

Russian Prisoner Escapes in Hijacked Chopper

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The  **Moscow Times**

A murderer escaped from a Russian penal colony aboard a hijacked helicopter but was captured a few hours later.

Law enforcement officials say the drama began Thursday morning when two people commandeered the helicopter owned by a private company and ordered its crew to fly to the high-security prison in Sheksna near Vologda, 300 kilometers north of Moscow.

Interior Ministry spokesman Valery Gribakin said the helicopter had been rented by an associate of prisoner Alexei Shestakov, RIA-Novosti reported.

“It has been established that in March the convict called this person and asked him to organize a top delegation helicopter visit. He did not understand exactly what was meant but went ahead and rented the helicopter,” Gribakin said.

“At the scheduled time today, the helicopter’s crew landed it at the designated place, taking on board a man and a woman. After the aircraft took off, they drew guns and forced the pilot

to hover above the penal colony and throw out a rope. The convict used the rope to climb onboard,” he said.

The craft flew away, then landed, and the prisoner and the hijackers scattered.

Gribakin told Russian news agencies that Shestakov, who had served 12 years of a 24-year sentence, then hijacked a taxi, but it was stopped at a police roadblock.

Gribakin says the escaped convict was wounded while resisting arrest, but did not elaborate.

The helicopter hijackers remain at large.

Elsewhere, a Bell 407 helicopter crashed into the Volga River near Nizhny Novgorod, killing the pilot who was the sole person onboard.

“The helicopter might have got caught on a transmission line. It sank [after crashing],” RIA-Novosti quoted a source from the Emergency Situations Ministry as saying. ☒

(AP, MT)

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