

Russian Strike Kills 11, Including Toddler, in Eastern Ukraine

By [Jonathan Brown for AFP](#)

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Nine people died — including a woman whose body was recovered from the rubble overnight — and 21 were wounded in the Russian shelling of a block of flats in Sloviansk **State Emergency Service of Ukraine**

The death toll from a Russian strike on a block of flats in the eastern Ukrainian city of Sloviansk climbed to 11 on Saturday as Moscow claimed advances near embattled Bakhmut.

Sloviansk lies in a part of the eastern Donetsk region that is under Ukrainian control. According to Kyiv, it was on Friday struck by seven missiles which hit five buildings, five homes, a school and an administrative building.

"The number of victims of the shelling of Sloviansk has risen to 11 people," a spokeswoman for the State Emergency Service in the region, Veronika Bakhal, said in televised remarks.

A previous toll reported nine dead, including a two-year-old boy who was rescued from the

rubble but died on his way to hospital, and 21 wounded.

Ukraine's First Lady Olena Zelenska sent her condolences to the child's family during this "indescribable grief."

President Volodymyr Zelensky denounced Russia for "brutally shelling" residential buildings and "killing people in broad daylight."

AFP journalists on Friday saw rescue workers digging for survivors on the top floor of the typical Soviet-era housing block, and black smoke billowing from homes on fire across the street.

The street below — including a playground — was covered in concrete dust and debris, including torn pages from school books and children's drawings.

In southern Ukraine, a 48-year-old woman and her 28-year-old daughter were killed Saturday in Russian shelling in the city of Kherson, the regional administration said on Telegram.

Embed:

Bakhmut advances

Sloviansk lies 45 kilometers (27 miles) northwest of the frontline hotspot of Bakhmut, the scene of the longest and bloodiest battle of Russia's invasion.

Russian troops have been battling since last summer to capture the town in eastern Ukraine, which has taken on huge symbolic importance even though analysts say it has little strategic value.

Kyiv has said the battle for the town is key to holding back Russian forces along the entire eastern front and Sloviansk is one of the cities that will be at risk if Kyiv loses the battle.

Russia on Saturday claimed advances on the northern and southern outskirts of Bakhmut, which had a pre-war population of 70,000 people.

"Wagner assault units have successfully advanced, capturing two districts on the northern and southern outskirts of the city," Russia's Defense Ministry said in a briefing.

The Russian Wagner mercenary group, headed by Kremlin-linked businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, has spearheaded much of the fighting for the city.

According to the ministry, Ukrainian troops "while retreating, are deliberately destroying city infrastructure and residential buildings in order to slow the advance" of Moscow's forces.

AFP was unable to verify the situation on the ground.

The town has become a fixation of military commanders, leading to a brutal nine-month war of attrition. Both Russia and Ukraine are believed to have suffered huge losses in the battle for Bakhmut.

Embed:

Brazil's Lula on Ukraine

Russia said Friday it was pushing to take the western districts of the heavily destroyed salt mining town.

On Thursday, Moscow claimed to have cut off Ukrainian forces in Bakhmut. Kyiv denied the claim, saying it had access to its troops and was able to send in munitions.

On the diplomatic front, Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said Saturday that the United States should stop "encouraging war" in Ukraine, as he wrapped a state visit to China.

He also urged the European Union to "start talking about peace."

Western capitals have been Ukraine's key backers, supplying Kyiv with arms, ammunition as well as financial aid.

President Zelensky has said he will not negotiate with Russia as long as President Vladimir Putin is in power, while Moscow said this month it wants any Ukraine peace talks to focus on creating a "new world order."

Russia has long said it was leading a struggle against Washington's dominance over the international stage, and argues the Ukraine offensive is part of that fight.

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