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Jail Terms Proposed for Airplane Laser Attacks

By Alexey Eremenko

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Authorities proposed 10-year prison terms for people who direct laser pointers at airplanes on Tuesday after the practice went viral in recent weeks.

The most recent incidents took place early Tuesday near Moscow's Vnukovo Airport, where two inbound jets, a Tu-204 from Istanbul and a Boeing 737 from Yakutsk, were hit by green laser beams during landing, Interfax said.

The attacks can cause short-term vision loss, but neither crew was blinded and both planes landed safely, the report said, without identifying the airlines. The perpetrators of the attacks, which came within a four-minute interval, remained at large.

There have been more than 30 laser attacks on pilots since the start of the year, compared with five in 2010. The majority of the incidents took place near airports in Moscow and Rostov-on-Don, where two crews were blinded last month but managed to execute safe

landings. A 22-year-old suspect was briefly detained but not charged in Rostov-on-Don.

The police chief for the Rostov region, Alexei Lapin, said Tuesday that federal law should be amended to jail people who blind pilots for 10 years if their actions result in deaths.

"There's a certain category of people who don't think about the consequences of their actions," Lapin said, Interfax reported. "Publicity in the media only encourages them to act. In medicine, this is called an epidemic, and it has yet to peak."

The ruling United Russia party has introduced a bill with similar penalties to the State Duma, but the legislation is unlikely to be approved during the spring session, which wraps up July 17, Deputy Pavel Krasheninnikov said Tuesday, RIA-Novosti reported.

Lapin also called for a ban on the unregulated sales of laser pointers — a measure that Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov introduced Monday by prohibiting the sale of the gadgets in local stores, Interfax said.

The Chechen ban came after a laser attack on a plane landing at the Grozny airport Sunday. The 17-year-old perpetrator was identified but got off with a "preventative talk" with the Chechen police chief, the report said.

Kadyrov has accused the media of encouraging copycat crimes, a stance echoed by senior Transportation Ministry official Andrei Shnyryov, who called on the media Tuesday to stop covering the laser attacks.

"Judging by the European experience, the less information there is on the issue, the fewer cases" will take place, Shnyryov said at a round table in Moscow.

Meanwhile, Oleg Smirnov, president of the Aircraft Infrastructure Development Fund, a nongovernmental organization, urged the Kremlin to expand the Chechen ban nationwide. "Those lasers might blind the pilot of a president's or prime minister's plane," Smirnov said at the round table.

The government will review proposals to ban or restrict the sales of laser pointers as soon as the documents are filed with the Cabinet, the prime minister's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said Tuesday.

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