

Afghan Troops Kill 28 Militants on Border With Pakistan

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KABUL, Afghanistan, Oct. 3 - Afghan government troops killed 28 militants in hours of fierce fighting on the border with Pakistan in the first serious attack by insurgents since the Sept. 18 elections, a spokesman for the defense ministry said today. Four soldiers were wounded in the battle when the insurgents attacked their base at Shkin, in southeastern Afghanistan, on Sunday night, said a spokesman, Gen. Zaher Azimi.

In a separate incident, three more militants were killed and two captured when they attacked a truck convoy carrying supplies for the United States military in another eastern province, Paktia, Sunday morning, news agencies reported. A truck driver was also killed and two Afghan soldiers wounded in the ambush.

Meanwhile, thousands of Afghanistan's Shia community in Kabul and the northern town of Mazar-i-Sharif blocked streets in the two cities to protest the killing of a parliamentary candidate, Muhammad Ashraf Ramazan, last week. The protesters called for the removal of the governor of Mazar-i-Sharif, Atta Muhammad, a political rival of Mr. Ramazan, and for a full investigation into the killing. Mr. Ramazan was running third in the race for seats in Balkh province when his car was fired upon by gunmen, killing him and his driver.

The attack on the base in Paktika, mounted by dozens of fighters armed with rockets and anti-aircraft guns, announced the end of a relative lull during Afghanistan's parliamentary and provincial assembly elections. Neighboring Pakistan has deployed extra troops over the last few weeks to contain the infiltration of militants across the border into Afghanistan. and violence had been down.

The calm was shattered 10 days after the elections with a suicide bomb attack in Kabul that killed nine and wounded 29 outside an Afghan National Army training base. Sunday's attack on the Afghan National Army base on the border was another escalation.

Troops battled for four and a half hours, with both sides employing heavy guns and artillery. Eventually the Afghan soldiers, who usually have American special forces mentors working with them, mounted a counterattack and routed the insurgents, General Azimi said. The bodies of 28 militants were found and enemy rockets and other weapons recovered at the end of the battle.