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03.17.22

US may drop Iran Guard as terrorist to remove sanctions

03.17.22

U.S. weighs dropping Iran's IRGC from terrorism list, source says
Iran official says delisting under discussion since election of Raisi and will come in exchange for 'commitment and/or steps by Iran, with respect to regional or other IRGC activities'

Reuters| Published: 03.17.22, 08:48

The United States is considering removing Iran's Revolutionary Guards from its foreign terrorist organization blacklist in return for Iranian assurances about reining in the elite force, a source familiar with the matter said on Wednesday.

The source said Washington had not decided what might be an acceptable commitment from Tehran in exchange for such a step, which would reverse former U.S. President Donald Trump's 2019 blacklisting of the group and draw sharp Republican criticism.

The move was the first time Washington had formally labeled part of another sovereign government as a terrorist group.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is a powerful faction in Iran that controls a business empire as well as elite armed and intelligence forces that Washington accuses of carrying out a global terrorist campaign.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the Biden administration was weighing whether to drop the terrorist designation "in return for some kind of commitment and/or steps by Iran, with respect to regional or other IRGC activities."

The Biden administration's consideration of such a tradeoff was first reported by Axios, citing Israeli and U.S. sources.

Multiple sources have said dropping the designation is one of the last, and most vexing, issues in wider indirect talks on reviving the 2015 deal under which Iran limited its nuclear program in return for relief from economic sanctions.

Asked about the possibility of removing the IRGC from the U.S. terrorism list, U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price declined comment beyond saying that sanctions relief is at the heart of negotiations to revive the nuclear deal.

Last week an Iranian official said the IRGC's removal from the blacklist had been under discussion as far back as June but that the issue had become more complicated after last summer's election of hardliner Ebrahim Raisi as Iran's president.

The Iranian official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the United States had made clear "they cannot remove it without major concessions from Iran," a stance he said had been rejected by Iran's lead nuclear negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani.

The IRGC's political influence in Iran's complex power structure has increased since the election of Raisi, who took office in August and whose government includes dozens of Revolutionary Guard commanders.

Raisi's election led to a five-month gap in the indirect U.S.-Iranian talks over reviving the nuclear deal, which Trump abandoned in 2018 and reimposed U.S. sanctions, prompting Iran to start violating its nuclear limits about a year later.

Negotiations resumed in late November, with officials from other parties to the deal - Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia - as well as **European Union** officials **coordinating the talks shuttling between U.S. and Iranian** representatives. **An agreement would allow Iran to sell its oil abroad.**

03.17.22

Russia bogged down, blasting Ukraine 4th week, peace talks by video 4th day

03.17.22

Russia bogged down, blasting Ukrainian cities as war enters fourth week

Zelensky evokes the Berlin Wall and the Holocaust in a speech to Germany's Bundestag by **video link** as Russian forces advance on Kyiv and Kharkiv; in Chernihiv, under intense bombardment, 53 civilians said killed

Reuters| Published: **03.17.22**, 12:27

Russian forces in Ukraine are **blasting** cities and **killing** civilians **but no longer making progress on the ground**, Western countries said on Thursday, as a war Moscow was thought to have hoped to win within days **entered its fourth week**.

Local officials said rescuers in the besieged southern port of Mariupol were combing the rubble of a theatre where women and children had been sheltering, bombed by Russian forces the previous day.

"The bomb shelter held. Now the rubble is being cleared. There are survivors. We don't know about the (number of) victims yet," mayoral adviser Petro Andrushchenko told Reuters by phone.

Russia denied striking the theatre, which commercial satellite pictures showed had the word "children" marked out on the ground in front before it was blown up.

Mariupol has suffered the worst humanitarian catastrophe of the war, with hundreds of thousands of civilians trapped in basements with no food, water or power for weeks.

Russian forces have begun letting some people out in private cars this week but have blocked aid convoys from reaching the city.

Viacheslav Chaus, governor of Chernihiv, a northern city that has been intensely bombarded, said 53 civilians had been killed there in the past 24 hours. The toll could not be independently verified.

In the capital Kyiv, a building in the Darnytsky district was extensively damaged by what the authorities said was debris from a missile shot down early in the morning.

As residents cleared glass and carried bags of possessions away, a man knelt weeping by the body of a woman which lay close to a doorway, covered in a bloody sheet.

Although both sides have pointed to limited progress in peace talks this week, President Vladimir Putin, who ordered Russia's invasion on Feb. 24, showed little sign of relenting.

In a vituperative televised speech, he inveighed against "traitors and scum" at home who helped the West, and said the Russian people would spit them out like gnats.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Putin's security council, said the United States had stoked "disgusting" Russophobia in an attempt to force Russia to its knees: "It will not work - Russia has the might to put all of our brash enemies in their place."

Kyiv and its Western allies believe Russia launched the unprovoked war to subjugate a neighbor that Putin calls an artificial state carved out of Russia. Moscow says it is carrying out a "special operation" to disarm it and "denazify".

Heavily outnumbered Ukrainian forces have prevented Moscow from capturing any of Ukraine's biggest cities so far despite the largest assault on a European state since World War Two. More than 3 million Ukrainians have fled and thousands of civilians and combatants have died.

