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Russian Forces Intensify Assault on Ukrainian Frontline Town

By AFP

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The town of Toretsk after Russian shelling. **State Emergency Service of Ukraine**

Russian forces have escalated attacks near Toretsk, a frontline town in eastern Ukraine that has remained relatively calm over recent months of fighting, officials said Wednesday.

Overwhelmed and outgunned, Ukrainian forces have struggled to hold the line in the eastern Donetsk region, which the Kremlin claims to have annexed in a 2022 referendum condemned by the West.

Ukraine's military said in a briefing late Tuesday that Russia had "intensified" its assaults near Toretsk and "launched five assault operations at once," targeting surrounding towns and villages.

Military analysts reported Russian advances toward Toretsk, which had an estimated pre-war population of around 32,000 people.

The Russian Defense Ministry on Wednesday also said its forces had "improved" their positions around Toretsk.

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Moscow's troops in recent months have swung the battlefield initiative in their favor and advanced north and south of Toretsk, but the front line has remained relatively stable near the mining town.

The Ukrainian military said the rise in Russian attacks had begun "after a prolonged lull."

'Shooting... all day long'

One resident in Toretsk, 67-year-old Oleksandr, told AFP journalists by phone that he had witnessed an increase in Russian bombardments, corroborating official reports.

"They started shooting in the morning and it was going on all day long," he said, adding that residents had been taking shelter in basements.

Residents were staying near the entrances of buildings "so that if anything happens, they can jump inside," Oleksandr said, adding that a Russian projectile had landed near his home earlier Wednesday.

Donetsk region Governor Vadym Filashkin announced Wednesday morning that Russian strikes near the town of Pokrovsk further south had killed one person and wounded another.

He also said 21 residential buildings had been damaged near Toretsk, nearly double that from a day earlier.

Meanwhile, Russian forces continue their advance toward Chasiv Yar, a strategic hilltop town further north of Toretsk whose capture would likely accelerate Moscow's gains toward large civilian hubs in the Donetsk region.

Units from Ukraine's 225th Separate Assault Battalion deployed near Chasiv Yar published drone footage on Wednesday taken over the city, showing rows of destroyed and smoldering housing blocks.

"Every day, fierce battles are fought for the city. Wave after wave, the occupiers try to break through our defense," Filashkin said, describing Russia's military strategy as "methodical scorched earth tactics."

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