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Black Box Missing After Crash

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A Tu-154 flying over the crashed Tu-154 at Domodedovo Airport on Sunday. **Sergei Karpukhin**

Investigators said Thursday that an inquiry into the weekend crash of a Tu-154 jet at Moscow's Domodedovo Airport has been hampered by a missing flight recorder, and they denied that it had been stolen from the crash site.

Heavy equipment has been called to the airport to assist in the search for the audio recorder, the only of the plane's three flight recorders still unaccounted for, said Investigative Committee spokesman Vladimir Markin.

“Special equipment will be used to lift the large, heavy parts of the plane to search for the recorder,” Markin said, Interfax reported.

An unidentified investigator told Interfax that the flight recorder was not in place under the cockpit cabin but said it had probably gotten lost in the crash, not stolen.

“You can't tear it out by hand,” the investigator said. "It's impossible just to pick it up and

walk away. It's not a sheet of paper."

But the delay in finding the flight recorder is unusual. Recorders usually emit a tracking signal, and Kommersant noted Thursday that finding them usually takes less time even when airplanes break up in the air, raining debris over large areas.

The crash of the 18-year-old plane operated by South East Airlines, formerly Dagestan Airlines, occurred Saturday when all three of the plane's engines stopped working shortly after takeoff from Vnukovo Airport and the pilots made an emergency landing with full fuel tanks. Two of the 167 people on board died, and about 60 others were hospitalized. Human error and a technical malfunction are among the possible causes being investigated for the crash.

Vnukovo Airport said Monday that substandard fuel could not have caused the crash because 50 planes received fuel from the same tank that day and none reported any problems. South East Airlines plans to request a new check into the fuel and is seeking fuel samples from the airport, Kommersant reported.

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