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Belarus Dismisses Reported Explosions at Airfield Near Ukraine

By AFP

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Russian TU-22 bomber landing at a Belarusian airfield. **Viktor Tolochko / TASS**

Moscow's ally Belarus on Thursday played down reports of overnight explosions at a military airbase near the border with Ukraine that is said to be used by Russian troops.

"On Aug. 10, at around 23:00 (20:00 GMT), during a test run, a piece of equipment that had its engine replaced caught fire," the Belarusian defense ministry said in a statement.

It added that the fire was extinguished "in a timely manner" and there were no casualties.

Earlier, a Belarusian Telegram channel that monitors military activity said "explosions" were heard near the Zyabrovka airfield in southeastern Belarus.

"At least eight flashes" were seen in the night of Wednesday to Thursday, it added.

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Franak Viacorka, a senior advisor to Belarusian exiled opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, said Russian military aircraft are often stationed at the airfield.

Zyabrovka is around 30 kilometers (18 miles) from the border with northern Ukraine.

The incident comes after a series of blasts at a key military airbase on the Russian-annexed Crimea peninsula, which Moscow said were caused by exploding ammunition rather than Ukrainian fire.

Western countries have slapped ex-Soviet Belarus with new sanctions this year for its role in Russia's Ukraine offensive launched on Feb. 24.

Russian troops entered Ukraine from several directions, including from Belarusian territory.

Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko relied on his Russian ally Vladimir Putin to suppress the 2020 protests against his re-election for a sixth term.

He welcomed Russian troops under the pretext of military exercises in the months before Moscow launched its military operation.

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