A Russian mine clearance expert was killed Monday by a bomb he was trying to defuse, in a series of incidents within the space of 24 hours in the breakaway republic of Chechnya claiming four lives, government officials said.

(08.03.2005)

Two members of Moscow-directed government forces deployed in the southern territory to curb separatists were killed in nine rebel attacks.

The military mine clearance specialist was blown up by the device he was trying to defuse in the Chechen capital Grozny.

Another soldier was killed late Sunday in an attack on an army truck in the south of the mountainous minority republic.

Some 80,000 government military personnel are deployed in Chechnya, says the Russian defence ministry.

Despite attempts by Moscow to normalise the situation, clashes with rebel forces continue on a regular basis.

Government troops poured into breakaway Chechnya in October 1999 in what was billed as a "lightning anti-terrorist operation," but guerrilla conflict continues to claim lives daily more than five years later.

Von: 7 March 2005, Agence France-Presse

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