

# Rising violence kills over 200 in a week in Syria's Aleppo

By ALBERT AJI and BASSEM MROUE Associated Press



In this image made from video and posted online from Validated UGC, a man carries a child after airstrikes hit Aleppo, Syria, Thursday.

DAMASCUS, Syria — The Syrian army and rebels unleashed deadly new attacks on each other Friday in Aleppo, with insurgents shelling a mosque during weekly prayers and government airstrikes hitting opposition neighborhoods in escalating bloodshed the U.N. decried as a “monstrous disregard for civilian lives by all parties.”

More than 200 people have been killed in eight days of mounting violence in and around the contested northern city, including 15 at the Malla Khan mosque hit by rebel rockets and another 10 from the government warplanes and helicopters, officials said.

The surge in fighting has caused the collapse of a two-month cease-fire brokered by the U.S. and Russia. It also has raised fears of an all-out government assault on Aleppo and warnings of a humanitarian

disaster in the 5-year-old civil war.

In rebel-held neighborhoods, medical facilities, bakeries and a water station have been pounded by a government bombardment, residents say. Electricity is down to a few hours a week. A single road out of Aleppo is the only supply line for the insurgent-controlled districts, where an estimated 250,000 people remain. If forces loyal to President Bashar Assad take the road,

there could be major shortages of food and medicines. “People have already started fleeing the city,” said Baraa al-Halaby, an activist who watched older men, women and children leave his rebel-held neighborhood Friday. “If Aleppo comes under siege, people will starve to death within a month.”

Assad’s military declared a brief truce in the capital of Damascus and its outskirts and the coastal province of

Latakia — but not in Aleppo.

That could signal plans for a ground assault. Pro-Assad media in Lebanon have been reporting for weeks that reinforcements are preparing for the “grand battle of Aleppo.” Syria’s largest city and its commercial center before the war, Aleppo has been divided between the two camps. Now it is once more the main battleground after peace talks stalled in Geneva.

Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the latest fighting showed a “monstrous disregard for civilian lives by all parties to the conflict.”

In a statement released in Geneva, Zeid urged the sides to step back from a return to all-out war. “In short, the violence is soaring back to the levels we saw prior to the cessation of hostilities. There are deeply disturbing reports of military buildups indicating preparations for a lethal escalation,” he said.

Though heat waves are common during Indian summers, authorities have done little to ensure water security or prepare urban populations for the risks. This year, Orissa’s capital of Bhubaneswar and Maharashtra’s city of Nagpur joined Gujarat’s Ahmedabad in launching a heat wave program to educate people on how to stay cool, provide shelters and train medical workers.

The southern state of Andhra Pradesh is running ads on TV and in newspapers urging people to stay indoors during the hottest hours. Construction and farm laborers are advised to seek shade when the sun is directly overhead.

Huge numbers of farmers, meanwhile, have migrated to nearby cities and towns in search of manual labor, often leaving elderly and young relatives behind in parched villages.

This is the second consecutive year southern India has suffered from a deadly heat wave, after some 2,500 people died in scorching temperatures last year.

# 16 blamed for mistakes in deadly U.S. attack on Afghan clinic

WASHINGTON (AP)— Human error, violations of combat rules and untimely equipment failures led to the mistaken U.S. aerial attack on a charity-run hospital in Afghanistan last fall that killed 42 people, a senior American general said Friday. Investigators called the attack a “disproportional response to a threat that didn’t exist.”

Sixteen military members were given administrative punishments that could stall or end careers, but no one faces a court martial. A senior defense official said one of the disciplined was a two-star general.

The AC-130 gunship, bristling with side-firing cannons and guns, fired on the hospital in the northern city of Kunduz for 30 minutes before the mistake was realized and the attack was halted, Gen. Joseph Votel told a news conference as he released the Pentagon’s final report on the incident. The intended target was an Afghan intelligence agency building about 450 yards away.

No one involved knew the targeted compound was a hospital, Votel said, but investigators concluded the U.S. ground and air commanders should have known.

Votel expressed “deepest condolences” to those

injured and to the families of those killed and said the U.S. government made “gesture of sympathy” payments of \$3,000 to each injured person and \$6,000 to each family of the killed.

Zabihullah Neyazi, a nurse who lost his left arm, eye and a finger in the Oct. 3, 2015, attack, said administrative punishment for the American service members wasn’t enough and said a “trial should be in Afghanistan, in our presence, in the presence of the victims’ families, so they would be satisfied.”

Pharmacist Khalid Ahmad, 24, said those responsible “are criminals, and they must be jailed.” Ahmad still has shrapnel embedded in his waist and cannot move his right leg.

Without Borders, the international charity organization whose hospital was destroyed, said Friday that it still wants an “independent and impartial” investigation. It said the punishments were inadequate and “out of proportion” to the deaths, injuries and destruction caused by the mistaken attack.

“The lack of meaningful accountability sends a worrying signal to warring parties, and is unlikely to act as a deterrent against future violations of the rules of war,” the organization said.

# Parts of India ban daytime cooking as hundreds die of heat

PATNA, India (AP) — With sizzling temperatures claiming more than 300 lives this month in India, officials said they were banning daytime cooking in some parts of the drought-stricken country in a bid to prevent accidental fires that have killed nearly 80 more people.

The eastern state of Bihar this week took the unprecedented step of forbidding any cooking between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m., after accidental fires exacerbated by dry, hot and windy weather swept through shantytowns and thatched-roof houses in villages and killed 79 people. They included 10 children and five adults killed in a fire sparked during a Hindu prayer ceremony in Bihar’s Aurangabad district last week.

People were instead told to cook to night.

Hoping to prevent more fires, officials have also barred burning spent crops or holding religious fire rituals. Anyone defying the ban risks up to a year in jail.

“We call this the fire season in Bihar,” Vyas, a state disaster management official who goes by one name, said Friday. “Strong, westerly winds stoke fires which spread easily and

cause great damage.”

Much of India is reeling under a weekslong heat wave and severe drought conditions that have decimated crops, killed livestock and left at least 330 million Indians without enough water for their daily needs.

Rivers, lakes and dams have dried up in parts of the western states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, and overall officials say that groundwater reservoirs are at just 22 percent capacity.

In some areas, the situation is so bad the government has sent tankers of water for emergency relief. Monsoon rains are still weeks away, expected to start only in June.

At least 300 people have died of heat-related illness this month, including 110 in the state of Orissa, 137 in Telangana and another 45 in Andhra Pradesh where temperatures since the start of April have been hovering around 111 Fahrenheit.

That’s about 8-10 degrees Fahrenheit hotter than normal for April, according to state meteorological official Y.K. Reddy. He predicted the situation would only get worse in May, traditionally the hottest month in India.

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