The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Belarus Blocks Land Border Exits

December 10, 2020



Belarus suspends departures on its land borders citing Covid restrictions. **Natalia Fedosenko / TASS**

Belarus will suspend departures from its ground borders due to the coronavirus situation, a government decree published Thursday says.

Starting Dec. 20, Belarus will prohibit its citizens as well as foreigners with permanent or temporary residency to cross the border via automobile checkpoints, simplified checkpoints, checkpoints at railway stations or in river ports.

Departures may be permitted "in exceptional cases related to extraordinary circumstances" and "in order to ensure Belarus' national interests," the government decree says. The order also makes exceptions for diplomats, people leaving due to a serious illness or death of a close relative and Belarusian citizens who hold residency in a foreign country.

Belarus previously restricted border crossings for foreigners and stateless persons from Nov. 1.

Entry to the country via Minsk International Airport remains unrestricted.

Many Belarusian opposition figures and protesters have fled to neighboring countries like Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Ukraine amid the ongoing crackdown on protesters rallying against President Alexander Lukashenko's disputed re-election.

Opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who fled Belarus for Lithuana herself following the Aug. 9 vote, criticized the border closings on her Twitter account.

"He [Lukashenko] didn't care about Covid before. Now repressed Belarusians cannot flee and seek asylum abroad," Tikhanovskaya said in a tweet.

Embed:

> Lukashenka closes inner borders of #Belarus because of Covid. Let's be honest: the dictator just terrorizes the country & violates human rights on the daily basis. He didn't care about covid before. Now repressed Belarusians cannot flee and seek asylum abroad.
>
> — Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (@Tsihanouskaya) December 10, 2020

Belarus is also struggling with an outflow of talent as young Belarusians leave the country in pursuit of better lives somewhere else. Earlier this month, Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko promised that the country would work on trying to curb the brain drain.

Belarus has been one of the only countries to not impose a nationwide lockdown during the coronavirus pandemic, with Lukashenko dismissing concerns about the virus.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/12/10/belarus-blocks-land-border-exits-a72303