



Indian policemen inspect the wreckage of a bus after an explosion in Srinagar on Saturday. At least two people were killed in a powerful blast set off by Islamic militants near the main jail in Indian Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar.

PHOTO: AFP

4 killed in Kashmir car bomb blast

AFP, Srinagar

At least four people were killed late Saturday in a powerful car bomb blast set off by militants near the main jail in Indian Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, police said.

"So far we have three policemen and a woman dead and 15 others injured," police spokesman Prabhakar Tripathi told AFP.

He described the explosion as "powerful" and said it was an attack by Islamic militants fighting Indian rule.

"The militants had planted an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) inside an abandoned car and triggered the blast by using a remote control device," Tripathi said.

The rebels targeted a police bus that was returning to another town after dropping some of the convicts at the jail.

Police in Indian-ruled Kashmir have announced a 20,000-dollar reward for information on who was behind a car bomb that left four people dead and 15 others injured, officials said Sunday.

Police have blamed the attack, which hit a police bus, on Muslim militants fighting to end Indian rule in the scenic Himalayan region.

"Whoever provides information about the

militants involved in the blast will be given a reward of one million rupees (20,000 dollars)," a police spokesman said in Srinagar.

It was the first major blast in the region this year after a lull in violence by the Muslim-majority region's insurgency, which according to official figures has left more than 47,000 people dead since it began twenty years ago.

The explosion, which took place 150 meters (164 yards) from Srinagar's central jail, shattered nearby windows and could be heard in a five-kilometre (three-mile) radius.

"It was a deafening blast. The impact has smashed all the window panes of our home and damaged several other houses," one witness, Sabeya Hameed, said by telephone.

She said she saw some of the casualties being loaded into ambulances to be taken to hospital but did not know whether they were civilians or security personnel.

The blast even set fire to a huge tree and caused a big crater at the scene.

Ramadan, which started August 23, has been marked by increased violence in Kashmir in the past as some militants believe those who die fighting during the holy month gain more heavenly rewards.

S Korea to train 3,000 'cyber sheriffs'

AFP, Seoul

South Korea plans to train 3,000 "cyber sheriffs" by next year to protect businesses after a spate of attacks on state and private websites, a report said Sunday.

"The 'cyber sheriffs' would be tasked with 'protecting corporate information and preventing the leaks of industrial secrets,'" Yonhap news agency said.

In the event of cyber attacks, the National Intelligence Service, the country's main spy agency, would set up a taskforce including civilian and government experts to counter the online threats, it added.

The country already has a military cyber unit.

South Korean and US government and private websites came under sustained attack in July designed to swamp and paralyze operations.

Afghans face dark months as vote fracas drags on

AFP, Kabul

Afghans face dark months ahead as vote rigging claims overshadow eagerly-anticipated elections, with the prospect of a lengthy and bitter bout of political unrest coming as the Taliban are at their fiercest.

Although preliminary results show President Hamid Karzai on the path to victory in the August polls, the sweep of fraud allegations and pitifully low turnout means credibility could slip away from his Western-backed government.

No one expects the official announcement of Afghanistan's new president to go ahead as scheduled on Thursday, already a blow to a process seen as a key test of Western-backed efforts to bring stability here after an eight-year war.

The Independent Election Commission has earmarked hundreds of thousands of ballots for audit and fraud investigators are only just beginning their task.

Haroun Mir, of the Afghanistan Centre for

Research and Policy Studies, predicted that war-scarred and fragile Afghanistan was "probably heading for another couple of months of this political crisis."

"People are losing faith in the Afghan government and Nato because of this political crisis," said Mir.

Afghanistan's electoral law says a candidate must receive 50 percent plus at least one vote to be declared the winner. If no candidate achieves this result, a run-off between the two top-scoring candidates takes place.

Karzai currently has 54.3 percent of the preliminary count.

In the worst case scenario, Mir told AFP, the electoral fraud complaints could take up to two months to iron out before final results are declared.

