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Rosatom’s Likhachev Says Ukraine Attacked Fuel Trucks, Endangered Zaporizhzhia Plant

By Reuters

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The Zaporizhzhia plant, Europe's largest with six reactors, was seized by Russian forces in the early weeks of the Ukraine war that broke out in February 2022. **Alexander Polegenko/TASS**

The head of Russia's state nuclear energy corporation accused Ukraine on Sunday of attacking diesel fuel trucks, killing two Russian servicemen and deliberately jeopardizing safety at the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in Ukraine.

Alexei Likhachev said the attack took place on Friday and also resulted in injuries to other Russian soldiers.

The Zaporizhzhia plant, Europe's largest with six reactors, was seized by Russian forces in the early weeks of the Ukraine war that broke out in February 2022. Each side has regularly accused the other of actions that endanger safety at the plant and increase the risk of a

nuclear accident.

Likhachev issued a statement saying Ukrainian forces had launched “a series of combined strikes” on Friday on fuel trucks which deliver diesel to the station.

“The strikes hit very close to the perimeter of the station's site,” he said.

“Two servicemen were killed, and a large number of Russian soldiers were injured, some seriously. They were all involved in supporting this purely civilian mission.”

Fuel is critically important for the plant as diesel generators provide power to keep nuclear fuel in the reactors cool when the plant's two external power links are down. Both were down for nearly three weeks in August and September.

Ukraine has demanded that Russia abandon the station and hand its operation back to Kyiv, a demand rejected by Moscow. The fuel currently generates no electricity.

The UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, has stationed an observer team permanently at the station, along with Ukraine's three other working plants.

The agency has repeatedly acted as an intermediary when disputes arise and last month helped arrange a local ceasefire in order to carry out repairs and restore external power links.

Russia attacked a truck near Ukraine's border with Poland, Polish and Ukrainian officials said on Sunday, the latest strike to hit areas near NATO as Moscow and Kyiv intensify their long-distance strikes to try to shift momentum in the war.

Polish border guards told Reuters that the Dorohusk-Yahodyn crossing point had briefly stopped working after the attack around 800 meters (half a mile) from Poland, but that the crossing has since resumed operations.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it had targeted infrastructure facilitating military cargoes from Europe in Western Ukraine. Ukraine is dependent on trade and arms shipments from across the Polish, Romanian and Moldovan borders.

Russia has begun targeting Ukraine's border crossings with its Western allies in recent weeks, part of a growing campaign by both sides to erode the other's economic infrastructure more than four years into Russia's invasion.

In India, where Russian President Vladimir Putin had been attending the BRICS summit, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that both Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping had offered help brokering a peace settlement, Russian state news agency TASS reported.

Last month, at a summit in Kyrgyzstan, Modi told Putin that the war must end, one of several calls for peace by leaders of nations that have traditionally strong relations with Russia.

Last month, Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev publicly told Putin that he should halt the conflict along the front line, which has remained largely static this year.

Russia has ruled that out, saying Ukraine should pull back to leave the industrialized eastern Donbas region in Moscow's hands, something Kyiv has said it will never do.

Both Brazil and China, themselves founding BRICS members, have called for a resumption of peace talks.

TASS cited Peskov as saying that Putin had informed Modi of the situation “on the ground” in Ukraine, and that Russia had not ruled out resuming three-way talks between Russia, Ukraine and the United States in October.

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