

34 charged over deadly east Lebanon incident

By Youssef Diab

BEIRUT: Military Prosecutor Judge Saqr Saqr Monday charged 34 people over the recent incident in Aarsal, east Lebanon which led to the death of two soldiers, and issued a witness summons for the town's mayor, judicial sources told The Daily Star.

According to the military, Captain Pierre Bashalani and Sergeant Ibrahim Zahraman were killed in an ambush by gunmen on the outskirts of the border town when an army unit was in pursuit of Khalid Hmayyed, a man wanted on terror charges. Hmayyed was killed in the incident.

The men are charged with the killing of Zahraman, 32, and Bshalani, 31; burning and disabling military vehicles, as well as damaging both public and private property, the sources said.

The sources added that two of those charged over the Feb 1. incident were already in Army custody.

Saqr also issued a summons for the head of Aarsal's municipality, Mayor Ali al-Hujairi.

The case was then referred to Military Investigative Judge Riad Abu Ghaida.

A delegation of the Future Movement visited Army Commander Gen. Jean Kahwagi to offer condolences over the slain soldiers.

The delegation included MPs Atef Majdalani, Bassem al-Shab, Jamal al-Jarrah, and Assem Araji.

Kahwagi also separately received a delegation of Zahle MPs.

A delegation of the family of Zahraman also visited the Army chief in the presence of Future lawmakers in Akkar Nidal Tohme and Khaled Zahraman.

Meanwhile, President Michel Sleiman said there could be no justification for the attack on the Lebanese Army.

"Justice will take its course in this matter until the end in order to achieve fairness and for the sake of the blood of the martyrs," Sleiman said during a meeting Monday with MPs Khaled Zahraman and Nidal Tohme as well as family members of the late Sgt. Zahraman.

Hmayyed, according to Army Military Intelligence, was wanted on several terror charges and a member of Al-Nusra Front, an Islamist group fighting alongside the rebels in Syria and affiliated with Al-Qaeda.

However, Aarsal residents deny Hmayyed had any affiliations with the Islamist group.

They also claim that the military came to the town in civilian uniform without prior notice.

However, recent footage aired by different local television stations show the slain soldiers had been in military attire.

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