If a run-off was needed, it would have to be postponed until next spring or summer as winter snows would hamper election logistics.

London-based think-tank the International Council on Security and Development has

already warned that this would create a political vacuum when Afghanistan needs a functioning government to begin tackling its vast problems.

What worries Afghanistan's Western allies is that all the mud-slinging, delays and upheaval could play into the hands of Islamist militants, who have regrouped since the 2001 US-led ouster of the Taliban.

"The beneficiary of that would be the Taliban and al-Qaeda," Richard Holbrooke, top US envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, told the BBC last week when asked about delays in the election process.

The Taliban insurgency to topple Karzai's government and force out the approximately 100,000 US and Nato-led troops here has worsened each year, with 2009 seeing record numbers of foreign military casualties.

The foreign deaths have sent public support for the war in coalition member states plummeting, with Western leaders facing calls to withdraw.

Pakistan to respond to Indian dossier next week: Malik

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan Interior Advisor Rehman Malik has said that Islamabad would hand over its response on the latest Indian dossier regarding the Mumbai terror attacks to New Delhi next week.

Malik, who chaired a meeting to review the progress of the 26/11 probe, asked the concerned authorities to follow the due process of law and ensure an efficient and transparent investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Minister of State for Law and Justice, Chaudhry Muhammad Afzal Sandhu, Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, senior officers of the Ministry of Interior, DG FIA and the head of the Investigation team on Mumbai attacks were also present in the meeting, The Nation reports.

Nato fighter jets violate Pak airspace

3 Pak soldiers killed in attacks

ANI, AFP, Islamabad/ Peshawar

Two Nato fighter jets reportedly flew inside Pakistan's airspace for nearly two hours on Saturday.

The airspace violation took place in different parts of the Khyber Agency bordering the Afghan border.

The aircraft were seen hovering over Bacha Mina, Khwaga Khel, Sheikh Mal Khel, Piro Khel, Ashmali Khel, and Loya Shalman areas creating panic and unrest among the local residents.

This is the first time that fighter jets of the allied forces have violated Pakistan's airspace.

Violation by helicopter gunships have been frequently reported in the recent past, The Nation reports.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's military on Sunday appealed to people in the Khyber tribal region to help security forces defeat militancy, as three soldiers were killed in attacks.

The army launched an offensive in the tribal district near the Afghan border early this month after a suicide

bomber targeted a border post killing 22 policemen.

"We appeal to the people of Khyber to defeat militancy and cooperate with the security forces in identifying militants hiding in the area," a statement from the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC) said on Sunday.

Earlier, two soldiers were killed and three others wounded on Sunday when a military convoy was hit by a roadside bomb in Bara town in Khyber, the region's administration chief Tariq Hayat told AFP.

In another attack, a soldier died when militants attacked security forces with hand grenades during a search and clearance operation in Swat, the military said.

Pakistani troops on Saturday killed 22 militants and destroyed three hideouts in an operation in Khyber's remote Tirah valley.

Authorities also sacked over 350 tribal police officers on Saturday when they failed to report for duty after militant leader Mangal Bagh threatened reprisals against those who did not quit their jobs.

