

Kashmir militants vow to continue attacks: 3 killed

AFP, SRINAGAR

Three suspected Muslim rebels were shot dead yesterday in Indian Kashmir as the region's main guerilla group vowed to continue attacks and shun peace talks, police and reports said.

The three suspected rebels were killed trying to cross from the Pakistan side of the divided state early Sunday, a police spokesman said.

In other violence, a landmine attack by rebels on an Indian police convoy wounded 10 on the outskirts of the summer capital, Srinagar, on Sunday morning, a police spokesman said.

"The policemen were returning from counter-insurgency operations when the attack took place," he said, adding two policemen were in critical condition.

The fresh violence came as region's most powerful rebel group, Hizbul Mujahedin, said it would shun a call by New Delhi to lay down

arms and hold peace talks to resolve the 18-year rebellion against New Delhi's rule.

"The gun only can lead to the resolution of the Kashmir issue. We will never accept India's condition to shun the gun and join the dialogue process," Gazi Misbaudin, Hizbul's chief commander of operations told the local Current News Service in an interview.

New Delhi has held talks with some Kashmiri separatist groups who oppose the continued violence and want to be part of a peace process between India and Pakistan.

India and Pakistan both claim the Muslim-dominated region. New Delhi alleges Islamabad arms and trains the rebels. Pakistan denies the charge.

The two sides, however, have engaged in a peace process since January 2004 to resolve the dispute that has claimed at least 42,000 lives by official count since 1989.

British army scraps Sikh regiment idea: report

AFP, LONDON

The British army considered setting up a regiment for British Sikhs but dropped the idea because it did not want to segregate them from other soldiers, the Sunday Telegraph reported.

The decision has sparked disappointment among some Sikh community leaders, who said there would be enough interest to make up a regiment, the paper added.

The army has repeatedly been in the headlines over alleged racism in recent months -- in March, British soldiers from Commonwealth countries formed a new body to fight

discrimination in the armed forces.

The following day, a lawmaker with the main opposition Conservative Party, former army colonel Patrick Mercer, was forced to quit his shadow ministerial job after suggesting that being called "a black bastard" was a fact of life for ethnic minority British soldiers.

"The creation of a Sikh regiment has been considered by the army policy staff responsible for both equality and diversity issues, who went on to consult with the Commission for Racial Equality," a Ministry of Defence spokesman told the paper.



PHOTO: STAR

Agriculture Adviser Dr CS Karim speaks at a symposium on 'Bio-secure agriculture in Bangladesh: Current status and policy issues' at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On his left is Dr AMM Shawkat Ali and on his right are Dr Qazi Shahabuddin and FAO Representative Ad Spijkers. Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) jointly organised the event.

Dhaka, New Delhi talk today

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Upon arrival, Menon told the press the purpose of his visit is "To hold substantive discussions on bilateral issues between the two countries and to see how to take our relations forward, to our mutual benefit."

He will meet Foreign Adviser Pranab Mukherjee today as well as call on senior government officials.

Acting Foreign Secretary Touhid Hossain will lead the Bangladeshi delegation at the official talks, to be held at the State Guest House Padma.

Foreign ministry sources said, although all bilateral issues will be addressed during the talks, the two sides are more likely to press for operationalising mechanisms for further negotiations on the matters rather than 'quick fixes'.

Both sides had agreed to hold

secretary-level talks annually, but flagging Dhaka-New Delhi relations turned the meetings into a biennial affair, held alternately in Dhaka in 2003 and in New Delhi in 2005.

Foreign Adviser Iftekhhar Ahmed Chowdhury in April, following his meeting with his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee on the sidelines of the Saarc summit in New Delhi, promised regular secretary-level talks as part of a "new upward trajectory" in Dhaka-New Delhi relations.

As a result of the talks, a MoU

Attack plotted against German minister in Afghanistan

AFP, BERLIN

German authorities learned of a plot to attack Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung when he visited Afghanistan earlier this month, the Bild am Sonntag newspaper reported.

Jung visited German troops in northern Afghanistan on June 6 but the trip was not officially announced for security reasons.

The German intelligence services warned of the plot just before the minister landed near Kabul, Bild said, citing the defence ministry and sources close to the intelligence community.

"The tip-off about a planned attack was very clear," the defence ministry is quoted as telling the newspaper.

As a result, the German army changed Jung's travel plans.

Germany has around 3,000 troops in Afghanistan serving under Nato's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), most of them in the relatively calm north of the country.

On May 19, a suicide bomb killed three German soldiers and six civilians in a crowded market in the town of Kunduz, 300 kilometres (190 miles) north of Kabul, in Germany's biggest loss in Afghanistan since 2003.

between Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institutions (BSTI) and the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is expected to be signed, which was recently approved by the council of advisers.

The MoU would be in line with Dhaka's emphasis on trade during the talks, with Bangladesh looking to close the cumulative trade deficit of \$7 to \$8 billion with India.

According to the MoU provisions, BSTI and BIS would standardise quality controls to allow the BSTI to perform tests and certify Bangladeshi goods for export to India.

These are the first steps to remove non-tariff barriers, long demanded by Bangladesh to expand its market in India, and especially stressed by Iftekhhar during informal bilateral talks during the last Saarc Summit.

Bangladesh has also demanded the removal of para-tariff barriers, which raises the price of Bangladeshi exports in India due to Indian customs surcharges, additional charges, internal taxes and charges levied on imports, and decreed customs valuation.

The secretary-level talks, including Menon's call on the foreign adviser later today, are expected to re-energise deals on joint-border patrolling and border demarcation issues between Dhaka and New Delhi.

Other issues, such as water and mutual concerns regarding fugitive criminals on either side of the border, are likely to receive attention during the talks.

The meet is also expected to bring up the multi-billion dollar investment proposals from two Indian business giants, Mittal and Tata.

High-level government sources, however, say that the government does not want to decide on the Tata and Mittal investment plans and wants an elected government to make the decisions.

Rice in Paris for major Darfur conference

AFP, PARIS

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived in Paris yesterday to take part in an international conference aimed at launching a new drive to end atrocities in Sudan's Darfur region.

Rice will on Monday join representatives of France, China, Russia and several other nations for the meeting held after Sudan bowed to months of pressure and agreed to the deployment of peacekeepers in Darfur under the United Nations and the African Union.

"I think that obviously France is taking a new and... energising role in Darfur.... And really we need the energy on Darfur," she told journalists on the plane to Paris.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy and his Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner have made Darfur a top priority amid concern over instability spreading to neighbouring Chad and the Central African Republic, two French

regional allies.

France last week launched an air bridge to ferry aid to Darfur victims in eastern Chad and is considering a humanitarian force to help some 500,000 internally displaced Chadians and refugees from Darfur.

Kouchner earlier this month visited refugee camps in eastern Chad and spoke of "the world's emotions" about the Darfur conflict in talks with Sudanese President Omar el-Beshir.

Rice said yesterday that she felt China, accused by some critics of helping Khartoum bankroll some of the atrocities in Darfur, had "been more outspoken about the need" to get the peacekeeping force in place.

"But I do think that there is more that will need to be done by China and by everyone to make sure that the Sudanese are finally going to carry through," she said.