Stalled on all Fronts

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky invoked the Berlin Wall and the Holocaust in a speech by video link to Germany's Bundestag, a day after a similar speech to the U.S. Congress.

Russia has assaulted Ukraine from four directions, sending two massive columns towards Kyiv from the northwest and northeast, pushing in from the east near the second biggest city Kharkiv, and spreading in the south from Crimea.

But British military intelligence said in an update on Thursday that the invasion had "largely stalled on all fronts", and Russian forces were suffering heavy losses from a staunch and well-coordinated Ukrainian resistance.

Northeastern and northwestern suburbs of Kyiv have been reduced to rubble by heavy fighting, but the capital itself has held firm, under a curfew and subjected to deadly nightly rocket attacks.

Amid the unrelenting fighting, both sides have spoken of progress at talks. Ukrainian officials have said they think Russia is running out of troops to keep fighting and could

soon **come to terms with its failure** to topple the Ukrainian government. Moscow has said it is close to agreeing a formula that would keep Ukraine neutral, long one of its demands. Moscow said **peace talks resumed on Thursday by videolink** for a **fourth straight day**, discussing military, political and humanitarian issues.

03.16.22

Portugal grants citizenship to descendants of Jews expelled during medieval Inquisition

03.16.22

Portugal to adjust Jewish citizenship law used by Abramovich

Law granting Portuguese citizenship to descendants of Sephardic Jews expelled in medieval times now **requires** applicants to **show 'connection with Portuga'**; Lisbon calls new requirement 'generous and fair'

Reuters| Published: **03.16.22**, 20:14

Portugal has tightened a **law** that **grants citizenship to descendants** of Sephardic Jews and which **allowed** sanctioned Russian oligarch Roman **Abramovich to become a citizen**, but the **changes** will **not be retroactive**, the foreign minister said on Wednesday.

The billionaire was granted Portuguese citizenship last year based on the 2015 law that offers naturalization to descendants of **Sephardic Jews** who were **expelled** from the Iberian peninsula **during the medieval Inquisition**.

Foreign Minister Augusto Santos Silva said a decree introduced a new **requirement** for applicants **to show** an "**effective connection with Portugal**", although he made no mention of any individuals when discussing the alterations.

Abramovich was among several Russian billionaires added to a European Union black list, drawn up after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. He was put on a British sanctions list last week.

Santos Silva said **Portugal would implement EU sanctions** against Abramovich **but could not ban him from entering the country because he was a citizen**.

The **alterations to the citizenship law** had already been **given the green light** by President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and **would come into effect soon**, the minister told a briefing for foreign journalists, without giving a date for implementation. Portugal's Publico newspaper reported that, under the new rules, applicants would have to provide **additional documents to show** a connection to Portugal, such as **inheritance of a property** in Portuguese territory or proof of visits to the country. Santos Silva said the law was "generous and fair" and introduced for descendants of Jews who were persecuted in the region or expelled, although he said improvements were needed.

An inquiry into the granting of citizenship to Abramovich was opened in January by the Portuguese prosecutor's office and his citizenship could be stripped depending on its outcome.

A spokesperson for Abramovich has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing.

A rabbi responsible for issuing a document needed to obtain citizenship was arrested last week over suspicions of money laundering, corruption, fraud and falsification of documents in the process.

Close to 57,000 descendants of Sephardic Jews have been granted citizenship since the law was implemented in 2015, according to official data.

03.16.22

Russia media censorship blocks two Israeli websites calling Ukraine a war

03.16.22

Amid media censorship frenzy, Russia blocks two Israeli websites

Following crackdowns on social media and several local and foreign news sites, Moscow targets Israeli outlets for the first time, blocking access to Vesti and Channel 9 for Russian-based users

AFP, Roy Hahn, Itamar Eichner | Published: 03.16.22, 18:47

Russia's media regulator Roskomnadzor blocked access to at least a dozen more media websites on Wednesday, including those of Israeli Russian-language news websites Vesti and Channel 9, in a crackdown online that sharply escalated after President Vladimir Putin sent in troops to Ukraine.

Besides the Israeli websites which serve the country's large Russian-speaking community, the Russian regulator also blocked sites such as award-winning investigation website Bellingcat and several Russian regional websites, like Permdaily.ru.

Communications Minister Yoaz Hendel called the ban an "aggressive and illogical move" and a "blatant and unacceptable violation of the freedom of the Israeli press."

Roskomnadzor — which prohibits referring to the fighting in Ukraine as a "war", but rather a "military operation" — said that the websites we listed according to a decision by the Office of Public Prosecutor of the Russian Federation.

Russia has restricted access to an increasing amount of independent media since it launched its Ukraine military campaign, and has blocked access to global tech giants Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Russian censorship can usually be bypassed through the use of VPNs (virtual private networks). Using a VPN allows for more private browsing by blurring the user's location and identity, thus allowing access to sites and services that are blocked in their country. This option has seen a recent surge in popularity since Moscow began tightening its hold on means of communication in the country.

