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Putin Orders Military to 'Dislodge' Ukrainian Forces as 120K Flee Border Area

By AFP

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Vladimir Putin. **kremlin.ru**

President Vladimir Putin on Monday ordered his army to "dislodge" Ukrainian troops who stormed over the border last week, as authorities in the Kursk region said over 120,000 people have been displaced due to the fighting.

Kyiv launched a surprise offensive into southwestern Russia's Kursk region on Tuesday, capturing over two dozen settlements in the most significant cross-border attack on Russian soil since World War II.

"One of the obvious goals of the enemy is to sow discord, strife, intimidate people, destroy the unity and cohesion of Russian society," Putin told a televised meeting with government officials.

"The main task is, of course, for the defense ministry to dislodge the enemy from our territories," he said.

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An estimated 121,000 people have fled parts of the Kursk region since the start of the fighting, which has killed at least 12 civilians and injured 121 more, regional governor Alexei Smirnov told Putin during Monday's meeting.

Authorities in Kursk announced that they were widening their evacuation area to include the Belovsky district, home to some 14,000 residents. The neighboring Belgorod region also said it was evacuating its border district of Krasnoyaruzhsky.

Ukraine has pierced into the region by at least 12 kilometres (seven miles) and captured 28 towns and villages, with the new front around 40 kilometers in length (24.8 miles), Smirnov said.

A Ukrainian official told AFP over the weekend that the operation was aimed at stretching Russian troops and destabilizing the country after months of slow Russian advances across the front line.

Putin said Russia would respond by showing "support for all those in distress" and claimed there had been an increase in men signing up to fight. "The enemy will receive a worthy riposte," he said.

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