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Foreign Ministry Summons Czech Diplomat Over Detention of Orthodox Church Cleric

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Metropolitan Hilarion. **Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency**

Russia's Foreign Ministry said Tuesday it had summoned a senior Czech diplomat to demand the release of a Russian Orthodox cleric who was detained after containers of a suspicious white substance were found in his car.

Metropolitan Hilarion, born Grigory Alfeyev, was detained on Sunday after Czech police found four containers of a "white substance" in the trunk of his car, according to his Telegram channel. Hilarion denied allegations of drug possession.

In its statement, Russia's Foreign Ministry said it had summoned the Chargé d'Affaires of the Czech Republic in the Russian Federation, Jan Ondřejka, to protest Hilarion's detention pending forensic chemical results to determine if formal charges will be filed.

"The ministry pointed out the sheer absurdity and total lack of foundation regarding the

accusations," it said.

Czech police confirmed they detained an individual on Sunday evening along a highway between the spa town of Karlovy Vary and Prague. They said "no one has been charged yet" but did not disclose the person's identity.

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The Czech Drug Enforcement Center told AFP it had carried out a vehicle stop based on an "anonymous tip-off reporting the transportation of narcotic and psychotropic substances."

"Conducting this kind of police operation on the basis of a mere anonymous tip points to its pre-planned and provocative nature," Russia's Foreign Ministry said.

Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova on Monday described the incident as an "orchestrated provocation" aimed at discrediting Hilarion.

Later on Tuesday, Hilarion's team wrote in a post on Telegram that he and his driver were released from police custody and do not currently face any charges.

"Laboratory testing confirmed the substance found in the vehicle was an illicit substance. According to Czech authorities, the investigation into the case will continue," the post read.

"The mere discovery of the illicit substance does not answer the central question: how the items ended up in the vehicle in the first place," it added, noting that Hilarion "categorically denies any involvement in the illegal possession or transportation of prohibited substances."

Earlier, his team claimed he had been receiving anonymous death threats demanding he leave the country due to his Russian origin and ties to the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Bishop Hilarion was once considered the right-hand man of Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, before allegedly falling out of favor with church leadership and being sent abroad.

Shortly after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, Hilarion was unexpectedly sent to lead the Orthodox Church's Hungarian diocese. Unlike many other top Russian clergymen who have publicly backed the war, Hilarion never publicly voiced support or condemnation of the invasion.

The 60-year-old was suspended from the Hungarian diocese in 2024 after allegations of sexual harassment from a younger aide, which Hilarion denies. He was reassigned to the Russian Orthodox Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Karlovy Vary in December 2024.

AFP contributed reporting.

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