

Kremlin's Khloponin Wants Tourism Halted at Ski Resort

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A damaged cable car that was blown up on Friday night near Mt. Elbrus. **Yevgeny Kayudin**

The Kremlin's envoy to the North Caucasus called on Monday for tourism to be halted at the country's most popular ski resort, where three Moscow tourists were gunned down by suspected Islamist rebels.

Security has been heightened since the Friday night shootout and a spate of other attacks including blowing up a cable car and killing a policeman and an official in Kabardino-Balkaria.

"We must stop receiving tourists," Itar-Tass cited Alexander Khloponin as telling officials in the town of Tyrnauz on the main road leading to Mount Elbrus, Europe's highest peak, which was open for holidaymakers on Monday.

The violence has shocked ordinary Russians and officials alike who see Elbrus as an oasis of calm in the North Caucasus.

Russia's Tourism Union said the attack on a minibus of Moscow skiers by masked assailants

was the first "terrorist" attack on tourists in Russia. It added that about 5,000 tourists visit Elbrus annually.

The tourists were attacked because one of them was mistaken for the daughter of ex-Federal Security Service chief Nikolai Patrushev, a law enforcement source told Interfax on Monday.

Khloponin called on travel companies to "not bring new groups, ... explain to them this is in the name of security." He also scolded the provincial leadership, asking them: "I want to hear from you how this situation was able to happen in this republic of which we have always been so proud?"

(Reuters, MT)

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