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In Photos: Chernobyl, 40 Years On

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April 26, marks the 40th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine. At 01:23 that morning, while concluding a safety test, reactor No. 4 went into meltdown, triggering a massive steam explosion that sent radioactive fallout across Europe. It remains the largest nuclear disaster in history, with an environmental, social and healthcare cost estimated to have exceeded $700 billion. The disaster permanently damaged public trust in more than just nuclear power, sending political shockwaves across the U.S.S.R. Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev would later say "Even more than my launch of perestroika, [it] was perhaps the real cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union." Decades on, the war in Ukraine has meant Chernobyl remains darkly relevant. Last year a Russian drone strike seriously damaged the site's outer protection, requiring $584 million in repairs to ensure radiation remains confined. These photos trace the disaster, ensuing cleanup efforts and Chernobyl's fragile place amid war.



Genya Savilov / AFP

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