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Moscow Says 23 Dead in Donetsk After Ukraine Attack

By AFP

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A Tochka-U short-range ballistic missile has been shot down over the city of Donetsk. **Valentin Sprinchak / TASS**

Russia said Monday that an attack by Kyiv's forces on the separatist stronghold of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine had left 23 people dead, with the military accusing Kyiv of committing a "war crime."

Moscow accused Ukraine's army of firing a Tochka-U missile at a residential area in Donetsk, in one of the most serious attacks on the city since Russia sent troops into Ukraine over two weeks ago.

Separatists, who have controlled the city since 2014, had earlier said fragments from a rocket they shot down had left between 16 and 20 civilians dead.

Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes serious crimes, increased the tally, saying at

least 23 civilians including children had died and 18 were injured.

Investigators said they opened a criminal probe.

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Earlier, Russia's Defense Ministry said 20 people had died and 28 had been hospitalized.

"The use of such weapons in a city where there are no firing positions of the armed forces," Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said, "is a war crime."

Official separatist Telegram channels distributed photos and video of the aftermath, showing burnt out cars, bodies strewn in the street, and damage to shops.

In an interview with Russian state-run television, the head of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, Denis Pushilin, said the shot-down rocket had inflicted damage to residential areas.

"People were waiting in line near an ATM and were standing at a bus stop," he said in remarks broadcast on Russian television.

"There are children among the dead," Pushilin said, adding that the casualty count would have been higher had the rocket not been downed.

Reports of the attack came as Ukrainian and Russian negotiators met for talks to resolve more than two weeks of fierce fighting but failed to find any breakthrough.

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