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Taxi Runs Into Crowd in Central Moscow

By Reuters

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A taxi drove into a crowd of pedestrians near Moscow's Red Square on Saturday, injuring eight people including two Mexicans in the city for the football World Cup which Russia is hosting, officials and eyewitnesses said.

The incident took place as residents and visiting football fans from around the world thronged the center of Moscow on a balmy summer evening.

Moscow's traffic management authority said the taxi driver had a driver's license issued in Kyrgyzstan, a mainly Muslim ex-Soviet republic.

The authority cited the driver, who was in police custody, as saying he had not driven into the crowd on purpose.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said in a post on Twitter: "There was an unpleasant incident with a taxi. The driver lost control of the vehicle."

The city's police said they had opened a criminal investigation into suspected violation of the traffic code.

Moscow city's healthcare department issued a statement saying eight people were hurt and had been taken to hospital. It said seven were in a satisfactory condition, while one woman was seriously hurt.

The Mexican embassy in Moscow said two Mexican women had been lightly injured. Also among those hurt were a Ukrainian and two Russian citizens, Russia's TASS news agency quoted a source in the emergency services as saying.

Video of the incident posted on social media showed the yellow Hyundai taxi pull sharply out of a line of stationery traffic, accelerate and mount the narrow pavement, which was packed with pedestrians.

The vehicle drove for about 10 meters along the pavement, bowling over pedestrians, with some of them being carried along on the bonnet of the car.

The taxi came to a partial halt after hitting a traffic sign. As bystanders tried to pull open the driver's side door, the driver, dressed in black trousers and black T-shirt, jumped out and sprinted away.

More bystanders chased after him and could be seen trying to tackle him to the ground as the footage ended.

Embed:

> Авария на Ильинке. pic.twitter.com/OL2YMz4XoB
>
> — ЦОДД (@gucodd) June 16, 2018

Moscow city transport authorities tweeted a picture of the scene of the incident after shortly ambulances had arrived.

A witness at the scene said that some of the people hit were wearing Mexican team colors. Mexico take on Germany on Sunday in their first World Cup match at Moscow's Luzhniki stadium, and thousands of Mexican fans are in the Russian capital.

A second witness at the scene told Reuters about the driver of the taxi: "He was pulled out of the vehicle, he ran off but bystanders apprehended him. He was shouting: 'It wasn't me'."

Another witness, Viktoria Geraimovich, said she called the emergency services on her mobile phone.

Describing the actions of the driver, she said: "He ran into a group of Mexicans. There were shouts, moans. He was only stopped because he hit a traffic sign."

"Someone gave him a punch in the face. He stayed in the car, people came up to him, said what are you doing, punched him in the face, he opened the door and tried to run away."

"It's scary that it was in the center (of Moscow) and I was right opposite," she said.

Interfax news agency cited a source as saying that the driver was drunk at the time of the incident. A medical source cited by Interfax said none of the people hospitalized was critically injured.

Russian authorities have vowed to host a safe football World Cup, which is taking place in 11 cities until July 15.

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In central Moscow, authorities have installed heavy concrete blocks across the entrances to pedestrianized areas following a spate of incidents in European cities in which vehicles were used to mow down people.

The U.S. State Department on Friday updated its travel advice on Russia, saying terrorist groups were plotting attacks.

"Terrorists may attack with little or no warning, targeting tourist locations, transportation hubs, markets/shopping malls, and local government facilities," the travel advice stated.

The Moscow traffic authority posted on Twitter a copy of what it said was the taxi driver's license. It gave his name as Chingiz Anarbek Uulu and said he was born on April 22, 1990.

It gave his birth-place as the town of Kochkor-Ata in Kyrgyzstan, near the border with Uzbekistan.

An account on Russian social media platform Odnoklassniki for someone with the same name and date of birth was last updated two years ago.

The last video he posted on his page depicted chapter 82 of the Koran, Islam's holy book, which discussed judgment day. There was nothing on the page to suggest any links to, or sympathies with, Islamist militant groups.

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