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At Least 7 Killed in Strike on Russia's Belgorod – Heath Ministry

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A shopping center on Plekhanov Street in Belgorod, which was hit by a shell. **t.me/astrapress**

At least seven people have been killed in missile strikes on the city of Belgorod in southwestern Russia, the country's Health Ministry said Thursday.

The Health Ministry confirmed seven deaths and said 18 people were injured.

Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said a one-year-old girl was among those killed.

Images of the aftermath showed a blown-out shopping center and scattered debris. One showed a body covered with a blanket nearby.

The Defense Ministry said it had intercepted 14 Ukrainian RM-70 multiple rocket launcher shells over the Belgorod region at around noon. It did not comment on the casualties.

Russia's Foreign Ministry blasted a "monstrous crime against civilians" and called for international condemnation of Ukraine.

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“It's becoming clear that there are no safe areas in the city, no safe places anywhere, and it's simply a matter of chance,” a local journalist from Belgorod told The Moscow Times, adding that Thursday’s attack happened in a residential area.

“People started to take the shelling more seriously” after a New Year’s Eve attack on Belgorod killed 25 people, said the journalist, who spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitive nature of the topic.

“People hide in the bathroom, in corridors, they run into these concrete shelters. It’s not clear how effective these protective measures are, but nevertheless, people treat such incidents more seriously than before,” the journalist added.

“I heard the sound of explosions...and almost immediately the sound of sirens. I live quite close to the shopping center, so it was loud. Now everything is quiet, but I’m not going outside,” a resident of Belgorod told The Moscow Times.

“Everyone asks [loved ones] if they are alive. You are sitting under the shelling and wonder who could be at the site at that time — an interesting aspect of communication in Belgorod,” she added.

A school and a school stadium were damaged as a result of Thursday’s attack, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency said.

Following the attack, parents of schoolchildren started writing comments on Gladkov’s VKontakte page and asking the governor to extend remote classes.

“Please, officially cancel full-time education until the end of the quarter...Is it really worth risking children for the sake of full-time education?,” said Marta Kalashnikova, a resident of Belgorod.

“It is clear that no one is safe from anything at home, but how to create a safe home-school-home route in such conditions? ...It is unknown how a particular child will behave,” Lidiya Gudkova said in a comment on VKontakte.

The governor of the neighboring Kursk region, Roman Starovoit, said the attack on Belgorod “deliberately” targeted civilians, adding that there were “many” dead and wounded in a local shopping center, outside a school and in residential courtyards.

Kyiv has not claimed responsibility for the attack.

Belgorod, which sits near the Ukrainian border, has borne the brunt of an increasing number of drone and missile strikes since December.

Authorities began evacuating hundreds of residents from the city last month after the deadly New Year’s Eve attack.

Some 300 residents have already left the city, one of the biggest civilian evacuations on Russian soil since Moscow launched hostilities against Ukraine in February 2022.

AFP contributed reporting.

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