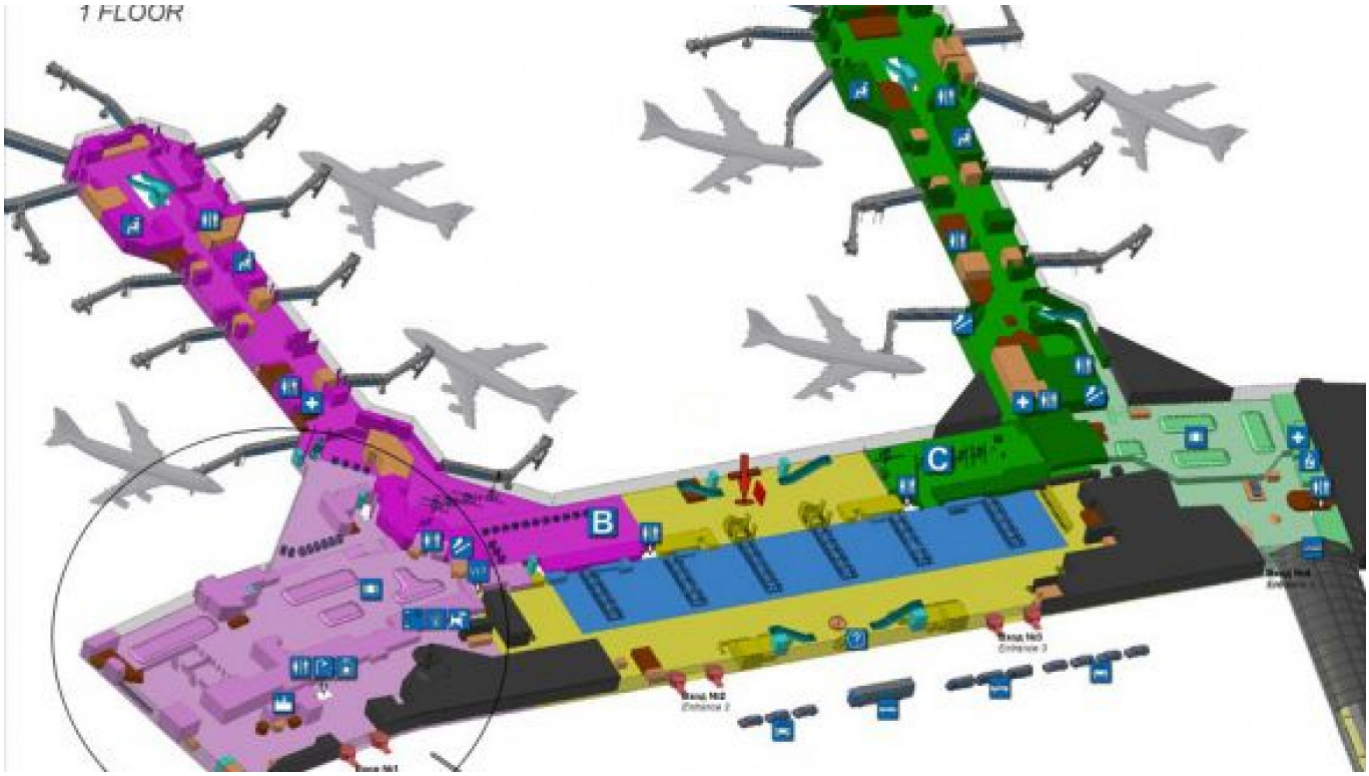
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Blast Kills 34 at Domodedovo

By Alexandra Odynova

January 24, 2011



A powerful explosion tore through the baggage claim area at the international arrivals hall of Moscow's Domodedovo Airport on Monday, killing at least 34 people and injuring about 170 others in what President Dmitry Medvedev called a terrorist attack.

The bomb, equivalent to at least 7 kilograms of TNT, went off at 4:32 p.m., the Investigative Committee said in a statement late Monday.

Unidentified officials, quoted by Russian news agencies, differed over whether the bomb was carried by a suicide bomber or went off in a suitcase.

Medvedev ordered all Moscow airports, the metro and other public transportation networks to be put on high alert and vowed to find and punish those behind the explosion.

"What happened shows all the laws that should have been enforced were far from correctly implemented. We need to examine this," a solemn-faced Medvedev said in televised remarks on Channel One.

He offered his condolences to the families of those killed and to the injured.

