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November 25, 2018 17:58

Russia prevents 3 Ukrainian naval ships from passing through Kerch Strait, sanding civilian bulk carrier under Crimean Bridge

KYIV/MOSCOW. Nov 25 (Interfax) - Russia has closed the passage under the Crimean Bridge, thereby preventing three Ukrainian Navy ships from passing through the Kerch Strait from the Black Sea into the Sea of Azov on Sunday afternoon.

"The Ukrainian Navy ships have been waiting for passing through the Kerch Strait for more than two hours. According to the Kerch Traffic Control service, the navigation in both directions was blocked as of 1:42 p.m. because of a tanker aground in front of the bridge from the side of the Sea of Azov. The passage through the strait is blocked in both directions. It should be noted that this information has not so far been confirmed by the international navigation control system," the Ukrainian Navy said on Facebook on Sunday.

The Ukrainian Navy has some time later posted on Facebook a photo of a large bulk carrier escorted by several more ships lying right across the Kerch Strait under the Crimean Bridge.

"Two Kamov Ka-52 helicopter gunships of the Russian Armed Forces took an attack course, with their onboard arms control systems locked on Ukrainian naval boats, at 1:12 p.m. on November 25, 2018," the Ukrainian Navy also said on Facebook.

Several Russian warplanes have been sent to patrol the Kerch Strait, an informed source in Crimea said.

"Several warplanes, which are based on the peninsula, were scrambled for patrolling," the interlocutor of the news agency said.

"Russian coastguard ships are continuing to escort Ukrainian warships at a dangerous distance," the Ukrainian Navy said.

The Russian state-run television channel Rossiya-24 (VGTRK) confirmed the reports saying that the passage under the Crimean Bridge was blocked.

"At the present time, the passage under the Crimean Bridge is completely blocked. Two civilian tugboats have hauled a civilian bulk carrier there and so blocked any attempt to pass under the Crimean Bridge. The large ship is lying right across the fairway. A coastguard boat is lying nearby," a correspondent said in a TV report from the scene.

The correspondent also confirmed reports on the presence of military helicopters over the scene. "We saw Russian combat helicopters circle over the Kerch Strait area and the Crimean Bridge and monitor the situation," he said.

The automobile traffic across the Kerch Strait has not been restricted either to cars or trucks, he said.

Ukrainian media said earlier that three Ukrainian naval ships approached the Kerch Strait from the Black Sea side.

The FSB Border Service department for Crimea said earlier in the day that "three Ukrainian naval ships crossed the Russian Federation's state border and unlawfully entered a temporarily closed area of the Russian Federation's territorial sea at about 7.00 a.m. Moscow time this morning, in violation of Articles 19 and 21 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea stipulating a coastal state's right to maintain security at sea."

"The vessels are making dangerous maneuvers and refusing to obey lawful demands by the Russian authorities," it said.

The Ukrainian Navy said on its Facebook account earlier on Sunday that the Russian coastguard ship Don rammed into a Ukrainian harbor tug, damaging its main engine, skin, and guardrail and causing it to lose a life float.

The incident happened on November 25, when "Ukrainian Navy ships, namely two small armored gunboats and a tug, were on a planned passage from the Odesa port to the Mariupol port in the Sea of Azov," it said.

"Information on the passage had been provided beforehand in line with international standards to ensure the safety of navigation," it said.

Kyiv said Russia's Sobol-type coastguard boats, the Don coastguard ship, Mangust-type boats and the Suzdalets anti-submarine corvette "committed openly aggressive actions against Ukrainian naval ships, in contravention to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and a treaty between the two countries on cooperation in using the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait."

The Russian maritime traffic control service "is refusing to comply with the right of navigation guaranteed by international agreements," it said.

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Interviews

[Markus Ederer EU and Russia are and will remain very important energy partners](#)

Head of the EU Delegation to Russia Markus Ederer has given an interview to Interfax in which he speaks about prospects of normalizing relations between EU and Russia, the EU readiness to take part in the post-war reconstruction of Syria, and about how the EU is going to protect its companies working with Iran in the light of new U.S. sanctions.

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[John Bolton Meeting between Putin, Trump in Paris in November to take place](#)

U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton has given a press conference at Interfax in the wake of his visit to Russia, in which he speaks about results of his visit, U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw from the INF Treaty, plans for a meeting between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin and others issues.

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[Jim Bridenstine It is my intention to make sure we keep our relationship strong and not let space get entangled with terrestrial challenges](#)

New NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine is on a first trip to Russia. After visiting Star City and speaking to students at Moscow State University, he went to Baikonur Cosmodrome, where he met with Roscosmos head Dmitry Rogozin to discuss the joint exploration of space and where the two plan to watch the launch of an expedition to the International Space Station. Bridenstine spoke to Interfax correspondents Dmitry Veklich and Nikolay Vlasov about the prospects of carrying out joint space flights, the future of the International Space Station, and Russia-U.S. cooperation in building manned infrastructure in lunar orbit.

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