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Putin Visits Kursk Region for First Time Since Ukraine's Offensive

By AFP

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Kremlin.ru

President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday expressed confidence that his army was on the brink of "fully liberating" Russia's Kursk region, as Ukraine hinted it was pulling troops back in the face of rapid Russian advances.

In his first visit to the region since Ukraine launched its shock counter-offensive in August, Putin, dressed in military camouflage, praised recent battlefield gains and urged his forces to push forward.

"I am counting on the fact that all the combat tasks facing our units will be fulfilled, and the territory of the Kursk region will soon be completely liberated from the enemy," he said in televised remarks.

Russia's forces have retaken 24 settlements in the border region over the last five days, chief

of the general staff Valery Gerasimov told the Kremlin leader.

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Minutes after footage of Putin's remarks aired on Russian state TV, Ukraine's top army commander suggested his troops were pulling back to minimize losses.

"In the most difficult situation, my priority has been and remains saving the lives of Ukrainian soldiers. To this end, the units of the defense forces, if necessary, maneuver to more favorable positions," General Oleksandr Syrsky said in a Facebook post.

He added, however, that "despite the increased pressure from the Russian [and] North Korean arm[ies], we will maintain defense in the Kursk region as long as it is appropriate and necessary."

Gerasimov said Russia had captured 430 Ukrainian soldiers in the region, while Syrsky said 942 Russians had been taken as prisoners of war.

Putin said captured Ukrainian fighters should be "treated as terrorists, in accordance with the laws of the Russian Federation," suggesting they could face trial and lengthy prison sentences.

Russia has previously prosecuted Ukrainian prisoners of war on terrorism charges, despite the Geneva Conventions prohibiting trials for combatants engaged in hostilities.

According to Gerasimov, Russian forces have reclaimed about 1,100 square kilometers (425 square miles) of territory in the Kursk region — most of the land Ukraine seized during its August 2024 offensive.

Russia's battlefield advances come as the United States presses the Kremlin to agree "unconditionally" to a 30-day ceasefire.

Ukraine had sought to use its control of Kursk territory as leverage in peace negotiations with Russia.

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