Ukraine says no to Russia's call for de-mining ports to allow grain shipments

Description

UKRAINE: Ukraine has rejected calls from Russia to de-mine its ports around the Black Sea to resume grain shipments, accusing Moscow of trying to "attack" the port of Odessa, the largest seaport in the crisis-stricken country.

Sergiy Bratchuk, a spokesman for Odessa's regional administration, in a statement on Wednesday, noted that Russia "dreams of parachuting troops" into the city and that Moscow's army "wants to attack" Odessa.

"The moment we clear access to the port of Odessa, the Russian fleet will be there," Bratchuk said. He had earlier said that any exports from Odessa must be "escorted by NATO countries."

His remarks followed a statement by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday about de-mining the Ukrainian ports.

"To solve the problem, the only thing needed is for the Ukrainians to let vessels out of their ports, either by de-mining them or by marking out safe corridors, nothing more is required," Lavrov said.

Speaking alongside Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, Lavrov said the main problem was that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had "categorically refused" to resolve the issue of the mined ports.

"If they've now changed their position, then on our side there are no complications, let's see how the preliminary agreements we discussed yesterday and today can be put into practice," Lavrov stressed.

Defense ministers of Russia and Turkey discussed a potential grain export corridor from Ukraine on Tuesday, according to reports.

Russia's Sergei Shoigu and Turkey's Hulusi Akar evaluated "all measures that can be taken regarding the safe shipment of grains, sunflower, and all other agricultural products," according to the Turkish ministry.

Turkey, a NATO member, shares a sea border with both Russia and Ukraine in the Black Sea. Ankara has offered its services to accompany maritime convoys from Ukrainian ports.

Ukraine, one of the world's biggest exporters of grain, has not been able to export the commodity since the onset of the conflict in the country in late February. Kiev and the West accuse Russia of creating the risk of global famine by shutting Ukraine's Black Sea ports.

The West has also accused Russia of blocking Ukrainian grain exports from the Black Sea.

Russia, however, says no action was required on the Russian side because it had already made the necessary commitments to solve the problem.

Moscow has also denied responsibility for the international food crisis, blaming Western sanctions.

The West's unprecedented sanctions against Russia have sent the prices of grain, cooking oil, fertilizers, and energy skyrocketing.

In a separate statement on Wednesday, the Kremlin said that for Russian grain to be delivered to international markets, sanctions on the country must be lifted.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said there have been "no substantive discussions" about lifting the sanctions.

Russia and Ukraine together produce virtually 30 percent of the global wheat supply.

President Vladimir Putin of Russia also reassured earlier this week that his government would "guarantee" peaceful passage to ships leaving Ukraine's ports.

Ukraine, which is a major exporter of corn, barley, sunflower oil, and rapeseed oil, used to export most of its goods through its main ports on the Black and Azov seas. But it has been forced to export by train or via its small Danube River ports since February.

Since the war in Ukraine, wheat and corn prices have jumped 41 percent and 28 percent, respectively,

Experts warn that rising food prices and shortages in the fragile emerging markets in Africa and West Asia could lead to a humanitarian disaster.

Last month, the Russian Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov said difficulties in the global food market have been building up for a long time, but "the crisis was further exacerbated due to the introduction by Washington and its satellites of illegitimate sanctions against Russia."

Russia launched a military operation in Ukraine in late February, following Kiev's failure to implement the terms of the Minsk agreements and Moscow's recognition of the breakaway regions of Donetskand Luhansk.

At the time, Russian President Vladimir Putin said one of the goals of what he called a "special military operation" was to "de-Nazify" Ukraine.

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