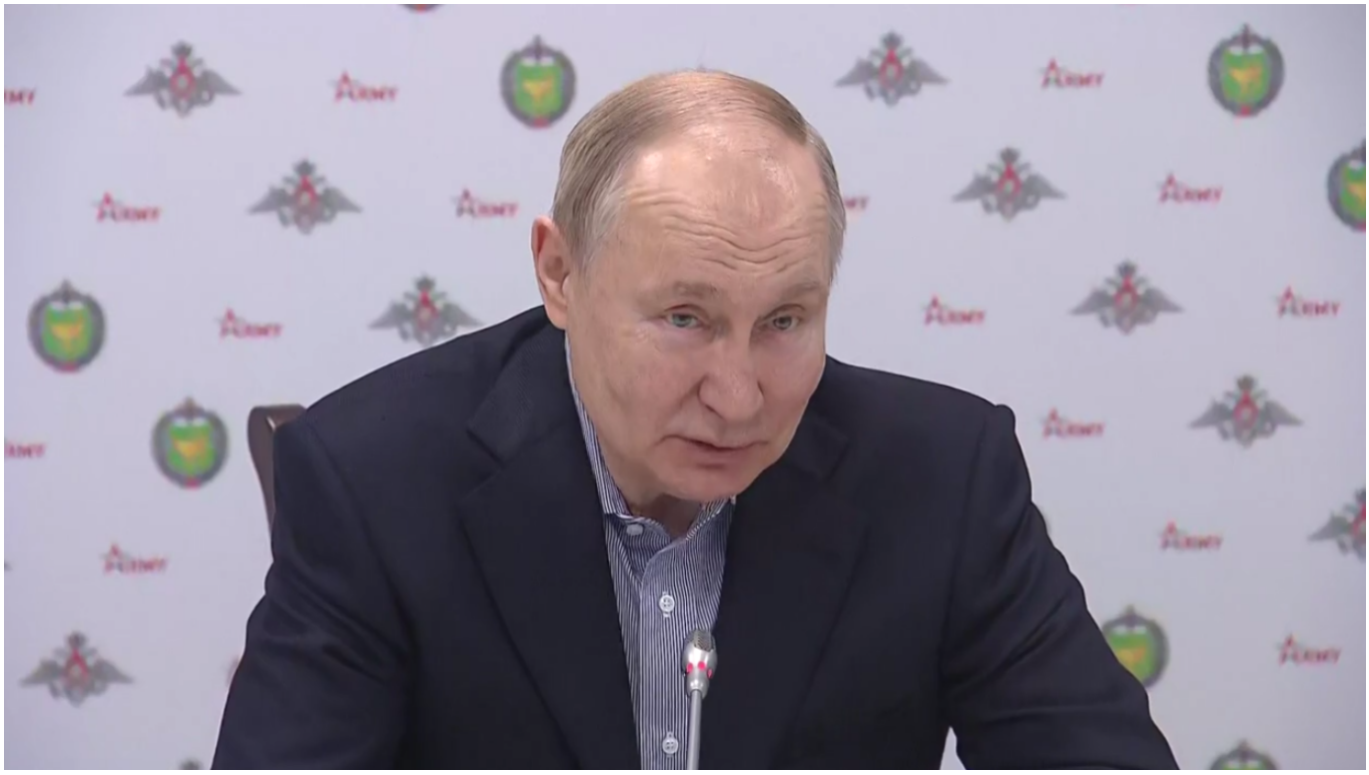
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Putin Says Russia Will 'Intensify' Strikes on Ukraine After Belgorod Attack

By AFP

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Vladimir Putin. **Kremlin**

President Vladimir Putin said Monday that Russia will "intensify" strikes against Ukraine after a deadly attack on the Russian city of Belgorod over the weekend left at least two dozen people dead and more than 100 injured.

Saturday's attack on Belgorod came after Moscow's large-scale air assault on cities across Ukraine the day before, killing 23 people.

"We're going to intensify the strikes. No crime against civilians will rest unpunished, that's for certain," Putin said Monday during a visit to a military hospital.

"Of course, we can strike public squares and Kyiv, and any other city. I understand. I'm burning with rage myself. But do we need to attack civilians? No, we hit military targets, and we'll continue to do that," the Russian leader added.

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Putin spoke as Kyiv said Russia's Armed Forces had used a "record" number of drones to strike Ukraine on New Year's Day.

He called the assault on Belgorod a "terrorist attack" and accused Ukrainian forces of targeting "right in the city center, where people were walking, before New Year's Eve."

The Russian leader also reiterated the view that Ukraine is being used by the West to "settle its problems" with Russia.

Putin said he believed the "strategic initiative" in the protracted conflict was on the Russian side.

"In any case, that is how I am being briefed and I always insist — any offensive operations should be done after a defeat of the enemy," he said.

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