

4 militants die in Pakistan's Bajaur area

by UPI

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan - Four Islamic militants were killed by Pakistani forces in the Bajaur region where Pakistan has declared victory over the Taliban, officials said Monday.

In what was reported to be the first clash in the area since Feb. 23 when a senior Taliban leader announced a unilateral truce, militants attacked a security post near Nawagai Sunday night, the BBC reported.

Since the attack, artillery guns positioned in the Khar garrison have pounded militants positions in the Nawagai area, observers said. Pakistani security forces also launched search operations there to flush out militants.

The Bajaur truce came days after a deal was signed between Pakistan and the Taliban to end an insurgency in the Swat Valley in return for the imposition of Islamic, or Shariah, law.

Pakistani officials claimed to have retaken the Bajaur region from the Taliban.

"The resistance has been broken down. We control the roads," Maj. Gen. Tariq Khan, inspector general of the Frontier Corps, told The New York Times. (NYSE:NYT) "They have lost."

Hailing the events in the northern area as a turning point in the government's battle against the Taliban militants, Pakistani officials have begun trying to persuade the 300,000 people displaced by the fighting to return.

However, residents and Western military experts said it was likely militants retreated into the mountains, waiting to re-emerge once the military presence eases, the Times reported.

Support of residents is critical to keeping militants out of the area, a tribal leader told the Times.

"If the government doesn't build and attract tribesmen back quickly, and do things to put money in their pockets, there is every likelihood of a reversion to the militants," said Khalid Aziz, a former chief secretary of the North-West Frontier province who works on the Pakistani-U.S. effort for Bajaur.

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