

International

Russians flee Putin regime to join Ukraine refugees in Zionist entity

Nearly 24,000 Ukrainians have fled to Zionist entity

REHOVOT: The moment Russian tanks rolled into Ukraine, Russian filmmakers Anna Shishova-Bogolyubova and Dmitry Bogolyubov knew they had to leave Moscow. "We were the next on the list," the couple told AFP in their borrowed flat in Rehovot, a quiet Zionist city 20 kilometers south of Tel Aviv. Once you're on the list of alleged "foreign agents", you face a life of "self-censorship or, sooner or later, prison", said Bogolyubov, who directed the German-financed 2019 documentary "Town of Glory".

The film portrays President Vladimir Putin's use of references related to the fight against Nazi Germany to establish his authority in Russian villages. As its international isolation has deepened, Moscow has come to view all movies made with foreign financing with suspicion, including documentaries, and the couple said theirs was no exception.

"Over the past few years, we felt threatened. In the past few months in particular, people were spying on us and taking photographs on our film sets," Shishova-Bogolyubova said. The couple decided to continue working in Russia but, taking advantage of their Jewish ancestry, they obtained Zionist entity's citizenship just in case. Zionist Law of Return gives the right of citizenship to anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent, a criterion that tens of thousands in both Russia and Ukraine meet.



Law of Return gives the right of citizenship

some but not all taking advantage of the law, according to immigration ministry figures. They have been joined by around 10,000 Russians, a Zionist immigration official told AFP. "Most of those are young graduates, from the urban middle class," the official said, asking not to be identified. Like the Bogolyubovs, Moscow-born linguist Olga Romanova had prepared for the day when she no longer felt safe in Russia. She applied for a Zionist entity's passport after Putin's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014.

"I always thought that one day I would join my children in Zionist entity, but it was then that I realized that things were going wrong in Russia," the 69-year-old told AFP in her son's house outside Jerusalem surrounded by photographs of her grandchildren. When the invasion started on the morning of February 24, "it was proof that I needed to leave as quickly as possible. "The war in Ukraine is incompatible with my way of thinking and my moral values. It makes me sick," she said, fighting back the tears.

New home or stopover?

The wave of immigration from Ukraine and Russia over the past seven weeks is the largest Zionists have seen since the early 1990s when the collapse of the Soviet Union prompted hundreds of thousands to seek a new life on the shores of the Mediterranean. "Here, we feel safe and we can sleep peacefully once more," said Shishova-Bogolyubova.

"My four-year-old daughter, who is diabetic, is completely taken care of. "But we don't know if we



DNIPRO: People displaced by the war in Ukraine eat lunch at a former maternity hospital turned shelter for internally displaced people in Dnipro. —AFP

will stay—that depends on our work. Right now, we just want to live for the moment and recover from our emotions. Afterwards, we will see." Sergey, a violinist who asked to be referred to by a pseudonym for fear of retribution, left Moscow for Zionist entity with his pianist wife and three young children but expects to move on. "I don't know if we'll stay here. We'll probably go somewhere else," he said.

Even for those who qualify for citizenship, Zionist

entity can be a terra incognita for new arrivals and nostalgia for Russia is never far below the surface. Romanova, the linguist, found space in her 20 kilograms of luggage for just two books, one an academic work, the other a novel by famed Russian novelist Mikhail Bulgakov which always accompanies her on her travels. "I lost my country. It was stolen from me. It was taken by Putin and those KGB thugs," she said wistfully. —AFP

Young conservatives target 'wokeism' on US campuses

CHARLOTTESVILLE: Back in high school, Jack used to be picked on for his politics. Now, as a college student, he is banding together with like-minded conservatives to fight back against what they see as the tyranny of "wokeism." "They called me names, called me bigoted, like backwards and whatnot," the first-year student, who asked not to use his last name, told AFP recently on the sprawling campus of the University of Virginia, a few hours south of the US capital.

