

International

# Zelenskyy, atomic agency chief discuss nuclear power plant fears

By Hanna Arhirova  
Associated Press

ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine — The U.N.'s atomic energy chief warned in a meeting Monday with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that the perilous situation at Europe's largest nuclear plant "isn't getting any better" as relentless fighting in the area keeps the facility at risk of a disaster.

The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant's six reactors are in shutdown and it is receiving the electricity it needs to prevent a reactor meltdown through just one remaining power line. It has on occasion had to switch to emergency diesel generators to power its essential cooling systems.

In a meeting with Mr. Zelenskyy in southern Ukraine, International Atomic Energy Agency Director-General Rafael Mariano Grossi said the situation at the plant remains tense because of the heavy military presence around it and a blackout that recently struck the facility, something that has occurred repeatedly since Russian forces took it over last year.

Mr. Grossi plans to visit the plant this week for the second time following Russia's invasion 13 months ago. The Vienna-based agency has staff permanently deployed at the plant since Mr. Grossi's last visit in September.

Earlier this month, fighting interrupted power supply to the plant for half a day.

Mr. Grossi had expressed alarm at that development. "Each time we are rolling a dice," he told his agency at the time. "And if we allow this to continue time after time, then one day our luck will run out."

Mr. Grossi and Mr. Zelenskyy met in the city of Zaporizhzhia, which is in Ukrainian-held territory, about 30 miles northeast of the nuclear plant with the same name.

The IAEA said in January it was placing teams of experts at all four of Ukraine's nuclear power plants to reduce the risk of accidents, including the now-closed Chernobyl plant whose deadly nuclear accident in 1986 spread fallout over much of Europe.

Mr. Grossi emphasized that his seventh trip to Ukraine underlined his commitment and support for "as long as it takes."

Also attending the meeting were other IAEA officials, the head of the presidential office, Andriy Yermak, and the head of nuclear operator Energoatom, Petro Kotin.

While in Zaporizhzhia, Mr. Zelenskyy also inspected military positions in the partially-occupied province and awarded soldiers military honors.

He visited wounded soldiers at a hospital and an apartment building that Kyiv claims was hit by a missile on Wednesday, killing at least



Efrem Lukatsky/Associated Press

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy meets with U.N. atomic energy chief Rafael Mariano Grossi during a visit Monday in Ukraine. Mr. Grossi said the situation at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant remains tense because of the heavy military presence around it.

one person and injuring more than 30.

Residents were still shocked by the experience.

"It's terrifying. I cannot find the words to tell you," said Hanna Budkova, 39, who was in a busy playground in front of the apartment block with her nearly 2-year-old daughter.

Elsewhere, two people were killed and 29 wounded Monday when Russian forces shelled the city of Sloviansk, in the partially occupied eastern Donetsk region, officials said.

Russia has denied targeting residential areas even though artillery and rocket strikes have hit Ukrainian apartment buildings and civilian infrastructure daily during the war.

The Sloviansk attack followed a typical pattern of long-range shelling adopted by the Kremlin's forces, es-

pecially in recent months as the fighting became deadlocked during the winter.

In the eastern Donetsk region, about 10 cities and villages were shelled by Russian forces over the previous 24 hours, Ukraine's presidential office reported.

Russian missiles hit the

city of Avdiivka, damaging residential buildings, a hotel and a courthouse, it said.

Avdiivka Mayor Vitali Barabash said utility companies are being evacuated from the front-line city, as it "resembles more and more a landscape from post-apocalyptic movies."



Chiang Ying-ying/Associated Press

Former Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou waves Monday as he leaves for China. Mr. Ma will visit China in a bid to ease tensions between the self-ruled island and the mainland.

## Taiwan's former leader Ma begins China visit

By Huizhong Wu  
and Johnson Lai  
Associated Press

TAOYUAN, Taiwan — Former Taiwan President Ma Ying-jeou departed for a tour of China on Monday, in what he called an attempt to reduce tensions a day after Taiwan lost one of its few remaining diplomatic partners to China.

The ex-president is visiting in a private capacity, bringing a delegation of academics and college students for exchanges, as well as members of his family, but the trip is loaded with political meaning.

Mr. Ma's policies brought Taiwan and Beijing to their closest relationship ever, but his exit from office was overshadowed by massive protests against a trade deal with the mainland and his successor has focused on bolstering ties with the U.S. and defending the autonomy of the democratically governed island that China claims as part of its own territory.

Current President Tsai Ing-wen is expected to launch a 10-day diplomatic tour of her own Wednesday, ostensibly to visit the island's remaining allies in Latin America. She will stop in the U.S., Taiwan's biggest unofficial partner and supplier of arms.

Mr. Ma's visit comes amid rising tensions. Beijing has stepped up pressure against Taiwan in recent years, poaching its diplomatic allies while also sending military fighter jets flying toward the island on a near daily basis. On Sunday, Honduras established diplomatic relations with China, leaving Taiwan with only 13 countries that recognize it as a sovereign state.

Mr. Ma, a member of the opposition Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), will land in Shanghai before starting his visit in nearby Nanjing.

He is expected to tour the mainland through April 7, stopping in Wuhan and Changsha, as well as other

cities. He is bringing college students from Taiwan to meet with fellow students from Shanghai's Fudan University and Changsha's Hunan University.

Mr. Ma has framed the visit as a bid to lower the tensions in cross-strait relations through people to people exchange. "I hope through the enthusiasm of the youth and their interactions to improve the cross-strait mood, so bring peace faster, and earlier," he said to reporters ahead of his departure on Monday afternoon. He also said it would be his first time visiting China.

His trip has not drawn much controversy in Taiwan, where the public is used to seeing Kuomintang politicians visit China.

However, it has been criticized by some political opponents and activists.

A former mainland student leader in the 1989 Tiananmen square protests called on Mr. Ma to cancel his trip. "If you have even a strand of affection for Taiwan ... you should announce the cancellation of your trip," said Wang Dan, a Chinese dissident who previously lived in Taiwan, on his Facebook page.

A handful of protesters from a pro-independence group held a demonstration at the departures area at Taoyuan airport before Mr. Ma's departure. "Ma Ying-jeou is humiliating our nation and forfeiting its sovereignty," they shouted before police carried them out. "You are a stinky beggar."

On the other side, a small group of people from the pro-unification camp also came to the airport to show their support. "Cross-strait relations are like flowers blossoming in spring and both sides are a family," they shouted.

Mr. Ma will not go to Beijing, but may meet with Chinese officials.

Mr. Ma met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Singapore in 2015, while he was still in office.

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