

EAST-WEST PRISONER SWAP WSJ journo among 26 freed in Russia prisoner deal

REUTERS, Moscow

Jailed US Wall Street Journal (WSJ) reporter Evan Gershkovich and ex-US Marine Paul Whelan were among 26 prisoners from the United States, Russia, Germany, Poland, Slovenia, Norway and Belarus being freed in a major east-west exchange yesterday, Turkey's presidency said.

It said 10 prisoners, including two minors, had been moved to Russia, 13 to Germany and three to the United States.

Turkish intelligence had announced that it was coordinating an extensive prisoner exchange, amid signs of a major swap between Russia and Belarus on one side and Western countries including the United States and Germany on the other.

"Our organisation has undertaken a major mediation role in this exchange operation, which is the most comprehensive of the recent period," the National Intelligence Agency (MIT) said in a statement.

Both the Kremlin and the White House declined to comment when asked about a possible exchange.

Flight tracking site Flightradar24 showed that a special Russian government plane used for a previous prisoner swap involving the United States and Russia had flown from Moscow to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, which borders Poland and Lithuania, before heading back to the Russian capital.

Reuters footage showed a Russian government plane on the ground in the Turkish capital Ankara.

Whelan and Vladimir Kara-Murza, a Russian-British dissident, both jailed in Russia, had suddenly disappeared from view in recent days, according to their lawyers.



Iranians gather for the funeral procession of assassinated Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Iran yesterday. The Islamic Republic's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei led prayers for Haniyeh ahead of his burial in Qatar, having earlier threatened a "harsh punishment" for his killing.

SHIP COLLISION India govt summons Sri Lanka envoy

REUTERS, Mumbai

India summoned the Sri Lankan envoy yesterday to protest following a collision between one of its fishing boats and a Sri Lankan naval vessel that killed a fisherman, with a second missing, authorities said.

The collision took place 5 nautical miles north of Katchatheevu, an island at the focus of contention between the neighbours, although India ceded it to Sri Lanka 50 years ago. Indian fishermen are barred from the waters around the island.

"The government of India has always emphasised the need to deal with issues pertaining to fishermen in a humane and humanitarian manner," India's foreign ministry said.

Sri Lanka did not want an escalation of the issue and looking to work with India for a solution, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry told Reuters. "We understand this is about livelihoods and lives," he added.

HEAVY RAINS Hundreds rescued from Himalayas in north India 12 people killed

REUTERS, New Delhi

Emergency workers rescued nearly 1,000 people who were stranded in different parts of the Himalayas following torrential rainfall in northern India, which caused widespread damage and left at least 12 people dead, officials said yesterday.

The capital Delhi received intense rainfall late on Wednesday, totalling 147 mm (5.8 inches) in eastern parts of the city and its suburbs, the India Meteorological Department said. At least seven people died in Delhi, according to local media.

Three people died and parts of two bridges washed away after a cloudburst in Uttarakhnad state, officials said, and bad weather was hampering communications in the terrain.

Rescue workers saved over 1,000 people who were stranded in different locations on the Kedarnath route and a patch of the national highway was washed out, district official Saurabh Gaharwar said by phone.

ISRAELI OFFENSIVE IN GAZA

Destruction of water wells deepens misery

REUTERS, Gaza

Israel's military blew up more than 30 water wells in Gaza this month, a municipality official and residents said, adding to the trauma of airstrikes that have turned much of the Palestinian enclave into a wasteland ravaged by a humanitarian crisis.

Salama Shurab, head of the water networks at Khan Younis municipality, said the wells were destroyed by Israeli forces between July 18-27 in the southern towns of Rafah and Khan Younis.

The Israeli military did not respond to the allegations that its soldiers destroyed the wells.

It is not only ever-present danger from Israeli bombardment or ground fighting that makes life a trial for Gaza's Palestinian civilians. It is also the daily slog to find bare necessities such as water, to drink or cook or wash with.

