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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Northeast Ukraine Town Urges Evacuations in Face of Russian Advance

By AFP

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A residential house in the town of Kupiansk, Kharkiv region, after Russian shelling. **State Emergency Service of Ukraine**

Ukraine urged civilians near the northeastern front line to evacuate on Thursday as Russia ramped up an assault to capture the territory already once seized during the conflict.

Kupiansk and the surrounding areas of Ukraine's Kharkiv region were liberated by Kyiv's forces last September, but Moscow has since pushed back on the region.

"Given the difficult security situation and the increasing amount of shelling by Russian terrorist forces in Kupiansk community, you have the opportunity to evacuate to a safer place," the city administration said, naming 37 settlements wedged between the town and Russian lines.

It said residents could evacuate to Kharkiv, some 56 miles (90 kilometers) west, where they

would have the option to move to safer regions, urging children, the elderly and the sick to leave.

"Do not neglect your safety and the safety of your loved ones," it said.

The warning came as Russia's Defense Ministry announced its soldiers had "improved their position" along the front line near the town, after reporting advances earlier in the week.

"In the course of offensive operations near Kupiansk, assault teams of the Western battle group improved their positions along the forward edge of the front line," it said in a daily briefing.

'Getting dangerous'

"It looks like the Russians are erasing places in the Kupiansk area," said Rostyslav Melnykiv, professor at a local university in Kharkiv.

"People are in danger of losing their lives, not just their homes," he told AFP.

One resident in the small town of Kivsharivka just outside of Kupiansk said she was preparing to evacuate with her children, while her husband refused to leave to care for his elderly mother.

"It's hard to leave them behind," Anna Koresh, 36, told AFP by phone.

"But since it's getting dangerous it's important to take the kids to a safe place."

Ukraine launched its highly anticipated counteroffensive in June after stockpiling Western weapons, but it has acknowledged difficult battles as it struggles to make headway.

Moscow said earlier Thursday it downed 11 Ukrainian drones nearing the Crimean peninsula and two headed for Moscow, in the latest wave of attacks targeting Russia and Russian-held territory.

"As a result of the thwarted terrorist attacks, there were no casualties or damage," the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement on Telegram.

Drone attacks

Moscow was largely spared in the early months of the war but the number of drone attacks on the capital has risen in recent months, with the city targeted multiple times this week.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned last month that "war" was coming to Russia, and that the country's "symbolic centers and military bases" would become targets.

On the other side of the front line, an oil depot in Ukraine's Rivne region was destroyed during a "massive drone attack" on Thursday, Governor Vitaliy Koval said, adding that emergency services and investigators were on the scene.

Those strikes came one day after a Russian attack on Ukraine's southern city of Zaporizhzhia

killed two people, officials said.

Zaporizhzhia, a strategically important city on the Dnipro River, lies some 44 kilometers (27 miles) from the frontline.

Zelensky posted a video of the strike on social media, showing a partially damaged church, with smoke rising from a fire burning in the courtyard.

Yuriy Malashko, the head of the Zaporizhzhia region, said Russia had hit a "church and retail outlets" in the city's Shevchenkivskyi district.

Nadiya, a 71-year-old Zaporizhzhia resident, told AFP Thursday that she had just gone to bed when the strike hit.

"I lay down on the bed — on the edge of my bed — and at the same time, there was a 'bang.' There was black smoke. Glass flew everywhere. I started screaming," she recounted.

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