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Al Jazeera

## Gaddafi forces shell Misurata

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Libyan government forces have launched a heavy attack on the coastal city of Misurata with dozens of Grad rockets, killing at least 23 people, a rebel spokesman said.

Rebels on Thursday warned of an impending "massacre" by troops loyal to Muammar Gaddafi if NATO does not intensify its attacks on government forces in and around the coastal city, which has been besieged for weeks.

Misurata, Libya's third-biggest city, is the only major rebel stronghold in the west of the country. It has been the scene of major fighting between rebels and Gaddafi's forces for several weeks.

"They fired Grads at a residential area called Kasr Ahmad near the port this morning. They fired at least 80 rockets on that area," Abdelbasset Abu Mzereiq told Reuters by telephone.

He later clarified that those killed had been civilians and not rebel fighters as earlier understood. The death toll from the 90 minute artillery barrage was likely to rise, the spokesman added.

"They keep killing civilians. Yesterday we lost five civilians in the shelling and 37 were wounded."

Gaddafi loyalists were firing shells on Tripoli Street, a thoroughfare which cuts to the city centre from the western outskirts, eyewitnesses told Al Jazeera.

The rocket assault on the residential area near the rebel-controlled port had also prevented a Qatari vessel from docking, another rebel spokesman said. It was not immediately clear what the ship was carrying.

It is difficult to independently verify accounts from western Libya because journalists are prevented from reporting freely.