

*Live updates | Separatist: More Ukraine fighters at Azovstal
Associated Press*



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***MOSCOW** — The head of the Russia-backed separatist region in eastern Ukraine says that there may be more Ukrainian fighters hiding at the sprawling Azovstal steel mill in Mariupol, even after Moscow officially declared the operation of taking control over it successful and completed.*

Denis Pushilin of the Donetsk People’s Republic said of the Ukrainian fighters on Thursday: “They could be hiding....They could be lost somewhere, lagged behind” the ones who surrendered and were captured.

The Russian military declared Azovstal and all of Mariupol “completely liberated” on May 20 and reported that a total of 2,439 fighters had come out of the last pocket of Ukrainian resistance in the besieged city.

Pushilin says any Ukrainians left behind at the plant don’t pose a threat to the Russian forces. Russian officials have said the vast territory of the steel mill is being demined.

Pushilin said it will be possible to say there is no one left there only after that process is completed, the rubble is cleared and the plant is thoroughly inspected, “Unfortunately, we already have wounded sapper,” he said. “There are a lot of traps, booby traps. Technically, they had everything for this. Therefore, mine clearance is very thorough.”



Associated Press Damaged buildings ruined by attacks are seen in Irpin, on the outskirts Kyiv, Ukraine, Thursday, May 26, 2022. (AP Photo/Natacha Pisarenko)



Associated Press Anatolii Chovpin stands outside the damaged building where he lives ruined by attacks in Irpin, on the outskirts of Kyiv, Ukraine, Thursday, May 26, 2022. (AP Photo/Natacha Pisarenko)

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS:

PRAGUE — The Czech Republic’s ambassador to Ukraine has returned to Kyiv as his country seeks to reinforce its embassy before it takes over the rotating presidency of the European Union in July.

Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky said Thursday that the work should help fulfill the priorities of the Czech presidency, which include supporting Ukraine with financial, humanitarian and political aid.

The Czech Republic is among the European nations that support a plan for Ukraine to quickly receive the status of a candidate for EU membership. The government in Prague closed its embassy in Kyiv on Feb 24 after Russia invaded Ukraine. The embassy, which reopened in the middle of April, currently has five diplomats.

Russia has started broadcasting its state television news in the ravaged port city of Mariupol and other locations it controls in eastern Ukraine, Russian and Ukrainian officials said Thursday.



Associated Press Nataliia Fedorova stands outside her home ruined by attacks in Irpin, on the outskirts of Kyiv, Ukraine, Thursday, May 26, 2022. (AP Photo/Natacha Pisarenko)

Russia’s Ministry for Emergency Situations, or MChS, said it has launched “three mobile complexes for informing and alerting the population” that will be “broadcasting news for two hours in different parts of Mariupol.”



Associated Press Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko speaks at a conversation about the war in Ukraine during the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Thursday, May 26, 2022. The annual meeting of the World Economic Forum is taking place in Davos from May 22 until May 26, 2022. (AP Photo/Markus Schreiber)

Such mobile units also operate in the city of Volnovakha and the Lyman district of Ukraine's Donetsk province, broadcasting state news shows, "practical information" and cartoons for children, Russian state news agency Tass reported Thursday.



Associated Press Russian soldiers Alexander Alexeevich Ivanov and Alexander Vladimirovich Bobykin, center, leave the courtroom after their trial hearing in Kotelva, northeastern Ukraine, Thursday, May 26, 2022. (AP Photo/Bernat Armangue)

Two Russian soldiers accused of war crime in Ukraine could face up to 12 years in prison. In the second hearing of the trial held on Thursday at the Kotelevsky District Court, the prosecutors asked for both to be sentenced to 12 years of prison, while the defence attorney asked for 8 years.

Petro Adnryushchenko, an advisor to Mariupol's Ukrainian mayor, posted on his Telegram channel footage of MChS trucks with TV screens broadcasting Russian news shows to crowds of people in the Russian-occupied city.

"Yesterday, the occupiers launched three mobile propaganda cars and additionally installed 12 75-inch TVs in places of mass gathering — humanitarian aid distribution points, paperwork points and water access points," he wrote.

