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# Ukraine Says 2 Villages Retaken in Fresh Offensive

By AFP

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Kyiv announced on Sunday that Ukrainian forces had retaken two villages in the eastern region of Donetsk, the first reported gains of their new offensive.

After months of building expectations, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Saturday that a counteroffensive against Russian forces was underway, but refused to provide any details.

"Neskuchne of the Donetsk region is under the Ukrainian flag again," said the state border guard service, releasing a video of Ukrainian troops announcing the takeover.

They also shouted Kyiv's traditional battle cries such as "Glory to Ukraine!" and a slogan deriding Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Earlier in the day, Ukraine's ground forces said that soldiers of the 68th separate ranger

brigade had liberated the nearby village of Blahodatne.

**Embed:**

The ground forces released a video showing soldiers hoisting a Ukrainian flag over a destroyed building.

Military spokesman Valeriy Shershen said in televised remarks that the retaken village was located on the border of the eastern region of Donetsk and the southern region of Zaporizhzhia where Moscow has reported heavy Ukrainian assaults over the past week.

He said Ukraine's forces captured several Russian and pro-Russian troops.

Big Ukrainian military successes in the Zaporizhzhia region could potentially enable its forces to break through the land bridge that connects Russia with the Crimean peninsula it annexed from Ukraine. This would be a major reversal for Moscow.

Ukraine has largely been silent on the offensive, but Putin on Friday said Kyiv's fightback had already begun but was already failing.

Washington-based think tank the Institute for the Study of War said Saturday that Kyiv's forces had conducted counteroffensive operations in at least four frontline areas.

## 'Worst since Chernobyl'

Kyiv reported the first gains of the long-awaited offensive as Ukrainian officials said seven people died and 35 people were still missing due to a devastating flood prosecutors called the "worst environmental catastrophe since Chernobyl."

The Russian-controlled Kakhovka dam along the front line in the Kherson region was destroyed on Tuesday, forcing thousands to flee and sparking fears of humanitarian and environmental disasters.

Ukraine accuses Russia of blowing up the dam on the Dnipro River, while Moscow says Kyiv fired upon the structure.

Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said that 77 towns and villages had been flooded in the southern regions of Kherson and Mykolaiv.

Klymenko said that in the Kherson region, 35 people were missing, including seven children.

As a result of the flood, five people died in the region of Kherson and two people in the region of Mykolaiv, he said.

More than 3,700 people have been evacuated from their homes in the two regions, the minister added.

On Sunday, three people were killed and another ten injured as Russia shelled a rescue boat evacuating civilians from Russian-controlled territory, regional authorities said.

In the city of Kherson, the largest population center near the dam, the water began to subside and locals began to return to their homes to assess the damage, an AFP correspondent at the scene said.

Ukrainian rescuers in orange boats continued their efforts to evacuate people from the city's most affected areas and nearby islands.

An employee at Kherson's meteorological agency, Lora Musiyan, said the level of water dropped by 1.7 meters from the peak measurements recorded this week.

Oleksiy Gesin visited his grocery store in central Kherson for the first time in six days. Armed with a shovel and wearing rubber boots and a jacket, he cleared up debris in the pouring rain. He said he sustained "significant" losses.

"The water in the store was up to my chest," he told AFP, adding that food will have to be thrown away.

## 'Very complicated'

Ukrainian Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin and representatives of the International Criminal Court visited the region of Kherson, his office said.

"This is the worst environmental catastrophe since Chernobyl so we are investigating not only a war crime but also an ecocide," Kostin was quoted as saying in a statement.

"The situation is very complicated," he added.

He noted that a number of "dangerous" facilities including at least three cemeteries, oil storage terminals and garbage dumps have been flooded.

A total of 450 tons of turbine oil have spilled into the waters of the Dnipro and the Black Sea, he said.

More than 170 prosecutors have been investigating the breach of the dam.

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