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Wave of Attempted Arson Attacks Hits Russia

By AFP

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State lender Sberbank reported a 30% increase in attempted arson attacks over the last week. **Alexander Koryakov / Kommersant**

Russia has seen a wave of attempted arson attacks targeting banks, shopping centers, post offices and government buildings over the last three days, according to media reports.

Around 20 separate cases of individuals trying to set off small explosive devices or launching fireworks into buildings have been recorded since Friday, mostly in St. Petersburg, Moscow and the surrounding suburbs, according to the state-run TASS news agency and the independent Fontanka site.

Citing an unnamed law enforcement source, TASS reported that the people had been recruited by online fraudsters offering money for the attempted attacks.

Footage from surveillance cameras at some of the sites, shared on social media, appeared to

show individuals using their mobile phones to film the fires they tried to set off.

Images from the aftermath of one attack showed a destroyed ATM and nearby windows blown out, while another showed a burnt-out police car.

Cash machines of state-run banks, shopping centers, post offices, military enlistment offices, police vehicles and other administrative buildings have all been targeted.

State lender Sberbank reported a 30% increase in attempted arson attacks over the last week, according to the RIA Novosti state news agency citing the bank's press service.

Most of those detained after the attempted attacks were pensioners, TASS reported.

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Sberbank said they had been recruited by scammers in Ukraine.

Moscow's FSB security service has previously warned Russians that Ukrainian fraudsters, posing as security agents, have called elderly citizens asking them to carry out arson attacks in exchange for money, or to regain access to blocked accounts.

There was no reaction from Kyiv to the wave of attempted attacks or accusations they were being orchestrated from Ukrainian territory.

Several Russian military enlistment offices were hit in arson attacks using homemade Molotov cocktails since Moscow ordered troops into Ukraine in February 2022.

The recruitment buildings became more heavily targeted after President Vladimir Putin announced an unpopular conscription drive in September 2022 that saw more than 300,000 Russians forcibly drafted to fight in the conflict.

Russian courts have handed out several years-long prison sentences to those arrested for the attacks.

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