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500 Miles From Ukraine, Russia's Leningrad Region Races to Convert Cellars Into Bomb Shelters

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The bomb shelter entrance. **Moskva News Agency**

Authorities in Russia's northwestern Leningrad region announced plans on Thursday to appropriate underground spaces, including apartment building basements, for use as bomb shelters.

"There's no time for disputes now," Leningrad region Governor Alexander Drozdenko wrote on Telegram, adding that the spaces will be repaired and prepared to shelter the region's 2 million residents "in the event of an emergency."

Drozdenko said the regional crisis center would soon formalize the decision to equip the shelters, either permanently or temporarily. The Leningrad region encircles St. Petersburg, Russia's second-largest city.

While he did not elaborate on the urgency, the announcement comes days after President

Vladimir Putin lowered Russia's threshold for using nuclear weapons, a move widely seen as retaliation for the White House giving Ukraine's military permission to strike targets inside Russia with long-range weapons it supplied.

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Earlier on Thursday, Ukraine said that Russia had fired an intercontinental ballistic missile for the first time during the war, though anonymous Western officials cited in media reports disputed the claim.

The Leningrad region's administrative center, Gatchina, is around 800 kilometers (500 miles) north of the Ukrainian border and has been targeted by Ukrainian drones over the past year. However, it remains outside the range of U.S.-supplied ATACMS and U.K.-supplied Storm Shadow missiles.

Last year, Russian authorities ordered upgrades to Soviet-era bomb shelters across the country, many of which had fallen into disrepair, according to officials who spoke with The Moscow Times.

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