

Belarus' Lukashenko Threatens to Kick Out Foreign Press Over Protest Coverage

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Protests have broken out in Belarus after election officials barred President Alexander Lukashenko's main election rivals from running. **Michele Tantussi / EPA / TASS**

Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko has threatened to kick out foreign journalists he accuses of stirring up protests against him ahead of next month's election.

Lukashenko, 65, faces what analysts call the toughest re-election campaign in his 26 years in power. Three of his main election rivals have been either jailed or barred from running, prompting the opposition to rally around the wife of a detained candidate instead.

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At a government session Thursday, Lukashenko accused foreign journalists of "calling for riots" and hurling "insult after insult."

"Why do you tolerate this?" Lukashenko [said](#), singling out the BBC and the U.S.-funded Radio

Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) news outlet, according to a Reuters translation.

“There is no need to wait for any end of the electoral campaign. Expel [them] from here if they do not comply with our laws and call people to the Maidans.”

Lukashenko’s threat referenced a wave of protests in neighboring Ukraine that forced out its Russian-backed president in 2014. Russian and Belarussian leaders, as well as U.S. President Donald Trump’s campaign this week, have used the imagery of the Maidan violence to warn against protests.

Authorities in Belarus have cracked down on the opposition and detained more than 250 people at protests last week.

Instead of the protests, Lukashenko said foreign reporters should focus their coverage on the harvest “where there is really a battle going on today.”

“Take a picture of a combine harvester,” Lukashenko said.

“Tell us about these ordinary people — hard workers who feed the country. They'll all run to the shops tomorrow, these hacks, to buy a piece of bread for themselves, relatives, friends, children.”

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