

104 Bodies Retrieved in Boat Disaster

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Bulgaria captain Alexander Ostrovsky's ex-wife mourning over his body during a funeral Wednesday in Kazan. **Denis Sinyakov**

Divers retrieved more bodies as they finished a search of all inner compartments but the engine room of the sunken Bulgaria riverboat on the Volga riverbed Wednesday, bringing the confirmed death toll to 104, including 20 children, the Emergency Situations Ministry said.

A team of 200 ministry divers worked in and around the decrepit 55-year-old vessel, which was overloaded with at least 208 people when it sank in just three minutes during a storm Sunday, the ministry said.

Forensic experts had identified 95 bodies as of late Wednesday.

Seventy-nine people survived Russia's worst river accident since 1983, when the Alexander Suvorov cruiser ship struck an Ulyanovsk railroad bridge on the Volga, killing 177.

With at least 25 people still missing and presumed dead, the Emergency Situations Ministry extended the search area 190 kilometers downstream from the site of the tragedy, while 402 emergency workers on 69 boats and 10 aircraft combed the banks and river islands.

The reason for the accident remained unclear. Meteorologists assailed a version advanced by one of the surviving crew members that the ship was flooded by a 2-meter wave and capsized.

Gennady Yeliseyev, deputy head of the Federal Meteorological Service, said the waves were only a meter high and posed no threat to the ship.

Emergency Situations Ministry officials said Wednesday that they would raise the boat with the help of Defense Ministry specialists and special cranes on Saturday.

Meanwhile, a Kazan court authorized the arrest of two people detained by police Tuesday in connection with the accident: Svetlana Inyakina, director of the Agrorechtur company that leased the riverboat, and Yakov Ivashov, a senior inspector with the local branch of the River Register, a government agency that oversees the safety of riverboats. The two are charged with providing services that didn't meet safety requirements and led to multiple deaths. The charge carries a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison.

The ship had room for 140 passengers, emergency officials say.

The captain of the Bulgaria, Alexander Ostrovsky, was laid to rest in a cemetery in Kazan, where the boat was headed.

"He was a good swimmer, I am sure he simply did his civil duty, heroically, up to the bitter end," Ostrovsky's ex-wife Tatyana said as she stood over his coffin, Reuters reported.

The Bulgaria's radio operator has said Ostrovsky overrode protests by crew members and passengers earlier in the voyage and insisted on sailing despite a faulty engine. When the ship went down, Ostrovsky refused to leave and worked until the last minute trying to save passengers, Itar-Tass reported.

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