

U.S. Blacklists 4 Belarus Firms

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WASHINGTON — The United States has imposed new economic sanctions against four state-owned enterprises in Belarus for a government crackdown on the political opposition, the State Department said.

The new measures were in addition to travel restrictions and other sanctions imposed earlier this year against Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko and other officials after a disputed December 2010 election.

"The sanctions are a response to the continued incarceration of political prisoners, the crackdown on political activists, journalists and civil society representatives," State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said Thursday.

"These measures target those responsible for the repression in Belarus following the December 19th presidential election. They are not designed to harm the people of Belarus," she said, and reiterated the U.S. call for the government of Belarus to release all political prisoners immediately.

The new economic sanctions were imposed against the Belshina tire factory, the Grodno Azot

fertilizer manufacturer, the Grodno Khimvolokno fiber manufacturer and the Naftan oil refinery, the State Department said.

The four firms are owned or controlled by Belneftekhim Concern, the largest petrochemical conglomerate in Belarus that is already under sanctions for being owned or controlled by Lukashenko, the Treasury Department said.

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