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Ukraine Orders Children To Evacuate From Northeastern Towns

By AFP

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The village of Zapadne in Kharkiv region. **@kharkivoda**

Ukraine on Thursday announced evacuations of children from several towns in the northeastern Kharkiv region threatened by Russian forces, as Moscow said it saw nothing new in U.S. President Donald Trump's call for it to end its invasion.

The evacuation announcement came as the Kremlin said that while it was ready for "mutually respectful dialogue" with Trump, his declarations on the conflict marked no break with the previous U.S. administration.

Trump on Wednesday threatened fresh sanctions on Moscow if Russia did not strike a deal to end the military campaign against Ukraine, which he called "ridiculous."

But on the ground in northeastern Ukraine, Kharkiv region Governor Oleh Syniehubov said "267 children and their families are to be evacuated from 16 settlements to safe places."

Syniehubov said the towns and villages affected are near Kupiansk, a town that Russia has tried to capture for months where fighting is raging around its outskirts.

Outnumbered Ukrainian forces are struggling to hold back a better-resourced Russian army across a long front line.

"The decision was made due to the intensified hostile shelling. We urge families with minors to save their lives and leave the dangerous areas," Syniehubov said on social media.

He earlier said a 54-year-old woman was killed in a Russian attack on a village near Kupiansk.

Kyiv also said that Russian air attacks had killed at least three others and wounded dozens in other frontline towns.

'Waiting for signals'

Expectations are high that Russian President Vladimir Putin and Trump will soon hold a phone call to discuss the conflict, after the Republican pledged on the campaign trail to bring a swift end to the fighting.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russia was "ready for equal, mutually respectful dialogue."

"We are waiting for signals, which we have not yet received," he added.

Russia also said it considered the policies of Joe Biden's administration "criminal," calling on Trump to "correct" them.

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Trump has not said publicly how he sees the contours of a potential peace deal between Kyiv and Moscow.

Putin has outlined maximalist demands that include the Ukrainian withdrawal from parts of its own territory still under Kyiv's control.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has meanwhile ruled out territorial concessions, though he has said he would consider trying to secure the return of land captured by Russia through "diplomatic" means.

Kyiv is also demanding security guarantees from NATO and the United States along with the deployment of Western, including American, peacekeeping troops.

Sanctions threat

In a post on Truth Social, Trump on Wednesday told Putin to make a deal "now" and threatened "high levels of Taxes, Tariffs, and Sanctions" on Moscow.

Trump said he was "not looking to hurt Russia" and had "always had a very good relationship

with President Putin," a leader for whom he has expressed admiration in the past.

"All of that being said, I'm going to do Russia, whose Economy is failing, and President Putin, a very big FAVOR. Settle now, and STOP this ridiculous War! IT'S ONLY GOING TO GET WORSE," he said.

Asked about the comments on Thursday, Peskov said the Kremlin did not see anything "particularly new" in Trump's threat of sanctions.

He said it was clear from Trump's first presidency that the Republican "liked" sanctions, adding that Moscow was "closely following" all of his statements.

The Kremlin has repeatedly dismissed the barrage of Western sanctions that it has been hit with since ordering troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

The Russian economy has largely defied Western hopes the restrictions would push it into economic collapse.

Peskov on Thursday conceded that Russia faced economic "problems" — like "almost all countries" — but said Russia had the resources to meet "all military requirements."

Russia's troops have been advancing on the battlefield in recent months, while both Moscow and Kyiv have increased their aerial attacks deep behind the front lines.

Moscow's army on Thursday claimed to have captured another small settlement in the eastern Donetsk region, which Russia declared to have annexed in 2022.

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