

ISRAEL IN 'ABUSIVE ARRESTS' OF PALESTINIAN CHILDREN: HRW

JERUSALEM: Human Rights Watch yesterday accused Israel of "abusive arrests" of Palestinian children as young as 11 and of using threats to force them to sign confessions.

Israeli authorities failed to inform parents of their children's arrest or whereabouts, the New York-based watchdog added, drawing on accounts of several children detained during intense unrest in east Jerusalem and the West Bank late last year.

HRW's Middle East director Sarah Leah Whitson urged the United States to pressure its Israeli ally to end what it said

were long-standing "abusive practices".

The rights group issued the accusations as US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter began a visit to Israel.

"Israeli security forces have used unnecessary force to arrest or detain Palestinian children," it said in a report giving details of the "abusive arrests" of six children.

"Forces have choked children, thrown stun grenades at them, beaten them in custody, threatened and interrogated them without the presence of parents or lawyers, and failed to let their parents know their whereabouts."

Israel's army, when contacted by AFP, had no immediate comment on the report. HRW said the military and justice ministry responded to its accusations and maintained that "security officials had adhered to the law in all cases, including by informing the children of their rights".

In one case, 11-year-old Rashid S, who was arrested in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem in November, said officers put a bag over his head, kicked him and verbally abused him in Arabic, according to the rights group.

Rashid was accused of throwing

stones during the months of unrest that rocked Jerusalem before and after a deadly July-August war in the Gaza Strip.

The Jerusalem riots, where security forces clashed with stone-throwing Palestinians, were accompanied by a spate of killings of both Jews and Arabs.

In the West Bank, 14-year-old girl Malak al-Khatib was violently arrested on suspicion of throwing stones at a road used by Jewish settlers, HRW quoted her mother as saying.

"Four soldiers beat her with something like a baton" during Malak's arrest until she lost consciousness, mother

Khoula said. "While on the ground, they kicked her and one soldier stepped on her neck." In every case HRW documented, the Palestinian families said Israeli authorities "did not inform parents of the child's arrest and interrogated the children without permitting them to speak to a parent or lawyer prior to the interrogation". Three children "said they signed confessions written in Hebrew, a language they do not understand, after interrogators threatened them".

Children urinated on themselves out of fear during the arrests, and had nightmares afterwards, it said. —AFP

PALESTINIAN VILLAGE OF SUSIYA FACES DEMOLITION BY ISRAEL

SUSIYA: Sitting under a fig tree to escape the searing sun, Jihad Nuwaja looks out on the only land he knows - the dry expanse of the Hebron hills in the southern West Bank. Within days, his home is set to be demolished and he, his wife and 10 children expelled. "It feels like the end," says the 47-year-old, pulling a fig from the laden tree and testing its ripeness. "They will come and demolish our homes and we will have nowhere to go. In the coming days, I will see one hundred children made homeless." Nuwaja's family is one of hundreds living in tents and prefabricated structures at Susiya, a Palestinian village spread across several rocky hillsides between a Jewish settlement to the south and a Jewish archaeological site to the north - land Israel has occupied since the 1967 Middle East war. The saga over Susiya has been drawn out over decades, but it reached a culmination in May when Israel's high court rejected an injunction seeking to halt the planned demolition of the village. With appeals exhausted and Ramadan over, the bulldozing is expected any day.

The Israeli general responsible for carrying it out came to tell the villagers as much last week. Israel's 48-year occupation of the West Bank, where Jewish settlements, which most world powers regard as illegal, have expanded rapidly, has thrown up many such disputes. But Susiya stands out for the depth of its perceived injustice. Many Israelis, from former defence ministry officials to settlement activists and the group Rabbis for Human Rights, believe the Israeli government is making a mistake, pointing to documents that show the Palestinians own the land and have inhabited and farmed the area since the 1830s.

US opposition

In the past, they lived in caves, but they were expelled from their original dwellings in 1986, after the archaeological site was discovered, and the caves in their current location were destroyed in the 1990s and early 2000s after a series of confrontations, including the killing of a settler. As a result, they now live in tents and prefabricated buildings. But Israel did not grant them permits to build the structures, therefore the high court has ruled that they can be

knocked down.

In recent days, American and European diplomats have visited Susiya to express their solidarity with the villagers, who number around 350 in total, living in about 80 tents and lean-tos. Brightly painted children's playground equipment, donated by international aid agencies, stands unused in the blazing midday heat but is popular in the evening. "We're closely following developments ... and we strongly urge the Israeli authorities to refrain from carrying out any demolitions in the village," US State Department spokesman John Kirby said on Thursday, a rare public statement on the issue. "Demolition of this Palestinian village or parts of it and evictions of Palestinians from their home would be harmful and provocative."

