

Deadly Blast Rocks Minsk Metro

April 11, 2011



People assisting a man injured in the Minsk metro explosion Monday. **Anton Motolko**

p { margin-bottom: 0.21cm; }

MINSK — An explosion tore through a key metro station in Minsk during evening rush hour Monday, killing at least 11 people and wounding 100 others, President Alexander Lukashenko said late Monday.

A reporter at the scene saw seriously wounded people being carried out of the Oktyabrskaya metro station, including one person with missing legs.

Several witnesses said the explosion hit just as passengers were stepping off a train about 6 p.m. The Oktyabrskaya station, where Minsk's two metro lines intersect, was crowded with transferring passengers at the end of the workday.

The metro station is within 100 meters of Lukashenko's residence and the Palace of the Republic, a concert hall often used for government ceremonies.

There was no immediate indication of whether the blast was an accident or a terrorist attack.

But a city police spokesman said Minsk had been placed on “heightened alert” after an explosion caused by an “unknown explosive device.”

“We are looking at all possible versions of what happened,” he told journalists.

Lukashenko visited the site of the blast and called an emergency meeting of key ministers.

One witness, Alexei Kiklevich, said at least part of the station’s ceiling collapsed after the explosion.

Igor Tumash, 52, said he was getting off a train when “there was a large flash, an explosion and heavy smoke. I fell on my knees and crawled. ... Bodies were piled on each other.”

He said he saw a man with a severed leg and rushed to help him.

“But then I saw he was dead,” Tumash said, starting to cry.

Political tensions have been rising in Belarus since December, when a massive demonstration against a disputed presidential election sparked a harsh crackdown by police in which more than 700 people were arrested, including seven presidential candidates.

The crackdown on the opposition rally has led to sanctions by the West, including a travel ban on Lukashenko, who was declared the overwhelming winner of the disputed Dec. 19 election, and his closest associates.

Lukashenko has run Belarus with an iron fist since 1994. But Belarus’ beleaguered opposition has been largely peaceful for years, with only a few clashes with police.

In July 2008, a bomb blast at a concert attended by Lukashenko injured about 50 people in Minsk. No arrests in the case were reported.

(AP, Reuters)

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/04/11/deadly-blast-rocks-minsk-metro-a6250>