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The SLA mans the most dangerous Israeli outposts

Three members of Israel's allied militia were killed when guerrillas blew up a military position during a fierce bombardment against occupation outposts in southern Lebanon.

The attack coincides with a visit to the region by a UN envoy to discuss the planned withdrawal by Israeli troops from Lebanon by July.

The casualties, also including six wounded militiamen and an Israeli soldier, were mainly at the Aramta redoubt, which was attacked with rockets and mortars early on Friday morning.

Aramta is one of several crossing points manned by the pro-Israeli South Lebanon Army (SLA) linking the Israeli-occupied zone with the rest of Lebanon.

The deaths bring to 21 the number of Israeli and SLA troops killed in the zone so far this year.

Security officials said guerrillas infiltrated the position and planted explosives, but other sources said a car bomb exploded in the outpost.

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'Direct hits'

SLA radio said a dozen rockets also fell near the town of Marjayoun, site of the SLA and Israeli army headquarters.

Israel launched retaliatory shelling and air raids after the wave of attacks.

The Shia Muslim group, Hezbollah, which spearheads the Lebanese guerrilla campaign to drive Israel from southern Lebanon, said its fighters attacked Aaramta and blew up its fortifications.

It said the fighters withdrew unharmed. But an SLA source said it was a "suicide attack".



"A pick-up vehicle entered the position and the driver blew it up, destroying a large part of the post", the source is quoted from the Lebanese capital, Beirut.

Security sources said in all 26 outposts were attacked on Friday morning with about 180 mortars and rockets fired.

Hezbollah announced it had scored "direct hits" on occupation outposts at Aaramta, Dabshe, Tohra and Sweida.

UN role

A Katyusha rocket crashed near the Indian peacekeeping base at Ibl Saqi, in the eastern sector of the occupied zone, but there were no casualties or damage.



Hezbollah launched co-ordinated attacks across the zone

UN special envoy Terje Larsen is visiting the region to examine Israel's planned withdrawal from Lebanon and the future of UN peacekeeping.

Despite Prime Minister Ehud Barak's pledge to withdraw his forces, there is some doubt whether Israel will pull back all the way to the border.

Hezbollah opposes any measure that would serve as a security guarantee to Israel and has not made clear whether it will continue attacking Israeli targets after the pull back.



The future of UN peacekeepers is being reviewed

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