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Hermitage Museum Cancels Archaeological Expeditions in Crimea

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St. Petersburg Governor's Press Service

The State Hermitage Museum has canceled all of its archaeological expeditions in annexed Crimea after Kremlin-backed authorities declared a state of emergency due to ongoing Ukrainian attacks and an acute fuel shortage.

"The expeditions are being postponed until the situation improves," Alexander Butyagin, head of the museum's archaeology department, told the state-run news agency TASS on Monday. "It's too difficult to organize normal operations right now."

According to media outlets in St. Petersburg, Butyagin was supposed to lead an expedition in Crimea last month. However, the expedition has since been moved to the southern Krasnodar region.

The exiled outlet Novaya Gazeta Europe, citing unidentified sources, reported that at least two other Russian scientific expeditions in Crimea not affiliated with the Hermitage have also pulled out due to the "unstable situation" on the peninsula.

The Hermitage itself has not publicly commented on its expedition plans.

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On Friday, Kremlin-backed authorities in Crimea declared a state of emergency following days of intense Ukrainian attacks that knocked out power in parts of the peninsula and compounded ongoing challenges for residents, including fuel shortages and restrictions on public transit.

Butyagin, who has overseen archaeological work at the Ancient Greek colony of Myrmekion in the Crimean port town of Kerch since 1999, only recently returned to Russia. He was held in jail in Poland for several months at the request of Ukraine, which accuses him of carrying out illegal excavations in Crimea.

The archeologist was released in April as part of a wider prisoner swap.

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