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In the Spotlight

By Anna Malpas

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Escaping the smog in Moscow has been everyone's top priority this month, and show-business stars have been no exception.

Eurovision-winning pop singer Dima Bilan hissingly compared Moscow to "Chernobyl" on Twitter: "I've just come back from Israel, and what is going on here?" he wrote. "It's just like Chernobyl. I'll think where to hide."

"Everyone who has to live through the smog and smoke in Moscow should be paid alimony for becoming disabled," he added.

For many pop stars, this is the traditional time to tour the Black Sea resorts, giving concerts for the hordes of vacationers — which is actually one of the main ways these celebrities make money. So it's an ill wind.

"Morally, I am with my people," crooner Lev Leshenko told the Komsomolskaya Pravda tabloid, calling the smog "a terrible tragedy," although he conceded that physically he is in Sochi.

Pop singer Filipp Kirkorov told RIA-Novosti that he was “in shock” about the smog, and that he had never seen so many people where he is touring down in Crimea. “It has never been like this. Everyone is running away,” he said.

His ex-wife, pop diva Alla Pugach-yova, has left to Jurmala, Latvia, Lifenews.ru reported.

It scooped the sensational news that she has reacted to the smog by giving up smoking — a huge concession from a star who refuses to kick the habit, even while she’s getting her latest facelift. She was photographed smoking an electronic cigarette — a supposedly healthy fad that is growing in Russia.

Pugachyova is staying in the presidential suite at the resort’s most expensive hotel, where the management always turned a blind eye to her puffing away, but this time around she is smoke-free, a member of staff told the tabloid.

Meanwhile Lifenews.ru hounded Mayor Yury Luzhkov for being on vacation during the dire weather.

On Aug. 6, the newspaper sent an official request to Luzhkov’s press office, asking whether the mayor was planning to break off his holiday.

His press secretary, Sergei Tsoi, responded by telephone on Friday in a call that is recorded on the newspaper’s web site.

“What’s the problem?” he asked, arguing that the issue was in the surrounding region, and that the Moscow authorities had done everything needed to be done. He also declined to say where Luzhkov was vacationing.

Lifenews.ru posted the telephone call on its web site with the headline,

“Luzhkov Does Not See Crisis in Moscow.”

This prompted Tsoi to take legal action against the news agency for slander — and Luzhkov is famed for never losing a court case.

Nevertheless, as a public relations move, it was a disaster. Luzhkov ended up breaking off his vacation — which he was spending getting treatment for a sports injury, Tsoi said.

“Of course, you did the right thing by coming back from vacation; you did it in time,” Prime Minister Vladimir Putin told Luzhkov with a hint of menace.

Tvoi Den had a fantastic coup, and it followed up every angle on Luzhkov’s supposed callousness.

It reported that Luzhkov, known for his hobby of beekeeping, had evacuated his bees from a particularly hot spot in the Kaluga region.

“In such heat, Yury Mikhailovich could not but make sure his winged workers had comfortable hives,” it wrote in an article dripping with irony, assuring us that the bees are now cooling off amid lakes and buckwheat fields.

It also published a rather odd cartoon showing Luzhkov trying to get through the pearly gates into heaven, arguing that he rebuilt the Christ the Savior Cathedral and gave lots of money to the Orthodox Church.

“He said you can’t get into heaven, but your money will be returned,” a gatekeeper tells him.

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