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Musicians Led a Merry Visa Dance

By Ellen Barry
 THE MOSCOW TIMES

Five Russian folk musicians, who have performed at the White House and New York's Carnegie Hall and Metropolitan Opera, have been forced to cancel performances in the United States when the U.S. Embassy failed to grant them visas.

The musicians, who include Russia's premier balalaika player Anatoly Tikhonov who played for President Richard Nixon in 1972, and U.S. consular officers said the problem hinged on their visa status, since they were guaranteed a form of compensation.

The musicians were to perform free of charge, sponsored by a U.S. firm promoting Russian tourism. Because consular officers considered the planned performances to be money-making ventures, band members were refused visas last week, members of the ensemble said Tuesday.

An embassy official said the artists had simply been asked for additional information to establish their visa status. However, this is a standard method used to avoid issuing a flat refusal.

The official also said professional musicians touring for profit in the United States must be cleared with the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

So the band has cancelled the first three concerts and appealed to the Russian Culture Ministry to overturn the decision.

A sixth member of the group, who applied independently for a visa, was given one and may end up taking the stage alone, said Galina Priobrazhenskaya, musical director of the group.

Meanwhile, Tikhonov, three singers and a pianist are grounded in Moscow.

"So one musician is a tourist, but five are a concert?" said Priobrazhenskaya, a singer.

The ensemble was invited to perform by the Utah-based tourist agency Bolshoi Cruises, which pledged to support the two-month trip.

Tikhonov, 60, who has made five previous trips to the United States, said he had been "offended" by the decision.

Press Minister Nominated Amid Cabinet Confusion

By Leonid Bershidsky
 THE MOSCOW TIMES

Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin was said Tuesday to have nominated a new press minister as confusion over possible cabinet reshuffles continued and a recent conservative ministerial appointee said he would not support the draft 1995 budget.

The "Segodnya" program on Russian television reported Tuesday night that Chernomyrdin had signed a decree nominating Sergei Grizunov as press minister. Grizunov was formerly the deputy to Press Minister Boris Mironov, fired by Yeltsin several months ago after being accused of fascism.

The new agriculture minister, Alexander Nazarchuk, said during a visit to southern Siberia that he supported state regulation of Russia's agriculture, unlike his predecessor Viktor Khlystun, who had allowed the breakup of state farms and freed grain prices.

Ignoring a veiled warning Chernomyrdin issued him in a television interview Sunday, Nazarchuk said he would not support the 1995 budget if it reduced government spending on agriculture, as the current draft envisages.

"I will not vote for such a budget,"

ITAR-TASS quoted him as saying.

Chernomyrdin told the news program Itogi on Sunday that Nazarchuk would have "no choice" but to go with the collective will of the cabinet.

Nazarchuk's appointment Thursday, hours before a confidence vote in the government, was apparently an attempt by Yeltsin to buy the support of the Agrarian Party faction.


After Yeltsin met with Chernomyrdin Tuesday rumors of ministerial appointments were fueled by a press release circulated by the presidential press service that said "personnel matters were discussed."

An Interfax report said Yeltsin also signed a directive that would reduce his vast staff by one third.

In his television interview, Chernomyrdin implied that acting Foreign Minister Andrei Vavilov and CIS Cooperation Minister Vladimir Mashits were candidates for replacement.

News agencies reported Monday that Justice Minister Yury Kalmykov had resigned. But Kalmykov's secretary, Vladimir Zimonenko, said Tuesday that the minister did not intend to resign.

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