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Deadly New Strike as Ukraine Mourns Dozens Killed at Wake

By AFP

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State Emergency Service of Ukraine

A 10-year-old and his grandmother were killed on Friday when Russian missiles smashed into Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine, just hours after another attack left dozens dead at a wake in a nearby village.

Rescue workers in Kharkiv were extinguishing fires next to charred vehicles, and twisted missile fragments lay in a deep crater in the center of the city, an AFP journalist at the scene said.

Multiple-story buildings surrounding the debris-strewn blast site were scarred by the impact of two cruise missiles, with dozens of windows blown out. Dazed residents walked beneath the skeletal housing blocks.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said the attack had killed a 10-year-old boy and described the

strikes as another example of "Russian terror" in a statement offering condolences to the child's family.

Kharkiv regional governor Oleg Synegubov said later that municipal workers had retrieved another body.

"Rescue workers found the body of a 68-year-old woman — the grandmother of the killed 10-year-old boy and his injured 11-month-old brother," he said.

Another 28 people had been wounded, he added.

In an earlier statement, Synegubov described how two Russian missiles had landed in the city. One hit a road in the center of the city; the other slammed into a three-story building, causing a fire that sent plumes of black smoke into the sky.

Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city that lies in a region bordering Russia, has been under persistent Russian shelling since Moscow's forces invaded in February last year.

Attack on soldier's wake

The strikes there came as Synegubov updated the death toll from Thursday's missile strike on a village in the Kharkiv region that had killed dozens of people less than 24 hours earlier.

"Fifty-two people have died as a result of this missile attack because one more person died in a medical facility," Synegubov told state-run television, raising the toll by one.

Related article: Russian Strike Kills 51 Gathered for Wake in East Ukraine

The Kremlin, responding to questions from reporters on the village strike, again insisted that Russian forces do not target civilians in Ukraine.

"Strikes are carried out on military targets, on places where military personnel are concentrated," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists.

Those killed in the village of Hroza had gathered at a cafe for the wake of a fallen Ukrainian soldier.

The strike provoked outrage from Western leaders while the United Nations said the attack could amount to a war crime.

The soldier being commemorated was killed a month after Russia invaded in February last year. He had been buried in the central city of Dnipro — away from his home village, which was then under Russian occupation.

He was reburied in Hroza on Thursday morning. His wife and son, also a soldier, were both killed in the strike, officials said.

Around 20 rescuers from Kharkiv city were cleaning the rubble from the destroyed cafe and nearby shop on Friday morning.

'Everyone died'

Oleksiy and some of his family came to the cemetery to mark out graves for his sister and brother-in-law killed in the attack — their bodies had been taken by police to Kharkiv.

"I don't know when we will be able to bury them," he told AFP. "My brother's body was preserved, but his wife's head was missing."

Nearby in the cemetery, a recently dug grave was covered with fresh flowers and a Ukrainian flag. It was the grave of 49-year-old Andriy Kozir, the soldier that villagers had gathered to pay homage to when a missile hit their cafe.

"Everyone at the wake died," said 73-year-old Valentyna Koziyenko, who lived opposite the destroyed cafe.

"The strike happened just after people went in," she told AFP, adding that the blast from the strike had torn the roof off her building.

"How did the Russians know that so many people were in there?" said Koziyenko. "Maybe someone told them."

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on Friday described the Kharkiv attacks as "atrocities" that "prove that global support for Ukraine must be sustained and increased."

Swathes of the Kharkiv region were captured by Russian forces in the early days of their invasion, launched in late February 2022.

Ukrainian forces clawed back much of that territory in a lightning offensive late last year.

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