

Islamic State images purport to show destroyed Syrian temple

25/08/2015 21:37 by admin

Beirut: The Islamic State group released propaganda images Tuesday that purport to show militants laying explosives in and then blowing up the 2,000-year-old temple of Baalshamin in Syria's ancient caravan city of Palmyra.

The images, posted on social media by supporters of the group, showed militants carrying barrels of explosives, and laying them inside the temple. Other smaller wired cans lay around the temple walls and columns. Then an image shows a grey plume of smoke rising above the temple from a distance, and then an image of the temple reduced to a pile of rocks. One caption read: "The complete destruction of the pagan Baalshamin temple."

The Associated Press could not independently verify the images. However, they were released like other group propaganda and carried a logo it often used in the city of Palmyra, in Syria's central Homs province.

The images also corresponded to prior AP reporting. A resident of Palmyra had told the AP the temple was destroyed on Sunday, a month after the group's militants booby-trapped it with explosives.

The U.N. cultural agency UNESCO on Monday called the destruction of the temple a war crime.

The temple, a structure of giant stone blocks several stories high fronted by six towering columns, was dedicated to a god of storm and rain — the name means literally "Lord of the Heavens." It was part of a sprawling Roman-era complex that includes other remains of temples to local gods and goddesses, including the even larger and slightly older Temple of Bel. Experts and residents fear the group will destroy the other ruins.

The Islamic State group, which has imposed a violent interpretation of Islamic law across its self-declared "caliphate" straddling Syria and Iraq, says such ancient relics promote idolatry. It already has blown up several sites in neighboring Iraq, and it is also believed to sell looted antiquities. The group had seized control of Palmyra, in the central deserts of Syria, in May.

- AP