The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Snowstorm Paralyzes Moscow on April Fool's Day

April 01, 2014



A woman helping a child cross a snow-covered street in Moscow on Tuesday. After a week of warm weather and excited talk of spring's arrival, temperatures plunged to -1 degrees Celsius and the city was blanketed in snow. Forecasters expect the rest of this week to remain chilly and cloudy.

A snowstorm buffeted Moscow for about 18 hours, snarling traffic and blanketing the city in a record 17 centimeters of white that many residents probably wished was an April Fool's joke.

"Winter has returned to Moscow, and this is no April Fool's joke," Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said at a City Hall meeting.

He asked Deputy Mayor Pyotr Biryukov whether the city was prepared to deal with the snow, Interfax reported.

Biryukov said Moscow had not seen so much snow on April 1 in 130 years but assured the mayor that the city would be unburied within 24 hours.

The snow, which began to dust the city on Monday afternoon, reached its peak overnight and continued to fall Tuesday morning. The temperature hovered around minus 3 degrees at midday.

City authorities dispatched more than 10,000 snowplows and other street-cleaning equipment to clear the snow.

"Workers started deicing the roads as a preventive measure at 11 p.m.," a City Hall spokesman told Interfax.

He said special efforts were also being taken to remove snow and any ice buildup from pedestrian areas, approaches to metro stations and routes used by public transportation.

Moscow's three airports were not affected by the bad weather, and flights were landing and taking off on schedule.

But morning traffic jams paralyzed main roads, including the Moscow Right Road, the Third Ring Road, Leningradskoye Shosse, Volokolamskoye Shosse and Prospekt Mira. Yandex, which tracks traffic jams on a 10-point system, showed a headache-causing eight points.

Moscow, which had seen record-breaking warm temperatures of around 17 C in March, will continue to shiver in the cold snap for the next two days, with the nighttime temperature sinking to lows of minus 6 to 7 C, weather forecasters said. The weather then is expected to warm up to daytime highs of 6 to 7 C on April 4 and 5. But truly warm weather is only forecast to return to Moscow in the second half of April.

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