



A man helps a police officer to carry a civilian's body following a Russian shelling in Konstantinovka, Donetsk region yesterday. Five people were killed and five others wounded in a Russian bombardment of the eastern Ukrainian city of Kostyantynivka, Ukraine's prosecutor general said yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

SYNAGOGUE BLAST France opens terror probe

AFP, Montpellier

An explosion outside a synagogue in southern France wounded a police officer early yesterday, in what authorities said was being treated as a potential terror attack.

Security around Jewish sites was tightened following the early Saturday blast outside the Beth Yaacov synagogue in the seaside resort of La Grande Motte, near the city of Montpellier.

A fire was also started at the entrance of the synagogue, but was quickly put out, with two doors damaged, investigators said.

President Emmanuel Macron called the incident "an act of terror".

Two cars outside the synagogue burst into flames after a gas canister likely exploded inside one of the vehicles, police said. The blast wounded a police officer, police said, without providing any other details.

La Grande Motte's mayor, Stephan Rossignol, said that CCTV had picked up images of an individual setting fire to the cars.

The potential suspect seen in the footage was brandishing a Palestinian flag, a source close to the probe added.

Another source said that the man was carrying two empty bottles and had a Palestinian flag draped around his waist as left the scene on foot.

Zelensky vows more 'retribution' for Russia

Signs anti-Russia laws to mark independence day; rivals exchange 230 prisoners of war

AGENCIES

President Volodymyr Zelensky vowed more "retribution" against Russia on Ukrainian Independence Day yesterday, as Kyiv and Moscow announced the exchange of 230 prisoners just over two weeks into Ukraine's surprise offensive on Kursk.

Zelensky also signed a law banning the Russian-linked branch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and called the legislation a "liberation from Moscow's devils".

Kyiv marked its independence from the Soviet Union at a tense moment in the long war as it mounts a push into Russia and Moscow eyes more east Ukrainian towns.

Zelensky published a video of him standing in a hilly, forested area filmed near from where Ukraine launched its shock incursion on August 6.

"Russia was seeking one thing: to destroy us... Instead, today we celebrate the 33rd Independence Day of Ukraine and what the enemy brought to our land has now returned to its home," he said.

The Ukrainian leader said Russia will "know what retribution is" and called President Vladimir Putin a "sick man from Red Square who constantly threatens everyone with the red button," referring to nuclear war.

Soon afterwards, Ukraine's military intelligence said it had carried out a "successful" attack on

an ammunition depot in Russia's southern Voronezh region.

Zelensky held official independence celebrations on Kyiv's Sofia Square, with Polish President Andrzej Duda and Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte.

In Russia, President Putin held a meeting with army chief Valery

eastern Ukraine.

Kyiv yesterday said that a Russian bombardment in the eastern city of Kostyantynivka had killed five people and Ukraine has carried out evacuations from the hub of Pokrovsk amid fears it will fall.

Both Kyiv and Moscow said they had returned 115 captive servicemen each in a deal brokered



Gerasimov with the Kremlin saying they had discussed "countering enemy forces invading the Kursk region and measures being taken to destroy them."

The Kremlin's choice of language was a break from previous statements that downplayed the Ukrainian surprise move.

While it has visibly rattled Moscow, Ukraine's Kursk operation has not slowed Russia's advance in

by the United Arab Emirates.

Kyiv had said one of the aims of its Kursk operation was to gain more Russian captives to get back its men from Russia. There were widespread reports in Russia of young conscripts going missing in Kursk.

Ukraine yesterday also ratified a statute that paves the way for Ukraine to join the International Criminal Court (ICC).

US sanctions 400 entities for aiding Russia's war

REUTERS, Washington

The United States on Friday imposed sanctions on more than 400 entities and individuals for supporting Russia's war effort in Ukraine, the State Department said, including Chinese companies that US officials believe are helping Moscow skirt Western sanctions and build up its military.

Washington has repeatedly warned Beijing over its support for Russia's defense industrial base and has already issued hundreds of sanctions aimed at restricting Moscow's ability to exploit certain technologies for military purposes.

