

# Fireball in jet stuns passengers

Associated Press

MOSCOW — A ball of lightning roared through the passenger lounge of a Soviet airliner and "flew above the heads of the stunned passengers" then disappeared out the tail section, the Soviet news agency Tass said Friday.

No one was injured in the incident, but radar and other equipment aboard the plane was damaged by the "visiting fireball," which left two holes in the plane, Tass said.

The account did not say when the lightning struck the aircraft, an Ilyushin-18. A spokesman for the news agency told The Associated Press in a telephone interview that the incident took place early this week.

The Tass statement, reported from the agency's bureau in Leningrad, said the plane took off in good weather from the town of Sochi on the Black Sea. Soon after takeoff, thunderclouds were spotted about 60 miles from the craft's flight path.

"Suddenly, at the height of 1,200 yards, a fireball about 4 inches in diameter appeared on the fuselage in front of the crew's cockpit. It disappeared with a deafening noise, but re-emerged several seconds later in the passenger's lounge, after piercing in an uncanny way through the air-tight metal wall," Tass said.

"The fireball slowly flew about the heads of the stunned passengers. In the tail section of the airliner it divided into two glowing crescents which then joined together again and left the plane almost noiselessly," the agency said.