

Third Bengal Tiger Cub Dies of Cold in Crimea Blackout

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The third white Bengal tiger cub has died in a Crimean zoo, amid a dispute between the peninsula's Russian authorities and the zoo's director over the confiscation of a power generator that was supposed to provide warmth for the animals, the FlashCrimea news portal reported Thursday.

"The third baby has died," an unidentified zoo employee was quoted by FlashCrimea as saying, adding the cub died earlier in the day.

The cub had persevered even as its two siblings, at about six weeks old, died earlier this month, following the blackout that plunged Crimea into an energy crisis.

The director and owner of the Skazka zoo in Crimea's city of Yalta, Oleg Zubkov, blamed the peninsula's administration for the animals' plight and said at a recent news conference that the third tiger cub was in a "critical" condition and had little chance of pulling through, Gazeta.ru news portal reported.

Zubkov accused Crimean authorities of seizing a power generator they had initially provided to help the zoo survive the blackout, according to a video message dated Sunday and posted on YouTube later that day.

Standing against the backdrop of a pitch-dark zoo, Zubkov said the Crimean administration's actions amounted to "fascism." The term echoed the accusation Moscow had frequently used to justify its annexation of Crimea last year, saying the land grab was necessary to protect the peninsula's Russian speakers from "fascists" in Ukraine.

Russia-appointed Crimean Prime Minister Sergei Aksyonov said Zubkov should be capable of buying more generators for his privately owned zoo, while the peninsula's authorities were more concerned about the wellbeing of local children, rather than tigers, Gazeta.ru reported.

Zubkov said in his video message Sunday he had ordered two more generators, but they were scheduled for delivery only two days later, and bemoaned the authorities' abrupt confiscation of the generator he had, "without waiting for two days."

Crimea's prosecutor general Natalya Poklonskaya accused Zubkov of failing to take proper care of his animals, and claimed his wish to hold onto the government-issued power generators amounted to "embezzlement of state property," the FlashCrimea news portal reported.

The three cubs were born in September but rejected by their mother Tigryula — a tiger donated to the zoo by then-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko in 2009.

The cubs had been on a special feeding regime and had been vulnerable, Zubkov has said.

Crimea has been suffering electricity shortages after Ukrainian activists blew up the existing power lines from Ukraine about two weeks ago.

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