

Militants Kill 35 Hindus Days Before Talks on Kashmir

By [SOMINI SENGUPTA](#)

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NEW DELHI, May 1 — Thirty-five Hindus were killed in recent days in two separate incidents in the Indian-administered portion of the disputed Kashmir province, the police said. The killings were believed to be the handiwork of Islamist militants just days before a scheduled meeting between the Indian prime minister and Kashmiri separatists.

In one incident, gunmen stormed a village in the Doda district, dragged Hindu villagers from their homes and shot 22 of them dead. In another, in the neighboring Udhampur district, suspected militants kidnapped 13 villagers from a remote mountainous spot. Four of their bodies were found lying in the woods late Sunday, while the rest were discovered Monday, the police said.

Even by the standards of blood-soaked Kashmir, it was a particularly grisly pair of incidents — and the deadliest violence since peace talks began more than two years ago between [India](#) and [Pakistan](#), neighbors and rivals on the question of Kashmir. The attacks are worrisome because they appear intended to fuel Hindu-Muslim tensions.

Their impact is likely to be felt during the talks about Kashmir's future, scheduled to begin Wednesday between the Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh, and a coalition of Kashmiri separatist leaders known as the All Parties Hurriyat Conference.

Mr. Singh and the leaders of Hurriyat were swift to condemn the fresh violence. But that does not mean that the negotiations will yield quick results. The last time the prime minister announced a roundtable on Kashmir, in February, Hurriyat leaders did not show up. Along with the Pakistani government, they have stepped up their criticism of the Indian government, contending that it is dragging its feet on a resolution to the Kashmir dispute.

"People of Kashmir have rejected and rebuffed terrorists repeatedly," Mr. Singh said in a statement on Monday.

Killings of Hindu and Sikh villagers became a routine form of terrorism some years ago, when relations between India and Pakistan were at a low ebb. The most infamous of the massacres was in March 2000, on the eve of President Clinton's state visit to India, when 37 Sikhs were killed in the village of Chattisinghpora.

Peace talks between India and Pakistan have, even by the Indian government's assessment, radically reduced violence in Indian Kashmir. But the killings, for which India blames both Pakistani security forces and militants, have hardly stopped.

The coming months are crucial for the peace efforts. It is usually in the summer, after the snows have melted on the rugged mountains of Kashmir, that Indians accuse Pakistan-backed insurgents of crossing over to the Indian side of the de facto border and stirring up trouble.

Only if Indians see that infiltration and violence are down are they likely to agree to any deals on Kashmir, including pulling back troops from the Siachen Glacier, one of the costliest and deadliest missions for the armies of both countries.

Yusuf Jameel contributed reporting from Srinagar for this article.