

5 Colombian soldiers killed in rebel minefield

At least five Colombian soldiers were killed and 10 wounded when they entered a minefield chasing leftist guerrillas.

Two officers and three troopers were killed Saturday as they crossed into the minefield in Tibu municipality on the Venezuelan border while pursuing one of the top leaders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) Ivan Marquez, Spain's EFE news agency reported Sunday.

'Five members of the military, a lieutenant, a sergeant and three enlisted men, were killed in action. The army troops are continuing the operations with the goal of neutralizing the capability of the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN),' an armed forces communique said.

The rebels blew up a bridge that links the town of Tibu with the rest of the region.

Last Tuesday, FARC guerrillas damaged the Cano Limon-Covenas oil pipeline, that spilled some 4,000 barrels of crude in the Tibu river precipitating an environmental crisis for the whole region. The river is the only source of drinking water in the region.

The Colombian armed forces launched an offensive against the FARC elements in February in the Catatumbo region to capture Marquez, who last year met Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as part of Venezuela's attempts to secure a humanitarian accord between the Colombian government and FARC for exchange of prisoners.

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