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Putin: Russia Will Improve Nuclear Combat Readiness

By AFP

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Adds further comments by Putin and Shoigu

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that Russia would continue developing its military potential and the combat readiness of its nuclear forces as Moscow's offensive in Ukraine continued to face severe challenges.

"The armed forces and combat capabilities of our armed forces are increasing constantly and every day. And this process, of course, we will build upon," Putin said during a televised meeting with Russia's military top brass.

He added that Russia would also "improve the combat readiness of our nuclear triad."

The Russian leader highlighted the new Zircon hypersonic cruise missile, which Russian troops will be able to use from January.

"In early January, the Admiral Gorshkov frigate will be equipped with the new Zircon hypersonic missile, which has no equivalent in the world," Putin said.

"We don't have any limits on funding. The country and the government give the army everything it asks for, everything," Putin added.

During the meeting, the Russian leader paid homage to fallen soldiers and described the conflict in Ukraine as a "shared tragedy" but placed blame for the outbreak of hostilities on Ukraine and its allies, not Moscow.

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"What is happening is, of course, a tragedy — our shared tragedy. But it is not the result of our policy. It is the result of the policy of third countries."

Nearly 10 months into the fighting, Russia has faced a series of humiliating setbacks on the ground in Ukraine.

The Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said Wednesday that Russian servicemen in Ukraine were fighting "the combined forces of the West."

Shoigu also said that Moscow planned to use two Ukrainian port cities on the Sea of Azov that its troops seized during the offensive.

"The ports in Berdyansk and Mariupol are fully functioning. We plan to deploy bases for support vessels, emergency rescue services, and naval ship repair units," Shoigu added.

The defense minister also said it was necessary to increase the number of combat personnel in Russia's army to 1.5 million troops and proposed widening the age range for mandatory military service — currently between 18 and 27 — to 21 and 30.

Putin said he "agreed to the suggestions for further structural changes to the armed forces," adding that the reforms would not lead to the "militarization" of the country.

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