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Russia to Do 'Everything' to Halt Ukrainian Shelling of Belgorod

By AFP

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Belgorod after shelling. **Vyacheslav Gladkov / Telegram**

Russia said Tuesday that its military would do everything possible to stop the Ukrainian shelling of Belgorod, a border town where hundreds were evacuated after fatal bombardments.

The vow came as the Defense Ministry said it had downed four Ukrainian drones over western Russia, with debris injuring three at an oil facility in the Oryol region.

Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu meanwhile said Russian forces were dictating the course of fighting on the front line, which has barely shifted in about a year despite fierce fighting.

Belgorod has suffered an uptick in fatal shelling attacks in recent weeks that prompted city officials to recently evacuate hundreds and extend a closure of schools.

"Of course, our military will continue to do everything in order to minimize the danger at first

and then eliminate it entirely," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

He accused the Ukrainian military of firing on civilian targets in the center of the urban hub of around 340,000 people with weapons supplied by European countries.

Related article: Russia's Belgorod Evacuates 300 Residents Over Ukrainian Strikes

The Kremlin has tried to maintain a semblance of normalcy on the home front, but the recent strikes on Belgorod have brought the Ukraine conflict closer to home for many Russians.

A series of aerial attacks from Kyiv's forces in Belgorod last month killed 25 people, the worst attack on Russian civilians since the conflict began nearly two years ago.

The head of the region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said Tuesday that three people had been injured by debris from downed Ukrainian weapons.

He said Russian air defense systems in the city had repelled 10 attacks overnight, though resulting debris left several homes damaged.

'Strategic initiative' on front

City officials last week encouraged residents to place tape over their windows to stop them from shattering during strikes, a widespread practice across Ukraine.

Hours after Peskov's comments, the Defense Ministry said its forces had downed four Ukrainian drones over the Kursk and Oryol regions in western Russia.

Oryol Governor Andrey Klychkov said three civilians were injured during an attack on "fuel and energy facilities" in the region.

Even though the front line in Ukraine is largely static, Shoigu on Tuesday assured Russian defense officials that his forces were in control.

"We retain the strategic initiative along the entire line of contact," he said, accusing the United States of pressuring Ukraine to keep fighting against Russia.

Western backing for Ukraine, Shoigu said, would not change the outcome but only prolong fighting.

He also said Russia this year would step up production of drones, a weapon increasingly used by both the Ukrainian and Russian militaries.

Separately, Ukrainian authorities said the death toll from a Russian strike in the west of the country a day earlier had risen to three.

"Unfortunately, as a result of rescue operations, one more fatality was found — a man born in 1955. Sincere condolences to the family," Khmelnytskyi's Mayor Oleksandr Symchyshyn said on social media.

The attacks in the western region came as part of a country-wide barrage that left at least five people dead and dozens more injured.

Kyiv later increased the toll from Russian strikes in December after another corpse was found in the capital, saying the new toll was 33 killed.

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