"I got excluded from groups due to my political views," said the young man, who describes himself as "moderately conservative." In a trend mirrored across the United States, Jack has been a part of student pushback against a "woke" ideology they see as dominating the traditionally left-leaning culture of college campuses.

Once a rallying cry for Americans to be alert to systemic racism and injustice, "wokeness" or "wokeism" have become the political terms of the hour, widely co-opted to denigrate "political correctness" and leftist orthodoxy. Like Jack, more and more people on the right-prominent public figures but also everyday people—are coming together to

accuse progressives of seeking to muzzle ideas they don't agree with.

Ronald Reagan pins

On the University of Virginia campus in Charlottesville—a storybook setting where carefree students play Frisbee on the lawns—Jack started attending events of the Young Americas Foundation, a student association that invites commentators, politicians and radio hosts to speak about "how to save America from the woke left." On one mild evening this spring, the association was hosting a distinguished guest: Donald Trump's former vice president, Mike Pence.

A message proudly trumpeting Pence's arrival was written in chalk on the tarmac, among the elegant red brick buildings that helped make the campus a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Abby Hinton, a freshman, came to learn how to "defend" herself against those who "try to push their politics" in a university environment where left-wing ideas predominate. Once inside the auditorium where Pence was to speak, the students were offered miniature copies of the US Constitution, Ronald Reagan badges and stickers proclaiming: "I support free speech not political correctness."

'Culture war'

In front of a full house, Pence launched into a tirade against the "political indoctrination" which, he said, has replaced the "patriotic education" that Americans used to enjoy. One student asked him

Protecting civilians

He proudly shows a video on his mobile phone that shows him with his comrades deployed for combat in the snow, Kalashnikov in his hand. But his mission also includes protecting and helping the local civilians. "The civilians have learned what war is," he said. "They stay in the basements and it's all they can do to stay alive. "Any time we can, we bring them food and water. There are a lot of elderly people there who have no place to go."

There are still a good number left in the village of Svyatogirsk, which had a population of 5,000 before the war, and was then best known for its Orthodox monastery. Behind the counter of his little cafe Andriy is kept busy. Local people mix with soldiers and reservists as they line up for a hot dog, a hamburger or a hot drink. "Some people have left and others have stayed," he said. "The people are here. Everybody is walking around, shopping—one way or another they have to eat."

Dressed in fatigues with a Kalashnikov slung over his shoulder, reservist Andriy, 35, is among the customers. For him, the territorial defense force is unique. "We have people of all ages and from different backgrounds who all came together because they had only one goal. Teachers, engineers, workers, artists, it's extremely important," said the young man, a civil servant before the war.

sent in his Easter Day address.

While "the details are for politics and politicians," Welby suggested that sending asylum seekers overseas posed "serious ethical questions. "The principle must stand the judgment of God and it cannot," Welby said. A country like Britain informed by Christian values cannot "sub-contract out our responsibilities, even to a country that seeks to do well like Rwanda," the church leader continued.

It "is the opposite of the nature of God." When unveiling the policy last week, Prime Minister Boris Johnson had already suggested there could be legal challenges to the plans. But the interior ministry, or Home Office, which is in charge of implementing the policy, argued that Britain's current system was "bro-



CHARLOTTESVILLE: Students return to the University of Virginia for the fall semester in Charlottesville, Virginia. —AFP

about the case of a female swimmer from the university who came second in a freestyle race against Lia Thomas, a transgender athlete whose participation in women's college championships has ignited major controversy.

"Our tradition of excellence has been affected by the woke left," lamented the young man, arguing that Thomas should not have been allowed to participate. Pence took the bait, telling the crowd that runner-up "Emma Weyant won that race."

"Many on the left have spent years agitating for a culture war," said the former vice president. "Looks like they got it and looks like they're losing," he added, to loud applause. —AFP



SEVERODONETSK: A girl stands by the door of a bunker in Severodonetsk, in eastern Ukraine's Donbass region as Russian troops intensified a campaign to take the strategic port city of Mariupol, part of an anticipated massive onslaught across eastern Ukraine. —AFP

"We will hold on until the last breath," he said. Many bridges in the region have been destroyed by the Ukrainians to slow down any advance by the Russians as Moscow turns the focus of its offensive towards the Donbas region. The one in Svyatogirsk is still standing, even though mines are ready to blow it up. Previously guarded by the territorial force, regular soldiers now keep watch over it. —AFP

ken" and pointed to unprecedented global migratory pressures.

