

Zelensky Says Situation 'Most Difficult' Near Bakhmut in Donetsk

By [AFP](#)

October 16, 2022



A local resident pushes his bike as smoke rises over the site of an explosion after a rocket attack in Bakhmut, Donetsk region, Ukraine. **AP / TASS / Kostiantyn Liberov**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Saturday the situation was "the most difficult" near the eastern town of Bakhmut, a few days after pro-Russian forces announced they were moving closer to the city.

"A very severe situation persists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions" in the Donbas, Zelensky said in his daily address, "the most difficult is near Bakhmut, like in previous days. We are still holding our positions."

This comes after Russian-backed separatist forces in Ukraine's Donetsk region said Thursday they had captured two nearby villages, Opytine and Ivangrad.

Russian troops have for weeks been pummeling Bakhmut, a wine-making and salt-mining

city that used to be populated by 70,000 people, in the hope of capturing the city.

About 15 kilometers (9 miles) from Bakhmut, in Chasiv Yar, AFP journalists spoke to a soldier just back from the Bakhmut front line.

With intense physical and emotional exhaustion in his eyes, the 50-year-old soldier from the 93rd brigade nicknamed "Poliak", recalled the four days on the tense battlefield.

"For days I didn't sleep, didn't eat, didn't drink except coffee," he said.

"Out of the 13 guys in my group, we lost two soldiers, and five got evacuated," said Poliak, slightly injured by shrapnel.

"This is our life now, we'll do everything for our country" he added, almost brought to tears.

For weeks Ukrainian troops have been clawing back large swaths of territory in the south and east of Ukraine — including Donetsk — controlled by Russian forces for months.

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