

## GERMAN TRIAL OF AUSCHWITZ MEDIC, 96, COLLAPSES

**BERLIN:** Germany's trial of a 96-year-old former Nazi medical orderly at the Auschwitz death camp has collapsed, a court spokesman said yesterday. No date for a retrial of Hubert Zafke has yet been set after the proceedings were derailed by complaints that the judges were biased. "When this will happen we cannot say yet," Carl Friedrich Deutsch, a spokesman for the court, said in a statement.

Zafke had faced charges of at least 3,681 counts of being an accessory to murder in the concentration camp in Nazi-occupied Poland. But concerns over his mental and physical health had led to repeated postponements of the trial in the northeastern lakeside town of Neubrandenburg.

Over the last few hearings, a parade of doctors have been quizzed about Zafke's mental health, reaching contradictory conclusions. Prosecutors, and civil plaintiffs, had in turn launched motions of bias against the judges, charging that they were unwilling to try wheelchair-bound Zafke.

Deutsch said the prosecutors had asked three judges to recuse themselves. There was insufficient time to decide whether to grant or reject these requests before the next scheduled hearing next Monday.

The spokesman added bluntly that he couldn't understand why prosecutors would employ a legal tactic that left them open to charges they had "torpedoed the proceedings which they themselves had launched".

### Anne Frank in Auschwitz

The charges against Zafke focus on a one-month period in 1944 when 14 trains carrying prisoners—including the teenage diarist Anne Frank—arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Frank, who arrived in Auschwitz with her parents and sister, was later transferred to another camp, Bergen-Belsen, where she died in March 1945, just two months before the Nazis were defeated. Yesterday's announcement marked the end of a case that had been marred by five delays and at times deteriorated into farce, increasingly frustrating victims' lawyers. The International Auschwitz Committee, which represents Holocaust survivors, had sharply attacked Germany's handling of the case, saying the court was hurtling "between sloppy ignorance and complete disinterest" in a resolution.

Some 1.1 million people, most of them European Jews, perished between 1940 and 1945 in Auschwitz before it was liberated by Soviet forces. More than 70 years after the prosecution of top Nazis began in Nuremberg, Germany has been racing against time to try the last Third Reich criminals.

Zafke was the fourth former concentration camp worker in the dock in the latest series of trials, following John Demjanjuk in 2011, Oskar Groening in 2015 and Reinhold Hanning this May—all convicted of complicity in mass murder. Those cases were hailed for providing a degree of catharsis for aged survivors, even if they shed little new light on the Holocaust.—AFP

## PROTESTERS IN ETHIOPIA KILL UC DAVIS STUDENT

**DAVIS:** University of California, Davis officials say that a post-doctoral researcher in the university's plant biology department was killed in Ethiopia when the vehicle she was riding in was struck by rocks thrown by protesters.

The university said in a statement Wednesday that Sharon Gray was in the East African country for a meeting about her research when she was killed Tuesday while traveling in a car in the outskirts of the capital, Addis Ababa.

The university said what happened was unclear but spokesman Andy Fell confirmed to the Sacramento Bee. Gray was the American the US Embassy in Ethiopia confirmed was killed in an area that has seen months of deadly protests.

UC Davis says another member of the plant biology department who was traveling with Gray was not injured in is headed home. This is the first foreigner killed in the massive anti-government protests that have claimed the lives of hundreds of protesters since November 2015.—AP



**GENEVA:** United Nation's Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura (R), accompanied by Special Advisor to the UN Syria envoy Jan Egeland, speaks during a press conference on the Aleppo situation yesterday.—AFP

## UN WARNS OF ALEPPO TOTAL DESTRUCTION AS ARMY ADVANCE 'BIGGEST GAINS IN YEARS AGAINST REBELS'

**BEIRUT:** The UN's Syria envoy yesterday warned Aleppo faces total destruction, as government forces made their biggest gains in years against rebels inside the opposition-held part of the battleground city.

Staffan de Mistura said eastern Aleppo could be "totally destroyed" by year's end, and called on the government to halt strikes if jihadist fighters left the city, even offering to escort them out himself. The envoy warned eastern Aleppo risked joining the ranks of the 20th century's worst tragedies, making comparisons to the Srebrenica massacre and the Rwandan genocide. His plea comes two weeks into an all-out government assault on opposition parts of Aleppo following the collapse of a short-lived truce negotiated by Russia and the United States. Loyalist fighters have made significant advances in the Bustan al-Basha district near the centre of Aleppo, divided between government fighters in the west and rebels in the east, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Observatory director Rami Abdel Rahman said it was the biggest and most significant advance inside the city since 2013. The offensive by President Bashar al-Assad's forces has seen rebel-held areas pounded relentlessly with air strikes, barrel bombs and artillery fire that the Observatory says have killed more than 270 people.

On Wednesday, the army said in a surprise announcement it would reduce its bombardment "to allow civilians who want to leave to reach safe areas". "Anyone who does not take advantage of the opportunity to lay down their arms or leave will meet their inevitable fate," a statement said.

### Army 'gimmick'

The Observatory reported fewer air strikes but heavy clashes in Bustan al-Basha, with the army now controlling key vantage points and half the neighborhood. Analysts dismissed the army announcement. "The regime and its allies have made a decision to conquer as much of eastern Aleppo as possible and they're moving ahead on that," said Emile Hokayem, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

"I think such announcements are actually marginal. They are a PR gimmick." Syria expert Thomas Pierret said the move could be intended to undercut growing international pressure for action over the plight of civilians in east Aleppo. The bombardment has damaged or destroyed several hospitals, including the largest facility serving the more than 250,000 remaining residents, who have been under near-continuous siege since mid-July. "The aerial onslaught on Aleppo... has bolstered Western proponents of a tougher approach" on Syria, said Pierret, a lecturer at the University of Edinburgh.

"A temporary halt or reduction of bombings could prevent interventionists from gaining further influence." Washington said this week it was suspending talks with Moscow on Syria over Russia's involvement in the Aleppo assault. But the US acknowledged Secretary of State John Kerry had called his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov to discuss Syria despite the announcement.

### 'Deluge of fire'

Moscow blames Washington for the truce's collapse and has shown no signs of easing its support for Assad. Speaking in

Geneva, De Mistura warned the ongoing assault would have dire consequences. "In maximum two months, two-and-a-half months the city of eastern Aleppo may be totally destroyed", he told reporters.

He urged fighters from the former Al-Nusra Front, now known as Fateh al-Sham Front after breaking with Al-Qaeda, to leave Aleppo under a deal to halt the regime's attack on the city. "If you decide to leave with dignity... I am personally ready to physically accompany you," said the envoy.

He also asked Russia and Syria's regime if they were truly prepared to bring about the ruin of Aleppo. "Or, are you rather ready to announce an immediate and total aerial bombing halt if Nusra leaves" the Italian-Swedish diplomat asked.

Russia said Thursday it was "ready to work" on a draft UN resolution calling for a ceasefire in Aleppo. The resolution was proposed by France, whose Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said during a visit to Moscow that "nothing can justify such a deluge of fire and of death" in Aleppo.

More than 300,000 people have been killed since the conflict began with fierce repression of anti-government protests in March 2011. It has since evolved into a complex multi-front war that has drawn in regional and international forces including, most recently, Turkey. Ankara launched an offensive on August 24, saying its forces and allied rebels would fight both the Islamic State group and Kurdish militia in northern Syria.

On Thursday, at least 29 rebels involved in Ankara's operation were killed in a blast claimed by IS at the Atme border crossing between Turkey and Syria, the Observatory said.—AFP