Vesty — Israel's most popular Russian-language news website and a Ynet sister publication — can also be accessed by Russian-based users through its Telegram channel.

03.16.22

Israel announces shelter, assistance, medical & social program for Ukraine refugees

03.16.22

Israel announces subsistence program for Ukrainian refugees

As thousands of Ukrainian refugees arrive in Israel, government puts together program to provide them with shelter, material assistance, and access to medical care and social services

Hadas Gil-Ad | Published: 03.16.22, 17:34

The Welfare Ministry announced on Wednesday it would expand aid and services offered to refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine.

The state would provide refugees with temporary shelter, food and other forms of material assistance and access to medical care and education and social services.

Almost three weeks since fighting first broke out in Eastern Europe, Welfare Minister Meir Cohen said that his ministry would cooperate with civil society groups to facilitate aid for incoming refugees. Cohen also promised to add more Russian-speaking representatives at the ministry's 118 hotline.

The program is designed to provide primary emergency assistance to asylum seekers until they receive official refugee status and a work permit, or until they return to their country of origin.

The Welfare Ministry estimates that the cost of assistance will hover around NIS 1,000 (\$310) per refugee, depending on the dynamic nature of the situation. The program will focus on the elderly population, children and teenagers at risk, people with disabilities, and families.

"This is our moral obligation as Jews and Israelis and we see this obligation as a great honor," Cohen said.

"I thank the prime minister [Naftali Bennett] for giving us this project. The Welfare Ministry is ready to use all the means at its disposal to help this population."

03.16.22

Zelensky calls on US Congress for more Russia sanctions, defense aid

03.16.22

Zelensky calls on U.S. Congress for more Russia sanctions, defense aid

In address carried live, Ukraine president repeats request for no-fly zone to be imposed over Ukraine to stop Russian bombing of cities; asks for more sanctions to be imposed on Russia; bipartisan agreement in Congress to provide more military aid to beleaguered nation

Reuters| Updated: 03.16.22, 15:41

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday called on the U.S. Congress on Wednesday for further military assistance to help protect the skies over Ukraine and for further sanctions against Russia including the withdrawal of all U.S. businesses.

"Russia has turned the Ukrainian sky into a source of death for thousands of people," Zelensky said in a video address to lawmakers.

Zelensky's speech was broadcast live, comes a day after he made a plea to Canada's parliament for more Western sanctions on Russia and the imposition of a no-fly zone over Ukraine.

"We are not asking for much. We are asking for justice, for real support," Zelenskiy told Canadian lawmakers on Tuesday.

A no-fly zone is a step U.S. President Joe Biden and NATO allies have resisted out of a fear of escalating the war that began with Russia's Feb. 24 invasion. Biden on Tuesday signed into law \$13.6 billion in emergency aid to Ukraine to help it obtain more weaponry and for humanitarian assistance.

Biden was expected to announce an additional \$800 million in security assistance to Ukraine later on Wednesday in remarks on U.S. aid to the country, a White House official said.

Zelensky has sought in recent weeks to shore up support for his country in various speeches to foreign audiences, also including the European Parliament and the British Parliament.

Support for Ukraine is a rare instance in which Republicans and Democrats have aligned in a sharply divided Congress, with some lawmakers in both parties urging Biden to go further in helping Ukraine. There is some bipartisan support in Congress for rushing combat aircraft to Ukraine.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed a resolution condemning Russian President Vladimir Putin as a war criminal.

The United Nations estimates that around 3 million people have fled Ukraine, mostly women and children, and are seeking safety in neighboring countries, mainly Poland.

Biden has announced a ban on Russian oil and other energy imports and has called for a suspension of Russia's trading status that affords its exported products lower tariffs in the international arena. The House is attempting to pass legislation responding to Biden's request this week.

Historic visits

It is rare for foreign leaders to address the U.S. Congress during wartime. A famous example came in 1941, when British Prime Minister Winston Churchill spoke to Congress just weeks after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor that drew the United States into World War Two. Churchill warned that "many disappointments and unpleasant surprises await us."

In 2015, then prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu delivered a speech to Congress opposing an international deal aimed at discouraging Iran from developing nuclear weapons as the matter was being debated in Washington.

Then prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressing the U.S. Congress in 2015 in efforts to stop the nuclear agreement with Iran

Then prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressing the U.S. Congress in 2015 in efforts to stop the nuclear agreement with Iran (Photo: AFP)

The first foreign leader to address a joint meeting of Congress was King Kalakaua of Hawaii in 1874, before Hawaii became a state.

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russian President Boris Yeltsin in 1992 addressed Congress. Yeltsin's upbeat speech proclaimed: "We have left behind the period when America and Russia looked at each other through gun sights, ready to pull the trigger at any time."

But the sanctions leveled by the United States and its allies against Russia following the invasion and moves to shore up Ukraine's military capability have brought back memories of the decades-long Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union to which Yeltsin had referred.

Russia calls its actions in Ukraine a "special operation."

