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Snowy Cyclone Pummels Russian Cities, Sparking Ire Toward Local Authorities

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Denis Grishkin / Moskva News Agency

Swathes of western, northern and southern Russia have been blanketed with record snowfall in recent days after a powerful winter cyclone swept in from the North Atlantic, prompting widespread discontent as municipal snow removal services in many cities struggled to keep the roads clear.

In Russia's capital, Moscow, snowdrifts grew to half a meter in height as Cyclone Ida brought 4-5 millimeters of snow to European Russia, Fobos weather center specialist Evgeny Tishkovets told the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

"Precipitation in Moscow exceeded the monthly norm by 7%," according to Mikhail Leus, another leading specialist at Fobos.

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The cyclone disrupted life as far south as Krasnodar, where the local airport was shut down Friday, and as far north as the Arctic city of Murmansk, where the heavy snowfall blocked public transportation.

The heavy snows have overwhelmed municipal snow removal services, particularly in St. Petersburg, where the city's streets and walkways have been covered in ice and snow, sending hundreds to the hospital. Rock group Leningrad posted a video clip about the city's problem with snow removal. The clip has since gained over 3 million views, prompting a response from the city's Governor Alexander Beglov.

In the city of Ryazan southeast of Moscow, the heavy snowfall and lack of cleanup led to injuries and stuck ambulances. Locals there launched a petition to ask Leningrad frontman Sergei Shnurov to make a similar video that mocks their own city's municipal services.

In the northern Russian republic of Karelia, a woman went on hunger strike to protest local municipal services after she and her elderly mother were trapped in their home by the snow.

Similar difficulties with snow removal have been reported in cities including Moscow, Smolensk, Nizhny Novgorod, Rostov, Samara, Vladimir and Kazan.

In Nizhny Novgorod, authorities have opened nearly 2,000 administrative cases over improper snow removal since the start of this winter. In the city of Krasnodar, local prosecutors said they have launched an inquiry into the city authorities' snow cleanup efforts.

Abnormal snowfall has been seen outside Russia, as well, with Istanbul shutting down its airport and Greece announcing a lockdown in several parts of the country.

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