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Uzbekistan Urges Russia to Respect Its Citizens Amid Migrant Crackdown

By AFP

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Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday urged Russia to treat its citizens with "respect" as authorities in Moscow tighten migration laws and carry out mass inspections targeting foreign workers

Over the past year, Russia has introduced tighter migration rules, including new laws to locate and expel migrants more easily. The changes have sparked protests from several Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan.

Roughly 4 million migrants from the five former Soviet republics of Central Asia — Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan — currently live in Russia, according to government data. Many work in low-wage sectors and send home remittances critical to their domestic economies.

Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry said it had received reports of "unauthorized inspections and cases of disrespectful and rude treatment" of its citizens in Russia.

It called on Moscow "to treat Uzbek citizens with respect and to prevent actions that humiliate their honor and dignity," according to a statement published by state media. Tashkent also submitted a formal protest note to Russia requesting clarification about the reports.

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Russia's Foreign Ministry said it was "studying" the note and described Uzbekistan as a "strategic partner," the state-run news agency TASS reported.

In recent months, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have issued similar protests, denouncing mass detentions of their citizens in Russia.

The crackdown follows the deadly 2024 terrorist attack at Crocus City Hall, which Russian officials blame on gunmen from Central Asia. Since then, Moscow has stepped up its efforts to police and repatriate foreign nationals.

The war in Ukraine has further complicated matters for Central Asian migrants, with Russian authorities accused of pressuring some to enlist in the military. Russia's Investigative Committee said last year that 10,000 foreign nationals with Russian citizenship had been sent to the front lines.

Ukraine's military estimates that around 3,000 Central Asians are fighting for Russia. Local media report that several dozen have been killed or imprisoned upon returning home.

Despite a decline in migration, remittances remain vital to Central Asian economies. According to the World Bank, they account for 45% of GDP in Tajikistan, 24% in Kyrgyzstan and 14% in Uzbekistan.

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