

Militants Kill 24 Hindus in Kashmir

By Rama Lakshmi
Special to The Washington Post
Tuesday, March 25, 2003; Page A10

NEW DELHI, March 24 -- Suspected Muslim militants gunned down 24 people in a Hindu village in India's part of the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir early today, police officials said, raising fears of renewed hostility between India and Pakistan.

Police said about 25 heavily armed militants dressed in police uniforms descended on the remote village of Nadimarg, about 30 miles south of Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim majority state.

"The men overpowered and disarmed the village security guards before firing indiscriminately at the villagers," said A.K. Suri, the police chief in Kashmir. Two children and 11 women were among those killed.

Indian news channels showed images of wailing women squatting on the ground and beating their chests in front of a row of corpses, each shrouded in white cloth. The attack was the bloodiest since state elections last September, when a new government took over with the promise of "a healing touch" for the violence-torn region. India's deputy prime minister, L.K. Advani, planned to visit the village on Tuesday.

Kashmir has been a hotbed of revolt and the trigger of two wars between India and Pakistan, both of which possess nuclear weapons. The countries each claim sovereignty over Kashmir. Pakistan-backed Muslim militants have for 13 years waged an armed insurgency to end Indian rule. According to officials, more than 35,000 people have died in the conflict.

© 2003 The Washington Post Company