03.16.22

Ukraine inflicts Russian forces every hour, a variant status for possible compromise

03.16.22

Ukraine says it launched counteroffensives against Russian forces

Official says armed forces are powerful and inflict heavy blows on Russian enemy every hour; '103 children killed in the war thus far, as Russians struck more than 400 educational establishments,' Ukraine's Prosecutor General says

Reuters| Published: 03.16.22, 12:24

Ukraine's armed forces are launching counteroffensives against Russian forces "in several operational areas," Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak wrote on Twitter on Wednesday.

"This radically changes the parties' dispositions," he added, without giving details. Reuters was unable immediately to verify his comments.

In an update on the war, the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces referred to the "high intensity of hostilities" but **did not say where** fighting was heaviest.

Ukrainian officials also made clear that the death toll was rising from the war that began when Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

The emergency service in Ukraine's eastern region of K harkiv region said on Wednesday that at least 500 residents of the city of K harkiv have been killed.

Prosecutor General Iryna Venediktova said on Facebook that 103 children have been killed so far in the war.

Russian forces have struck more than 400 educational establishments and 59 of them have been destroyed, she said.

The governor of the Chernihiv region in northern Ukraine said there was no electricity in the region's main city, Chernihiv, or in some other settlements in the area.

But Governor Viacheslav Chaus said **Ukraine's** armed **forces** "are powerful and **inflict** powerful **blows on the Russian enemy every hour.**"

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Wednesday peace talks were sounding more realistic but more time was needed.

The **Kremlin**, meanwhile, said that a remilitarized Ukraine with its own army along the lines of Austria or Sweden was being **looked at as a possible compromise.**

"This is a **variant that is currently being discussed and which could really be seen a compromise,**" Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quoted as saying by RIA news agency.

The reference to demilitarization appeared to relate to the **idea of neutral status for Ukraine.** Ukraine was **promised by NATO** as far back as **2008** that it **would** one day become a member of the alliance. **Russia** has said it cannot allow that to happen, and cited it as part of the logic for what it calls its special **military operation** in Ukraine.

03.15.22

Israeli court to rule on displacement of West Bank Palestinians after 22 years of petitions

03.15.22

Israeli court to rule on displacement of West Bank Palestinians

Supreme Court hears petitions against long-running bid by the Israeli army to displace over 1,000 Palestinian inhabitants from a rural part of the West Bank it designates for military exercises

Reuters| Updated: 03.15.22, 23:48

After two decades of inconclusive legal maneuvering, the Israeli Supreme Court is expected to hand down a ruling soon on the IDF's move to demolish eight small communities in a rocky, arid area of the southern West Bank near the city of Hebron.

Petitioners say this move would make more than 1,000 Palestinians homeless and endanger their distinct, generations-long nomadic way of life, eking out a living from farming and herding.

"They have been dragging us from one court hearing to another for 22 years," Othman al-Jabareen, one of the Palestinian petitioners, said in court. "God willing, the justices will let us stay on our land because we have no other option."

The state prosecutor said in Tuesday's hearing that the military has conclusively stated the crucial importance of the area for military training. "We've looked into that issue over and over," the prosecution said.

The area, spanning 3,000 hectares (7,400 acres) and known to Palestinians as Masafer Yatta, and to Israelis as the South Hebron Hills, lies close to the West Bank border with Israel.

In 1999, hundreds of Palestinian inhabitants were displaced from their homes after the military declared the area a military exercise zone. Initial petitions were filed in 2000 and a court ordered the Israeli government to allow the residents to return pending a final ruling.

After repeated delays and failed mediation attempts, the government and military filed responses to the Palestinian petitions in 2012.

As the case languished without a definitive outcome over the past two decades, Palestinian residents said they were denied building permits with the army demolishing any new structures including houses, water wells and solar panels. The military, meanwhile, has conducted only sporadic exercises.

Palestinians in the area also say they have struggled to connect to water and electricity networks to which nearby Jewish settlements have access.

"This case is not about a firing zone, it is about taking control of land, because unlike other areas, most of this land is privately owned," said Shlomo Lecker who, along with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, is representing 200 of the Palestinian families under threat of displacement.

"In effect, this is land expropriation without compensation."

Outside the Jerusalem court, dozens of Israeli protesters opposed to Israeli presence in the West Bank since the 1967 Six Day War, held up signs reading, "Families, not firing zones" and "Masafer Yatta is not a military playground".

03.15.22

EU PM's of Czech Republic, Poland & Slovenia meet in Kyiv to support Ukraine

03.15.22

Three EU country leaders arrive in Kyiv in show of support for Ukraine

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal hails what he calls the 'courage of true friends'; decision to visit Kyiv was taken in consultation with senior EU officials but receives no formal mandate

Reuters| Published: 03.15.22, 21:52

The prime ministers of the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia arrived in Kyiv by train on Tuesday to show support for Ukraine, the first foreign leaders to visit the capital since Russia invaded last month.

Russian air strikes and shelling hit Kyiv on Tuesday killing at least four people, authorities said, as invading forces tightened their grip and the mayor announced a 35-hour curfew starting at 8 p.m. (1800 GMT).

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Czech counterpart Petr Fiala and Slovenia's Janez Jansa were to meet Ukrainian officials.

Also in attendance was Polish Deputy Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, leader of the country's ruling PiS party, who is seen as the main decision-maker in the country.