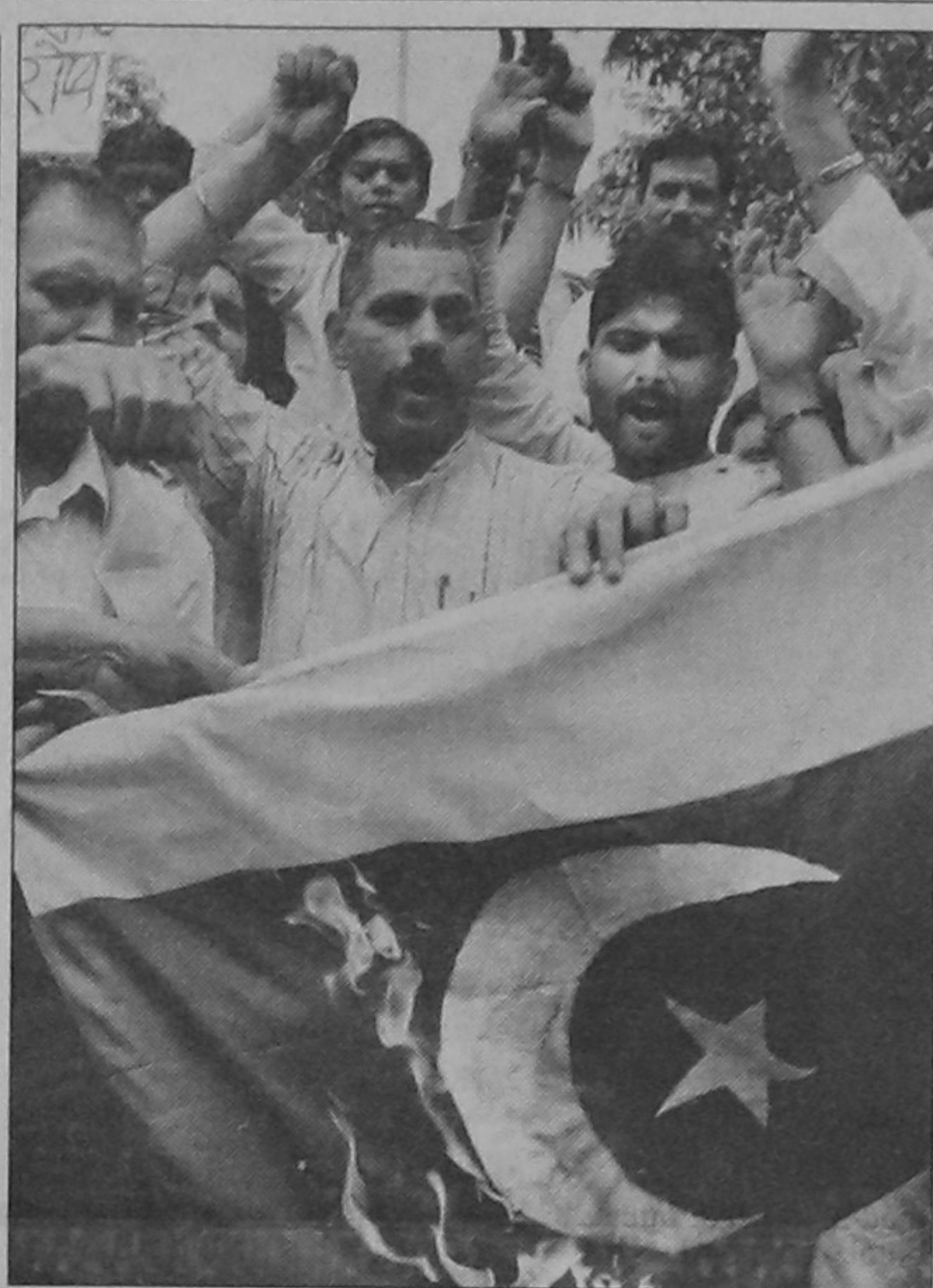


PHOTO: AFP

Indian activists of the right-wing Hindu organisation, the Shiv Sena shout slogans as they burn a Pakistani national flag during a protest against the Pakistani government in Amritsar yesterday. India accused Pakistani frontier troops on Saturday of firing two rockets across the border near a popular tourist attraction site in northern Punjab.



PHOTO: AFP

Members of a leftist students' group holds a rally in front of the US Embassy in Manila yesterday. Student protesters called for the scrapping of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), which allows US troops to take part in joint military exercises in the Philippines, after a decade since it was ratified. The students accused the US of meddling in Philippine affairs.

North Korean ready for third nuclear test

ANI, Pyongyang

North Korean leader Kim Jong Il has reportedly instructed party and military leaders to start preparing for a third nuclear test with the use of enriched uranium.

