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Belarus Autocrat on McDonald's Departure: 'Thank God'

By AFP

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Belarusian law enforcement officers block an entrance to a McDonald's restaurant near Pushkinskaya station of the Minsk metro during a 2020 opposition event. **Natalia Fedosenko / TASS**

Belarus's autocratic president, Alexander Lukashenko, on Friday ridiculed McDonald's after the announcement it would be replaced by a Russian franchise following its departure over the Ukraine conflict.

McDonald's in Belarus will from Tuesday operate under the name 'Delicious. Full Stop.', the moniker of the Russian chain that took over the U.S. burger group in Russia in June.

"Thank God it's leaving," Lukashenko said during a meeting with representatives of the country's agricultural sector.

"We have to do now ourselves what that McDonald's once did — and even better if we have to!"

Lukashenko, a former collective farm boss during the Soviet era, has ruled Belarus with an iron fist for nearly three decades, brutally repressing any perceived threat to his rule.

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He is also an ally to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who used neighboring Belarus as a launching pad for his military invention in Ukraine in February, for which both Belarus and Russia have been sanctioned by the West.

"We also know how to cut bread in half and put a piece of meat, fries and salad in it," Lukashenko said.

The KSB Victory Restaurants franchise, which operates McDonald's in Belarus, announced earlier in November it would be changing its name to that of the Russian chain.

Its outlets in Russia first opened their doors on June 12, replacing McDonald's, which left the country over Moscow's Feb. 24 offensive against Ukraine.

Dozens of other prominent Western brands, including Coca-Cola, H&M and IKEA, have also quit the Russian market since the Kremlin announced the beginning of its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

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