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Arson Suspects Detained Over 'Mathilde' Biopic Attacks

September 21, 2017



The leader of the fundamentalist group “Christian State - Holy Rus” Alexander Kalinin **Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia Press Service**

Three people have been detained on suspicion of setting cars on fire to protest a controversial film about a Tsar’s affair with a Polish ballerina, the Interior Ministry said Wednesday.

Konstantin Dobrynin, a lawyer employed by the director of “Mathilde,” posted photographs last week of two burnt cars outside his office near Moscow’s central Arbat district with leaflets scattered at the site reading “Burn for Mathilde.”

The arson was seen as an act of intimidation ahead of the release next month of director Alexei Uchitel’s “Mathilde,” a biopic on Tsar Nicholas II’s affair.

One suspect in the Sept. 11 arson attacks was detained in Moscow and two were detained in Lipetsk region, the Interior Ministry said on its website.

State Duma Deputy Natalia Poklonskaya, who is among those leading the charge against

“Mathilde” claiming it offends religious believers, said the detentions were made on her request.

“I am convinced of the need to strengthen measures on the part of law enforcement agencies to prevent manifestations of extremism,” she told the Komsomolskaya Pravda tabloid.

Related article: Russian Tsar's Love Life Sparks Cinema Censorship Row

The Interior Ministry refuted Poklonskaya’s claim, saying in a statement later in the day that its investigation began “immediately after receiving the reports of the incident.”

Meanwhile, the St. Petersburg-based Fontanka.ru news website cited unnamed sources with knowledge of the situation as saying that a total of 10 people have been detained in connection with the incidents.

The leader of the fundamentalist group “Christian State - Holy Rus” was listed among those detained. However, the Interfax news agency cited a law enforcement source as saying that Kalinin was released after questioning. His brother Yuri was charged with malicious destruction of property alongside two other unidentified suspects, another unnamed source told the agency.

The RBC business outlet quoted a Moscow Interior Ministry branch source confirming the detention of “Christian State” leader Alexander Kalinin.

“Kalinin, in particular, called for the burning of cinemas where Alexei Uhictel’s film ‘Mathilde’ was announced to be screened,” the unnamed source said.

The attack near lawyer Dobrynin’s office follows an Aug. 31 Molotov cocktails attack on Uchitel’s studio in St. Petersburg and an explosion at a Yekaterinburg cinema on Sept. 4.

Russia’s leading cinema chain said last week that it would not screen “Mathilde” due to frequent threats to theaters.

Culture Minister Vladimir Medinsky criticized “the deliberately whipped up hysteria surrounding an otherwise ordinary artistic film” last Wednesday.

In an accompanying statement on the ministry’s website, Medinsky warned that appeasing “activists who flout the law” creates a dangerous precedent.

The Russian Orthodox Church canonized Tsar Nicholas II in 2000.

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