Fox News quoted Kim as saying that the "emphasised the importance of improvement of nuclear technologies with the aim of attracting the US to direct bilateral talks."

According to sources, the meeting between Kim and military leaders and high-ranking officials of North

Korean regime took place on August 26 in the port city of Wonsan.

Sources added that the date of nuclear test could be September 20, which marks the official end of the "150-Day Battle."

Another date being speculated as the possible test date is October 10 when the Labour Party of Korea was founded.

Earlier, US State Department spokesman PJ Crowley had said that Washington was preparing to accept Pyongyang's offer for one-on-one talks as part of

efforts to resume the six-nation negotiations.

But he insisted there has been no shift from previous US statements that Washington would only meet with North Korea as part of the six-nation process.

In April, Pyongyang had pulled out of the talks with the US, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan in protest of international criticism of what it claimed to be a satellite launch, but which other nations suspected was a test of long-range missile technology.

Japan's Democrats to take power amid high expectations

AFP, Tokyo

Half a century of almost uninterrupted conservative rule in Japan will come to an end this week as Yukio Hatoyama's Democrats take power, facing huge pressure to revive the economy.

It is the first time since 1955 that the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has been voted out of government in the world's number two economy, and only their second stint ever in opposition.

Hatoyama -- whose Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) won a landslide general election victory two weeks ago with a promise of change -- is set to be appointed prime minister by parliament on Wednesday.

Experts say his honeymoon with voters may not last long.

Opinion polls show the DPJ faces high expectations from voters eager to see an improvement in the ailing economy following the worst slump in decades, but pulling the country out of its long economic malaise will be no easy task.

While the recession may be over, officially at least, unemployment and homelessness are on the rise and the country faces major long-term challenges to cope with an ageing and shrinking population as well as soaring public debt.

"Drastic changes won't come immediately. But the DPJ must show tangible changes that people can see and feel in order to stay in government," said Tomoaki Iwai, a professor of politics at Tokyo's Nihon University.

Hatoyama, 62, has laid out an ambitious agenda, promising to boost household income through financial assistance for families and farmers, free high school education and an end to highway tolls -- all without raising taxes.

He has delighted environmentalists but irked business leaders by pledging to cut Japan's greenhouse gas emissions by ambitious 25 percent by 2020 from 1990 levels -- if other major emitters commit to similarly aggressive goals.

Afghans allowed to question detention

AP, Washington

The Pentagon has begun putting into place a new programme under which hundreds of prisoners being held by the military in Afghanistan will be given the right to challenge their detentions, a defence official said yesterday.

Prisoners at Bagram military base are all to be given a US military official to serve as their personal representative and a chance to go before new so-called Detainee Review Boards, to have their cases considered, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to be able to discuss a programme that has not been formally announced.

The initiative amounts to the first time prisoners will be able to call witnesses and submit evidence in their defence. There are some 600 detainees at the facility, some who have been held for up to six years.

Peace can't be possible till Maoists shed arms

ANI, Kathmandu

Nepalese Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal said here on Saturday, that peace cannot be established as long as the Maoist rebels do not surrender all their weapons.

Addressing students Madhav Kumar accused the Maoists, led by former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', of playing divi-

sive politics.

"To enter into a pact with the government and then blame others is bad... Nobody asked Maoists to walk out of the government, they left the government of their own... They are busy in criticizing me and my government. I feel they have deep grudge, that's why they are speaking ill of me," Madhav Kumar Nepal said.



PHOTO: AFP

Afghan journalist Sultan Munadi's son Parsa (3), sits with his grandfather (2R) during a press conference in Kabul yesterday. British commandos who rescued British-Irish journalist Stephen Farrell from his Taliban kidnappers left behind the body of his Afghan colleague Sultan Munadi because they were cornered under heavy fire from militants, Nato said. Sultan Munadi's brother Mohammad Osman has told AFP that he believed the operation was unnecessary and Munadi's death avoidable.

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