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Blood and Black Smoke: Deadly Russian Strike Rocks Ukraine Market

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Drying blood was smeared across a billboard advertising electronics and black smoke billowed over the tangled metal remains of a supermarket after a Russian strike tore into Kostyantynivka in east Ukraine.

Anya Alyabieva was dozing off in her shop that sells hardware and military accessories when the blast jolted her from her stupor and sent panic racing through the quiet residential district of the frontline town.

"Everyone started running. The usual exit from the building was completely blocked and it was impossible to get out," she recounted, wide-eyed.

"We started climbing out the window. We barely made it out. We turn around and everything is burning," the 25-year-old said.

"I started running one way and my colleague ran the other way," she told AFP, showing several light cuts on her arms sustained in the blast.

Embed:

The latest bombardment on the industrial town — already scarred by months of relentless Russian attacks — left 14 dead and wounded 43 more, officials said.

Kostyantynivka, once home to around 70,000 people, lies 13 kilometers from advancing Russian forces.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said people had been trapped under the rubble and vowed that "Russia will be held accountable for this terror."

One man in shorts and a T-shirt hurled expletives at police as he barged through a cordon towards body bags lined up by rescue workers, apparently in search of a missing relative.

'Suddenly a huge explosion'

Nearby, a crying woman with a handkerchief over her mouth was appealing to police for any information about a missing child relative.

Natalia, who lives in a Soviet-era apartment building with a leafy courtyard just next to the market was watching television when the blast blew out the windows of her balcony.

"Bang is a mild way of putting it," the 51-year-old in a red shirt and dyed black hair told AFP.

AFP reporters saw dozens of people running from the scene as police warned of a potential second strike.

Plumes of black smoke rose from the ruins of the large shopping complex as firefighters worked to extinguish the blaze.

Nearby, a woman with a blood-soaked shirt and a bleeding leg was crying outside a residential building surrounded by shards of broken glass.

"I didn’t hear anything coming, just suddenly a huge explosion. I’m in shock," said one witness in a dressing gown and flip flops, declining to give her name.

Air raid sirens sounded over the frontline city as panicked and tearful residents cleared debris and made phone calls to missing family members.

Drones and an uptick in artillery fire in the area were also audible around the town located in the eastern Donetsk region.

Russia has long seen the mining region as a key prize, and has redoubled its offensive there after claiming to have annexed it late in 2022.

Russian troops recently claimed to have captured a string of nearby villages where residents

have been fleeing.

Ukrainian authorities have ordered the evacuation of children and their guardians — including from villages around the key railway hub of Pokrovsk — anticipating more advances.

Natalia had fled from Pokrovsk to Kostyantynivka just one week ago, escaping fighting that she told AFP was even scarier.

Authorities had given Natalia the option of leaving the war-battered region entirely but she felt she had no options.

"The question is: Where to and with what money?" she said, the sounds of nearby shelling echoing in the distance.

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