The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Ukraine Sets Major Oil Refinery Ablaze in Largest-Ever Drone Attack on Moscow

June 18, 2026



Black smoke rises from a Gazprom Neft-operated oil refinery south of Moscow on June 18, 2026. **AFP**

Black smoke blanketed the skies of southern Moscow on Thursday morning after Ukrainian drones struck and set fire to a major oil refinery, in what was the largest-ever attack on the Russian capital since the start of the war.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said around 6 a.m. local time that air defense systems were "repelling a large-scale attack" and that "several drones" managed to strike the Gazprom Neft-operated refinery located about 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) southeast of central Moscow.

Videos shared on social media showed huge columns of smoke and multiple large fires rising from the facility, which supplies around a third of Moscow's gasoline and fuel. The refinery was also attacked on Tuesday, after which it reportedly halted operations.

Sobyanin said nearly 200 Ukrainian drones were intercepted during the early morning barrage, eclipsing the capital's previous record attack in March of this year, when 74 drones were downed.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called strikes "a fully justified response to Russian attacks on our cities and communities."

"It is time the war ended, and Russia must take the necessary steps in diplomacy," Zelensky wrote in a post on X.

Embed:

> ⛔ Ukraine has launched its largest drone attack on Moscow in years, sparking fires in and around the capital and forcing evacuations at the country's largest airport, officials said.
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> Read more: https://t.co/zUpanS6bNR pic.twitter.com/PaDD1QFM57
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> — The Moscow Times (@MoscowTimes) June 18, 2026

A woman who lives in southeastern Moscow, not far from the Gazprom Neft refinery, told The Moscow Times that she woke up around 5 a.m. to the sound of air defense shooting at drones.

"I was horrified, shocked and angry. The closer this situation gets to us, the more I find myself thinking about human lives," the woman said, asking to remain anonymous.

Another Muscovite, who lives near a shopping center that was also struck on Thursday, said many people in the capital have gotten used to Ukrainian attacks after more than four years of war.

"There isn't much anxiety," she said, describing the mood on the ground.

Both women told The Moscow Times that they did not receive an SMS alert warning of the incoming drone attack.

In the Moscow region, Governor Andrei Vorobyov said 17 people, including two children, were wounded in the Ukrainian drone attacks.

Some people living in the area around the Gazprom Neft refinery claimed there were downpours of "black rain," or rainfall contaminated with pollutants like soot. Local authorities advised residents to minimize their outdoor exposure and wear masks if possible.

Related article: Has the Tide Turned Against Russia in the Ukraine War?

Sheremetyevo Airport, Russia's busiest airport, said it evacuated passengers to "safe locations" and suspended flights during the drone attack on Moscow. All major airports in the Russian capital halted but then later restored regular operations.

Aeroflot and Rossiya airlines said they canceled more than 170 flights to and from Moscow.

Flight restrictions were also temporarily imposed at airports in central Russia, including Kazan, where President Vladimir Putin was scheduled to meet Southeast Asian leaders at an ASEAN summit.

Speaking alongside the president of the Philippines at the summit later in the day, Putin made no mention of Thursday's attack.

However, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who was also at the gathering in Kazan, told state media that Russia would carry out major strikes against Ukraine in response.

Meanwhile, in the southern Rostov region, local authorities said one person was killed and two others were injured in Ukrainian strikes that damaged a diesel locomotive and set two buildings on fire.

Russia's Defense Ministry said a total of 555 drones were intercepted across the country and annexed Crimea between Wednesday night and Thursday morning.

Related article: Russia's Fuel Shortages Are Manageable. But the Kremlin's Options Are Shrinking.

Ukraine began ramping up its attacks against Russian oil refineries and supply lines this spring in a bid to deprive the Kremlin of windfalls from surging oil prices. Drone strikes have halted or scaled back production at facilities that account for large shares of Russia's gasoline output.

In addition to attacking Russian refineries, Ukraine has been targeting fuel trucks that supply annexed Crimea, which has led to an acute gasoline shortage in the annexed peninsula.

Dozens of Russian regions have seen fuel rationing measures slowly introduced at gas stations in recent weeks. The disruptions arrive at a critical time, with both the summer vacation travel season and the agricultural farming season in full swing.

Industry sources told Reuters this week that Russia will import fuel from Asia by sea this month due to the shortages.

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