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Russia Claims Advances Near Chasiv Yar as Ukraine Hails New Aid

By Victoria Lukovenko for AFP

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Russia's Defense Ministry/TASS

Russia said Sunday its forces had gained territory near the key battleground town of Chasiv Yar in east Ukraine, highlighting the pressure facing Kyiv as it gears up to receive $61 billion in new U.S. aid.

After nearly a year-and-a-half delay, the United States House of Representatives finally approved the aid package in a vote Saturday, giving a morale boost to Ukrainian forces on the defensive.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Sunday it had taken control of Bohdanivka, a small frontline village less than three kilometers northeast of Chasiv Yar.

"Units of the southern grouping of troops have completely liberated the settlement of Bohdanivka," the ministry said.

Chasiv Yar, which had a population of about 13,000 before the conflict, has been largely destroyed by fighting and most residents have fled.

The Kremlin has sought to play down the impact of the new package of U.S. aid, which Russia's Foreign Ministry said would deepen Washington's "immersion" in the war.

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"Feverish attempts aimed at saving [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky's neo-Nazi regime are doomed to failure," Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhailo Podolyak said the new U.S. aid would lead to "de-escalation" and "punishment" for Russia.

"That is why we are pleased to hear today the unconditional whining, hysterical panic in Russian official statements," he said. "It will help a lot."

Ukrainians also hailed Washington's approval of the new assistance, which comes as Kyiv's outgunned and outmanned troops cede ground on the frontline.

"It will help a lot," 50-year-old nurse Oksana told AFP in the capital.

"The most important thing is to have something to defend ourselves with. Both civilians and our guys. It will save our lives," she said.

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Ukrainian officials have said the delay in aid has left civilians vulnerable and forced it onto the back foot on the battlefield, as Russia seeks to press its advantage.

But most were relieved regardless.

"Of course, it's not too late," 19-year-old barber Dmytro told AFP.

"In any case, we need help. If it was either later or earlier, it will help in any case," he said.

Kyiv's forces said earlier this month that the situation around the frontline town of Chasiv Yar was "difficult and tense," and that Russia was unleashing constant fire.

It has also reported increased civilian casualties. On Sunday, prosecutors said Russia shelled the town of Ukrainsk in the eastern Donetsk region, killing an 82-year-old woman.

"In addition, four men aged 21 to 53 sustained injuries of varying severity," the Donetsk Regional Prosecutor's Office said. "Six apartment buildings were damaged."

Russia separately "fired ballistic missiles" at the southern region of Odesa, targeting logistics and port infrastructure as well as defense forces in the south of the country.

''The blast wave and rocket fragments damaged private houses,'' it added.

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