

14 Turkish soldiers, 138 ISIL militants killed as battle for Al-Bab intensifies

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Beirut: At least 14 Turkish soldiers have been killed as battle between Turkish-backed Syrian rebels and Islamic State militants intensified around the northern Syrian town of al-Bab on Wednesday.

Battle of Al-Bab intensifies

A further 33 Turkish soldiers were reported wounded. It is the Turkish military's biggest loss in a single day since launching its military operation in Syria in August.

The Turkish army said IS used multiple suicide bombs, with 138 IS fighters killed in the fighting. This toll could not be verified independently.

"The operation to control Al-Bab, which is being besieged under the Euphrates Shield Operation, is ongoing," the army said in a statement.

The military had said earlier that the rebel forces, which have been launching attacks on Islamic State fighters in al-Bab for weeks, had largely established control over the strategic area around the town's hospital.

"Once this area has been seized, Daesh's dominance of al-Bab will to a large extent be broken," it said in an earlier statement on Wednesday, using an Arabic acronym for the group. Islamic State was using suicide bombers and vehicle-borne explosives intensively, it added.

Turkey says its military operation has wrought heavy losses on IS and that it is close to breaking the group's resistance in al-Bab, the BBC's Middle East analyst, Sebastian Usher says.

Turkey's president said the Islamic State group is fighting "for dear life" to hold on to the northern Syrian town of al-Bab, carrying out suicide bombings and attacks with improved explosive devices against Turkish troops and Turkey-backed Syrian opposition fighters.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan told reporters Wednesday however, that he hoped the town would "soon fall and the people of al-Bab will find the opportunity to return to their own lands."

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