

International

Russians fleeing Putin face lukewarm welcome in France

Ukrainian refugees are welcomed with open arms

PARIS: Artyom Kotenko's world collapsed when Russia invaded Ukraine. Born to a Ukrainian father and a Russian mother in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, he lived in Russia for most of his life. "I was crushed. I could not live or breathe," the 50-year-old artist and graphic designer, who is a Russian national, told AFP in Paris.

A week after President Vladimir Putin sent troops to pro-Western Ukraine, Kotenko left behind his old life in Saint Petersburg and went to Helsinki. From there he made his way to Paris, which he says "healed his wounds". "I stopped feeling like I was suffocating, like I was dying every day. I was able to breathe again," he said in the 13th district of Paris where pro-Ukrainian graffiti adorns the streets.

But much to Kotenko's disappointment, Paris appeared indifferent to his plight.

Kotenko, who worked at Saint Petersburg's State Hermitage Museum, the Tovstonogov Bolshoi Drama Theater and the Higher School of Economics, realized he could not get a job in France. He wanted to draw on his extensive teaching experience to work with the children of Ukrainian refugees but found out that those jobs were reserved for EU citizens. "This is strange. This has to change because there are a lot of people like me and there is work for us," he said.

Political exiles

French President Emmanuel Macron has led diplomatic outreach to the Kremlin over the war in Ukraine, and Ukrainian refugees are welcomed with open arms in France. But Russians fleeing Putin's regime realise they are left to their own fate in one of the wealthiest EU countries.

Since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, tens of thousands of Russians have fled the country in protest over Putin's policies and out of fear for their children's future. Observers point out that most of Russia's new political exiles are liberal-leaning well-educated professionals in their prime.

Some even draw parallels with the departure of intellectual elites from Soviet Russia in 1922 in a phenomenon that has come to be known as the "Philosophers' Ships". Some leading Western democracies have indicated their willingness to tap into the professional knowledge and experience fleeing Russians have to offer. German Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck said in early May that Berlin might simplify visa procedures and help find jobs for Russians fleeing Putin's regime.

"We want them to be aware that we could really

use them," he told reporters. US officials are also considering ways to lure highly educated anti-Kremlin Russians. The French interior ministry did not respond to a request for comment.



PARIS: This undated image Courtesy of the Kashnitsky Family shows Daniel Kashnitsky, 41-year-old public health specialist, and his wife Natalya in France. —AFP

Many political emigres say France should do the same. "If people seek an opportunity to move here, you need to support them," said Daniel Kashnitsky, a 41-year-old Muscovite, pointing to France's notorious bureaucratic hurdles. He, his wife and their four children-two of them adopted-applied for asylum in France in April and met with AFP in the 18th district of Paris. After a long day at the prefecture the children appeared exhausted. "We have nowhere to live," said Kashnitsky's 38-year-old wife Natalya. "It's stressful." The family arrived in Paris more than a month after the war in Ukraine broke out. A public health specialist who previously lived in Sweden, Lithuania and Zionist entity, Kashnitsky said he did not want to leave his "beloved" Moscow. The war changed everything. First, Kashnitsky staged an anti-war protest in central Moscow and spent a night in jail. He also gave interviews to Swedish media. Then he realized it was time to leave. "It was important to me to take the kids out," Kashnitsky told AFP, adding that his eldest son was turning 18 in May and could be drafted. —AFP

'We don't matter': Fuming at Kyiv under Russian bombs

KYIV: The pudgy Ukrainian policeman taking pasta and bread to villagers trapped under bombs on the eastern front sometimes feels like he is entering enemy territory. Vladyslav Kopatskiy pulls the groceries from the back of his car and casts a quick glance at the horizon for signs of smoke from incoming Russian shells.

He then enters homes where his humanitarian mission is often greeted with misgivings-or worse. Many residents of this frontline village of Novomykolaivka and other areas of Ukraine's war-torn east are believed to back the Russians. And others who were brought up with Soviet propaganda-often older people-simply have a deeply-engrained mistrust of any Ukrainian in authority, which can be particularly dangerous in places near the front.

The 24-year-old lists cases of locals arrested on suspicion of giving away coordinates of Ukrainian missile systems and rear bases that then come under Russian attack. "Unfortunately, this happens," he said after coming out of a hut where a family has spent the past three days hiding in a makeshift cellar from Russian shellfire and bombing raids. "We try to talk to them, explain things to them, but people who have a Soviet upbringing are not easy to convince. They have one point of view and they stick to it." That view-instilled through Kremlin propaganda that portrays Ukrainians as neo-Nazis who take orders from Washington-makes Kopatskiy into a potential target in such frontline villages.

Soldiers who come in closest contact with Ukrainians still clinging onto their homes in the war zone estimate that between 30 and 45 percent support the invading Russians. "They give the Russians our coordinates. That is certain," a soldier who uses the nom de guerre Zastava said during a brief break from five days of hard battle at the front.

