

Kashmiri rebels want peace road map

Talks with PM starts today

AFP, Srinagar

Indian Kashmir's leading separatist Muslim cleric said he wants a "well-drawn road map" to emerge from talks with Premier Manmohan Singh set for today and aimed at settling the future of the revolt-hit region.

The talks between the moderate wing of the Hurriyat separatist alliance, led by Kashmir's chief cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, and Singh will mark a resumption of a dialogue stalled since the Congress government's election in May 2004.

"Of course this (peace effort) is a

long-drawn process," Farooq said before leaving Sunday for the talks in New Delhi.

The Hurriyat wanted "something concrete" to result from the discussions, he said in Srinagar, summer capital of mainly Muslim Indian Kashmir where a bloody insurgency against New Delhi's rule has raged for 16 years.

"We don't want a photo session. We want a well-drawn road map," Farooq, 32, said at his heavily guarded home where his father was slain in 1990 by unknown gunmen.

Farooq said most of the confidence-building measures between

Hurriyat arrived later Sunday in New Delhi ahead of the meeting.

He welcomed improving ties between India and Pakistan, which each hold the scenic Himalayan region of Kashmir in part and claim it in full, but said New Delhi must give Kashmiris "the feeling it's addressing their problems."

The Hurriyat talks are part of a wider peace process between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, who have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir.

Farooq said most of the confidence-building measures between

India and Pakistan had not changed Kashmiris' lives, apart from the launch of a bus linking the two sides of the divided region.

"There are still bunkers. People are still subject to humiliating searches" by soldiers, said Farooq who was a teenager when he took over the hereditary post of head cleric of Kashmir's largest mosque after his father's killing.

Noting a 25 percent drop in violent incidents this year, he said, "Why not cut down on the number of troops" in Kashmir?"

New legal team for Saddam ahead of Oct 19 trial

AFP, Baghdad

The family of former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein has reorganised his defence team and announced plans to launch a media campaign ahead of his trial next month on charges of crimes against humanity.

The move came as Iraq government spokesman Laith Kubba announced that Saddam Hussein and seven of his former henchmen will go on trial on October 19 over with the massacre of 143 people in the village of Dujail.

Under measures adopted by Saddam's eldest daughter Raghda, Saddam will be assigned a new legal committee of international lawyers headed by Iraqi lawyer Khalil Dulaimi, with the deposed leader having the final say on the team.



PHOTO: AFP

An elderly Nepalese activist is comforted by others after being injured in a clash with riot policemen during a demonstration in Kathmandu yesterday. Several thousand demonstrators representing the seven political parties were dispersed by riot police firing tear gas. Several political leaders and scores of other activists were arrested.



PHOTO: AFP

Leaders of Pakistani opposition parties attend a national conference in Islamabad yesterday to discuss the country's first diplomatic contact with Israel. Pakistan's six-party Islamic alliance Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) organised the national conference.

Arson blamed as new Paris fire kills 14

AFP, Paris

Fourteen people including two children were killed and more than 30 injured in an apartment block fire in a southern Paris suburb early yesterday -- the third fatal fire to hit the French capital in nine days.

The blaze broke out at around 1.00 a.m. (1200 GMT) in the hall of an 18-storey highrise containing some 110 local authority flats at L'Hay-les-Roses near Orly airport. The casualties -- including 13 who were seriously injured -- were all caused by smoke inhalation.

Police said the origin of the fire appeared to be criminal, and they played down any similarity with the fires on August 26 and 29 which killed 24 African immigrants in two dilapidated Paris squats.

"This is a block of flats. It's got nothing to do with the fires in the Paris squats," said fire-service spokesman Michel Cros.

Four people were being questioned by police Sunday morning though they were not believed to be suspects. Local residents said that vandals had been spotted setting light to letter-boxes on the ground floor of the highrise.

Kabul warns aid workers

Attack on polls candidate, 11 killed

AP, AFP, Kandahar

A spate of assaults by suspected Taliban rebels killed 11 people, including four policemen and wounded an election candidate, and Afghanistan warned yesterday that aid workers and other "soft" targets were in danger of attack ahead of elections this month.

A bomb wounded a candidate in upcoming parliamentary elections as eight policemen, two militants and a civilian were killed in Afghanistan's bloody countdown to the polls, officials said yesterday.

Parliamentary candidate

Habibullah Khan from the Garmser district of Helmand province, 600km south of Kabul, was severely wounded by a bomb placed at the door of his house early Sunday, said district police chief Deljan.

In Dishu district also in Helmand province, police chief Haji Amanullah was killed by the Taliban along with his son and three bodyguards in an ambush which left two militants dead.

In the southern province of Zabul four Afghan policemen were killed in two separate attacks.

Three officers guarding a convoy transporting goods to US bases were killed Saturday when it came under fire

from Taliban insurgents.

The warning came after a string of kidnappings that left a British engineer and two Japanese teachers dead. Five Afghans, including a district governor and an election candidate, were also kidnapped last week. A purported Taliban spokesman claimed to have killed them, though the claim couldn't be independently confirmed.

Interior Ministry spokesman Latfullah Mashal said he was confident the Sept. 18 legislative elections would be successful even though "al-Qaeda and the Taliban will try their best to disrupt peace and stability."