



An Orthodox priest Oleksandr sprinkles holy water on believers during the Orthodox Easter service next to The Nativity of the Holy Virgin Church damaged by shelling during Russia's invasion in the village of Peremoha, in Kyiv region, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russia strikes arms depots in Kharkiv

Ukraine says US officials to visit Kyiv, urges Easter truce for Mariupol

REUTERS, Kyiv

Russia's defence ministry said yesterday its high-precision missiles struck nine Ukrainian military targets overnight, including four arms depots in the Kharkiv region where artillery weapons were stored. The ministry also said its missile and artillery forces destroyed a further four such arms depots in the same region and hit a facility in Dnipropetrovsk region producing explosives for the Ukrainian army.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin were set to visit Kyiv yesterday to discuss Ukraine's call for more powerful weapons. The trip, announced by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Saturday, would be the highest-level by US officials since Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine on February 24.

The White House has not confirmed any visit by Blinken and Austin. The State Department and Pentagon declined to comment.

As Christians in Ukraine celebrated Orthodox Easter yesterday, there was no end in sight to a war that has killed thousands of people, uprooted millions more and reduced cities to rubble. Ukraine said two children were among those killed

in shelling yesterday. Kyiv also called for a truce in battered Mariupol for Orthodox Easter, celebrated in both Russia and Ukraine. "Usually we would come to our churches with Easter baskets. But now this is impossible," Serhiy Gaidai, governor of the eastern Luhansk region, wrote on Telegram, saying seven churches in the Luhansk

“We are all convinced that we will not be destroyed by any horde or wickedness.”

region had been “mutilated by Russian artillery.” “We are all convinced that we will not be destroyed by any horde or wickedness,” Zelensky said in an Easter video message from the 1,000-year-old Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv, praying God would “give endurance to those who, unfortunately, would not see the return of their child from the front.” He told a news conference on Saturday that talks with his US visitors would cover the “powerful, heavy weapons” Ukraine needed and the pace of supplies that he said would be used to retake territory.

Moscow, which describes its actions in Ukraine as a “special military operation”, denies targeting civilians and rejects what Ukraine says is evidence of atrocities, saying Kyiv staged them. Ukraine said yesterday that Russian forces were bombarding the steel works in Mariupol where Ukrainian defenders were holding out, days after Moscow declared victory in the southern port city and said it did not need to take the plant. “The place where our civilians and military are located is shelled with heavy air bombs and artillery,” senior Ukrainian presidential advisor Mykhailo Podolyak said on Twitter, calling for “a real Easter truce in Mariupol”. Ukraine estimates tens of thousands of civilians have been killed in Mariupol and says 100,000 civilians are still in the city. The United Nations and Red Cross say the civilian toll is at least in the thousands. A new attempt to evacuate civilians from Mariupol failed on Saturday, an aide to the city’s mayor said. Meanwhile, the UN refugee agency said yesterday the number of Ukrainians who have fled the country since Russia’s invasion two months ago is approaching 5.2 million.

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FROM PAGE 1

Mentioning that the difficulties to import some goods due to the ongoing war, the PM asked the people not to keep an inch of land uncultivated and ensure the optimum use of the soil for food autarky. Hasina asked the authorities of development work – architects, engineers or project planners of different ministries – to keep the provision of fire-fighting facilities in every development project. She also called for ensuring wide roads for smooth movement of fire service vehicles and water sources at nearby places. “During designing a project, everyone has to keep one thing in mind that it’ll have to ensure modern fire extinguishing systems in the institutions and the availability of water for firefighting.” The PM also asked to protect waterbodies and conserve rainwater in the project sites or multi-storey structures. Noting that there is the capacity to fight fire in the highest 20-storey structure in the country, Hasina said some might have plans to construct 30-storey buildings or 40-storey buildings or even 100-storey skyscrapers. In this regard, she asked them to consider the firefighting capacity before taking any plan for construction of the high-rise buildings. The PM asked the fire service department to ensure training and rehearsal over fire

extinguishing systems and on what to do in case of fire in educational institutions, mills and factories. Hasina said the government has decided to set up a fire service station in every upazila. Mentioning there are now 456 fire service stations in the country, she said the construction of 55 more stations would be completed by June next. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Secretary of Security Services Division Mokabbir Hossain and Director General of Fire Service and Civil Defence Department Maj Gen Sazzad Hussain spoke at the function.