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Russian Culture Minister Slams 'Hysteria' Over Tsar Biopic 'Mathilde'

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Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky **Lyubimov Andrei / Moskva News Agency**

Russia's Culture Minister on Wednesday criticized "hysteria" surrounding a film about Tsar Nicholas II's affair with a Polish ballerina, which has seen its director and cinemas across Russia facing religiously-motivated threats.

Russia's leading cinema chain said on Tuesday it would not screen Alexei Uchitel's "Mathilde" due to frequent threats to theaters and visitors' safety.

The announcement follows an Orthodox group's threat earlier this year to burn cinemas if they showed the biopic of Tsar Nicholas II, who was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000.

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Commenting on a newspaper report which cited him as saying he was outraged by the cinema

chain's decision to cancel the film, Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky wrote on Twitter that the company had every right to do so.

"It is the deliberately whipped up hysteria surrounding an otherwise ordinary artistic film that is disturbing," Medinsky wrote on Wednesday, not the film's cancelation.

The Culture Minister additionally addressed controversy surrounding "Mathilde" in online statement on Wednesday after "the latest events force us to issue a definitive statement."

"By pandering to 'activists' who flout the law, we are creating a dangerous precedent of appeasing irresponsible hysteria," the statement read.

"Dear film industry workers, you are professionals and people of action. The viewer evaluates your work, while reckless cult member-arsonists are clients of other specialized structures."

On Monday, Russia's National Film Foundation canceled a screening of the film for "technical reasons," hours after two cars outside director Uchitel's lawyer's office were set on fire in central Moscow. The arson attack was just the latest in a series believed to be in opposition to the film.

Orthodox activists, including State Duma Deputy Natalia Poklonskaya, have rallied against the film depicting the Tsar's affair with Mathilde Kschessinska, saying it offends religious believers.

An elderly widow of the Tsar's nephew has sued the director's studio over the film.

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