"The practice of 'nothing to feed, feed lies' is gaining momentum."



Associated Press Russian soldiers Alexander Alexeevich Ivanov, right, and Alexander Vladimirovich Bobykin, second right, attend their trial hearing in Kotelva, northeastern Ukraine, Thursday, May 26, 2022.

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin says the West will fail in its attempts to isolate Russia and face growing economic problems.

Speaking Thursday via video link to members of the Eurasian Economic Forum, Putin said Russia wasn't going to shut itself off from international cooperation. The forum includes several ex-Soviet nations.

Putin said that trying to isolate Russia is “impossible, utterly unrealistic in the modern world” and “those who try to do it primarily hurt themselves.”

The Russian leader cited growing economic challenges in the West, including “inflation unseen in 40 years, growing unemployment, rupture of supply chains and the worsening of global crises in such sensitive spheres as food.”

“This is not a joke,” he said.

“This is a serious thing that will have an impact on the entire system of economic and political relations.”

He lambasted the West for seizing Russian reserves, saying that “the theft of others’ assets never brought any good.”

KYIV, Ukraine — A regional governor in eastern Ukraine says shelling of the city of Kharkiv killed at least four civilians. Kharkiv Gov. Oleg Synyehubov said that another seven residents of Ukraine’s second-largest city were wounded in Thursday’s shelling.

He urged people to stay in shelters, warning that the barrage might continue.

KYIV, Ukraine — The Ukrainian governor of the eastern Luhansk region says Russian bombardments killed three people in and around the city of Lysychansk, which is a key focus of fighting.

Serhiy Haidai said Thursday that one person was killed in Lysychansk and two in the nearby village of Ustynivka amid a Russian artillery bombardment on Wednesday. He said strikes in the region had hit various targets including private houses and a humanitarian aid center, without specifying how the people died.

Haidai is the Kyiv-backed governor of the Luhansk region, where the Ukrainian government is holding onto a small area around Lysychansk and Sievierodonetsk in the face of a focused push by Russian forces.

In the northern Kharkiv region, governor Oleh Synehubov said two men ages 64 and 82 had been killed in shelling of the town of Balakliya and 10 other people were injured, including a 9-year-old girl.

DAVOS, Switzerland — *Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov says that not enough strategic steps have been taken in recent years to prevent Europe’s growing dependence on Russian gas and to counter hybrid attacks.*

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Thursday, Petkov said that the war in Ukraine “caused many crises to us because we had allowed ourselves to be dependent on Russia”.

Petkov said that after Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Europe criticized Moscow but did nothing to reduce its dependence on it.

“While we linked the price of electricity to that of gas, Russia now can not only reduce gas supplies, but also regulate electricity prices in Europe,” he said.

DAVOS, Switzerland — *German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has reiterated his conviction that Russian President Vladimir Putin won’t win the war in Ukraine. “He has already failed to achieve all his strategic goals,” Scholz said Thursday in his speech at the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland.*

The chancellor said that “a capture of all of Ukraine by Russia seems further away today than it did at the beginning of the war. More than ever, Ukraine is emphasizing its European future.”

In addition, Scholz said Thursday, the “brutality of the Russian war” has prompted two states to move closer to NATO.

“With Sweden and Finland, two close friends and partners want to join the North Atlantic alliance. They are most welcome!” the chancellor said.

MILAN, Italy — *The World Food Program has been pushing to get wheat out of Ukrainian ports to help feed the hungry elsewhere in the world and avert growing food insecurity in vulnerable regions, while also making room for the harvest of grain that has recently been planted.*

“We are pushing 100% to get the food that is stuck in that port out. It needs to be a continuous flow, it cannot be a few ships full. We need to get what we can out of there, not just for the Ukrainian economy but to get to people who need it in Yemen and Somalia and Afghanistan,” said WFP spokesman John Dumont.

Dumont was in Odesa a couple of weeks ago, and says the grain silos are full. “They are planting now. Where are they going to put that wheat when it is harvest time at the end of June and July? There is no place for it to go.”

