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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Ukraine Strikes Russian Bombers Ahead of Istanbul Talks

By AFP

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A Russian Air Force Tupolev Tu-22M3 could be among the aircraft targeted by Ukraine, online reports indicate. **Anton Novoderezhkin/TASS**

Ukraine said Sunday it destroyed Russian bombers worth billions of dollars as far away as Siberia, in its longest-range assault of the war as it geared up for talks on prospects for a ceasefire.

In a spectacular claim, Ukraine said it damaged $7 billion worth of Russian aircraft parked at four airbases thousands of kilometres away, with unverified video footage showing aircraft engulfed in flames and black smoke.

A source in Ukraine's SBU security services said the strikes hit 41 planes that were used to "bomb Ukrainian villages."

The drones were concealed in the ceilings of transportation containers, which were opened up

to release them for the assault, the source added.

Ceasefire talks

The long-planned operation came at a delicate moment three years into Russia's invasion.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Sunday that he was sending a delegation to Istanbul led by his Defense Minister Rustem Umerov for talks on Monday with Russian officials.

Turkey is hosting the meeting, which was spurred by U.S. President Donald Trump's push for a quick deal to end the three-year war.

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Zelensky, who previously voiced scepticism about whether Russia was serious in proposing Monday's meeting, said priorities included "a complete and unconditional ceasefire" and the return of prisoners and abducted children.

Russia has rejected previous ceasefire demands.

It said it has formulated its own peace terms but refused to divulge them in advance.

Operation 'Spider's Web'

Zelensky on Sunday hailed the "brilliant" results of the coordinated attack code-named "Spider's Web," which he said had used 117 drones and was the country's "most long-range operation" in more than three years of war.

Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed on Telegram that several of its military aircraft "caught fire," adding that there were no casualties.

Rybar, a Telegram account close to the Russian military, called it a "very heavy blow" for Moscow and pointed to what it called "serious errors" by Russian intelligence.

The SBU source said strikes targeted Russian airbases in the eastern Siberian city of Belaya, in Olenya, in the Arctic near Finland, and in Ivanovo and Dyagilevo, both east of Moscow.

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The operation was prepared for over a year and a half, the Ukrainian SBU source said, and aimed to destroy "enemy bombers far from the front."

Zelensky said one of the targeted locations was right next to one of the offices of Russia's FSB security services.

'First such strike on Siberia'

Russia said it had arrested several suspects, including the driver of a truck from which a drone

had taken off, state agencies said.

Zelensky, however, said that people involved in preparing the attacks were "extracted from Russian territory in time."

The SBU claimed in a social media post to have hit Russian military planes worth a combined $7 billion in a "special operation."

Igor Kobzev, Governor of Russia's Irkutsk region, which hosts the targeted Belaya airbase, said it was "the first attack of this sort in Siberia."

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He called on the population not to panic and posted an amateur video apparently showing a drone flying in the sky and a large cloud of grey smoke.

Russia drone strikes

Russia has been announcing Ukrainian drone attacks on a near-daily basis, usually saying they had all been shot down.

At the same time, Russia has been carrying out constant attacks on Ukraine.

On Sunday, Ukraine's Air Force said it was hit by 472 Russian drones and seven missiles overnight — a record since the beginning of the invasion.

In a rare admission of its military losses, the Ukrainian army said Russia's "missile strike on the location of one of the training units" had killed a dozen soldiers, most of whom had been in shelters during the attack, and wounded more than 60.

The attack led Ukrainian ground forces commander Mykhailo Drapaty to announce his resignation, saying he felt "responsibility" for the soldiers' deaths.

Separately on Sunday, the Russian army said it had captured another village in Ukraine's northern Sumy region, where Kyiv fears Moscow could mount a fresh ground assault.

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