

Qahwaji Denies Army Besieging Arsal

by Naharnet Newsdesk 12 February 2013

Army chief Gen. Jean Qahwaji denied on Tuesday that the northeastern town of Arsal was besieged, saying the army had only deployed units in and around it.

“Arsal is not besieged by the army ... Its units are deployed in it and around it and mainly on the side of the border with Syria,” Qahwaji told President Michel Suleiman during talks at Baabda palace.

A presidential statement said Qahwaji briefed Suleiman on the latest measures taken by the army following an ambush by the town's residents that left two soldiers dead.

The patrol was ambushed earlier in the month by Arsal gunmen as it was hunting a man wanted for several terrorist acts.

Since then, the military has set up checkpoints at Arsal's entrances, searching all vehicles entering the town and exiting it.

Military Examining Magistrate Fadi Sawan, who was handed the case file, will start on Wednesday questioning several suspects arrested by the military.

On Monday, State Commissioner to the Military Court Judge Saqr Saqr charged 34 people and summoned Arsal municipal chief, Ali al-Hujairi, to question him as a witness over the ambush.

Al-Hujairi had appealed for Qahwaji to hear the two versions of the story when Arsal's residents claimed that the military patrol's members were in civilian clothes and hadn't informed the town's authorities that they were planning to carry out a raid.