

# Kashmir rebels unveil unification plan

REUTERS, AFP, Srinagar

A Kashmiri separatist leader put forward a peace plan on Saturday to unify the disputed Himalayan territory - claimed both by India and Pakistan - and give it autonomy. Sajad Gani Lone, chairman of Jammu and Kashmir Peoples Conference, proposed that unified Kashmir be administered by its people, while the region's defence could be the joint responsibility of Kashmiri, Indian and Pakistani authorities. Lone said "Achievable Nationhood" - a 266-page document - was the first of its kind to be presented by a separatist since the insurgency broke out in Indian Kashmir in 1989. Among other things, the document envisages unhindered, tax-free movement of goods between the two Kashmirs which India and

Pakistan claim in entirety but rule only in part. "Achievable Nationhood achieves unification of two parts of Jammu and Kashmir," Lone told a news conference. "Achievable Nationhood propounds the creation of a single Jammu and Kashmir Economic Union which would result in a boundary-less and prosperous Jammu and Kashmir," he said. Lone's peace formula comes a month after Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf said Islamabad would abandon its claim to Kashmir if India agreed to give the territory autonomy under joint supervision by both countries. India welcomed the proposal saying it could be discussed during formal peace talks between the two sides. The nuclear-armed South Asian rivals have fought two of their three

wars over Kashmir since they won independence from Britain in 1947. "The people of J&K (Jammu and Kashmir) have both a responsibility and a right to put forward a clear vision for their future," Lone said. Lone walked out of Kashmir's main separatist alliance, All Parties Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference, after his father and region's senior separatist leader, Abdul Gani Lone, was assassinated by unidentified gunmen in 2002. Authorities say violence has steadily decreased in Kashmir since India and Pakistan began a peace process in 2004. But people are still killed in daily shootouts and occasional grenade attacks. Officials say more than 40,000 people have been killed in the Muslim-majority region in a 17-year revolt against Indian

rule. Human rights groups put the toll at around 60,000 dead or missing. Meanwhile, two civilians were killed and 36 people injured when suspected Islamic rebels hurled a grenade at a security patrol in insurgency-racked Indian Kashmir on Saturday, police said. The attack took place in Shopian town, 50 kilometres (30 miles) south of Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar. The suspected Islamic rebels lobbed the grenade at the security patrol in a main market street, a police spokesman said. At least 32 civilians and four members of the security patrol were injured, the police spokesman said. The condition of four civilians was critical, he said.

