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Moscow Claims More Advances in Ukraine's Kharkiv Region

By AFP

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Russian Defense Ministry

Russia's Defense Ministry said Sunday that its forces had captured four more villages in Ukraine's Kharkiv region as thousands of residents were evacuated amid Moscow's surprise ground offensive.

The ministry said its forces had "advanced deeply into the enemy defenses" and taken villages including Gatishche, Krasnoye, Morokhovets, and Oleinikovo.

Ukraine's military, meanwhile, said it was managing to hold back further Russian advances.

At an evacuation point near the front line in Kharkiv region, AFP reporters on Sunday saw groups of people who had been evacuated from around the town of Vovchansk, most of them elderly and disoriented.

"We weren't going to leave. Home is home," said 72-year-old Lyuda Zelenskaya, hugging a

trembling cat named Zhora.

Liuba Konovalova, 70, said she had endured a "really terrifying" night before her evacuation.

Around them, volunteers assisted evacuees toward a few wooden benches where they registered and received food before being evacuated toward Kharkiv, the regional capital.

"In total, 4,073 people have been evacuated," Kharkiv region Governor Oleh Syniehubov said on social media.

Ukrainian authorities have reported that several civilians have been killed in Russia's new offensive since it began early Friday.

Syniehubov said the latest casualty, a 63-year-old man, was killed by artillery fire in the village of Glyboke.

'Everything... is being destroyed'

Oleksiy Kharkivsky, a senior police officer from Vovchansk who is helping to coordinate evacuations, said "several people" had been killed by shelling on Saturday and one person was found dead in rubble overnight.

"The city is constantly under fire," he said. "Everything in the city is being destroyed... You hear constant explosions, artillery, and mortars. The enemy is hitting the city with everything they have."

Kharkivsky estimated that around 1,500 people had been evacuated or fled Vovchansk since Friday, adding that there had been 32 drone strikes on the town over the past 24 hours.

But the Ukrainian military said its defenses were holding.

"Russian occupiers' attempts to break through our defenses have been stopped," Ukraine's commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky said.

But he added that the situation in the Kharkiv region had "deteriorated significantly" and was "complicated."

Ukrainian officials have warned for weeks that Moscow might try to attack its northeastern border regions, pressing its advantage as Ukraine struggles with delays in Western aid and manpower shortages.

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