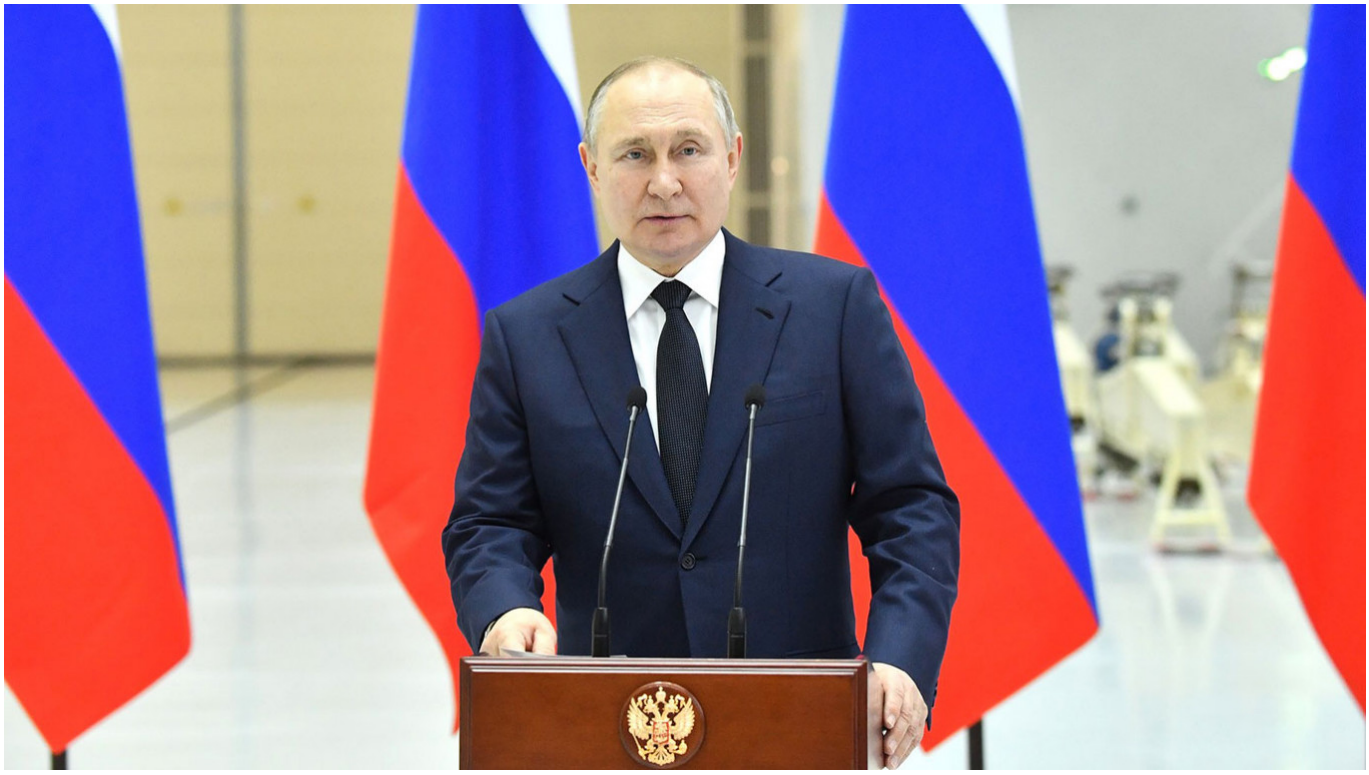
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Russia to ‘Calmly’ Continue Ukraine Operation – Putin

By AFP

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President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday Moscow will proceed according to plan with military operations in Ukraine as the pro-Western country braces for a major Russian offensive in the east.

"Our task is to fulfill and achieve all the goals set, minimizing losses. And we will act rhythmically, calmly, according to the plan originally proposed by the General Staff," Putin said during a televised press conference.

Speaking to reporters following a meeting with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko at a cosmodrome in Russia's Far East, Putin dismissed claims Moscow's army was struggling against the Ukrainian resistance and was forced to withdraw from around major cities, including the capital Kyiv.

"Our actions in certain regions of Ukraine were just related to containing (enemy) forces, destroying military infrastructure, creating conditions for a more active operation in Donbas," Putin said referring to a region in eastern Ukraine, parts of which are controlled by pro-Russia separatists.

Putin also said the operation was not going to speed up, in order to minimize casualties.

"I often hear the question: is it possible to do it a bit faster? It is. This depends on the intensity of hostilities, but the intensity of hostilities is, unfortunately, related to losses," he said.

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Russia has repeatedly denied targeting civilians, accusing Ukraine of using its population as a "human shield."

Asked about reports of the discovery of hundreds of dead bodies of civilians in the town of Bucha outside Kyiv after the withdrawal of Moscow's troops, Putin dismissed them as "fake."

He compared the accusations to those concerning the use of chemical weapons by the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. "It's the same kind of fake in Bucha," Putin said.

He also said Ukraine's "inconsistency" during peace talks with Russia was slowing down the process.

"Yesterday evening, the Ukrainian side changed something again. Such inconsistency on fundamental points does create certain difficulties in reaching final agreements," Putin said.

He added that until an agreement is reached, "the military operation will continue until the full completion of (its) tasks."

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