“It needs to get out in a continuous way. It cannot just be a little one-off humanitarian convoy. The Black Sea needs to open.”

MOSCOW — *The Kremlin says it expects Ukraine to see what is happening in the country and to accept Moscow’s demands.*

Asked Thursday if Russia expects Ukraine to make territorial concessions, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov replied: “Moscow expects the acceptance of its demands and the understanding of the real situation that exists de-facto.”

Russia has previously demanded recognition of its sovereignty over the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014. It also is seeking acknowledgement of the independence of Russia-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian officials said in March that the status of Crimea and the separatist regions could be discussed later. In recent weeks, they have toughened their stand and said that Russian troops should pull back to where they were before Moscow launched a military action in Ukraine on Feb. 24.

Speaking in a conference call with reporters on Thursday, Peskov said: “Kyiv must acknowledge the de-facto situation and just have a sober assessment of it.”

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina — *British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss says Russian President Vladimir Putin is “trying to hold the world to ransom” by demanding that some sanctions be lifted before Russia allowed Ukrainian grain shipments to resume.*

“He’s essentially weaponized hunger and lack of food among the poorest people around the world,” Truss said during a visit Thursday to the Bosnia.

“We simply cannot allow this to happen.”

Truss vows that “will do all, with our allies and partners, to get the grain out of Ukraine and supply the rest of the world. “

But she says that the sanctions must stay in place to cut off funding for the war in Ukraine.

“We need to ensure Putin loses in Ukraine,” Truss says.

“What we cannot have is any lifting of sanctions, any appeasement, which will simply make Putin stronger in the longer term.”

MOSCOW — *The Kremlin says that the West needs to lift some of its sanctions against Russia for grain shipments from Ukraine to resume.*

Western allies have accused Russia of blocking grain exports from Ukraine in a move that is exacerbating food shortages in Africa and other regions.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that “we categorically reject the accusations and accuse Western countries of taking a series of unlawful actions that has led to the blockade.”

Speaking in a conference call with reporters, he added that the West, in particular, “must cancel the unlawful decisions that hamper chartering ships and exporting grain.”

MOSCOW — *The Russian military says it has destroyed a large Ukrainian unit with equipment at a railway station in the east.*

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Thursday that the Russian warplanes hit the railway station in Pokrovsk when an assault brigade that arrived to reinforce the Ukrainian forces in the region was unloading there.

Konashenkov also said that the Russian military destroyed Ukraine’s electronic intelligence center in Dniprovske in the southern Mykolaiv region, killing 11 Ukrainian soldiers and 15 foreign experts. His claims couldn’t be independently confirmed.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, the Russian artillery hit over 500 Ukrainian targets, including troops concentrations and artillery positions, he said.

The General Staff of the Ukrainian military said Thursday that the Russian forces have continued attempts to press their offensive in several sections of the front-line in the east and also launched missile and air strikes at infrastructure facilities across the country.

Rodion Miroshnik, a representative of the separatist Luhansk region in Russia, said that about 8,000 Ukrainian soldiers are currently in captivity in the separatist Donetsk and Luhansk regions and their number is growing daily by the “hundreds.” His claims couldn’t be independently verified.

LONDON — *Britain’s military says Russia has suffered substantial losses among its elite units because of “complacency” among commanders and failure to anticipate strong Ukrainian resistance.*

The U.K. Ministry of Defense says the airborne VDV has been involved in “several notable tactical failures” since the Feb. 24 invasion, including the attempt to capture and hold Hostomel Airfield near Kyiv and failed attempts to cross the Siverskyi Donets River in eastern Ukraine.

In its daily intelligence update, the defense ministry said the VDV had been sent on missions “better suited to heavier armoured infantry and has sustained heavy casualties during the campaign. Its mixed performance likely reflects a strategic mismanagement of this capability and Russia’s failure to secure air superiority.”

It said “the failure to anticipate Ukrainian resistance and the subsequent complacency of Russian commanders has led to significant losses across many of Russia’s more elite units.”

