

13 killed in violence in north-west Pakistan

At least 13 people, including a female councillor and a policeman, were killed in attacks by Taliban militants and security operations by government forces Monday in north-west Pakistan, officials and media reports said.

Helicopter gunships and artillery pounded several positions of militants in restive Swat district, where the troops are fighting the followers of a radical cleric Maulana Fazlullah, who wants to enforce Taliban-style rule in the region.

'According to preliminary information, between 10 and 12 insurgents have died and half a dozen sustained injuries in the security actions,' a local military official said.

A female councillor was gunned by unknown gunmen who broke into her house early Monday in the Mingora area of the district.

Mohammad Jamil, a resident, said Taliban gunmen had warned her to abandon 'immoral activities' she was suspected of carrying out.

A political worker from the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party, Siraj ud Din, was also assassinated by suspected Islamist insurgents while he was on his way home after offering prayer in the mosque.

The killings came as the conflict between Taliban and security forces in Swat, formerly a popular tourist destination in North Western frontier Province, completed one year.

Separately, a policeman was killed when insurgents attacked a police check post in Hangu district of NWFP with rocket propelled grenades and assault rifles. One policeman was killed in the ambush, the Geo news channel reported.

Troops also targeted locations of militants in the tribal Mohmand district, where Pakistani troops launched a major offensive to eliminate sanctuaries of Taliban and Al Qaeda militants.

There were no reports of casualties so far but local tribesmen handed over 17 Taliban rebels to the authorities, Geo TV said.

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