

3 Tourists Killed in Caucasus Ski Resort

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The  Moscow Times

Masked gunmen shot dead three vacationers from the Moscow area on a road in Kabardino-Balkaria in the violence-plagued North Caucasus region, news agencies reported Saturday.

Separately, attackers blew up a cable-car support pole near Mount Elbrus in the same province late on Friday, bringing down dozens of cabins, reports said. Nobody was hurt.

The attacks underscored the persistent violence in the North Caucasus, home to a spreading Islamist insurgency, and clouded the Kremlin's plans to draw investment and tourists by developing ski resorts in the region southeast of Sochi, where Russia is to host the 2014 Winter Olympics.

Assailants in a black car without license plates forced a minibus carrying five vacationers from the Moscow area to a halt and demanded to see their documents, Itar-Tass reported.

When the passengers asked to see identification, the assailants opened fire, killing two men and a woman and wounding the other two passengers, it said.

On Saturday, a bomb squad defused a car bomb placed near a hotel in a popular ski resort area,

also in Kabardino-Balkaria, police said.

The car bomb was parked near a small hotel in Terskol village, police spokesman Maxim Ushanov said.

Terskol is near Mount Elbrus, Europe's tallest mountain and a popular winter sports destination.

Russian officials in January announced a \$15 billion plan to develop five large ski resorts in the Caucasus, an effort to address the poverty and high unemployment that feed the insurgency. The killing of the tourists, the ski lift bombing and the car bomb could discourage the foreign investment that Russia has sought for the project.

No claim of responsibility has been issued for the attacks, but insurgent leader Doku Umarov this month vowed that violence would increase if Russia does not give up the largely Muslim region. Umarov made that statement after the January suicide bombing at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport that killed 36 people. Umarov said he ordered that attack.

Although Kabardino-Balkaria has been comparatively quiet, violence there appears to be growing.

Ushanov said the head of administration of a village near the republic's capital was killed Saturday by gunmen who shot him in the workout room of the village's sports complex.

In the capital Nalchik, a traffic policeman mistakenly killed a police inspector who he suspected was an attacker, Ushanov said. The traffic policeman had called for assistance after stopping a suspicious car for a documents check; three inspectors in civilian clothes drove to the scene and got out of their car with assault rifles in their hands and the frightened traffic policeman opened fire, Ushanov said.

(Reuters, AP)

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