

500 Days of the War: A Timeline in Indian Media

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale attack on Ukraine. Estimated figures show that millions of Ukrainians were forced to flee their country while thousands were killed. Here is an overview of the Russia-Ukraine war:

24 February 2022: Putin announced a special military operation in Ukraine aimed towards 'demilitarisation' and 'denazification' of the country to protect ethnic Russians from an alleged genocide convened by Ukrainian forces in breakaway Russian pro-Russia territories, effectively beginning the invasion.

Western countries and Ukraine declared it as an illegal invasion. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky declared martial law and forbade any man of fighting age from leaving the country. The attempts of Russian forces to capture key cities and the capital Kyiv were met with strong resistance. Flights over Ukraine and from cities in southern Russia were cancelled.

2 March 2022: Russian forces managed to capture the city of Kherson in southern Ukraine and occupied a significant territory of the neighbouring Zaporizhzhia area. Their efforts to capture Kyiv were repelled.

16 March 2022: In one of the deadliest attacks, Russian forces bombed the Donetsk Academic Regional Drama Theater in Mariupol, killing more than 600 people who had taken shelter in the basement of the building.

Many groups labelled the strike as a war crime. An extensive report by Amnesty International concludes that the Russian military committed a war crime when they struck the theatre.

9 April 2022: Russia initiated a missile strike on a railway station in Kramatorsk, resulting in the deaths of 52 people and wounding over 100 others. The attack took place at the start of a Russian offensive, ordered by President Vladimir V. Putin, to seize all of Donbas.

Later, in a joint investigation, Human Rights Watch and SITU research group said strong evidence suggested that the missile strike on the Kramatorsk train station in eastern Ukraine was a "clear war crime" by Russia.

13 April 2022: A big breakthrough emerged for Ukraine when its military claimed it fired two Neptune anti-ship cruise missiles at the Russian flagship cruiser, Moskva, leading to the vessel's sinking. However, Russia said that the ship sank after an explosion.

The next day, the Ukraine's defense ministry official Twitter handle published an artwork by Andriy Dankovych showing the launch of the Neptune missile. The tweet read: "Neptune bids the cruiser 'Moskva' farewell." The artwork was widely shared among netizens, some remembering the watershed event as 'Moskva Day'.

16 May 2022: The area of Mariupol was captured by Russian forces as the last remaining Ukrainian soldiers surrendered, securing a land corridor for Moscow. More than 260 Ukrainian fighters were evacuated from the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, Ukrainian officials claimed. The troops were sheltered under the plant for weeks, fighting off a Russian siege.

30 June 2022: Russian forces withdrew from Snake Island in the Black Sea post a 'successful operation'. The island was captured in the early days of the war. The move was claimed by Russia as a gesture of goodwill and facilitation of grain exports.

The ministry's statement added that the withdrawal was aimed at demonstrating to the world that "Russia is not impeding UN efforts to organise a humanitarian corridor to ship agricultural products from Ukraine".

29 July 2022: A prison housing Ukrainian prisoners of war in the town of Olenivka in the Donetsk region was destroyed in a missile strike, killing more than 53 Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) and leaving 75 wounded. Russia and Ukraine blamed each other for the attack. Ukrainian forces also said that they had been able to repeal concentrated and repeated attacks by the Russians in the Donetsk region.

20 August 2022: Russian nationalist and President Vladimir Putin's close aide Alexander Dugin's daughter Daria Dugina was killed in a car blast that was originally planned to kill Alexander. Also known as 'Putin's brain', Alexander Dugin is a prominent proponent of the "Russian world" concept ideology and a vehement supporter of Russia's sending of troops into Ukraine.

The United States intelligence agencies believe parts of the Ukrainian government authorised the car bomb attack. On the same day, Russian shelling ravaged an entire residential colony resulting in 12 injured, including four children, in the southern region of Mykolayiv.

6 September 2022: The Armed Forces of Ukraine launched a counteroffensive on the Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory that took Russians by surprise and recaptured several areas of the Kharkiv region. On the same day, it was revealed by a US official that Russia had been purchasing arms from North Korea.

9 November 2022: Russian forces were ordered to pull back from the Ukrainian city of Kherson, the only regional capital they had captured back then, dealing a major blow to the Russian offensive. The announcement came hours after the Russian-installed deputy head of Kherson, Kirill Stremousov, was reportedly killed in a car crash after weeks of urging residents to evacuate the area.

21 December 2022: Ukrainian President Zelenskyy visited the US for the first time since the war and met US President Joe Biden to secure advanced air defense missile systems, among other weapons. The US also announced economic aid to Ukraine.

Zelenskyy made a case to lawmakers that Ukraine's struggle was part of a global fight for freedom and democracy. He also emphasised that the threat of Putin's violence transcended Ukraine.

1 January 2023: Ukrainian forces launched a missile strike on the Makiivka city, where Russia claimed that 89 of its soldiers were killed. However, Ukrainian forces claimed that around 400 Russian soldiers were killed in the strike. Russia, however, acknowledged the attack to be the worst military loss since the war in Ukraine began. Russia launched a swathe of drone attacks across Kyiv, although most of the drones were shot down.

