leader in an election year as that would alienate the powerful Meena community from the party. Besides, Avtar Singh Badana, also a Gujjar leader, is seen to be having more political clout than Pilot.

At least two of the seven who took charge on Monday, Vyalar Ravi and Narayansamy, are all smiles. Ravi is rather kicked about the parliamentary affairs ministry charge which has been yanked away from Priya Ranjan Dasmuni. In trying to regain foothold as the West Bengal PCC chief, Dasmuni is still not sure whether he lost out in Delhi.

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Rain, storm won't hit wheat target

By **Debabrata Mohanty** in New Delhi

THE WHEAT production target for 2008 won't suffer from the untimely rain and hailstorms that lashed wheat-producing areas in Punjab and Haryana recently.

"There might have been some damage, but it's not a matter of concern yet," said agriculture secretary P.K. Mishra at the curtainraiser event of the four-day Global Agro Industries Forum to begin on Tuesday.

Mishra said the production estimate remained unchanged at 74.81 million tonnes. Agricultural scientists have predicted that if the rain continues, damage would be severe in places where the crop was sown early.

The recent rains have also damaged

crops of cumin, chillies, mango, maize and potato in Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh. Gujarat's mango, wheat and maize output has been adversely affected.

Mishra said the Centre has asked states to inform about the extent of crop damages. He said weather conditions and temperatures are conducive as of now, specially for wheat. "In some places, wheat was sown late and those crops would benefit from the rain," Mishra said.

Last month, the government had projected the 2008 wheat output to be 74.81 million tonnes, down from the earlier estimate of 75.5 million tonnes. India had imported 1.8 million tonnes of wheat in 2007, down from 5.5 million tonnes in 2006, when the government had imported the

grain after a gap of six years.

The achievement of the target, however, may not have any meaning if the food and consumer affairs ministry fails to procure adequate foodgrain from the farmers.

With private companies like ITC and Cargill paying more to farmers, the FCI is keeping its fingers crossed over its wheat target. In February this year, the government had raised the procurement price to Rs 1,000 per quintal from Rs 850.

But agriculture minister Sharad Pawar on Monday said the government would not raise the procurement price for farmers. Pawar told reporters in Punjab that government agencies would buy 12 million tonnes of wheat from Punjab and Haryana.

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R PRASAD



...but why change?
The American presidency has mostly been good for the Americans!