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Zelensky Accuses Russia of ‘Nuclear Terrorism’ on Chernobyl Anniversary

By AFP

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People light candles set in the shape of a radiation sign during a commemoration ceremony in the town of Slavutych on April 25, 2026. **Genya Savilov / AFP**

President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia of "nuclear terrorism" on Sunday, as Ukraine marked the 40th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster amid deadly new drone attacks.

Five people were killed across Ukraine after Moscow launched more than 100 drones overnight, the latest in an almost nightly barrage the country has faced since the beginning of the war in 2022.

In a social media post marking the Chernobyl anniversary, Zelensky said Russia's invasion was "again bringing the world to the brink of a man-made disaster."

He highlighted how Russian drones regularly pass over Chernobyl and that one had hit its

protective shell last year.

"The world must not allow this nuclear terrorism to continue, and the best way is to force Russia to stop its reckless attacks," he added.

The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi and Moldovan President Maia Sandu joined the commemorative events.

Commenting on damage to the shell, which the environmental group Greenpeace says raises the risk of a radioactive leak, Grossi said that "repairs should start as soon as possible and that leaving the situation as it is now is problematic."

Any repairs to the massive metal outer structure, which may potentially take up to four years, are virtually impossible due to Russia's invasion, according to Greenpeace.

Russia's nuclear agency Rosatom, the successor of the Soviet Atomic Energy Ministry that managed the facility, said: "To remember Chernobyl means to remember the people who bore the brunt of the disaster and to take that experience into account in every decision we make today to prevent a similar catastrophe."

Rosatom took over the plant in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia, Europe's biggest civilian nuclear power complex, after it was occupied by Russia early in the invasion. The plant is now in shutdown mode, but Moscow and Kyiv repeatedly accuse each other of targeting it during the conflict.

Ukraine has called for sanctions against Rosatom.

Including Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine has four nuclear power plants, which are vital for the country's power supplies amid constant blackouts caused by relentless Russian attacks on energy infrastructure.

The 1986 explosion at Chernobyl was the worst civilian nuclear disaster in history and changed global perceptions of atomic energy.

Thousands are estimated to have died as a result of exposure to the radiation, though assessments of the precise human toll vary. Some 600,000 people involved in the clean-up operation — known as "liquidators" — were exposed to high levels of radiation.

Hundreds of thousands more were evacuated due to the radioactive contamination. The zone around the plant has become an exclusion zone, with abandoned towns, fields and forests.

In total, the disaster made large swathes of land in northern Ukraine and southern Belarus effectively uninhabitable.

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