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Strikes on Russian-Held Ukraine Kill 26, Occupation Authorities Say

By AFP

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An apartment building in Luhansk suffers damage from a Ukrainian military strike. **Alexander Reka /T ASS**

Updates throughout.

Ukrainian strikes on parts of the Russian-held Luhansk and Kherson regions killed 26 people and injured dozens more on Friday, occupation authorities said.

Both Ukrainian regions were among four Russia claimed to have annexed in September 2022 despite not fully controlling any of them following the full-scale military campaign launched that February.

A shop in the village of Sadove in the southern Kherson region "with a large number of visitors and employees was destroyed," Vladimir Saldo, head of Russian occupation authorities in Kherson, wrote on Telegram.

A HIMARS missile struck shortly afterward as residents from neighboring houses rushed to help the victims, Saldo told Russian media, putting the overall toll at 22 dead and 15 injured.

Saldo condemned the "vile murder of civilians" made possible by Western arms deliveries to Ukraine.

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Earlier on Friday, Russian-appointed officials in Luhansk reported that a Ukrainian missile strike on an apartment block in the eastern region's main city of the same name killed four and wounded more than 40.

Luhansk city came under a "massive" missile attack on Friday morning, according to Leonid Pasechnik, the Russia-appointed head of the region almost entirely under Moscow's control.

A section of an apartment block collapsed and the "bodies of four peaceful civilians killed were removed from the rubble," the Moscow-backed region's government said on Telegram.

"Forty-six people have received medical treatment," said regional health minister Nataliya Pashchenko, adding that they included an eight-year-old boy and three teenage boys.

The condition of 10 of the injured is "grave," she said.

The strike tore open the facade of a five-storyy Soviet-era apartment blocks from the roof down and left a deep crater in the ground, images posted by the Russian emergency services showed.

Rescuers carried out one elderly casualty on a stretcher, footage posted by the emergency services showed.

The strike damaged a total of 33 apartment blocks in the east of the city as well as two schools, three kindergartens and a higher education college, Pasechnik said.

The Russian Defense Ministry accused Ukraine of targeting civilian areas, saying "the Kyiv regime... deliberately fired five U.S.-made ATACMS missiles at residential districts of the city of Luhansk."

"Four American missiles were shot down by Russian air defenses. One missile struck two apartment blocks," the ministry said.

The attack came as Russia's Defense Ministry claimed new advances against Kyiv's stretched military.

Over the last week, Russian troops "improved their positions along the front line and liberated the settlement of Paraskoviivka," the ministry said.

The village is around 25 kilometers (15 miles) southwest of the city of Donetsk, capital of the region that Moscow claims to have annexed in 2022.

After months of stalemate, Moscow is gaining ground in the east, capturing 47 Ukrainian towns and villages in total since the start of this year, according to President Vladimir Putin.

In the central city of Nikopol in the Dnipropetrovsk region, Russian shelling killed a 71-year-old woman, the regional authorities said.

The city is on the Dnipro River and Russian forces control the opposite bank.

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