"It is here, in war-torn Kyiv, that history is being made. It is here, that freedom fights against the world of tyranny. It is here that the future of us all hangs in the balance," Morawiecki wrote on Twitter.

The Czech Republic and Poland, former communist members of both the EU and NATO, have been among the strongest backers of Ukraine in Europe since the Russian invasion.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal hailed what he said was the "courage of true friends" and said the leaders would discuss support for Ukraine and further sanctions against Russia.

Morawiecki's top aide Michal Dworzcyk told private broadcaster Polsat News on Tuesday evening that the three prime ministers had started a meeting with Shmygal and President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

Polish state-run broadcaster TVP Info reported that Morawiecki and Kaczynski also went to meet the Kyiv authorities, without giving further details.

Fiala said the decision to visit Kyiv was taken in consultation with European Council President Charles Michel and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

The idea of the trip was agreed at an EU leaders' summit in Versailles in France last week, Dworzcyk said.

But an EU official said there was no "formal mandate" extended by Brussels.

"It's a very valid initiative. Every initiative to bring peace back to Ukraine is of course welcome," the official said. "Some leaders might also wonder: will this jeopardize or will this improve conditions for negotiations with the Russians. It remains to be seen, of course. It's a fine line."

Russia calls its actions a "special military operation" to "denazify" Ukraine, which Kyiv and its Western allies reject as a pretext for an unjustified and illegal attack.

03.14.22

Israeli websites (denial-of-service) attack for an hour by Iranian hackers

03.14.22

Israeli government websites go offline in suspected Iranian cyberattack

Cybersecurity experts say no risk of sensitive information leaking, harm to infrastructure as services restored; Tehran claims thwarted Mossad plot to sabotage nuclear facility shortly after attack

Daniel Salami, Moran Azulay, Yuval Mann, Yoav Zitun, Reuters | Published: 03.14.22, 21:46

Several Israeli government websites went offline Monday evening in what is suspected to be a large-scale cyberattack perpetrated by Iranian-aligned hackers.

The National Cyber Directorate said that "the attack was aimed at government and non-security websites, and especially not at public computer systems as for now."

According to estimates, the websites were targeted by a DDoS attack, which disrupts a website's normal traffic by overwhelming the target or its surrounding infrastructure with a flood of internet traffic.

DDoS (distributed denial-of-service) attacks are considered quite basic and don't pose a risk of sensitive information leaking.

The attack lasted for a little longer than an hour and all websites were back online.

Shortly earlier, Iranian state television reported that security forces had thwarted planned sabotage at the country's major Fordow nuclear site by a network recruited by Israel, and that the forces had made several arrests.

"Mossad agents tried to arrive and sabotage IR6 centrifuges in Fordow. The Mossad recruited a neighbor of one of the workers at the facility, provided him with special equipment and instructed him," the report said, referring to Israel's national intelligence agency.

Iran's powerful paramilitary Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) later shared an ominous message with the word "surprise" in Hebrew to its account on the instant messaging app Telegram.

Iran has accused Israel of carrying out several attacks on facilities linked to its nuclear program and of killing its nuclear scientists over the past years. Israel has neither denied nor confirmed the allegations.

On Sunday, the IRGC claimed responsibility for a dozen ballistic missiles that struck alleged Israeli "strategic centers" in Iraq's northern Kurdish regional capital of Erbil in the early morning hours, Iran's state media reported, while warning Israel of a "harsh response" if it retaliates.

The IRGC vowed to avenge the death of two of its members in a recent attack near Damascus attributed to Israel.

03.14.22

International sanctions imposed to freeze assets of top Russians, upheld by Israel

03.14.22

Jet linked to Russia's Abramovich leaves Israel for Istanbul

Billionaire's plane takes off from Ben Gurion Airport less than a day after arriving due to Israel restricting private jets' parking time to prevent Russian-Jewish oligarchs from skirting foreign sanctions

Reuters| Published: 03.14.22, 20:44

A jet suspected to be used by sanctioned oligarch Roman Abramovich left Israel on Monday, as international moves to freeze assets of top Russian businessmen following Russia's invasion of Ukraine gathered pace.

A person with knowledge of the matter told Reuters a plane used by Abramovich flew into Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport on Sunday.

Flight-tracking website Radarbox said the plane, which has the tail number LX-RAY, took off from Ben Gurion with Istanbul marked as its destination.

Tracking websites showed it arrived from Moscow late on Sunday. Israeli restrictions imposed on private jets since the invasion meant it could not remain on the ground for more than 24 hours.

Reuters could not immediately confirm that Abramovich, who also holds Israeli and Portuguese citizenship, was aboard.

Earlier a van accompanied by security guards left Abramovich's villa in Herzliya Pituah, an affluent suburb of Tel Aviv, headed to the airport, Kan public radio said. It was unclear from footage tweeted by the station whether he was inside.

Abramovich, owner of Britain's Chelsea soccer club, was among seven oligarchs added to the British sanctions list on Thursday in a bid to isolate Russian President Vladimir Putin over his invasion of Ukraine.