The settler movement, which is influential in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government, is pushing for the demolitions to be carried out promptly, saying there is no further legal impediment. Local settler leader Yochai Damri points to the archaeological site and evidence of an ancient synagogue to argue that the Jews were there first. Israeli Vice Prime Minister Silvan Shalom told Reuters the government was abiding by the court's decision in the same way as when the judiciary ordered it to evacuate Jewish settlers. "If the Supreme Court has authorized the decision to evacuate people, it's something we should do. We have evacuated Israelis (settlers) as well as Palestinians that are staying on land that does not really belong to them, so it's not something we are doing with the Palestinians only," he said. Wary of international reaction, the Israeli responsible for overseeing the demolitions, Major General Yoav Mordechai, has said he is examining "alternative solutions". But Susiya residents say they haven't been presented with anything and fear it is only a matter of time.

"We are just waiting for the bulldozers," says Jihad Nuwaja, who was born in Susiya in 1967 and has rarely strayed from the hills since, making a living from rearing goats, harvesting figs and olives and making honey. "Living in caves and tents is not a comfortable life," he said. "But soon it will get even more uncomfortable." — Reuters

KURDISH-US ALLIANCE AGAINST IS STOKES RESENTMENT IN SYRIA

BEIRUT: A close alliance between the US-led coalition battling the Islamic State jihadist group and Syrian Kurdish fighters has racked up successes, but also stirred resentments that could hamper the campaign. Analysts warn that IS can only be defeated in Syria with support from Sunni Arabs, many of whom are being alienated by what they see as US favouritism towards the Kurdish minority.

In recent months, fighters from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) have repelled several IS attacks and deprived the group of its key border bastion of Tal Abyad.

US-led air strikes have been key to these advances, and Washington has praised the Kurds as a reliable ally. But in areas where tensions between Kurds and Arabs are already tense, the alliance is viewed with suspicion and anger. Osama Abu Zeid, a legal adviser to rebel groups under the Free Syrian Army banner, slammed Washington for playing favourites. "We reject this policy of supporting parties based on ethnic or sectarian affiliation," he said, accusing the US-led coalition of sowing mistrust.

The Kurds "are seen as the darlings of the West," said Emile Hokayem, a senior fellow and Syria expert at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"They get intelligence, military support and weaponry, they get the media attention, while the Arabs would say they are suffering more, they are fighting IS and they are fighting (President Bashar al-) Assad." "The US coalition strategy has

favoured the Kurds and, in the process, has alienated important Arab constituencies," Hokayem said.

History of tensions

Suspicion and tensions between Kurds and Arabs in parts of northern Syria have deep roots. From the 1970s, the Damascus regime resettled Sunni Arabs in traditionally Kurdish areas in a bid to dilute Kurdish nationalist sentiment and win support from Arab tribes.

Fierce competition for resources also created tensions between ethnic groups, particularly during the drought years that preceded the Syrian uprising.

More recently, the Syrian opposition has been angered by the Kurds' failure to join the uprising. Instead, Kurds have maintained a tacit deal with the regime to stay neutral and focused on securing Kurdish-majority areas and building local governance as part of a dream of self-administration.

That policy has strained ties between the main exiled opposition National Coalition and the largest Kurdish group, the YPG's political wing, the Democratic Union Party. Relations have deteriorated further in recent weeks as the Kurds have clawed back large swathes of territory from IS, sparking a furious war of words.

The exiled opposition has accused YPG fighters of "terrorism" and "widespread violations" against civilians, including looting and the ethnic cleansing of Arabs and Turkmen from captured villages. — AFP



SANAA: Vendors salvage goods from under the rubble of their shops following an air-strike by the Saudi-led coalition on the Yemeni capital Sanaa yesterday. — AFP

DEATH TOLL FROM YEMEN REBEL SHELLING DOUBLES TO 100

SAUDI-LED COALITION TARGET HOUTHIS POSITIONS

SANAA: The death toll in Yemen from the Shiite rebel shelling of a town near the southern port city of Aden rose yesterday to nearly 100, the head of an international aid group said, describing it as "the worst day" for the city and its surroundings in over three months of fighting.

The rebels, known as Houthis, and their allies started shelling the town of Dar Saad on Sunday after earlier losing control of some of Aden's neighborhoods. The violence highlighted the bloody chaos of the civil war gripping the Arab world's poorest country, which also has been the target of Saudi-led, US-backed airstrikes since late March.

Hassan Boucenne of the Geneva-based Doctors Without Borders said that by yesterday, his organization reported nearly 100 people dead, twice the casualty toll from the previous day.

The shelling also wounded about 200 people, said Boucenne, the head of the organization in Yemen. Of the victims, 80 percent are civilians, including many pregnant women, elderly and children, he added.

"Yesterday was the worst day in Aden since

(the Saudi-led coalition campaign) started in March," Boucenne told The Associated Press, adding that he fears "attacks on civilians will continue." Sunday's shelling in Dar Saad began after the Houthis rebels lost control of much of the Aden district of Tawahi, according to officials and witnesses. Tawahi is now under a security lockdown, the officials said, as anti-Houthi forces search buildings looking for rebels, some of whom had fled to the nearby mountains.

