

20 Taliban killed in Nato strikes

Blast near Pak consulate in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul/Herat

Nato-led ground troops backed by air power killed more than 20 Taliban-linked militants in a battle in central Afghanistan that erupted after a bomb wounded some soldiers, an official said yesterday.

Nato's International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) confirmed Wednesday's fighting in Ghazni province's Andar area, about 150km southwest of Kabul, but could give no details.

The fighting started after a roadside bomb hit an Isaf vehicle, and slightly injured some soldiers,

Captain Mark Windsor said.

The spokesman could not say how many insurgents were killed when military forces hit back.

Ghazni province spokesman Ismail Jahangir said reports from the district were that more than 20 rebels were killed.

"The international forces had an operation against Taliban in Andar district yesterday. We have reports that more than 20 Taliban were killed," Jahangir told AFP.

It was not possible to independently confirm the figures because of the remoteness of the area, where Taliban extremists are

active.

The Taliban were ousted from government in a US-led invasion in late 2001 and are waging an insurgency to take back power.

The unrest has increased every year, with this year shaping up to be the most violent.

Meanwhile, a small bomb exploded yesterday near Pakistan's consulate in Afghanistan's western city of Herat, injuring a policeman and a woman, police said.

The bomb, attached to a bicycle, appeared to have been detonated remotely, deputy city police chief Ghulam Sarwar Haidary told AFP.

Pak troops vacate fort in tribal area

12 civilians killed in clashes

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistani officials said yesterday that troops were vacating a key fort in a tribal area bordering Afghanistan, identified by the United States as a haven for Islamic militants.

Earlier at least 12 civilians, including seven members of the same family, were killed yesterday in fresh clashes between troops and Taliban militants in northwestern

Pakistan, officials said.

Helicopter gunships pounded militant positions in the Swat Valley in a second day of fighting, which has brought a two-month-old peace deal in the former tourist region to the brink of collapse.

The civilians died when shells hit houses, gardens and even a golf course a day after five soldiers and 25 extremists were killed in a gunbattle sparked by a militant

attack on a checkpost.

Residents said shells hit a house

early Thursday in the Deolai area of Swat, killing five children and their parents.

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hospital for local tribesmen and some 300 troops have begun leaving, said Major General Mohammad Alam Khattak, head of the paramilitary Frontier Corps.

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Nepali PM seeks to meet Manmohan on Saarc summit sidelines

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kathmandu

Nepal's caretaker Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who is scheduled to attend the 15th Saarc Summit in Colombo this week amid uproar among the political parties, is seeking a bilateral meeting with his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh on the sidelines of the regional meet.

The meeting between the two premiers is likely to trigger another controversy in Nepal with the Maoists regarding the wily politician, considered New Delhi's favourite, with wariness.

A chastened Koirala was forced to pare his jumbo 35-member delegation, which would have cost the cash-strapped nation dependent on foreign aid Nepali Rs 7.3 million, to only 10 members after an uproar on Wednesday among the major parties as well as in the caretaker parliament.

However, the team still includes his daughter, minister without portfolio Sujata Koirala, whose inclusion was opposed by the Maoists on the ground that she lost the April election. Koirala's personal physician, secretary and adviser on foreign affairs are also in the entourage.

Though officially Nepal wants to discuss enhanced investment and hydropower issues with India, the Maoists feel Koirala would also try to gauge the extent of Indian support for him and his Nepali Congress (NC) party.

The bilateral meeting between Koirala and Singh is likely to have a crucial effect on Nepal's future politics.

The talks also follow a string of bomb blasts in India – in the western commercial hub of

Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore.

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