

THREE YEARS ON, HOPES FADE FOR THOSE TRAPPED IN UKRAINE WAR

UKRAINE WAR MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL TO BOTH SIDES

DONETSK, Ukraine: After three years of war, Irina and her husband Arkady have all but lost hope of ever seeing the day the big guns fall silent and Ukraine becomes whole again. The middle-aged couple live in the shelled-out northern outskirts of the Russian-backed separatist rebels' de facto capital city of Donetsk in the eastern industrial heartland of the divided former Soviet state.

Ukraine again," 50-year-old Arkady said without revealing his surname. "Imagine if your neighbor attacked you with a knife and wounded you. Would you stay friends with that person and invite him over for tea?"

Daily journal of grief

Irina has kept a daily war journal that is filled with notes underscored with

hard-to-fathom numbers. One entry describes how her husband was picking apricots when shrapnel from a shell hit him in the head and broke one of his ribs.

"Over time, you tend to forget everything, especially when there is shelling every single day," the 48-year-old says of her diary. The windows of their two-storey house have thick slabs of wood nailed over them to protect the glass through which icons peek out. "Only 40 or 50 people still live here," she says of her Severniy suburb of Donetsk. "Every home has been damaged.

In March alone, they hit our neighbor's house six times. The shelling is more intense now than when the war started," Irina says. Fellow Severniy resident Lidia said the latest fighting caused an electricity blackout-something they have long ago grown used to. "It feels like no one needs us," the 67-year-old pensioner says.

Mutually beneficial war

The European Union and the United States fully back Kiev's claim that Russia started and supported the war in order to meddle and disrupt its Western neighbor's affairs after its February 2014 ouster of a Kremlin-backed regime. Ukraine's subsequent embrace of the West was followed by Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the takeover of government buildings in the east in April by groups of armed men who swore allegiance to Moscow. Kiev responded by launching a military offensive to win back the separatist region. — AFP



UKRAINE: This file photo shows pro-Russian rebels stationed in the eastern Ukrainian city of Gorlivka, Donetsk region, launching rockets from Grad launch vehicles.—AFP

They speak Russian like those around them and think of the fighting that invaded their lives three years ago yesterday as a permanent conflict that may splinter their homeland for good. "It will be hard for us to be one with

grief and pain from the first page to the last. One of the bloodiest conflicts in Europe since the 1990s Balkans wars has killed more than 10,000 people and driven at least two million from their homes. Irina fills in the details of those



PARIS: A worker removes graffiti outside French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen's campaign headquarters, yesterday in Paris.—AP

ARSON BID HITS CAMPAIGN HQ OF FRANCE'S LE PEN

PARIS: A building housing French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen's campaign headquarters was hit by a arson attempt yesterday, firefighters and police said, with only minor damage caused. Firefighters were called around 2.40 am (0040 GMT) to the ground floor offices of an insurance company on the upmarket Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honore in central Paris. A fire service spokesman said the fire was "quickly brought under control" and damaged only the door and a doormat.

The upper floors of the building, on one of the French capital's most exclusive streets close to the president's Elysee Palace official residence, house the campaign offices of far-right National Front (FN) leader Le Pen. The anti-globalization, anti-EU Le Pen is neck-and-neck with centrist Emmanuel Macron in polls for the first round of the election on April 23.

A police source said the cause of the fire was "not natural and probably criminal", adding that the graffiti slogan "FN vs KLX" was found nearby. A group calling itself "Fight Xenophobia" contacted AFP to claim the attack, which it said was carried out with "Molotov cocktails". The caller, who refused to give a name, also claimed to have carried out a similar attack on a far-right newspaper and said the action would continue until the election.—AFP

DORTMUND STRUGGLES TO COME TO TERMS WITH BOMB ATTACK ON BUS

MUNICH: Sometimes, it's hard to focus on a soccer game. Borussia Dortmund players had to, though, less than 24 hours after a bomb attack on their team bus. And they will have to do so again on Saturday, when Eintracht Frankfurt visits in the Bundesliga. Dortmund midfielder Nuri Sahin made it clear that his thoughts were far from the field in the rescheduled Champions League quarterfinal match against Monaco on Wednesday - a game Dortmund lost 3-2 after an uncharacteristically hesitant start.

"Until I was on the pitch in the second half, I didn't think about football, to be honest. Because last night I didn't realize what happened, and when I was at home and my wife and my son were waiting in front of the door, there I felt how lucky we were," the visibly shaken Sahin told former Norway international Jan Aage Fjortoft, now a journalist. "I know football is very important. We love football. We suffer with football. We love football. I know we earn a lot of money, we have a privileged life, but we are human beings. There's so much more than football in this world. Last night we felt it."

Dortmund defender Marc Bartra was hit by shrapnel as three explosions hit the bus. The Spaniard was taken to the hospital and had surgery on a broken bone in his wrist. A spokeswoman for federal prosecutors, Frauke Koehler, said metal from one of the

bombs lodged in a headrest. It could easily have been a lot worse. "I can't forget the faces," Sahin said of his teammates, who ducked for cover when the explosions hit. "I will never forget these faces in my life for sure. Oh yeah, when I saw Marc there and I saw Schmelle (Marcel Schmelzer), I sat next to Schmelle and I will never forget Schmelle's face. It was unbelievable."

Schmelzer also highlighted the impact of the attack on his side. "We have to function like puppets," the Dortmund captain said. "You read the whole time of an attack on our bus. But you shouldn't forget there were 30 people sitting in it, so it's an attack on us as people. It makes us incredibly sad but also incredibly fortunate to be standing here today, especially when you hear the details that are coming out (from the investigation). We're just incredibly lucky no one else besides Marc was seriously injured."

Dortmund coach Thomas Tuchel was stinging in his criticism of UEFA for going ahead with the Champions League game so soon after the attack. "We had the feeling that we were being treated as if a beer can had hit our bus," said Tuchel, who claimed he wasn't asked about whether to proceed with the game. But Dortmund chief executive Hans-Joachim Watzke said Tuesday that a congested calendar meant there was little option for postponing the game further.



GERMANY: In this file photo police officers stand in front of Dortmund's damaged team bus after explosions which injured two people before the Champions League quarterfinal soccer match between Borussia Dortmund and AS Monaco in Dortmund, western Germany.—AP

UEFA spokesman Pedro Pinto said the governing body was in touch with all parties. Tuchel may have been trying to protect his players but it's clear that the attack had an effect on his side. "Most players hardly slept,

myself included," Dortmund midfielder Julian Weigl said. "I tried to come to terms with it with my family, tried to wind down and switch off. In the end in the game we made the best we could of it."—AP