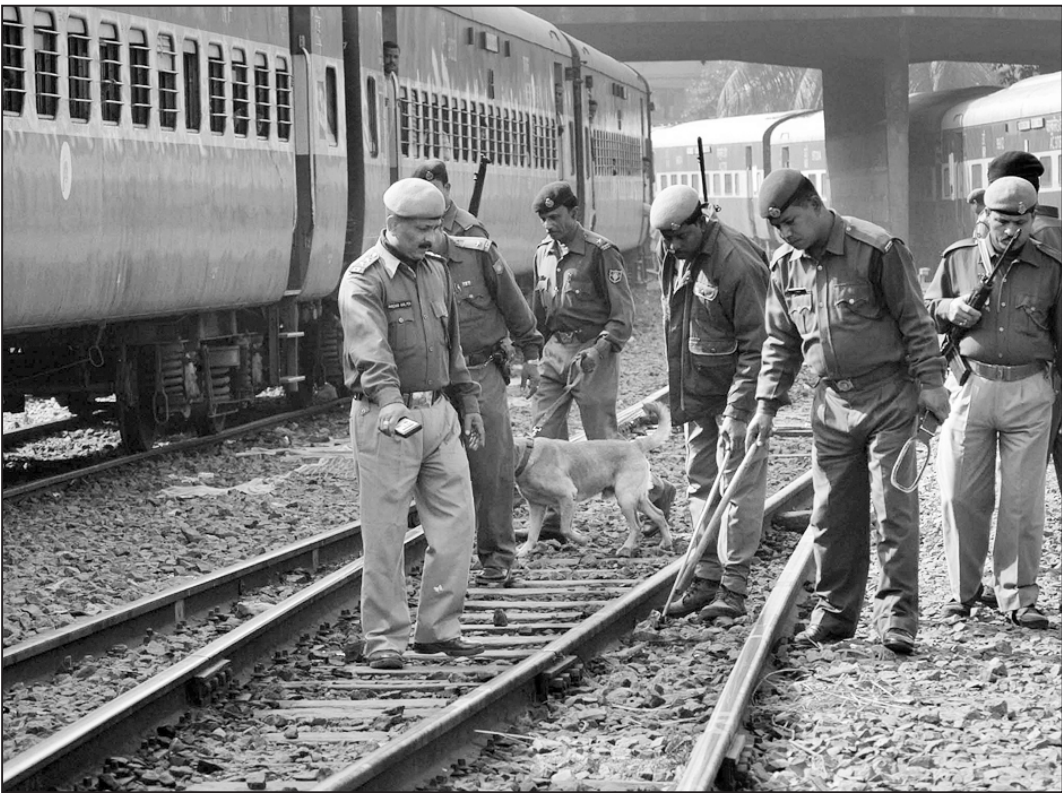


PHOTO: AFP

Indian security personnel check the railway tracks near the Guwahati Railway station in Guwahati, the capital city of India's northeastern state of Assam yesterday. Soldiers in armoured vehicles patrolled Assam, enforcing a curfew and with orders to shoot on sight after 57 people were killed in attacks blamed on separatist militants.

## Two killed in clash over West Bengal industrial hub

REUTERS, Kolkata

At least two people were killed and dozens injured in eastern India on Sunday after rival political activists hurled crude bombs and fired handguns over the acquisition of farmland for an industrial hub, police said. The industrial zone is to be built in West Bengal state with help from Indonesian conglomerate the Salim Group, but the project has faced opposition from farmers refusing to give up their land. The violence erupted in Nandigram, about 150 km north of Kolkata, capital of the communist-ruled state, which has been wooing domestic and foreign investors over the past few years. At least two persons are dead, but there are rumours of more people killed which we are verifying," Ashok Dutta, a senior police official told Reuters. Anger has simmered among Nandigram's farmers, but on Sunday tensions boiled over as villagers and supporters of opposition parties clashed with communist cadres.



PHOTO: AFP

A Sri Lankan female army soldier checks bus passengers at an entry point to Colombo yesterday. Eleven people were killed and 47 wounded Saturday when a suspected female suicide bomber blew up on a bus in Sri Lanka, the second deadly bus attack in two days.

## LTTE bombs fuelling ethnic backlash Says Lankan president

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's president yesterday accused Tiger rebels of stoking an ethnic backlash by majority Sinhalese on the minority Tamil community after 17 people died in bomb blasts on crowded buses at the weekend. "The aim of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) is to have a backlash against the Tamils and to undermine our efforts to find a peaceful solution," President Mahinda Rajapakse said in a statement released by his office Sunday. He appealed to the Sinhalese community to show maximum restraint to two separate bomb blasts blamed on suspected Tamil rebels on buses travelling the main southern coastal highway from the capital Colombo at the weekend. An LTTE defence spokesman,

Rasiah Ilanthirayan, denied any responsibility for the blasts, which occurred on a road widely used by tourists to reach southern beaches along Sri Lanka's west coast. Officials said 11 people were killed and 47 wounded Saturday when a suspected female suicide bomber blew up a bus near Ambalangoda, 85 kilometres (53 miles) south of Colombo. The attack followed a bus blast late Friday when six passengers were killed and another 70 wounded near Colombo. Authorities blamed both attacks on the LTTE, which is fighting for an independent Tamil homeland in a conflict that has claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1972. Fighting has escalated in the past year, with more than 3,800 people dead despite a nominal ceasefire agreement reached in 2002.

