

BEIRUT (AP) -

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Alep, cel mai mare oraș din Siria, a devenit un front-cheie în războiul civil din țara după ce rebelii au lansat o ofensivă acolo în iulie 2012.

În luni de zile de lupte de stradă sângeroase, luptătorii de opoziție și-au extins lent controlul lor, deși lupta a părăsit de mult orașul în ruine.

The police academy has recently emerged as a new front in the fight for Aleppo, which is considered a major prize in the conflict. Activists say the government has turned the facility into a military base, using it to shell opposition areas in the countryside as well as rebel-held neighborhoods inside the city.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said clashes raged Wednesday around the complex, which is located in the suburb of Khan al-Asal.

"The rebels are still trying to storm the school, but they can't because the regime is carrying out airstrikes and bombarding rebel forces," said Observatory director Rami Abdul-Rahman.

He said at least six rebels were killed Wednesday in the fighting, bringing the three-day death toll to 37 opposition fighters and more than 50 regime troops.

Another key front in the battle for control of Aleppo is the city's international airport. Rebels have been trying for months to seize the facility, and have made headway in recent weeks, overrunning checkpoints and capturing a military base charged with protecting the airport.

The government is desperate to hold onto the facility, which it has used in the past to fly in supplies to its troops bogged down in the city. However, the fighting has forced the government to close the airport to flights and try to send supplies and reinforcements overland.

Most of those reinforcements, including dozens of vehicles and thousands of troops, are now stuck in the city of Safira, southeast of Aleppo, according to Abdul-Rahman. Fighters from Jabhat al-Nusra, an Islamist extremist rebel group that the U.S. has designated a terrorist organization, have cut the road leading from Safira to the airport, and for weeks have battled troops along the road, preventing them from pushing north to the city to link up with government troops there.

The Observatory reported fierce clashes north of Safira on Wednesday, with both sides shelling

each other with mortars and artillery.

The U.N. says some 70,000 people have been killed since Syria's conflict began in March 2011.

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