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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

45 Dead, 20 Missing as Ukraine Ends Tower Block Search

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Rescuers works on a residential building destroyed after a missile strike, in Dnipro on January 14, 2023.
Vitalii Matokha / AFP

Rescuers called off the search Tuesday for victims of the Russian missile strike on an apartment building in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro, with 20 people still missing and funerals being held in the grief-stricken community.

After the carnage, Ukrainians pressed ahead with talks to obtain more Western weapons, and Ukraine's army chief Valery Zaluzhny met Mark Milley, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, for the first time in person in Poland.

Ukrainian authorities said Tuesday the Russian strike in the eastern city of Dnipro at the weekend killed at least 45 people including six children.

The youngest was 11 months old, officials said, and one of the bodies recovered from the

rubble Tuesday was that of a child.

The toll made Saturday's attack one of the deadliest since Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine last February.

The Kremlin has denied responsibility for the strike that also injured 79 people.

Several hundred Dnipro residents gathered to pay their last respects to Mykhaylo Korenovsky, a Ukrainian boxing coach who died in the barrage.

"He gave many a start in life," said Taras Ivanov, whose son trained with Korenovsky.

"Everything inside me is shaking," the father told AFP, calling the coach a "legend."

Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky reiterated his pledge that everyone who "caused this terror" would be found and held to account.

At 1:00 p.m. (11:00 GMT), emergency services said the search and rescue operations at the site were completed.

"Twenty people are still missing," they said.

In Moscow, at a monument to Ukrainian poet Lesya Ukrainka, a few residents laid flowers in the snow in memory of those killed in Dnipro.

'Unwavering support'

Kyiv has called for more weapons to defend itself, and at the weekend received pledges of British tanks. On Tuesday Ukraine army chief Zaluzhny said he had met in Poland with Milley and "outlined the urgent needs of the armed forces of Ukraine."

The pair "discussed the unprovoked and ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine and exchanged perspectives and assessments," said Joint Staff spokesperson Dave Butler.

"The chairman reaffirmed unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

Germany announced on Jan. 5 it was following the United States in sending a Patriot missile defense battery to Ukraine.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte signaled his "intention" Tuesday during a meeting with President Joe Biden to assist in the effort.

"We have the intention to join what you're doing with Germany on the Patriots project, the air-defense system," Rutte told Biden in the White House.

Putin warned more armaments would only intensify fighting and the Kremlin vowed to burn the materiel.

U.S. elder statesman Henry Kissinger said Tuesday that Russia's invasion showed there was no longer a point to keeping Ukraine out of NATO, Kyiv's long-held aspiration which he had

previously opposed.

Fighting in Donetsk

The Dnipro attack triggered the resignation of a high-profile Ukrainian official who had sparked outrage by suggesting air defense could have been responsible by intercepting a Russian missile, which then fell on the building.

Ukraine's army said the apartment block was hit by an X-22 Russian missile that it does not have the capacity to shoot down.

Meanwhile fighting was continuing across the frontline Tuesday, with AFP journalists in the eastern town of Bakhmut witnessing heavy shelling.

Outside the city, servicemen dug new trenches while tanks and armored vehicles rolled past.

"It's like Verdun out there," said Ivan, a military ambulance driver, referring to the notorious World War I battle.

Even as the booms of shelling echoed down Bakhmut's streets, volunteers were busy Tuesday providing food and shelter to the roughly 8,000 people still living in the city, many without electricity or gas but defying recommendations to evacuate.

Among them was Tetyana Starkova, 67, who cradled a paper cup of steaming tea in a busy humanitarian hub where a Baptist group sang religious songs and residents charged phones and warmed themselves by a stove.

"We sit here while it's warm then we go home and get under the blankets," she said.

Nearby, uncertainty still surrounded the fate of the war-scarred town of Soledar that Russia claims to have seized.

Capturing Soledar could improve Russian forces' position as they push toward what has been their main target since October, the nearby transport crossroads of Bakhmut.

Both sides have conceded heavy losses in the battle for the town, and a Ukrainian military spokesman said Tuesday that fighting was ongoing.

The deputy head of Ukraine's presidential office, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, said two people died in Russian shelling of southern regions Mykolaiv and Kherson.

He also said two civilians were killed in Donetsk, the eastern region at the epicenter of recent fighting.

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