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India has blamed two Pakistani-backed groups for the attack

The funerals have taken place of 36 Sikhs gunned down in Kashmir as President Clinton began a landmark visit to India.

There were emotional scenes as the bodies were cremated at the local temple in the mainly Sikh village of Chattisinghpora, 70km south of the state capital Srinagar.

A crowd of more than 1,000 people had gathered to take part in the ceremonies.

The attack on Monday night was carried out by 40 to 50 gunmen, according to police.

They forced the residents from their homes, segregating the men from the women.

They then opened fire on the men with automatic weapons. Thirty-four died instantly, while one died in hospital later.

In another incident in Kashmir, police say separatist militants have stormed a camp used by Indian security personnel in the capital, Srinagar.

The camp has now been surrounded by Indian forces.

A spokesman for a militant group, Lashkar-e Toiba, said the



Sikhs have not been targeted before in Kashmir

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▀ The BBC's Mike Wooldridge reports "No one had expected an attack on a Sikh village"  real **28k**

Condemnation

The killings of the Sikhs have been condemned by all sides.

At a news conference in Delhi, Mr Clinton said it was a "brutal attack" and a reminder of the violence which had blighted the region.

He also urged India and Pakistan to open a dialogue to resolve the Kashmir dispute.

"The violence must end," said Mr Clinton.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee described it as an act of ethnic cleansing, and said: "We have the means and the will to eliminate this menace."

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Behari Vajpayee

Pakistan has condemned the killings and demanded a thorough investigation.

"We will very much look forward to a thorough inquiry to be conducted so that it is not exploited for purposes of propaganda in order to deflect attention from Indian repression in Kashmir," said Pakistan's Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar.

India's National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, said India had evidence the killings were carried out by two Pakistani-backed militant groups, Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hizbul Mujahideen.

A spokesman for one of the groups denied involvement, and said the Indian authorities carried out the attack in order to discredit separatist groups.

Monday's killings were the first in which members of the tiny Sikh community have been killed anywhere in Indian-administered Kashmir.

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