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The region has seen a succession of killings

Police in Indian-administered Kashmir now say about 70 people have been killed in a wave of attacks by Muslim separatist militants in the last 24 hours.

The violence began only hours after militant groups publicly rejected the idea of joining a ceasefire called by the largest group, Hizbul Mujahideen.

The Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, accused militant groups backed or protected by Pakistan of launching the attacks in a bid to derail recent peace efforts.

But he told parliament in Delhi his government was determined to pursue the peace process and would not be cowed by terrorism.

The latest violence follows a statement from an alliance of Kashmiri militant groups on Tuesday rejecting India's offer of peace talks.

In the most recent attack, 11 Hindus were shot and killed in the village of Pogal in the Jammu region of southern Kashmir on Wednesday morning.

Late on Tuesday, 19 Hindu labourers were massacred at a brick kiln south of the capital, Srinagar. Seven others were killed in a separate attack nearby.

Two days of tension

Militants reject peace talks

Gun battle with police - around 30 die

Brick labourers massacred south of Srinagar- 19 dead

Separate attack nearby - seven dead

Villagers shot in Pogal village - 11 dead

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Those attacks came only hours after the killing of about 30 people in an exchange of fire between the militants and Indian security forces at Pahalgam, along the route of pilgrimage to the Hindu cave shrine of Amarnath.

'Instructions from Pakistan'

Mr Vajpayee told parliament that innocent people were dying.

"It is clear that... after the Hizbul Mujahideen's ceasefire call and moves for peace talks, either groups which enjoy Pakistan's protection or militant groups that take instructions from Pakistan have decided to end the peace and attack and kill innocent people," he said.

"The path we are following in Jammu and Kashmir is one of peace and we will not leave it.

Whatever difficulties we encounter, we will face. A message should go from this house that we will not be cowed down by terrorism."

The BBC's Mike Wooldridge in Delhi says the Hizbul Mujahideen militants have also indicated that they will not allow the latest killings to derail peace attempts.

In Tuesday's massacre south of Srinagar, the militants struck at a brick kiln at Mirbazar in Anandnag district shortly before midnight. They are said to have fired indiscriminately at the Hindu labourers who were asleep.

Shoot-out

The victims were migrant workers from the Indian states of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

Earlier in the evening the militants had fired at Indian police at Pahalgam, along the pilgrimage route to the Hindu cave temple at Amarnath.

The police returned fire and in the ensuing gun battle 25 civilians are said to have died, along with two policemen and two militants. A further 46 people were injured in the exchange.

An indefinite curfew has been imposed in the Hindu majority city of Jammu, as a precautionary measure.

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