

# Migrants turn to 'The Beast'

Mexico's caravan crackdown brings back train-riding

The Associated Press

IXTEPEC, Mexico — The train known as “The Beast” is once again rumbling through the night loaded with people headed toward the U.S. border after a raid on a migrant caravan threatened to end the practice of massive highway marches through Mexico.

A long freight train loaded with about 300 to 400 migrants pulled out of the southern city of Ixtepec on Tuesday. They sat atop rattling boxcars and clung precariously to ladders alongside the clanking couplings. Most were young men, along with a few dozen women and children. Mothers clambered up the railings clutching their infants. Migrants displayed a Honduran flag from atop the train.

The train known in Spanish as “La Bestia,” which runs from the southern border state of Chiapas into neighboring Oaxaca and



Central American migrants ride atop a freight train during their journey toward the U.S.-Mexico border.

north into Gulf Coast state Veracruz, carried migrants north for decades, despite its notorious dangers: People died or lost limbs falling from the train. Mexican authorities started raiding the trains to pull migrants off in mid-2014 and the number of Cen-

tral Americans aboard the train fell to a smattering.

But about a week ago, a long-time migrant rights activist, the Rev. Alejandro Solalinde, noticed a change: Large numbers of migrants started getting off the train in Ixtepec, the Oaxaca

town where his Brothers on the Road shelter is located.

Many had waited weeks for Mexican visas that never materialized, and simply decided to head north without papers. Others were part of a 3,000-person migrant caravan that was broken

up in a raid Monday by federal police and immigration agents on a highway east of Ixtepec.

With dozens of police and immigration checkpoints dotting the highways, many migrants now view the train as a safer, albeit still risky, way to reach the U.S. border.

“They’re riding the train again, that’s a fact,” said Solalinde, who shelter now houses about 300 train-riding migrants. “It’s going to go back to the way it was, the (Mexican) government doesn’t want them to be seen. If the migrants move quietly like a stream of little ants, they’ll allow them to, but they are not going to allow them to move through Mexico publicly or massively” as they did with the large caravans that began in October. In fact, Solalinde predicts “they’re not going to allow caravans anymore.”

In Monday’s raid, federal police and agents detained 371 people, wrestling men, women and children into patrol trucks and vans and hauling them off, presumably to begin deportation proceedings. Many others abandoned the road and fled into the surrounding countryside.

## Concern over compromised vaccines

KUAJOK, South Sudan — Despondent, Akon Mathiong points to two small mounds of dirt where she buried her grandsons, 4 and 5 years old, last month. They died after contracting measles in one of the worst-hit areas of South Sudan’s latest outbreak.

The family said the boys had been vaccinated against the highly infectious disease. Similar infections are prompting questions about whether some vaccines have been compromised in a country largely devastated by conflict.

More than 750 measles cases, including seven deaths, have been reported since January. That’s almost six times the number of cases for all of 2018, according to World Health Organization data.

The increase in measles cases is part of a global one, in part because of misinformation that makes some parents balk at receiving a vaccine.

Many in developing countries don’t dispute the vaccine but instead have lack of access.



A health worker vaccinates children against measles outside of Kuajok, South Sudan, which is grappling with a measles outbreak.

Though an emergency vaccination campaign is underway in South Sudan, the outbreak is spreading, leading some to doubt the vaccine’s viability in some cases.

Medical workers at Kuajok hospital are seeing some vaccinated children contract measles, said Dr. Garang Nyuol.

To ensure the integrity of the highly effective measles

vaccine it must be kept between 35 and 46 degrees. Kuajok hospital administers measles vaccines year-round, yet several staffers said its two generators often shut down for hours, even days, at a time.

“I’m worried about the effectiveness of the vaccine,” said Chok Deng, the director general for Gogrial state’s ministry of health. — AP

## Civilian deaths a growing problem

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan and international forces were responsible for more civilian deaths in the first three months of 2019 than the Taliban and other militants, a new UN report said Wednesday. It marks the first time in recent years that civilian deaths attributed to government forces and their allies exceeded those blamed on their enemies.

The statistics reflects what many say is a growing problem in Afghanistan’s brutal war, in which civilians die not only in suicide bombings and insurgent attacks but also in the cross-fire as Afghan forces and international allies pursue militants.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan reported Wednesday that 581 civilians were killed between Jan. 1 and March 31, with Afghan forces

and their allies responsible for 305 of those deaths. The insurgents were responsible for wounding more civilians than the coalition forces, the report said.

Nearly half of the civilian deaths attributed to Afghan forces and their allies occurred during airstrikes, while some of the other civilians were killed during searches and raids of militant hideouts. U.S. forces carry out airstrikes when called to assist Afghan forces.

More than 50 percent of the civilians killed were women and children, said Richard Bennett, UNAMA’s human rights director.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani earlier this year urged his ground forces to take greater care to protect civilian lives while conducting search operations. — AP