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Moscow's Freezing Rain Diverts Medvedev's Plane

By The Moscow Times

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A cheerful butterfly umbrella shielding its bearer from icy rain Wednesday. **Vladimir Filonov**

Freezing rain in Moscow forced Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's plane to divert to St. Petersburg on Tuesday night.

The Tu-204 changed its flight path en route from Perm, where Medvedev had gone on a one-day working trip, said the prime minister's spokeswoman, Natalya Timakova.

"Before descending to land, the decision was made to fly to an alternative airport because of bad weather," she told RIA-Novosti. "The prime minister's plane landed safely at the St. Petersburg airport."

Medvedev's pilots feared that freezing rain — which fell during one of the wettest Octobers in Moscow's history — might have caused ice to form on the runway at Vnukovo Airport, Life News reported.

Medvedev's unexpected arrival at St. Petersburg's Pulkovo Airport disrupted a planeload of tourists who had just touched down from a vacation in Cyrpus, news site Fontanka.ru reported. A bus carrying the passengers, including children, had to wait 40 minutes on the tarmac while a large number of government vehicles picked up Medvedev and the other people on his plane, the report said.

But pilots ferrying a group of journalists in Medvedev's press pool apparently had no reservations about possible ice in Moscow. Their Tu-154 jet took off from Perm shortly after Medvedev's departure and landed safely at Vnukovo at 8 p.m.

Meanwhile, this week's rain means that Moscow has seen more than twice the average monthly rainfall, weather forecasters said Wednesday.

Meteorologists recorded 130 millimeters of rainfall at a city weather station for October, compared with an average of 59 millimeters for the month since records were first taken, an official at the state weather bureau for Moscow and the Moscow region told Interfax.

More rain and snow was expected Wednesday, but Thursday and Friday should be mostly dry, he said.

Igor Pergamenshchik, spokesman for Moscow's deputy mayor in charge of housing and public utilities, said the recent downpours have not disrupted the lives of city residents.

"The situation in Moscow is under control, and no serious accidents have been reported," Pergamenshchik said, according to Interfax.

In the Moscow region, however, it was a different story, with 200 residents losing power in the early hours of Wednesday.

The regional branch of the Emergency Situations Ministry told Interfax that power outages had affected the villages of Trubino, Nazimikha, Staraya Sloboda, Novaya Sloboda, Mogutovo, Kozino, Aniskino and Lionikha after trees fell on power lines.

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