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Relatives and friends mourn a murdered Hindu women

By Daniel Lak in Delhi

For the second day running, suspected Muslim militant gunmen have shot dead members of the Hindu faith in the troubled territory of Indian-administered Kashmir.



In the latest incident, five Hindu truck drivers were separated from followers of other religions in a convoy of vehicles that were stopped by militants on the main highway. They were then shot dead.

On Sunday, four Kashmiri Hindus in a remote village in the south of the territory were murdered.

More vicious phase

The killing of Hindus by Muslim militants in Kashmir usually comes as the conflict there enters a dangerous and more vicious phase.

For centuries various religions co-existed relatively peacefully in Kashmir but about 10 years ago, attacks by Muslim separatist militants drove many tens of thousands of Hindu Kashmiris into exile.

Since then there have been more killings of those Hindus who stayed behind.

Sunday's killings in a remote village is the sort of attack that has

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come more often in recent years of the conflict.

It was also in an area of Indian Kashmir remote from the traditional Hindu areas of settlement in the Kashmir Valley.

As for the murder of the five truck drivers, it seems certain they were singled out because of their religion.



Security has been stepped up in Kashmir ahead of President Clinton's visit to India

Muslims and Sikhs who were part of the convoy stopped by militants on the highway south of Srinagar were not harmed as the gunmen shot dead the five Hindus.

'Ethnic cleansing'

The authorities in Delhi and Kashmir say Muslim militants backed by Pakistan have an agenda of ethnic cleansing as part of their violent campaign to wrest Kashmir from Indian control.

Pakistan denies this and any active involvement in the insurgency.

But it appears that fears in India of heightened militant violence in Kashmir before President Clinton's visit to the region next month are coming true.

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