



Villagers watch as rescue workers search for survivors in twisted carriages of two passenger trains following an accident in Purwodadi district, Central Java, some 451km east of Jakarta yesterday. At least 13 people were killed and 26 others injured when the two passenger trains collided.

41 Taliban, 6 cops killed in major Afghan battle

District governor killed in ambush

AFP, Kandahar

Forty-one suspected Taliban and six policemen were killed in a major battle in southern Afghanistan in an area where the Taliban leader once lived, a governor said yesterday.

The battle southwest of Kandahar city lasted almost the entire day Friday, with helicopters from the US-led coalition firing rockets in support of Afghan forces on the ground.

"In the result, 41 Taliban were killed, a big number of them were wounded," Kandahar governor Assadullah Khalid told AFP.

"Six police were martyred, nine police were wounded," he said, adding that three civilians were also wounded and 13 Taliban arrested.

The dead included a district police chief, he said.

In a separate ambush, Taliban insurgents gunned down an Afghan district governor in troubled southern Afghanistan Saturday in insurgency-hit Helmand province, police said.

Abdul Majeed, the governor for the province's Baghran district, was killed in his car, district police chief Bahaudin Khan told AFP. "Our

district governor was martyred today," he said.

A Taliban spokesman, Yousuf Ahmadi, said by telephone the movement was responsible for the attack. He claimed seven police were also killed but this was rejected by Khan.

Khalid said Taliban fighters had gathered in the area, which includes the Panjwayi and Zarai districts about 40km southwest of Kandahar city, for about three days after fleeing an offensive in neighbouring Helmand province.

A Taliban spokesman said the battle had started with a Taliban attack. The spokesman, Yousuf Ahmadi, only acknowledged two Taliban deaths and said three of the fighters were wounded.

"Late in the day the US planes appeared and Taliban escaped the area. Lots of civilians were killed by the bombing in the village," he said by telephone from an unknown location.

Two wounded civilians and four wounded police were in hospital in Kandahar city, an AFP reporter said.

Nepalese cry 'hang the king' as opposition vows more protests

AFP, Kathmandu

Thousands of Nepalese protesters shouting "Hang King Gyanendra" marched in the capital Saturday after opposition parties dismissed the monarch's new pledge of elections as a hollow offer.

The protesters walked five kilometres (three miles), blowing whistles and chanting "Leave the palace, we will run the country" and "Give us back our rights" as onlookers cheered and clapped, some joining the procession.

Riot police watched the pro-democracy protest but did not intervene. A police official told AFP there were no arrests.

The march came after the seven-party opposition alliance coordinating committee vowed to step up its anti-king campaign and strictly implement an indefinite general strike, saying Gyanendra had "failed to address the political crisis."

The past week has seen the most intense protests against

Gyanendra's regime since he seized power 14 months ago. Thousands have demonstrated, hundreds have been arrested and four protesters have been killed by security services.

Gyanendra said Friday in a message marking Nepal's New Year: "There is no alternative to multiparty democracy." He expressed a desire for "an exemplary democratic exercise like general elections" but set no dates for a poll.

Earlier Saturday, baton-wielding police charged about 100 journalists who staged a rally in the capital and chanted "Restore complete democracy," witnesses said. Around six journalists were injured and half a dozen arrested, they said.

Opposition parties promised to step up protests after Nepal's Maoist rebel leader accused Gyanendra late Friday of "feudal stubbornness."

"The king and royal army have made it clear that they want to

continue their rule over the people and the country," said the Maoist leader Prachanda.

A general strike that began April 6 had been tapering off amid hopes the king would reach out to opponents in his message.

But following opposition disappointment at the king's speech, most businesses and shops shut again in the Kathmandu valley and few vehicles travelled the streets where security men stood guard.

Once foes, the opposition parties and Maoists entered a loose alliance last November, further isolating King Gyanendra, the world's only Hindu monarch.

The rebels, who have been waging a 10-year battle to topple the monarchy, have called a ceasefire in the Kathmandu valley to aid the protest campaign but have continued attacks on security forces elsewhere in the Himalayan kingdom.

US bans business with Hamas

REUTERS, Jerusalem

The US government said on Friday it barred American citizens, US companies and foreign companies operating in the United States from doing most business with the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority, warning violators could face sanctions.

The US Treasury Department gave them 30 days to terminate ongoing contracts and programmes with the Authority.

"Transactions with the Palestinian Authority by US persons are prohibited, unless licensed," a Treasury Department document said, citing "existing terrorism sanctions programmes."

Treasury Department spokeswoman Molly Millerwise said: "Companies operating in the US are subject to US jurisdiction. Likewise, US companies operating abroad are still subject to US jurisdiction and must abide by US law."

Bomb blasts at Delhi Jama Masjid

Cops on alert

AFP, New Delhi

Security was stepped up at temples and mosques in northern India Saturday to guard against reprisal attacks as police hunted for those responsible for blasts at the country's biggest mosque in which 14 people were injured.

Officials said it was too early to say who was behind the two explosions, which occurred after Friday evening prayers at the crowded 17th-century Jama Masjid in the old quarter of the capital.

Life at the mosque resumed its regular routine by early Saturday as Muslims attended prayer services.

"There's no panic. Everything is normal. People have been coming in for prayers," mosque spokesman Amanulla Khan said.

Police often suspect such attacks on religious sites are aimed at fomenting violence between Hindus and Muslims. New Delhi has had to battle conflicts instigated by both Hindu extremists and Islamic militants.

Cheney income tops Bush 12-fold

AFP, Washington

US Vice President Dick Cheney and his wife earned 8.82 million dollars last year, some 12 times the amount President George W. Bush made, the White House said Friday.

But the Cheneys donated 6.9 million dollars of their income to charity, cutting their net income to a more manageable 1.96 million dollars -- meaning that they will get a tax refund of 1.9 million dollars.

The president and his wife Laura Bush reported a net income, after charitable donations and other deductions, of 618,694 dollars for 2005, of which 400,000 came from his White House salary.

Their income was down from 672,788 dollars declared last year.

The presidential couple gave 75,560 dollars to charities during the year, including relief funds after Hurricane Katrina last August and to help Pakistan after its devastating earthquake last year.

Their net income left them with a federal tax bill of 187,768 dollars.

Cheney's stock options from his previous stint as chief executive at oil services firm Halliburton pushed his and his wife Lynne's combined gross income to 8.82 million dollars.