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2nd An-24 Crashes in a Month, Injuring 12

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An An-24 similar to this one skidded off the runway and broke apart while landing at the Blagoveshchensk airport. **Maxim Stulov**

An An-24 plane carrying 36 passengers and a crew of five crash-landed Monday in stormy weather in the capital of the Amur region on China's border, injuring 12 people, emergency officials said.

The accident could cause the Kremlin to increase pressure on airlines to phase out the aging twin-engine turboprop, which President Dmitry Medvedev said last month should be grounded after a July 11 crash-landing killed seven.

In the most recent incident, an An-24 operated by IrAero airline skidded off the runway and broke apart while landing at the Blagoveshchensk airport, according to the Amur region branch of the Emergency Situations Ministry.

Low visibility, strong winds and heavy rain contributed to the accident, it said.

An investigation has been opened.

Eight of the 12 people injured in the crash remained in the hospital Monday night with non-life-threatening injuries like cuts, bruises and glass splinters, Interfax said. Among those hospitalized was a boy of about 3, with bad bruises, and his father, who suffered a fractured knee, it said.

"No other injuries have been identified on the child: no head injuries or damage to the internal organs," a local hospital said in a statement carried by Interfax. The boy's mother was expected to arrive Tuesday from the family's home in Ekimchan, a village in the Amur region.

Also injured in the crash were the plane's pilot, co-pilot and flight engineer, emergency officials said.

Medvedev called for the grounding of all An-24s after an Angara Airlines plane crash-landed in the Ob River on July 11, killing seven of the 37 people on board. The pilots attempted an emergency landing after an engine caught fire during a flight from Tomsk to Surgut.

But the An-24, which entered production in 1959, continues to fly. The plane is a mainstay for cash-strapped airlines that serve hard-to-reach areas of Siberia and the Far East, and its grounding would cut off hundreds of remote communities from the rest of Russia.

Medvedev has also ordered the phaseout of another aging regional plane, the Tu-134 twin jet, after an aircraft operated by RusAir crashed and exploded as it landed in thick fog in Karelia's capital, Petrozavodsk, on June 20. Five of the 52 people on the flight from Moscow survived.

In Monday's crash, the An-24 was on a multi stop trip through the Far East, flying from Irkutsk to Chita before crash-landing in Blagoveshchensk. The plane was to have finished its journey in Khabarovsk.

Irkutsk-based IrAero, founded in 1999, operates a fleet of about a dozen planes, including Bombardier CRJ200 regional jets, according to its web site.

Blagoveshchensk, a city of 214,400, is on the Amur River, which separates Russia from China, and is located opposite the Chinese city of Heihe.

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