

Country being militarised: HRCP report

■ Law and order worsened ■ 600 women killed for honour ■ 6 million children out of school ■ NAB a tool for political harassment

By Mohammad Kamran

ISLAMABAD: The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has revealed that administration and public life is being militarised on a large scale and Pakistan faces the continual degradation of human rights involving constitutional violations, bad law and order, state intimidation, increased poverty and other worsening socio-economic indicators which have contributed to the fall of Pakistan from 138th to 144th place in the UNDP's ranking.

The HRCP compiled the facts and figures about the rights situation in Pakistan during the preceding calendar year in its annual report launched on Friday.

The report presents very grim facts and figures hinting at a further worsened situation due to a lack of good governance. "National affairs are not being managed by cabinet-governed parliamentary democracy. Military dominance is pervasive in many civil departments despite the existence of an elected

government. The government is responsible to a larger extent for this sordid human condition in Pakistan," said IA Rehman, executive director of the HRCP.

Mr Rehman said that each year the HRCP presents its annual report and people say the situation remains the same and in some cases appears to have deteriorated. But these are ground realities and access to this information is the right of every individual, he added.

The HRCP report cites official sources while giving indications that poverty has soared in the country with nearly 40 million people living below the poverty line. One of the major contributing factors towards poverty was unemployment, which was officially estimated to have reached over 14 percent, the report added.

According to the report, there was no decrease in violence against women in 2003 and over 600 lost their lives due to honour killing. Over 1,500 women remained confined in separate

HRCP report a farce: Rashid

ISLAMABAD: Information and Broadcasting Minister Sheikh Rashid blasted on Friday Human Right Commission of Pakistan's (HRCP) report for 2003. Commenting on the report Sheikh Rashid termed it a farce that gross human rights violations were committed in Pakistan. "It is a totally baseless and inaccurate report and represents certain minds," Sheikh Rashid said. "Every country has its peculiar conditions and it is easy to prepare a report for vested interests," he added. He said democracy was functioning satisfactorily in Pakistan and President Pervez Musharraf had fulfilled all his promises. He said Pakistan was an active partner in the war against terrorism. —APP

overcrowded jails in utterly sordid conditions, it added.

About the state of Pakistani children in 2003, the report states that over six million children across the country did not go to school. Many were engaged in work sometimes in extremely hazardous conditions, whereas, Article 11(3) of the Constitution of Pakistan states that no child below the age of 14 shall be engaged in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment. The report also mentions over 1,300

cases of sexual and physical abuse of children in the first nine months of 2003. It also states that about 3,000 juvenile prisoners were being kept along with adult male prisoners despite the promulgation of the Juvenile Justice System Ordinance 2000.

Over 84,000 men, women and children remained imprisoned in 87 prisons across the country. All jails were overcrowded.

Giving facts about the law and order situation, the HRCP report states that at least 90 peo-

ple were killed in incidents of sectarian terrorism in 2003. Three attempts were made to assassinate President General Pervez Musharraf. About 146 people were killed in 'encounters', as compared to 154 in 2002. About 101 people died in tribal feuds.

It further states that the state authorities misused the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) through accountability courts for political harassment. Similarly, the Exit Control List (ECL) was being used as a tool of harassment for political opponents, it added. The expenditure on health remained at 0.7 percent of GNP, the lowest in the world, and drug prices were among the highest in the region.

Contrary to official claims, the report stated that spending on education remained a mere 7.8 percent of total government expenditure. Similarly, the literacy rate stands at 35 percent while official sources claim it to be 51 percent.

On the issue of administration of justice, the HRCP stated

that there was a delay in the appointment of judges in the superior courts and specifically mentioned the strength of judges of the Federal Shariat Court which had created immense hardships for litigants.

About the legislative business, the report states that no serious legislation was made until December 2003 when parliament endorsed the 17th Amendment Bill. "The presidential orders and ordinances continued to be issued throughout the year in 2003." On the other hand laws relating to freedom of expression, promulgated in 2002 were not implemented in 2003 despite pleas from media organisations.

A growing number of journalists faced threats from official and unofficial quarters. At least two writers lost their lives as a direct result of the opinions they expressed. The authorities also tried to block some internet sites just to deprive people of their access to 'right' information, said the report.