Top European Union diplomats have agreed to add Abramovich to the EU list of Russian billionaires sanctioned since the fighting began, two diplomatic sources said on Monday.

Abramovich has denied having close ties to Putin.

A British transport ministry source said on Friday that Britain was searching out helicopters and jets belonging to the sanctioned oligarchs.

Multiple properties including opulent yachts worth hundreds of millions of dollars have been seized by authorities in Europe in recent days. One of Abramovich's own yachts, the \$600 million Solaris, arrived in Montenegro's territorial waters on Sunday. In Slovakia, which borders Ukraine, visiting Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said Israel "will not be a route to bypass sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States and other Western countries".

In an interview with Israel's Channel 12 on Friday, Victoria Nuland, the U.S. undersecretary of state for political affairs, said Washington was asking Israel to join in financial and export sanctions against Russia. Lapid did not say directly whether Israel was considering its own sanctions. But he said the foreign ministry was "coordinating the issue together with partners including the Bank of Israel, the Finance Ministry, the Economy Ministry, the Airports Authority, the Energy Ministry, and others".

Asked for further details, the Bank of Israel said in a statement to Reuters that it was "constantly monitoring developments in the payments systems, the markets, and the financial system."

Any Israeli sanctions could complicate efforts by Bennett to mediate the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. He held talks in Moscow with Putin on March 5 and has spoken several times by phone with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. A senior Israeli official said Abramovich was not involved in Israel's mediation efforts. Sympathy for Ukraine is strong in Israel. The country's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem said on Thursday that it had suspended a strategic partnership with Abramovich, after Britain's move against him.

03.14.22

Zelensky adviser says peace talks in Jerusalem 'realistic' as late as May

03.14.22

Zelensky adviser says peace talks in Jerusalem 'realistic'

Oleksiy Arestovych tells Ynet that Ukraine's terms for ceasefire are full withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine, will further ongoing talks on the status of Donbas and Crimean Peninsula; says war can end as soon as next two weeks or as late as May
Alexandra Lukash Published: 03.14.22, 16:41

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's adviser said on Monday it is "realistic" for negotiations to end the war in Ukraine to take place in Israel's capital of Jerusalem.

Oleksiy Arestovych told Ynet that Zelensky was has personally proposed to hold the talks in Jerusalem, seeing as Israel has good relations with both Ukraine and Russia.

"There is certain progress regarding the talks between the two countries, and if president Zelensky says it is an option, it would probably happen. If the Russians would not agree to this, it wouldn't be considered as a possibility in the first place," Arestovych said.

He added that he can't elaborate on the latest developments in the talks between the countries, but said one of the conditions for ceasefire is the full withdrawal of Russians from Ukraine, as it was before the invasion. He added the status of the separatist regions in Donbas and the Crimean Peninsula will be discussed later in the negotiations. Arestovych also said that Zelensky has changed view that Israel is not involved enough in helping Ukraine after progress was made in peace talks following the Israeli mediation. "We feel that Israel is more involved in the talks, and we really appreciate the effort."

Arestovych said the war was Ukraine's greatest challenge since 1944. "Now we are at the crossroads, either it will end much faster than we thought, or it will last for months. "The Russians are now looking for reinforcements and trying to bring more troops from Syria, but it's not going so well, they may find some 10 to 15 thousand soldiers to fight at the difficult warzones of Mariupol and Mykolaiv. But so far, we've managed to stop their advancement to Kyiv, Sumy and Kharkiv. "Once we repel them there, we will reach the point where we can talk seriously about a truce," he said, adding that depending on developments, a ceasefire would be reached in two weeks or in late April, and possibly early May.

03.14.22

Israel to allow Ukraine refugees with relatives in country to stay until it's safe

03.14.22

Bennett says Israel to allow Ukraine refugees to stay until it's safe to go back
PM says Israel is on verge of a mass immigration wave, and it must not let down its 'brothers and sisters' fleeing warzone as well as non-Jewish Ukrainians; Herzog says Israel 'must not stand by' in wake of crisis
Ahiya Rabad| Published: 03.14.22, 15:27

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett on Monday said Israel will allow ineligible for citizenship refugees fleeing from the war in Ukraine to stay in the country until it's safe for them to go back.

"These days there is a significant challenge facing the people of Israel. We are on the verge of a mass wave of immigration. Many Jews want to come to Israel from the war zones, and we must not let them down," he said at the memorial service for Joseph Trumpeldor and the fallen soldiers in the Battle of Tel Hai.

"We have a duty and a historic virtue to preserve our ability to protect the existence of the Jewish people and the Jewish state on our own. It is our duty to give our brothers and

sisters the warmest welcome. To take care of them even after everything is over, because they belong here, and the people of Israel will embrace them."

Bennett said when it comes to non-Jewish immigrants, Israel will accept "Ukrainians fleeing the warzone, who have relatives in the country. We will allow them to stay until the wrath passes."

Bennett also spoke about Israel's mediation efforts to try to end the war in Ukraine and the humanitarian aid sent to the war-torn country.

President Isaac Herzog also attended the memorial, saying the legacy of the Battle of Tel Hai "requires us to aid, help and never stand by". The Battle of Tel Hai was fought on 1 March 1920 between Arabs and a Jewish defensive paramilitary force protecting the village of Tel Hai in Northern Galilee.

