Six Pakistani soldiers hurt in landmine blast near Afghan border

A landmine injured six Pakistani soldiers Tuesday in a violence-hit northwestern tribal belt bordering Afghanistan, residents and a military official said.

Wana (Pakistan): The incident occurred in the Shakai district of South Waziristan where thousands of troops are hunting for Al Qaeda-linked militants.

"The soldiers were in a vehicle when it struck a land mine planted to target security forces," a military official said. "Six soldiers were injured and one of them is in critical condition."

Residents said troops retaliated with mortar fire on surrounding hills. "Several mortars were fired at surrounding hills from the army camp soon after the incident, but we have not heard of any civilian casualties," resident Sher Ali told AFP. This was the second attack in less than 24 hours on troops in the troubled region. It is home to fiercely independent Pashtun tribes sympathetic to Afghanistan's ousted Taleban regime and Al Qaeda fugitives. Five Pakistani soldiers were killed and several others injured Monday when their convoy came under attack in the Sarvakai area east of Wana. Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao said remote control devices hit two vehicles of the convoy in Monday's attack. The military has conducted several operations this year against Al Qaeda hideouts and training camps in the rugged region and has killed more than 150 foreign Al Qaeda-linked militants in the past 12 months. A massive air and ground military operation against suspected Al Qaeda fighters in June in Shakai, 25 kilometers (15 miles) north of Wana, left 65 militants and 18 soldiers dead.

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