"I remember one old man came to check us out and then we were immediately hit," he told

AFP. Fortunately everyone survived. "The older ones-they do not want to support us."

The Donbas war zone is heavily populated by Russian speakers who can trace their roots back to families sent in by the Kremlin to dilute Ukraine's nationalist strains after World War II.



NOVOMYKOLAIVKA, Ukraine: Twenty-five-year-old son of Andriy Oleynik stays at his room as his family lives inside a house with all windows sealed in Novomykolaivka, eastern Ukraine, on May 11, 2022, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. —AFP

They live side-by-side with Ukrainian speakers with older ties to the region-and a longer memory of Kremlin repressions dating back to the times of Joseph Stalin. "We have villages next to each other where one supports the Ukrainians and one supports the Russians," Zastava said.

But Novomykolaivka native Andriy Oleynik has little patience for history lessons or debates about Ukraine's linguistic divide. The wheelchair-bound 48-year-old has spent the past week listening in the dark to screaming war planes and bursting shells scattering shrapnel across surrounding farms. His shed was destroyed and his level of anger at both Moscow and Kyiv for failing to negotiate a truce has ratcheted up another notch. The air in his wooden house feels heavy because all the windows have been shuttered for weeks to limit the dangers posed by exploding glass. —AFP

Qatar Amir blames Zionist entity for ...

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restoring a landmark 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and major world powers, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, have been on a pause since mid-March.

The JCPOA was torpedoed in 2018 by then US president Donald Trump's unilateral decision to withdraw from the deal and impose a punishing sanctions regime. Qatar, a close US ally, has added the Iran nuclear dispute to its list of diplomatic hotspots where it has taken a behind-the-scenes mediation role.

"Regarding the negotiations taking place in Vienna, Qatar always looks at them positively," Sheikh Tamim said during the joint news conference with Raisi, adding that "the only solution to any disagreement is by peaceful means and dialogue". "We are, God willing, pushing all the parties towards" reaching an agreement that is "fair" for everyone, said the Qatari Amir.

US mourns million COVID dead...

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have exceeded more than 2 million people," the UN health agency said in a statement. The WHO's European region comprises 53 countries and regions, including several in central Asia. According to the health body, 2,002,058 people have died from COVID out of the 218,225,294 registered cases in the region.

America recorded its first COVID-19 death, on the West Coast, in early Feb 2020. By the next month, the virus was ravaging New York and the White House was predicting up to 240,000 deaths nationwide. But those projections were way off. Even in New York - the hard-hit early epicenter of America's COVID crisis - the million death milestone was difficult to comprehend.

First image of Milky Way black...

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Black holes are regions of space where the pull of gravity is so intense that nothing can escape, including light. The image thus depicts not the black hole itself, because it is completely dark, but the glowing gas that encircles the phenomenon in a bright ring of bending light. As seen from Earth, it appears the same size as a donut on the surface of the Moon, Issaoun explained.

"These unprecedented observations have greatly

Raisi did not raise the nuclear issue during the news conference, but he cautioned against the meddling of any foreign country in the region. "Any interference of western and foreign countries in the region not only can't ensure security but will also be harmful to regional security," he said.

The Amir's one-day visit came as the EU's nuclear talks coordinator, Enrique Mora, continued discussions with Bagheri in Tehran, state news agency IRNA reported. An EU spokesman said Mora was seeking to rescue the nuclear deal. "It's in the interest and it's the role of the coordinator actually to do everything he can in order to save this agreement," said Peter Stano. Mora "is in Tehran exactly to move these talks forward, to be able to go back to Vienna and to conclude them in a positive way," he added.

Among the key sticking points in the negotiations is Tehran's demand for the United States to remove Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps from a designated list of terror groups. IRNA said "unfreezing Iran's assets, cooperation in holding the 2022 World Cup, pursuing prisoner exchanges and cooperation in the field of energy" were also on the agenda of the Amir's visit. —AFP

"It's unfathomable," Diana Berrent, one of the first people in New York state to catch COVID-19, said of the toll that far exceeds epidemiologists' worst predictions. Back in spring 2020, New York City hospitals and morgues overflowed, and the sound of ambulance sirens rang down empty streets as then-president Donald Trump responded chaotically in Washington.

Two years on, and life in the Big Apple is largely back to normal as residents attempt to put the collective trauma of the virus that has killed 40,000 New Yorkers behind them. Broadway stage lights are once again illuminated, yellow taxis clog main avenues and bars in business districts hum with post-work chatter.

"Without a doubt you feel the energy of the people that are on the streets. It's been a long time coming," Alfred Cerullo, president of a business improvement group in Midtown Manhattan, told AFP. New York's rebound has been aided by its high inoculation numbers - about 88 percent of adults are fully vaccinated, a rate that was boosted by mandates, including for indoor activities like dining. —AFP

improved our understanding of what happens at the very center of our galaxy," EHT project scientist Geoffrey Bower, of Taiwan's Academia Sinica, said in a statement. The research results are published in The Astrophysical Journal Letters.