"In the face of the war and the heartbreaking humanitarian disaster, we must do everything we can to absorb as many immigrants as we can. We must provide help to those in need."

On Sunday, Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked announced the new outline for admission of non-Jewish refugees from Ukraine, saying those who have relatives in the country would be exempted from the total entry slots available.

Israel's Supreme Court on Monday said that an urgent hearing against the Interior Minister's policy on the entry of refugees will be held within seven days.

The petitioners sought to revoke the restriction on entry of refugees from Ukraine, along with a request for a warrant to stop the outline from coming into effect. In response, the court announced that the skies will remain open for at least another seven days since the 25,000 entry cap of refugees hasn't been reached yet.

03.14.22

Civilians began to leave besieged city, forces still fail to capture any big cities

03.14.22

Hope for trapped civilians as first convoy escapes besieged Mariupol

Ukraine says Monday ceasefire talks 'hard' after weekend progress; Russia says at least 20 killed by a Ukrainian missile with a cluster charge in separatist region, Kyiv claims false flag

Reuters| Published: 03.14.22, 19:10

Russian forces allowed a first convoy of cars to escape Ukraine's besieged port of Mariupol on Monday after 10 days of failed attempts to relieve civilians dying under relentless bombardment.

The southeastern port, totally surrounded by Russian troops since the first week of the invasion, has suffered the worst humanitarian impact of the war, with hundreds of thousands of people sheltering in basements without food, water or shelter.

Local Ukrainian authorities say as many as 2,500 civilians have died so far in the city, a toll that cannot be independently confirmed. Russia denies targeting civilians.

"At one o'clock (1100 GMT) the Russians opened a checkpoint and those who have cars and fuel began to leave Mariupol in the direction of Zaporizhzhia," Andrei Rempel, a representative of the Mariupol city council who is now in Zaporizhzhia, a Ukrainian-held city further north, told Reuters.

"In the first two hours, 160 cars left. There are probably already many more now. The city continues to be bombed but this road is not being shelled. We don't know when the first cars can get to Zaporizhzhia as there are still many Russian checkpoints that need to be passed."

The city council said the convoy had already passed Berdyansk, a Russian-held city about 85 km from Mariupol.

"There is also confirmation that a ceasefire is currently holding along the humanitarian corridor that has been established," it said.

Obtaining safe passage for aid to reach Mariupol and civilians to get out has been Kyiv's main demand at several rounds of talks. All previous attempts at a local ceasefire in the area have failed.

'It's hard,' says negotiator

Russian and Ukrainian delegations held a fourth round of talks on Monday - by video link this time rather than in person in neighboring Belarus as in the past - but no new progress was announced.

"Communication is being held yet it's hard," tweeted Ukrainian negotiator Mykhailo Podolyak, who had earlier created some hope of headway by saying on Sunday that Russia was beginning to talk "constructively".

The talks had paused for the day but would resume on Tuesday. Russia "still has a delusion that 19 days of violence against (Ukrainian) peaceful cities is the right strategy", he said.

Nineteen days into Russia's invasion, its troops have still failed to capture any of Ukraine's 10 biggest cities, despite hammering several of them with relentless bombardment.

Drone video footage released by Ukrainian forces in Mariupol, the last Ukrainian-held city on the Azov Sea coast, showed a desolate wasteland of bombed-out buildings, many in flames, with smoke pouring into the sky.

Robert Mardini, Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which has a team on the ground in Mariupol, described "the level of fear, of despair" there.

"People are running out of water, electricity, gas for heating, access to medical services - the situation is really untenable, unbearable for civilians, and they really want a safe passage," he told Reuters.

Russian forces have been bearing down on the capital Kyiv from the northeast and northwest, but have made little progress so far towards the capital itself, despite heavy fighting that has reduced suburbs on the outskirts to rubble.

In Kyiv itself, an apartment block was hit by a missile overnight, killing at least one person, officials said.

"The staircase was not there anymore, everything was on fire," apartment resident Maksim Korovii said.

He and his mother did not know what to do, he said.

"So we ran out to the balcony. We managed to put on whatever clothes we had at hand and made our way from balcony to balcony and in the end, we climbed down by the next building's entrance."

Russia denies targeting civilians, saying it is conducting a "special operation" to demilitarise and "denazify" Ukraine. Ukraine and Western allies call this a baseless pretext for a war of aggression.

In Donetsk, held since 2014 by Russian-backed separatists, Russia's defense ministry said at least 20 people had been killed and 28 wounded by what it said was a Ukrainian missile with a cluster charge. It released footage of a missile on a busy street and vehicles destroyed by shrapnel.

Ukraine accused Russia or its allies of carrying out that attack themselves as a pretext: "It is unmistakably a Russian rocket or another munition," Ukrainian military spokesman Leonid Matyukhin said.

Reuters could not verify either account.

The Ukrainian foreign ministry said a pregnant woman who was photographed being evacuated wounded from a maternity hospital in Mariupol bombed by Russia last week had since died along with her unborn baby. Reuters was not able to verify this.

