

Plane Crash Toll Rises to 45 as Young Boy Dies

June 22, 2011



A man weeping at the plane crash site near Petrozavodsk on Wednesday. **Vladimir Larionov**

A 9-year-old boy died of his injuries Wednesday, bringing the death toll in the crash of a Tu-134 passenger plane that slammed into a highway in heavy fog to 45, officials said.

The RusAir flight from Moscow crashed just moments from landing at the Petrozavodsk airport in the northwestern republic of Karelia.

Eight people initially survived, dragged from the burning wreckage by locals. The Emergency Situations Ministry said the boy, Anton Terekhin, died of his injuries early Wednesday.

Health and Social Development Minister Tatyana Golikova had said Tuesday that Terekhin, whose 14-year-old sister was also injured, had lost a lot of blood and was in an extremely grave condition.

Their mother, earlier reported to have survived, died in the crash.

Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov said Tuesday that preliminary information showed

the crash was caused by the jet's pilot missing the runway in adverse weather conditions.

It was the deadliest air disaster in Russia since Polish President Lech Kaczynski's official plane crashed near the western city of Smolensk in a thick fog in April 2010, killing him and all 95 others on board.

Ivanov said the two crashes looked similar.

Aviation officials said the Tu-134's approach was too low, so it clipped a tree and then hit a high-power line before slamming into the ground. A traffic controller who oversaw the plane's approach said visibility near the airport was bad — close to the minimum level at the time of the crash — but the pilot still decided to land.

Both the plane's pilots were killed in the crash.

Kommersant said the Petrozavodsk airport has outdated navigation equipment that might have made it more challenging for the plane's pilot to make the final approach in poor weather.

Moskovsky Komsomolets quoted one pilot, Sergei Knyshev, as saying that the level of crew training has fallen compared with Soviet times. "The main cause is that the system of pilot preparation has been broken," he said.

Aviation safety expert Valentin Dudin told Komsomolskaya Pravda that pilots sometimes are reluctant to abort landings in bad weather and fly to other airports because management at some Russian carriers strongly encourages fuel saving. "Profits come first," he said.

Meanwhile, FIFA president Sepp Blatter expressed his condolences to the family of Russian referee Vladimir Pettai, who died in the plane crash.

Russian Football Union leader Sergei Fursenko said his organization would help support Pettai's wife and two children.

Pettai, 37, who was appointed to FIFA's international referees list last year, had refereed European Championship qualifying matches at the under-21 and under-17 level, and was an additional assistant in Champions League games last season.

Also, news site Lifeneews.ru retracted on Wednesday a report that a 2-meter boa constrictor had perished in the crash. It said the report that one of the survivors had taken the snake to Petrozavodsk to show her parents was false.

(AP, Reuters, MT)

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