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Russia's Belgorod Cancels Orthodox Christmas Masses Amid Rocket Attacks

By AFP

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Russian Orthodox Christmas celebrations in eastern Ukraine's partially occupied Donetsk region. **Dmitry Yagodkin / TASS**

Russian authorities said Saturday that they would cancel Orthodox Christmas midnight masses in the city of Belgorod, a day after some residents were offered to relocate to safety following an unprecedented wave of rocket attacks.

Western Russia's Belgorod and its capital city have been hit with near-daily Ukrainian attacks over the past week, the deadliest of which killed 25 people on Dec. 30, according to officials.

Russia celebrates Orthodox Christmas on Jan. 7 and midnight masses are held on the night of Jan. 6.

Belgorod mayor Valentin Demidov said on social media that he and local church leaders agreed that "night masses in Belgorod would be cancelled in connection to the operational

situation."

Related article: Russia to Evacuate Some Residents From Belgorod Amid Shelling

On Friday, authorities in the Belgorod region offered to evacuate residents who were concerned for their own safety amid increasing Ukrainian strikes.

Both Moscow and Kyiv have escalated attacks in recent days as the war in Ukraine approaches its second anniversary.

In eastern Ukraine, Russian-backed authorities said Ukrainian shelling killed two people on Saturday.

"Two people were killed in Makiivka and Horlivka," the Moscow-installed head of the Donetsk region, Denis Pushilin, said on the messaging app Telegram, referring to two occupied industrial towns.

Russia had announced earlier that its forces shot down four Ukrainian missiles over annexed Crimea overnight.

The attack came a day after Russia said it repelled a Ukrainian drone attack on Crimea, downing 36 of them over the peninsula.

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