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## Turkish forces kill 15 Kurdish women fighters

Female unit of Kurd separatist movement PKK wiped out by Turkish army in Bitlis province, interior ministry says.

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Fifteen rebel Kurds, all of them women, were killed in fighting with Turkish security forces in the southeast of the country, the Turkish interior ministry has said.

The clashes took place in a rural area of Bitlis province, a centre of the armed rebellion being waged by the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), according to a statement carried by the

official Anatolia news agency on Saturday.

A local security source said the Kurd separatist movement had a number of women-only units and that one of these had been wiped out.

The ministry statement also said a member of a local Kurdish force armed by Turkey was killed and three others wounded in the fighting.

Saturday's violence erupted the day after Turkish security forces wrapped up a massive offensive against PKK fighters around Mount Cudi near the Iraqi border that left seven policemen and six rebels dead.

The operation was the largest against the Kurdish militants so far this year and involved thousands of members of the security forces, including police and the army, backed by helicopters and fighter jets.

Saturday's deaths bring the number of Kurdish rebels killed in less than a week to 21, while eight members of the security forces have died, reflecting an upsurge in fighting with the approach of spring.

In recent months, the government has also intensified pressure on alleged sympathisers of the Kurdish rebels.

In December, Turkish air strikes killed 34 Kurdish smugglers near the Iraqi border in December when commanders mistook them for PKK fighters.