

33 policemen, six soldiers, 20 insurgents die in Yobe battle



•Troops kill 70 Boko Haram men in Konduga •Senate alarmed

All was quiet yesterday in Damaturu, the Yobe State capital, where troops repelled a major Boko Haram advancement.

Thirty-three policemen and six soldiers died in the battle, it emerged yesterday.

The sect members invaded the town from Gujba in the southeast axis at dawn, shooting and bombing their way up to the Government House where they faced a tough resistance from troops.

But they hit the Police Mobile station in the town.

Women suicide bombers simultaneously struck in a market in Maiduguri, the neighbouring Borno State capital.

Damaturu is now under a 24-hour curfew declared by Governor Ibrahim Gaidam, who was in Abuja on an official assignment at the time of the attack.

Medical sources said bodies of 33 policemen, six soldiers and 20 members of Boko Haram were deposited at the Gen. Sani Abacha Specialist Hospital in Damaturu.

It was also gathered that 16 people died in the suicide attack in Maiduguri.

The deaths from Monday's attacks bring the toll to at least 245 people reported killed in a week of increasing violence in the North.

Also yesterday, no fewer than 70 of Boko Haram fighters were killed as they attempted to take another Borno town, Konduga, according to a security source.

Troops from 7 Division of the Army stopped the sect's advance.

The sect has been trying to take Konduga, 60 kilometres from Maiduguri, which they hope to use as a springboard to taking the Borno State capital.

A leader of the Civilian JTF, the group of residents assisting the military to fight the insurgents, said their men joined with the troops to repel the insurgents in a battle between Monday night and yesterday morning.

He told reporters: "Nobody can tell you the exact number of the insurgents killed but we have killed many of them while others escaped with bullet wounds.

"Scores of the insurgents met their Waterloo when they attempted to attack Konduga town. They came in Hilux vehicles and motorcycles."

In Abuja, Senate President David Mark raised the alarm over Monday's failed attempt by Boko Haram to take over the Yobe State Government House.

Mark spoke when Senator Ahmed Lawan (Yobe North) raised the issue of the daring attempt by Boko Haram insurgents.

He described as "a new dimension" the attempt by the insurgents to capture the Government House.

He said: "Ahmed, please you know I agreed with you that you will not raise the matter to a level where it will become controversial.

"Let me just tell you why I allowed you it is because of the fact that insurgents are attacking left, right, front and back in Northeast but that of yesterday (Monday) was because they were able to get to the Government House, which gave it a new dimension.

"It has nothing to do with state of emergency, please do not make any statement that is controversial."

Lawan, under Order 43, asked for the indulgence of the Senate and the leave of the Senate President, to explain Monday's Boko Haram onslaught.

He said: "I spoke with you (Mark) this morning on the need for me, on behalf of my colleagues from Yobe State, to make a personal explanation on what happened in Damaturu, Yobe State capital yesterday (Monday.)

"Mr. President, I will like to formally inform this Senate that Damaturu was attacked by insurgents from about 5am on Monday and the military or the armed forces, battled the insurgents and controlled the situation.

"So many lives were lost but at this moment, we cannot determine the exact number of the dead and so many were also wounded and, of course, psychologically, hundreds of thousands of Yobeians and even other Nigerians are traumatised for that incident.

"Mr. President, I want to say this, that a war is not won by the name of the operation; a war is won by the operators of the operation that operate in the theatre of war.

"Our soldiers were determined to fight the insurgents. They fought very gallantly and exhibited valour and they did that because they have motivation, not because there was any state of emergency existing.

"Mr. President, the significance of what happened in Damaturu yesterday (Monday) should not be lost on us.

"I believe that we can win this war, if we all come together, get the proper leadership, support the leadership

across all the three tiers of government and across all the political parties.

"I believe that this war is winnable and I believe that if we do the right thing, we'll see the right result that we saw yesterday."

Mark added that he allowed Lawan to speak because the dimension the attack took was really frightening.

"I was in touch with the governor, Ibrahim Geidam, for most of the time and we were all very worried and because of the magnitude of what had happened in the last few days, bomb blasts in Kano, the attack in Borno, the bomb blast in Borno and the incident that took place in Damaturu.

"Because they have been raised on the floor here, it is only proper that we observe one minute silence in honour of those who lost their lives," Mark said.