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Russian Forces at Northeastern Edge of Kyiv

By Velyka Dymerka for AFP

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Anti-tank hedgehogs in the center of Kyiv. **UNIAN**

Russian forces on Thursday rolled their armored vehicles up to the northeastern edge of Kyiv, edging closer in their attempts to encircle the Ukrainian capital.

An AFP team saw plumes of smoke rise over the village of Skybyn, just a few hundred meters past the last checkpoint marking Kyiv's northeastern city limits.

Ukrainian soldiers described a night of heavy battles for control of the main highway leading into the city.

"There are ongoing military operations in Skybyn," said a soldier who agreed to be identified only as Sergiy, adding that one Russian column of armoured vehicles had been partially destroyed.

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An AFP team witnessed Grad missile strikes in Velyka Dymerka, a neighboring village five kilometers outside Kyiv's city limits, which stood largely deserted on a sunny and bitterly cold day.

At least half-a-dozen Grad missiles rained down on the empty road, hitting several houses, which appeared to be empty at the time, and damaging the journalists' vehicle.

But the Ukrainian forces only had a minimal presence in the village, which locals said witnessed heavy fighting overnight.

"They were still outside the day before yesterday, but yesterday they started coming in," said Vasyl Popov, a 38-year-old advertising salesman.

"It's frightening, but what can you do, there is nowhere to really run or hide. We live here."

Russian forces have been slowly encircling Kyiv, reaching its northwestern edge on the first day of their assault on Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Kyiv's northwest suburbs such as Irpin and Bucha have been enduring shellfire and bombardments for more than a week, prompting a mass evacuation effort.

The roads leading northeast, which lead to less populated villages, had been largely open in the first week of the Russian offensive.

But Russian forces launched a deadly aerial assault on the city of Chernihiv, about 125 kilometers, last week.

They have been making rapid advances toward Kyiv ever since, leaving the city of 3 million people with only its southern roads open for a possible evacuation and the delivery of new supplies.

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