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City Criticized as Snow Paralyzes Traffic

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Snow plows clearing Tverskaya Ulitsa in central Moscow on Thursday morning. **Vladimir Filonov**

Moscow traffic was crippled for a second consecutive day Friday, as freezing rain added to the difficulties caused by Thursday's massive snowfall, feeding growing criticism that City Hall failed to clear roads efficiently.

Community workers removed 1.13 million cubic meters of snow in Moscow from Thursday to Sunday, Interfax reported, citing a Mayor's Office spokesman. On Thursday, the first of day of the snowfall, the city saw one-sixth of the normal amount of snow for the whole winter in Moscow fall on the ground, the spokesman said.

Hundreds if not thousands of motorists were caught in a nighttime traffic jam on the Moscow Ring Road, where traffic was at a standstill over dozens of kilometers for several hours.

A video that was re-posted by popular blogger Ilya Varlamov showed rows of trucks blocking traffic around 4 a.m. along the ring road's outer side. According to the film's author, identified only by his YouTube channel called "foxbrth," the backup stretched from Lyubertsy in the

southeast to Ostashkovskoye Shosse in the north.

With congestion levels hovering at eight points on the 10-point Yandex.Probki scale, the situation was only marginally better than Thursday morning, when the index reached nine points.

The Russian whether bureau forecasts the return of the heavy snowfall and blizzard on Monday night, which will continue through Tuesday and change Wednesday into light snow until at least Saturday. The ground will be in glazed frost until at least Thursday.

There was widespread ridicule on Friday about comments from Mayor Sergei Sobyanin, who said Thursday that authorities were coping well with the situation and that there are "no streets in the city that are congested because of snow." Sobyanin also said that authorities had deployed roughly 12,000 snowplows.

Numerous motorists calling Ekho Moskvy radio Friday morning reported that they had not seen any snow-clearing equipment on the roads.

Traffic police on Friday blamed federal and Moscow region authorities outside the ring road for the congestion. "Numerous difficulties entering and leaving the city were caused by the failure to remove snow from key thoroughfares outside the Ring Road," an unspecified city traffic police official told Interfax.

Amid public discontent with congestion on the roads, city authorities imposed 4.3 million rubles ($140,000) in fines on 173 subcontractors for not cleaning roofs properly, RIA-Novosti reported, citing Alexei Dronov, head of the City Hall-affiliated union of administrative and technical inspections.

The blizzard that swept over much of western and central Russia on Thursday caused widespread power outages. More than 10,000 people were left without electricity Friday, Interfax reported, quoting local authorities. In the western Pskov region alone, 408 villages were cut off from power, the news agency said.

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