



Ukraine kills 21 with missiles near Snake Island after abandoning

After two missiles hit apartment building and recreation centre



Bodies of civilian people killed by a Russian missile strike are seen in front of a damaged residential building

earlier 41 people had been rescued from the apartment building where 152 lived.

The regional governor said the Soviet-era missiles had been fired from the direction of the Black Sea.

The Kremlin denied targeting civilians: “I would like to remind you of the president’s words that the Russian Armed Forces do not work with civilian targets,” Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

The attack came just four days after Russia struck a crowded shopping mall in central Ukraine killing at least 19 people.

Kyiv says Moscow has dramatically escalated its long-range attacks hitting civilian targets far

from the front line in recent days, which Ukraine describes as a war crime. Russia says it has been aiming at military sites.

Thousands of civilians have been killed since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24 in what Ukraine says is an unprovoked war of aggression. Russia calls the invasion a “special operation” to root out nationalists.

On Thursday, Russia pulled its troops off Snake Island, a desolate but strategically important outcrop that it seized on the war’s first day and had used to control the northwestern Black Sea, where it has blockaded Odesa and other ports.

In his nightly video address, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy

The superiority in fire power of the occupiers is still very much in evidence. They have simply brought in all their reserves to hit us

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKIY

hailed what he described as a strategic victory at Snake Island.

“It does not yet guarantee security. It does not yet ensure that the enemy will not come back,” he said. “But this significantly limits the actions of the occupiers. Step by step, we will push them back from our sea, our land and our sky.”

Standing ovation for EU flag

In Kyiv, Ukrainian lawmakers gave a standing ovation as the flag of the European Union was carried through the chamber to stand alongside Ukraine’s own flag behind the dais, a symbol of Ukraine’s formal EU candidate status granted last week.

Zelenskiy and the lawmakers also stood for a minute of silence for those killed in the morning attacks near Odesa.

Russia’s stepped up campaign of long-range missile attacks on Ukrainian cities has come as its forces have ground out success on the battlefield in the east, with a relentless assault to force Kyiv to

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Moscow has so far denied responsibility for the strike and the Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, yesterday reiterated Russia’s claim that it was not targeting residential areas

cede two provinces to separatists.

Moscow has been on the verge of capturing one of those provinces, Luhansk, since taking the city of Sievierodonetsk last week after some of the heaviest fighting of the war. Ukraine’s last bastion in Luhansk is the city of Lysychansk across the Siverskyi Donets river, which is close to being encircled under relentless Russian artillery assault.

The Russians were shelling Lysychansk from different directions and approaching from several sides, regional Governor Serhiy Gaidai said on Ukrainian television.

“The superiority in fire power of the occupiers is still very much in evidence,” Zelenskiy said. “They have simply brought

in all their reserves to hit us.”

National symbol

In Russian-occupied Sievierodonetsk, residents have emerged from basements to sift through the rubble of their city.

“Almost all the city infrastructure is destroyed. We are living without gas, electricity, and water since May,” Sergei Oleinik, 65, told Reuters. “We are glad that this ended, and soon maybe reconstruction will start, and we will be back to more or less normal life.”

But after its losses in the east, the Ukrainian victory at Snake Island gives Kyiv a major success in the Black Sea. The island has been a national symbol since the first day of the war when a Ukrainian guard ordered by Russia to surrender radioed back: “Russian warship, go fuck yourself.”

Russia has used its control of the sea to impose a blockade on Ukraine, one of the world’s biggest grain exporters, threatening to shatter Ukraine’s economy and cause global famine.

Moscow denies it is to blame for a food crisis, which it says is caused by Western sanctions hurting its own exports. President Vladimir Putin met the president of Indonesia on Thursday and spoke by phone yesterday to the prime minister of India, promising both major food importers that Russia would remain a big supplier of grain.

‘In Afghanistan’, says Taliban leader in rare appearance



A man sells stickers picturing Taliban supreme leader Haibatullah Akhundzada at market in Kabul (file photo)

work?” After receiving pledges of allegiance from participants raising their hands, Akhundzada praised the Taliban’s victory last August, which marked the end of a 20-year struggle to overthrow a Western-backed government and drive US-led forces out of the country.