## Canadian FM assures Kabul of support

AFP, Kabul

Canada's foreign minister met President Hamid Karzai Sunday on a short visit to pledge support for insurgency-battered Afghanistan, where 2,500 Canadian troops are helping to fight the Taliban. Foreign Minister Peter MacKay said before the meeting he would also raise Pakistan's plans to mine and fence part of its border with Afghanistan to block routes used by militants operating across the frontier. Karzai and the United Nations have spoken out strongly against the plan, but Pakistan has not stepped down. MacKay was due Monday to meet Canadian troops serving with the NATO-led international

Security Assistance Force in the southern province of Kandahar -- the birthplace of the Taliban -- before returning home. Forty-four Canadian soldiers have lost their lives in Afghanistan since 2002, the year after the Taliban were driven from power. Around 190 foreign soldiers involved in the Afghanistan operation were killed last year, the bloodiest in the Taliban insurgency. Around 4,000 lives were lost over the year, with rebels accounting for most of the dead, according to official figures. The Canadian mission in the most volatile area of the country has come in for criticism from opposition parties in Ottawa and is among issues that threaten the position of the conservative minority government this year.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani Christian men push a cart displaying pictures of former UN secretary general Kofi Annan (R) and newly appointed UN secretary general Ban Ki-Moon during a "Peace Expectation Rally" in Islamabad yesterday. The rally was organised by Christian leader J Salik to welcome the newly appointed United Nation secretary general Ban Ki-moon for world peace.

## 2 babies, 2 women killed in Afghan blast

AP, Kabul

A roadside bomb ripped through a vehicle in eastern Afghanistan yesterday, killing a woman, her two newborn twin babies and the children's grandmother, an official said. The father of the twins and the vehicle's driver also were wounded in the blast in Mandozayi district, Khost province, said Jamal Arsalah, the province's governor. The babies were born on Saturday and the family was taking them back to their village, Arsalah said. It was not immediately clear why the vehicle was targeted. Militants usually use roadside bombs to attack Afghan and foreign troops on patrol. In southern Afghanistan on Sunday, two assailants on a motorbike gunned down a high school principal, an official said. Abdul Rahim was leaving the mosque near the town of Lashkar Gah in Helmand province when he was shot and killed, said Sajful Maluk Noori, the province's education director. Noori said the shooting was "a terrorist act" carried out by "the enemies of Afghanistan," a term used to describe Taliban militants. "This act will not stop our classes or our ongoing examinations," Noori said.

## Nepal's splinter rebel group ready for talks

REUTERS, Kathmandu

A splinter group of Nepal's Maoist rebels is ready for talks with the government to try to end a violent struggle in the south, its leader said. Jwala Singh, leader of the break-away Democratic Terai Liberation Front, also demanded the people of the southern plains region called Terai be allowed to run the army, police and the local administration of the region bordering India. "Our Front is ready for talks with the seven-party government and the Maoists in the presence of the United Nations if a written proposal is made and approved by parliament," Singh said in a statement late on Saturday.

The offer came a week after Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala said he was ready for talks with the insurgents. Singh's group broke away from the main Maoist rebels in 2004 and now operates in parts of the Terai. It says people of the region are not given a proper share of jobs or allocation of funds. Complicating matters, the group split into two factions last year and both factions say they are separately fighting for the rights of people in the area. The main Maoist group and the multi-party government signed a landmark peace deal in November declaring an end to a decade-old conflict that has killed more than 13,000 people.

## Yet another serial killing case in India

REUTERS, Hyderabad

Police investigating the sexual murders of two labourers have stumbled on India's second serial killing case in the space of a few days, digging up nine bodies so far in Hyderabad. "We are recovering bodies one after another," said S Prabhakar Reddy, a top police official. The killings follow the discovery of skulls from 17 people, mostly

children, at a house near New Delhi, in another murder drama that has transfixed India. Police had arrested two men after two labourers in Hyderabad, a centre for the tech sector, were sodomised and their heads smashed with a boulder. The arrested men told interrogators they had sodomised or raped and killed 13 people, most of them men but including two women.