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Russia Steps Up Attacks on East Ukraine's Avdiivka – Mayor

By AFP

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A church and a damaged building face the Ukrainian city of Avdiivka. **Dmitry Yagodkin / TASS**

Russia has stepped up attacks on Ukraine's shattered eastern frontline town of Avdiivka, its mayor said Thursday.

The industrial town near the Russian-held regional stronghold of Donetsk has been under fierce attack for more than a month.

"It is very hot. Indeed, in the last few days, the enemy has become more active," Avdiivka's Mayor Vitaliy Barabash said on national television.

Russian troops are using armored vehicles, targeting the industrial zone and hitting positions in the town "around the clock" to strike high-rise buildings, Barabash said.

Under fire since 2014, the town has been largely destroyed by shelling.

There are 1,431 people left in the town, he said, out of a pre-war population of around 30,000.

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General Oleksandr Tarnavskiy, who is leading the counteroffensive in the south, said that "our soldiers are firmly holding the defense in the direction of Avdiivka."

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky last week described Avdiivka as one of the "hottest" areas on the frontline.

The British defense ministry said in an intelligence report Thursday said Russia "is almost certainly attempting a pincer movement to encircle the town."

It said Russian forces are likely near the town's huge coke plant located in a "key tactical position" close to the main entry road.

Production has been suspended for months due to frequent Russian bombardment.

Russian soldiers have recently advanced on the village of Stepove, to the north of the plant.

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