Russian troops killed in rebel attacks and mine blasts (Chechnya)

Vladikavkaz - Four Russian soldiers died and 14 were wounded in rebel attacks and land mine explosions across Chechnya over the previous day, an official in Chechnya's Moscow-backed government said Sunday.

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Rebels fired on Russian military positions 22 times in the previous 24 hours, killing three servicemen and wounding 11 others, the official said.

A Russian sapper was killed while attempting to defuse a land mine on a road near the village of Gikalo in the Grozny suburbs Saturday. Three more servicemen were wounded when their car hit a mine near the village of Samashki in the Achikhoi-Martan district, the official said.

Two Chechen police officers were also killed when unknown attackers opened fire on them in the capital, Grozny.

Russian forces used heavy artillery to pound suspected rebel positions throughout the mountainous southern Chechnya, and troops rounded up 140 people in the last 24 hours on suspicion of aiding rebels, the Chechen official said.

Russian forces have waged two wars against Chechen rebels in the past decade, withdrawing in 1996 after a devastating 20-month conflict that left the region with de facto independence and returning in 1999.

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