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Uzbekistan Cancels Festival With Pro-Invasion Russian Artists

By AFP

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Russian rock star Grigory Leps, who recently performed at a Moscow patriotic rally attended by President Vladimir Putin. **Igor Ivanko / Moskva News Agency**

Central Asian Uzbekistan has canceled a music festival in which Russian artists supporting the Kremlin's Ukraine invasion were due to perform, officials told AFP Tuesday.

The decision came after neighboring Kazakhstan made a similar decision earlier this year.

Both countries are close to Moscow but have not voiced support for the invasion of Ukraine, which has made Russia's allies in the former Soviet Union nervous.

The festival, called Zhara ("heat" in Russian) was due to take place in the capital Tashkent on May 20 and 21.

"It is canceled because of the participation of Russian singers and their publications on social media," an official of Uzbekistan's main ticket booking service told AFP.

The official said he was not sure if the festival would still take place.

But a police spokesman in Tashkent confirmed to AFP that "the Zhara festival was canceled on an order from the interior ministry."

Asked if this was due to the presence of Russian artists who have voiced support for Moscow's Ukraine offensive, he said: "this is correct."

Grigory Leps, a Russian rock star who recently performed at a Moscow patriotic rally attended by President Vladimir Putin, was among those due to perform.

Russian pop star Olga Buzova, a pro-Kremlin artist who traveled to eastern Ukraine late last year to support Moscow troops, was also due to perform.

The Zhara festival was also canceled in Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city, last month because of the "unstable situation in the world."

Azerbaijan, a Moscow ally in the Caucasus, had canceled the festival last year.

Central Asian states retain close ties with Moscow but try to maintain diplomatic neutrality on Ukraine in an effort to keep good ties with both Russia and the West.

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