12 January 2023: Russia captured the salt-mining of Soledar, marking its first win after a series of setbacks in the war. Yet, Ukrainian authorities insisted that the fight for the hotly contested town continued.

Russia called it an "important" step for its offensive as it would allow Russian troops to push on to the nearby city of Bakhmut, and cut off the Ukrainian forces there, a spokesman said.

Private military company Wagner refuted the Russian military's claim that only regular military forces had been deployed. They claimed that they had directed the advance on Soledar.

20 February 2023: US President Biden made a surprise visit to Kyiv and met Zelensky to reiterate solidarity with the Ukrainian forces. He also announced \$500 million in aid to Ukraine, comprising of javelins, howitzers, and artillery ammunition. By visiting in person, Biden offered support for Zelensky.

24 February 2023: On the anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine war, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) suspended Russia's membership for its "illegal, unprovoked and unjustified" invasion. "This is the first time a member of FATF is suspended," FATF President Raja Kumar told a news conference. "Russia is effectively sidelined from the organisation."

25 March 2023: Putin threatened to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus as Western support for Ukraine continued to rise, especially the UK's decision to provide armor-piercing rounds to Kyiv. The deal would not violate nuclear nonproliferation agreements, Putin said that the US had stationed nuclear weapons in the territory of its European allies for decades.

27 April 2023: Chinese president Xi Jinping held an hour long phone call with Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky assuring him of sending an envoy to Kyiv to serve as a mediator to pursue a "political settlement". Russia had shelled eight territories in 24 hours through the day, injuring 16 and killing 2, in the Kharkiv region.

14 May 2023: Two military helicopters and two Russian fighter jets were shot down near the Ukrainian border. As per news reports, one Su-34 fighter-bomber, a Su-35 fighter, and two Mi-8 helicopters had been shot down in Russia's Bryansk region, killing all four crews.

20 May 2023: Russia's private military group Wagner claimed that their forces have taken control of the eastern city of Bakhmut. Ukrainian officials had refuted Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin's claims. Taking Bakhmut, which Russia refers to by its Soviet-era name of Artyomovsk, would represent Moscow's first big victory in the conflict in more than 10 months.

28 May 2023: As the Ukrainian capital prepared to celebrate the anniversary of its founding, Russia unleashed waves of air strikes on Kyiv overnight in what officials said appeared to be the largest drone attack on the city since the start of the war. Scores of drones were shot down, and one person was killed in the attack.

4 June 2023: The Russian defense ministry claimed to kill 250 Ukrainian soldiers and destroying several combat vehicles in its counteroffensive to a 'large-scale' assault in the Donetsk province. Donetsk is one of four Ukrainian territories that Russia annexed last September, along with Luhansk, Zaporizhia and Kherson.

6 June 2023: Ukraine accused Russia of blowing up the Kakhovka dam and hydroelectric power station on the Dnieper River in an area controlled by Moscow, while the latter blamed Ukrainian bombardment. The bombing triggered massive floods and threatened drinking water supplies for both sides. Thousands of people were forced to flee their homes and an ecological disaster has been unleashed on southern Ukraine by the collapse.

18 June 2023: Ukraine takes control of the village of Piatykhatky on the Zaporizhzhia battlefield, according to a statement from Vladimir Rogov, an official with the Moscow-appointed administration in the region. Rogov said Ukrainian forces had taken the settlement of Piatykhatky and were entrenching themselves there while coming under fire from Russian artillery.

24 June 2023: In a big blow for Putin, the head of the Wagner Group staged an armed mutiny and warned the government to topple the country's Defence Ministry. Wagner troops marched in the city of Rostov-on-Don and took control of key military facilities before marching into Voronezh. The Russian President described it as "stab in the back" and warned of 'brutal' action against the rebel soldiers.

25 June 2023: Less than 24 hours after the mutiny, Wagner chief Prigozhin halted his operation after striking a deal with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. He asserted that the decision was made to avoid 'bloodshed' in Russia and he would move to Belarus along with his soldiers.

27 June 2023: Two Russian missiles struck a popular pizza restaurant in Kramatorsk city in Donetsk Oblast, in one of the deadliest Russian attacks recently, killing 11 people, including four children. As many as 56 people were injured in the attack.

6 July 2023: Another Russian missile strike in Ukraine's western city of Lviv resulted in the deaths of 10 people, and 42 others were injured.

7 July 2023: The US decided to provide Ukraine with the controversial 'cluster bombs' owing to a lack of ammunitions cited by their Ukrainian counterpart.

Cluster munitions scatter “bomblets” across large areas that can fail to explode on impact and can pose a long-term risk to anyone who encounters them, similar to landmines. Over 100 countries have banned cluster munitions citing humanitarian reasons.

Scores of missile attacks and bombings have reduced a large portion of the Ukrainian territory to smoky ruins, severely affecting security and normal lives for citizens.

As of now, Iran is the only country to openly provide support to Russia, reportedly supplying combat drones to Moscow. There are rumours that China is secretly providing assistance to Moscow amid its own confrontations with the US. The Putin administration has also named China as one of their major allies.

India has remained neutral in the conflict, and prime minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly called for peace between the two regions in his meetings with Putin.

Source: National Herald, 8 July, 2023, New Delhi