

ISI held Osama prisoner for 6 yrs, handed over to US: report

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London: Pakistan's ISI had held Osama Bin Laden prisoner for nearly six years in Abbottabad and handed him over to the US in a staged raid, a media report said in new controversial account of the al-Qaeda chief's death.

Pulitzer Prize-winning American investigative journalist Seymour Hersh has already termed the official US account of the raid and Osama's killing as "a fairytale".

The BBC report by Jane Corbin, who has investigated al-Qaeda and Osama for nearly two decades, claims there was a conspiracy at the highest levels of the US and Pakistani government to assassinate him.

Citing Hersh, who spoke to Corbin about his article published in the London Review of Books last month, the report says the ISI was holding Osama prisoner for nearly six years in the garrison town of Abbottabad and just handed him over to the Americans in a staged raid.

Hersh's article had created a lot of flurry as it, among other things, claimed that the al-Qaeda chief's body may have been torn to pieces by rifle fire with some parts tossed out over the Hindu Kush mountains.

He had also said that a former Pakistani intelligence officer disclosed Osama's hideout to CIA in exchange of USD 25 million bounty on his head.

Hersh said knowledge of Osama's whereabouts went right to the top of the Pakistan army and intelligence service while the CIA rejects this view, saying that the Pakistani top brass did not know.

"There is one other possible explanation however - the murky history of rogue elements within Pakistan's military and intelligence service sympathetic to Islamic militants," today's report said.

"It is possible someone knew about or helped shelter Bin Laden. And it seemed incredible to me when I went to the Abbottabad compound before it was demolished that he could have lived right under the nose of Pakistan's military elite close to the country's military academy," Corbin added.

The report also says that Carlotta Gall, who reported for the New York Times from Pakistan, supports Hersh's account of knowledge at the top level of the army and intelligence service.

She learned from a local source that the ISI had a specific 'Bin Laden desk' run by one man, it said.

"They were hiding him and keeping him in some sort of protective custody," she said.

However, some security experts dispute that and say it is just not "plausible" that the top levels knew about Osama, the report adds.

"The problem for Mr Hersh is that his account is largely based on one American source, a retired senior intelligence officer in the US government who he does not name. (CIA deputy director Michael) Morell dismisses that, saying this person was never in the meetings he was in - meetings which were completely different to Mr Hersh's account," it says.

Osama was killed in Abbottabad on the night of May 2, 2011 in a covert raid conducted by US Navy SEALs.

- PTI