Despite video showing at least two pregnant women being carried out of the ruins, Russia has said the hospital was not used at the time and had been occupied by Ukrainian fighters.

The invasion has sent more than 2.8 million people fleeing across Ukraine's borders and trapped hundreds of thousands in besieged cities.

Global financial markets rallied on Monday on hopes for progress from the talks. Stocks rose while oil prices gave up some of their massive recent gains.

Russia is the world's biggest exporter of combined oil and gas, and Russia and Ukraine together supply nearly a third of the world's grain exports, as well as metals and chemicals used worldwide in industry and agriculture.

The war has caused a surge in commodity prices, threatening the global recovery at a time when inflation in the developed world is already at its highest since the 1980s and many poor countries are facing a food crisis.

Russia itself has been cast into economic isolation never before visited on such a big economy.

According to several U.S. officials, Russia has asked China for military equipment. Moscow and Beijing both denied this.

U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, who met China's top diplomat Yang Jiechi in Rome on Monday, warned Beijing it would "absolutely" face consequences if it helped Moscow evade sanctions.

03.14.22

Polish center near Auschwitz opens doors to refugees fleeing Ukraine war

03.14.22

Weary refugees from Ukraine find shelter near Auschwitz

Educational center sitting a little over a mile away from the former Nazi death camp aims to do everything possible to make sure that those fleeing the war in Ukraine had a safe place to stay

Reuters| Published: 03.14.22, 17:16

A youth education center near Auschwitz dedicated to preserving memories of World War Two and the Holocaust has opened its doors to help refugees fleeing war in the present.

Days after leaving her home city of Nikopol in southern Ukraine with her mother and three young children, Tamila Tvardovska could finally set her heavy bags down and rest.

The 39-year-old was among 50 refugees, most of them women and children, who arrived at the International Youth Meeting Centre in Oswiecim on Sunday, a quiet building that normally hosts educational events.

"I think there will be peaceful skies above our heads (here)," Tvardovska said.

The center, which sits a little over a mile away from the former Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, aimed to do everything possible to make sure that those fleeing the war in Ukraine had a safe place to stay, Leszek Szuster, its director said.

"I am pleased that in this extraordinary situation we have the possibility to offer help to our friends from Ukraine," he said.

So far, the center has served nearly 2,000 meals to refugees since the beginning of March.

The number of refugees fleeing Ukraine since Russia invaded on Feb. 24 climbed to more than 2.8 million, United Nations data showed on Monday, in what has become Europe's fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War Two.

At least 1.7 million of them have crossed the border into Poland, where citizens have stepped in house refugees and non-governmental organizations and local communities have mobilized volunteers to provide everything from food and water to mobile SIM cards.

Pavel, a 27-year-old economist, took a drag from his vape pen in the courtyard of the center as he recalled scenes of chaos when he fled Kyiv with his girlfriend and his mother soon after the start of the invasion.

"We have another war in Europe and we are being saved by this place," Pavel said. To suddenly become a refugee and to be sheltering in a place of such historical significance as Auschwitz was surreal, he said.

More than 1.1 million men, women and children, mostly Jews, lost their lives at Auschwitz, built by the Nazi Germans in occupied Poland as the largest of their concentration camps and extermination centers. The Nazis killed 6 million Jews during World War Two.

Russia describes its actions as a "special operation" to demilitarize and "de-Nazify" Ukraine. Ukraine and Western allies call this a baseless pretext for Russia's invasion of the democratic country of 44 million.

Just a few weeks ago, Pavel said, he was playing guitar and eating sushi in his apartment with his girlfriend.

"I don't know what to do, I don't know where to live. I left my life there. I don't know."

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Ynet-News, Mar 13, 2022 – Sunday

03.13.22 – Su- - - News Placed in Mar 14 spot – Monday
Pentagon warned; Ramadan April 3, symbolically a time of terrorist fervor

03.13.22 – Su- - - News
Russia planes fired 30 rockets at Ukraine military base near Polish border

03.13.22 – Su- - - News
Iran missile attack on Kurds targeted secret Israel base, for officer's assassination

03.13.22 – Su- - - News Placed in Mar 13 spot – Sunday
China seeks to prevent escalation in Ukraine as Russia asked them for weapons

03.12.22 – Sa- - - News Placed in Mar 12 spot – Saturday
Russia receiving 16,000 troops from Middle East, eager to join action in Ukraine

03.12.22 – Sa- - - News
Israel, Ukraine deny report Bennett recommended yielding to Russian demands

03.10.22 – Th- - - News Placed in Mar 11 spot – Friday
Knesset law; PA/Jew marriage must emigrate or live apart, source of acts of terror

03.10.22 – Th- - - News
Ukraine urges Europe & Israel's chance to cleanse & defeat this total evil Putin

03.10.22 – Th- - - News

Lapid & Jordan King Abdullah discuss Jerusalem tensions of Ramadan & Passover

03.10.22 – Th- - - News

Israeli West Bank Jewish growth using military presence, despite hostile US policy

03.10.22 – Th- - - News

US House budgets \$1 billion Iron Dome in addition to \$3.8 b defense assistance