Friday's sanctions include measures against companies in China involved in shipping machine tools and microelectronics to Russia, according to a State Department fact sheet outlining its sanctions against 190 targets.

The US Treasury Department said it was also targeting transnational networks involved in procuring ammunition and other materiel for Russia, helping Russian oligarchs and others evade sanctions and laundering gold for a sanctioned company.

The Biden administration also added 123 entities to its US export control list known as the Entity List which forces suppliers to obtain licenses before shipping to targeted companies. Those added on Friday included 63 entities in Russia and 42 in China, according to a notice published in the Federal Register.

The US Treasury said it was imposing sanctions on several Russian financial technology, securities, real estate lending and other financial firms, but it stopped short of imposing sanctions against foreign banks for aiding transactions that support

Russia's war effort.

The Treasury has warned banks since December that continued transactions in Russia's war economy could cut them off from the dollar-based financial system.

The State Department's sanctions include moves aimed at stifling Russia's energy sector and against companies in Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Central Asian economies that the US believes are helping Russia evade sanctions, the State Department said.

Targets include the import-export arm of China's Dalian Machine Tool Group, which the State Department said had supplied \$4 million of dual-use items to Russian companies.

The Treasury also targeted more than 20 Hong Kong and China-based firms it said were supplying Russia's military industrial base.

The spokesperson for China's embassy in Washington, Liu Pengyu, said Beijing "firmly opposes unilateral sanctions based on 'long-arm jurisdiction'" and added that "normal trade between China and Russia should not be undermined, still less turned into an instrument to smear and contain China."

The latest US sanctions include measures against firms supplying components used in the Orkan drones that Russia is using in Ukraine.

Washington also sought the sanctions to disrupt future energy projects in Russia and its shipment of liquefied natural gas. It targeted Russia's \$21 billion Arctic LNG 2 project, which has already been hit by Western sanctions that have curbed its access to ice-class tankers, and other companies involved in future energy projects in Russia, according to the fact sheet.



FESTIVAL KNIFE ATTACK

German police hunt suspect

AFP, Solingen

German police yesterday hunted a man who stabbed three people to death and wounded eight others at a street festival in the city of Solingen, with a terror motive for the attack "not excluded".

The knife man went on a rampage in the western town of Solingen late on Friday, as thousands had gathered for the first night of a "Festival of Diversity", part of a series of events to mark the town's 650th anniversary.

Yesterday, police announced they had detained a person as part of the probe, with a prosecutor later saying it was a 15-year-old who may have been in contact with the knife man.

"The author (of the attack) has not yet been identified," Markus Caspers, prosecutor of Duesseldorf that lies just west of Solingen, told a press conference.

"We have not been able to identify a motive for now, but in view of all of the circumstances, we are working under the assumption that the initial suspicion of a terrorist motive cannot be excluded," Caspers said.

The people killed were men of 56 and 67 years of age and a 56-year-old woman, officials said.

"The victims were completely unknown with no known ties between them, so based on this we're concluding that it could be a terror act," Caspers said, adding that "no other motive is evident at this time".

Four of the wounded were in a "serious" condition. Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said Germany's "security authorities are doing everything they can to catch the perpetrator" of the "horrific act", while Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he "must be caught quickly and punished".



A woman kneels at a makeshift memorial of flowers and candles for the victims yesterday close to the scene where at least three people were killed and several injured when a man attacked them with a knife late Friday in Solingen, western Germany, during a festival to mark the city's 650th anniversary.

PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan blast kills two children

Injures 16

REUTERS, Quetta

A bomb blast in southwestern Pakistan killed two children and injured 16 people yesterday, police officials said.

Seven policemen were among those injured when the remote-controlled bomb, attached to a motorcycle, detonated near police headquarters in Pishin, the city's senior superintendent of police, Manzoor Buledi, told Reuters.

"Explosives were planted in a motorcycle which was parked in the area," said police officer Mujeeb-Ur-Rehman, adding that the two children killed were passing through the area when the blast occurred.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed deep sorrow and grief over what he called the martyrdom of young children in the explosion. In a statement he expressed condolences to their families.