Sagittarius A* - abbreviated to Sgr A*, and pronounced "sadge-ay-star" - owes its name to its detection in the direction of the constellation Sagittarius. Located 27,000 light years from Earth, its existence has been assumed since 1974, with the detection of an unusual radio source at the center of the galaxy.

In the 1990s, astronomers mapped the orbits of the brightest stars near the center of the Milky Way, confirming the presence of a supermassive compact object there - work that led to the 2020 Nobel Prize in Physics. Though the presence of a black hole was thought to be the only plausible explanation, the new image provides

Palestinians honor slain journalist...

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In a sign of Abu Akleh's stature among Palestinians, she received what was described as a full state memorial at the Ramallah compound of President Mahmoud Abbas. Thousands lined the streets as her coffin, draped in the Palestinian flag, was driven through the West Bank city. Many held flowers, wreaths and pictures of Abu Akleh, who has been widely hailed for her bravery and professionalism through her coverage of the conflict. "This crime should not go unpunished," said Abbas, adding that the PA held the Zionist entity "completely responsible" for her death, and had "refused and rejected" a Zionist proposal for a joint investigation. Zionist Prime Minister Naftali Bennett had said Wednesday it was "likely" Abu Akleh was killed by stray Palestinian gunfire - but Defense Minister Benny Gantz later conceded that it could have been "the Palestinians who shot her" or fire from "our side".

Bennett on Thursday accused the PA of blocking Zionist entity from accessing "the basic findings" that would be necessary in order to reach the truth, and

warned them not to "taint the investigative process." Draped in a Palestinian scarf, Tariq Ahmed, 45, described the death as a "tragedy for all the nation", comparing his grief to that he felt at the funeral of iconic Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. "I have not felt this pain since Arafat died," Ahmed said. Another mourner, 45-year-old Hadil Hamdan, said that "Shireen was part of our lives", adding that "her voice entered every home, and her loss is a wound in our hearts". Abu Akleh, a Christian born in Zionist-annexed east Jerusalem, is scheduled to be buried in the city on Friday. As her coffin began its journey to Jerusalem to the drumbeat of a marching band, crowds chanted slogans demanding an end to Palestinian security cooperation with the Zionist entity.

The Zionist entity had publicly called for a joint probe and stressed the need for Palestinian authorities to hand over the fatal bullet for forensic examination. The European Union has urged an "independent" probe while the United States demanded the killing be "transparently investigated", calls echoed by UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet. But senior PA official Hussein Al-Sheikh, a close Abbas confidant, said the Palestinian "investigation would be completed independently". He added that Abu Akleh's family, the United States, Qatar and "all official authorities" would be informed of the results. —AFP

US parents in panic over baby...

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gotten by thanks to family and friends, who send her bottles of formula from Boston, New York and Baltimore when they find them. "It's horrible, terrifying," she said, adding that she even ordered formula from Germany.

The situation took a major turn for the worse on February 17 when, after the death of two infants, manufacturer Abbott announced a "voluntary recall" for formula made at its factory in Michigan - including Similac, a brand used by millions of American families. A subsequent investigation cleared the formula, but production has yet to resume, exacerbating already

the first direct visual proof. Capturing images of such a faraway object required linking eight giant radio observatories across the planet to form a single "Earth-sized" virtual telescope called the EHT. "The EHT can see three million times sharper than the human eye," German scientist Thomas Krichbaum of the Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy told reporters.

"So, when you are sitting in a Munich beer garden, for example, one could see the bubbles in a glass of beer in New York." The EHT gazed at Sgr A* across multiple nights for many hours in a row - a similar idea to long-exposure photography and the same process used to produce the first image of a black hole, released in 2019. That black hole is called M87* because it is in the Messier 87 galaxy. The two black holes bear striking similarities, despite the fact that Sgr A* is 2,000 times smaller than M87*. "Close to the

edge of these black holes, they look amazingly similar," said Sera Markoff, co-chair of the EHT Science Council, and a professor at the University of Amsterdam. Both behaved as predicted by Einstein's 1915 theory of General Relativity, which holds that the force of gravity results from the curvature of space and time, and cosmic objects change this geometry.

Despite the fact Sgr A* is much closer to us, imaging it presented unique challenges. Gas in the vicinity of both black holes moves at the same speed, close to the speed of light. But while it took days and weeks to orbit the larger M87*, it completed rounds of Sgr A* in just minutes. The brightness and pattern of the gas around Sgr A* changed rapidly as the team observed it, "a bit like trying to take a clear picture of a puppy quickly chasing its tail," said EHT scientist Chi-kwan Chan of the University of Arizona. —AFP

Normally, hospitals and pediatricians give parents formula samples to figure out which one works best for their child. But few have any left to give. Hohman said it was frustrating that his daughter cannot try other formulas that might be more nutritious for her. Espinosa said the shortage has been "extremely frustrating and especially with a newborn, somebody who is requiring... very specific food right now." —AFP