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Belarus Businessmen Granted House Arrest After Lukashenko Prison Visit

By AFP

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All top Lukashenko critics have either been jailed or forced out of the country since the country's Aug. 9 election. **president.gov.by**

Belarus authorities have released from jail and moved to house arrest two entrepreneurs with links to the opposition, after President Alexander Lukashenko held a surprise meeting with jailed critics in prison at the weekend.

State television late Sunday said that Yury Voskresensky — a businessman with ties to a top Lukashenko critic — and Dmitry Rabtsevich, head of Minsk office of software company PandaDoc, had been released from jail.

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Both men took part in an unexpected meeting in a jail run by the KGB security service between Lukashenko and critics jailed in the run-up to and after August's disputed presidential election.

The meeting, which state media said lasted some four-and-half-hours, was ostensibly set up to discuss plans for constitutional reforms.

Speaking to Belarusian television, Rabtsevich said the purpose of the meeting was to "build dialogue" and find a way out of the current stalemate.

A photo posted by Lukashenko's press service showed prisoners who attended also included Viktor Babaryko, a banker once seen as the strongman's toughest rival in August elections, lawyer Liliya Vlasova and Vitali Shkliarov, a Belarusian-U.S. strategist.

Voskresensky is closely associated with Babaryko, who has been in prison since June.

Unprecedented protests broke out after Lukashenko claimed victory in Aug. 9 elections over a popular opposition candidate, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who claims to have been the true winner.

All top Lukashenko critics were either jailed or forced out of the country, including Tikhanovskaya who was granted shelter in EU member Lithuania.

But hopes for change after Lukashenko's meeting with his jailed opponents were dashed Sunday when police deployed water cannon and stun grenades and detained hundreds of demonstrators at an opposition march.

Activists said that the tactics used by police were some of the harshest tactics seen since the election. Viasna rights group said 600 people had been detained in Belarus on Sunday.

During the first days of post-election protests riot police detained thousands of demonstrators who have reported torture and abuse in custody, prompting international condemnation and Western sanctions.

Several people have died in the crackdown.

Lukashenko has dismissed opposition calls for his resignation and sought help from Russia's President Vladimir Putin, who has promised military backup and economic aid.

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