Overnight, the Saudi-led coalition targeted Houthi positions north of Aden and in Dar Saad, killing at least 55 rebels, officials and witnesses said.

Shelling continues

The coalition also struck the home of Mehdi Meqlawa, a prominent supporter of former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, in a Sanaa suburb. In the Yemeni capital, it also hit Houthi headquarters near the Souq Aziz market, killing one person.

Rebel shelling continued yesterday in Taiz, Yemen's third-largest city, killing eight residents, while ground fighting raged on in Marib, with six

anti-Houthi tribesmen and 10 Houthi fighters killed in clashes. All officials and eyewitnesses spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to reporters or feared reprisals.

Houthi officials declined to comment on the fighting. The spokesman of the Yemeni government in exile, Rageh Badie, said they appointed the head of the Resistance Council, Nayef al-Bakri, as governor of Aden. Al-Bakri served as deputy to the former governor, Abdulaziz bin Habtoor, who fled the embattled city earlier this year. Al-Bakri is joined by the exiled deputy minister of health and the transportation and interior ministers, who have flown into Aden two days ago from Saudi Arabia. Other exiled ministers will follow suit over the next few weeks, Badie said.

Yemen's conflict pits the Iran-allied Houthis and troops loyal to the former president, Saleh, against an array of forces, including southern separatists, local and tribal militias, Sunni Islamic militants as well as loyalists of exiled President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, who is backed internationally. — AP

IN AN IS CAMP, CHILDREN TOLD: BEHEAD THE DOLL

SANLIURFA: The children had all been shown videos of beheadings and told by their trainers with the Islamic State group that they would perform one someday. First, they had to practice technique. The more than 120 boys were each given a doll and a sword and told, cut off its head.

A 14-year-old who was among the boys, all abducted from Iraq's Yazidi religious minority, said he couldn't cut it right. He chopped once, twice, three times. "Then they taught me how to hold the sword, and they told me how to hit. They told me it was the head of the infidels," the boy, renamed Yahya by his IS captors, told The Associated Press last week in northern Iraq, where he fled after escaping the IS training camp.

When Islamic State extremists overran Yazidi towns in northern Iraq last year, they butchered older men and enslaved many of the women and girls. Dozens of young Yazidi boys like Yahya had a different fate: The IS sought to re-educate them. They forced them to convert to Islam from their ancient faith and tried to turn them into jihadi fighters.

It is part of a concerted effort by the extremists to build a new generation of militants, according to AP interviews with residents who fled or still live under IS in Syria and Iraq. The group is recruiting teens and children using gifts, threats and brainwashing. Boys have been turned into killers and suicide bombers. An IS video issued last week showed a boy beheading a Syrian soldier under an adult militant's supervision. Last month, a video showed 25 children unflinchingly shooting 25 captured Syrian soldiers in the head.

In schools and mosques, militants infuse children with extremist doctrine, often turning them against their own parents. Fighters in the street befriend children with toys. IS training camps churn out

the Ashbal, Arabic for "lion cubs," child fighters for the "caliphate" that IS declared across its territory. The caliphate is a historic form of Islamic rule

that the group claims to be reviving with its own radical interpretation, though the vast majority of Muslims reject its claims.

"I am terribly worried about future generations," said Abu Hafs Naqshabandi, a Syrian sheikh who runs religion classes for refugees in the Turkish city of Sanliurfa to counter IS ideology. The indoctrination mainly targets Sunni Muslim children. In IS-held towns, militants show young people videos at street booths. They hold outdoor events for children, distributing soft drinks and candy - and propaganda. They tell adults, "We have given up on you, we care about the new generation," said an anti-IS activist who fled the Syrian city of Raqqa, the extremists' de facto capital. He spoke on condition of anonymity to preserve the safety of relatives under IS rule. With the Yazidis, whom IS considers

heretics ripe for slaughter, the group sought to take another community's youth, erase their past and replace it with radicalism.

Yahya, his little brother, their mother and hundreds of Yazidis were captured when IS seized the Iraqi town of Sulagh in August. They were taken to Raqqa, where the brothers and other Yazidi boys aged 8 to 15 were put in the Farouq training camp. They were given Muslim Arabic names to replace their Kurdish names. Yahya asked that AP not use his real name for his and his family's safety.

He spent nearly five months there, training eight to 10 hours a day, including exercises, weapons drills and Quranic studies. They told him Yazidis are "dirty" and should be killed, he said. They showed him how to shoot someone from close range. — AP



MAARUF: Members of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) take position in a classroom in the village of Maaruf near the northeastern Syrian city of Hasakeh on July 16, 2015, as they battle Islamic State group jihadists. — AFP



MOSUL: In this photo released on Jan 11, 2015, by a militant website, which has been verified and is consistent with other AP reporting, an Islamic State militant, center, holds plastic bags full of stationery and other gifts as he distributes them to Iraqi young students, at a school classroom, in Mosul, northern Iraq. — AP