Johnson has pledged to do "whatever it takes" to ensure the plans work—but the UN refugee agency UNHCR condemned the scheme as an "egregious breach of international law." According to an exchange of letters published by the Home Office, the ministry's top civil servant, Matthew Rycroft, stressed on the eve of the announcement his doubts about both the expected "deterrent effect" of the scheme and its cost. But Home Secretary Priti Patel said it would be "imprudent" to delay a measure that "we believe will reduce illegal migration, save lives, and ultimately break the business model of the smuggling gangs". —AFP

Behind the frontlines, Ukrainians find world of ways to help

LVIV: Inside a packed warehouse in war-torn Ukraine, 35-year-old volunteer Roman Kolobochok said his friend on the frontline needed a sniper scope and he was going to find him one. His friend had messaged him a website link for the telescopic lens he needed, and he was in the middle of ordering one from the United States. In times of war, everybody should contribute with their best skill, said the veteran scout in the western region of Lviv.

"If you're a good hustler, you should do it," he said. Standing between shelves stuffed high with donations from across the world, the improvised logistician is just one of a flurry of volunteers across Ukraine applying a range of talents to help. Before the war, Kolobochok headed the souvenir department of a restaurant chain, but also travelled to the US through his job as a medical courier for a Ukraine-based surrogacy company, he said.

After Russia invaded on February 24, he asked his bosses at the restaurant business to borrow a corner of their warehouse. Today, a team of fellow scouts receive requests for aid from across the country on a messaging app, then carefully match them up with available supplies on a multicoloured spread sheet. The storehouse shelves are stacked with everything from sleeping bags and tents, to flour, coffee drinks, medical gloves and soap. In a medicine section, insulin sits in the fridge.

Boots and chainsaws

In recent days, the scouts have dispatched humanitarian and medical aid to the capital Kyiv, to the eastern city of Kharkiv and Mykolaiv near the Black Sea, Kolobochok says. But with around 50 fellow scouts now fighting the Russians, his team are also actively looking for night-vision goggles, GPS systems, and army food ration packs.

The response has been overwhelming, he says. Strangers are making donations and the Spanish scouts have sent in truckloads of aid. One American even took time off from work in Texas to fly to Philadelphia, where he picked up 100 trauma first aid kits he had bought and then drove them to a New York airport. In just days, they managed to raise enough funds to buy a drone. "The world is supporting us," Kolobochok said.

At a different storage point in the city of Lviv, fellow scout Anastasiia Sokhatska stood amid piles of home-made camouflage nets, packs of mineral water, tactical boots, flags and a couple of boxed chainsaws for combatants to build hideouts. When the army needs something, she says, she and fellow volunteers fundraise on social media, collect the supplies, and then make sure they are delivered. "I need to help. This is my country," she said, as beside her two young men packed up bags.

Earlier the same day, she had learned that a close friend due to celebrate his wedding this summer had been deployed very close to the Russian frontier. "I just don't have the possibility to do nothing," said the 26-year-old, who used to work in the IT sector. Being a woman has also been an asset. Ukrainian men of fighting age are not allowed to leave Ukraine, but women can drive back and forth across the nearby Polish border, ferrying in donated goods and equipment. "I go there because I'm a woman, and I can just go abroad," she said. —AFP

UK archbishop slams plan to send migrants to Rwanda

LONDON: The leader of the Church of England, Justin Welby, on Sunday criticized the British government's plans to send asylum seekers to Rwanda to process their claims. The scheme has sparked outrage and widespread criticism from human rights organizations and even the UN. And Welby, who as the Archbishop of Canterbury is the Church of England's highest cleric, added his voice to the dis-