People have dug wells in bleak areas near the sea where the bombing has pushed them, or rely on salty tap water from Gaza's only aquifer, now contaminated with seawater and sewage.

Children walk long distances to line up at makeshift water collection points. Often not strong enough to carry the filled containers, they drag them home on wooden boards.

Gaza City has lost nearly all its water production capacity, with 88 percent of its water wells and 100 percent of its desalination plants damaged or destroyed, Oxfam said in a recent report.

Palestinians were already facing a severe water crisis as well as shortages of food, fuel and medicine before the destruction of the wells, which has deepened the anguish

brought on by the Gaza offensive, now in its 10th month.

COGAT, the branch of the Israeli military that manages humanitarian activities, told Reuters it has coordinated water line repairs with international organizations and "dozens" were done in the last month including one to the northern Gaza Strip.

Other work including power repairs at a desalination plant and construction of additional lines was under way.



Hamas fighters "have been known to attack civilian infrastructures and humanitarian aid routes, adding to the complexity and danger of delivering much-needed humanitarian aid to the region," COGAT said.

All Gazans can do is wait in long lines to collect water since US, Qatari and Egyptian mediators have failed to secure a ceasefire from Israel and its arch-foe Hamas. Not only is there a shortage of water, much of it is also contaminated.

"We stand in the sun, my eye hurts because of the sun, because we stand for long (hours) to (secure) water," said Youssef El Shenawy, a Gaza resident.

Iran, allies plan joint retaliation against Israel Say sources, analysts

AFP, Beirut

Iran and armed groups backed by it are preparing coordinated action meant to deter Israel but avert all-out war, sources and analysts said, after the killings of top Hamas and Hezbollah figures.

On Wednesday, Iranian officials met in Tehran with representatives of the so-called "axis of resistance" -- a loose alliance of Tehran-backed groups hostile to Israel -- to discuss retaliation for the deaths of Hamas's leader and Hezbollah's top military commander, said a source close to Lebanese group.

"Two scenarios were discussed: a simultaneous response from Iran and its allies or a staggered response from each party," the source who had been briefed on the meeting told AFP, requesting anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei threatened a "harsh punishment" for the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, which the group blamed on Israel, also vowing revenge.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was speaking yesterday at the funeral of Fuad Shukur, the group's top commander leading operations in Lebanon's south, where the group has been exchanging near-daily fire with Israel since the Gaza offensive began in October.

"There is a very strong likelihood that the response will be coordinated... among other resistance actors," said Amal Saad, a Hezbollah researcher and lecturer at Britain's Cardiff University.

Trump attacks Harris's racial identity Says she opted to 'turn Black'

REUTERS, Chicago



US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump falsely suggested to the country's largest annual gathering of Black journalists on Wednesday that his Democratic rival Kamala Harris had previously downplayed her Black heritage.

"She was always of Indian heritage, and she was only promoting Indian heritage. I didn't know she was Black, until a number of years ago, when she happened to turn Black, and now she wants to be known as Black," Trump said, drawing a smattering of jeers from an audience of about 1,000 people.

"So I don't know, is she Indian or is she Black? Trump continued. "But you know what, I respect either one, but she obviously doesn't, because she was Indian all the way, and then all of a sudden she made a turn, and she went - she became a Black person."

Harris, who is of Indian and Jamaican heritage, has long self-identified as both Black and Asian. She is the first Black person and Asian American person to serve as vice president.

Hours after Trump's comments, Harris told members of the historically Black sorority Sigma Gamma Rho gathered in Houston that his remarks were "yet another reminder" of what the four years under the former president looked like.



Demonstrators gather as they participate in an anti-government demonstration to protest against bad governance and economic hardship in Abuja, Nigeria yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Advertisement for Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) featuring a table with columns for 'পদের নাম', 'সংখ্যা', 'নির্দেশিত যোগ্যতা, অভিজ্ঞতা এবং বয়স', and 'কৌশলিক বৈশিষ্ট্য, ২০১৫ অনুযায়ী'. The table lists various positions and their requirements.