“The success of the Afghan jihad is not only a source of pride for Afghans but also for Muslims all over the world,” he said according to state-run Bakhtar News Agency, using the Arabic word signifying a spiritual struggle.

Akhundzada rarely leaves Kandahar, the Taliban’s birthplace and spiritual heartland, and apart from one undated photograph

and several audio recordings of speeches, has almost no digital footprint.

But analysts say the former Shari’a court judge has an iron grip on the movement and he bears the title “Commander of the Faithful”.

His arrival at the meeting hall was greeted with cheers and chants, including “Long live the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan”, the Taliban’s name for the country.

Akhundzada’s appearance comes a week after a powerful earthquake struck the east of the country, killing over 1,000 people and leaving tens of thousands homeless.

No women are attending the clerics’ meeting, but a Taliban

Why is the world interfering in our affairs? They say ‘why don’t you do this, why don’t you do that?’ Why does the world interfere in our work?

HIBATULLAH AKHUNDZADA

source told AFP this week that thorny issues such as girls’ education -- which has divided opinion in the movement -- would be discussed.

Akhundzada did not mention the subject in his speech, which was confined largely to telling the faithful to strictly observe Islamic principles in life and governance.

Since the Taliban’s return, secondary school girls have been barred from education and women dismissed from government jobs, forbidden from travelling alone, and ordered to dress in clothing that covers everything but their faces.

They have also outlawed playing non-religious music, banned the portrayal of human figures in advertising, ordered TV channels to stop showing movies and soap operas featuring uncovered women, and told men they should dress in traditional garb and grow their beards.

In age-old ritual, Mexican mayor weds alligator to secure abundance

Reuters | Mexico City

A small town Mexican mayor married his alligator bride in a colourful ceremony as traditional music rang out and revellers danced while imploring the indigenous leader to seal the nuptials with a kiss.

San Pedro Huamelula Mayor Victor Hugo Sosa obliged more than once during Thursday’s wedding, bending down to plant his lips on the small alligator’s snout, which had been tied shut presumably to avoid unwanted biting.

The ritual marriage likely dates back centuries to pre-Hispanic times among Oaxaca state’s Chontal and Huave indigenous communities, like a prayer pleading for nature’s bounty.

“We ask nature for enough rain, for enough food, that we have fish in the river,” said Sosa, mayor of the small fishing village on Oaxaca’s steamy Pacific coast.

Oaxaca, located in Mexico’s poor south, is arguably the country’s richest in indigenous culture and home to many groups that have stubbornly maintained their languages and traditions.

The age-old ritual in San



Mayor of San Pedro Huamelula Victor Aguilar holds his alligator wife

The unusual tradition, which dates back hundreds of years, requires the mayor of San Pedro Huamelula to marry a reptile every summer to ‘bring luck’ to local fishermen

Pedro Huamelula, now mixed with Catholic spirituality, involves dressing the alligator or caiman in a white wedding dress plus other colourful garments.

The seven-year-old reptile, referred to as a little princess, is believed to be a deity representing mother earth, and her marriage to the local leader symbolizes the joining of humans with the divine.



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TWEETS

01



I am grateful to my friend President @EmmanuelMacron for increasing France’s security assistance to Ukraine. Today we need it more than ever to protect Ukraine, to protect the values of Europe on the frontline

@ZelenskyyUa

02



I believe in Ukraine’s European future. It is your future and only you can make it happen. You can change this country for good and this will be your ultimate victory. A free and vibrant Ukraine. A sovereign Ukraine, finally reunited with our European family.

@vonderleyen

03



@WHO welcomes the #UNGA political declaration on Global #RoadSafety, as Member States committed to cut road traffic deaths and injuries by 50% by 2030. This is an important milestone for road safety and sustainable mobility.

@DrTedros

04



Investors are still backing fossil fuels, and governments still hand out billions in subsidies for coal, oil and gas - some \$11 million every minute. For the health of our societies and planet, we need to quit our addiction to fossil fuels. Now.

@antonioгутеррес

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