The president also postponed his trip to the World Economic Forum in Davos, where he was supposed to arrive Tuesday evening and speak at a plenary session Wednesday.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the blast.

State television showed footage of passengers busily moving inside the airport without any sign of panic. Several passengers confirmed that they saw no panic, even though broken glass littered the floor and injured passengers were being rushed to ambulances.

"It's very bad. It's 100 percent terrorism," Ariel, who flew in from Israel, said in an interview after arriving on an airport express train at Paveletsky Station about two hours after the blast. "I think I'm going back to Israel right now."

A YouTube video shot on a cell phone camera (see below) in the smoke-filled arrivals hall showed bodies lying on the floor. Several people in regular clothes, apparently passengers, walked around unrestrained, together with rescue workers and businesslike security officials. A man in a black suit stood with a baggage cart in the hall.

Airport personnel had to break down a brick wall to help passengers exit the baggage claim area, RIA-Novosti reported.

Planes continued to take off and land after the explosion. Sibir and Transaero, the biggest Russian airlines based at Domodedovo, said Monday evening that no flights had been affected.

The last deadly blasts in Moscow occurred March 29 when two female suicide bombers originating from the North Caucasus blew themselves up in the Moscow metro, killing 40 people and wounding 160 others. North Caucasus insurgents later claimed responsibility for the attacks.

The insurgents have targeted Moscow in several high-profile terrorist attacks since fall 1999.

But the Domodedovo blast was not necessarily perpetrated by North Caucasus insurgents, said Maxim Agarkov, a retired Interior Ministry officer who has worked in airport security.

"The attackers might have targeted a plane heading to Domodedovo, but the bomb went off too late," he said by telephone.

According to the airport's web site, passengers from flights from Cairo, Ashgabat, Tokyo and Dusseldorf were collecting their baggage at the moment of the blast.

Still, an unidentified law enforcement official told Interfax that three North Caucasus natives — suspected rebels living near Moscow — had been put on a national wanted list after Monday's explosion.

The official said investigators had linked the men to two suspected female suicide bombers, one of whom died in a largely unnoticed blast in a Moscow sports club on Dec. 31. No one but the woman died in the explosion. The second woman, a 24-year-old native of Chechnya, was arrested earlier this month in Volgograd on suspicion of illegally transporting explosives.

“It is possible that one of these three men blew himself up at Domodedovo,” the official told Interfax.

At Paveletsky Station, some passengers were convinced that the bombing was linked to the restive North Caucasus, where federal forces have fought two wars since 1994.

“I am not surprised,” said Andrei, who spent an hour at the gate waiting to deplane after arriving on a flight from Germany.

“What else do you expect after 15 years of civil war?” he said, referring to the military conflict in the North Caucasus.

After the attack, the Aeroexpress train offered free rides between the train station and Domodedovo Airport, while sympathetic Twitter users offered free rides to the airport and back. Interfax reported that taxi drivers at the airport had hiked prices to as much as 20,000 rubles ($670) for the 42-kilometer ride into the city. The trip usually costs about 2,500 rubles to the city center.

A Domodedovo employee spoke of the confusion and shock that settled over the airport in the moments after the explosion.

“At the very beginning we didn’t understand what was happening. When we did, it was already late,” said the employee, who spoke on condition of anonymity because she was not authorized to speak to the media.

The exact number of fatalities was unclear Monday night. The Emergency Situations Ministry reported on its web site that at least 34 people were dead and 168 were injured, including 74 who were hospitalized. But the National Anti-Terrorism Committee and Domodedovo Airport’s spokeswoman said at least 35 were dead.

The identities and nationalities of the dead were not immediately released. The Emergency Situations Ministry said on its web site that four foreigners had been identified among the injured: Diana Shtotts, 36, of Germany; Suzanna Fialova, 36, of Slovakia; and two Tajik citizens, Saidbek Iskadarov, 42, and Bakhtiyor Gafforiv, 29.

Also injured were Romano Rosario of Italy and Frederic Ortis of France, Interfax said, citing the Health and Social Development Ministry.

Shortly after the explosion, state television reported that dozens of ambulances were headed to the airport from Moscow and hospitals in the nearby town of Domodedovo. Mayor Sergei Sobyanin and Moscow region Governor Boris Gromov also rushed to the airport, together with investigators from the Federal Security Service, the Interior Ministry and the Investigative Committee.

Security was beefed up at Sheremetyevo and Vnukovo airports. No flights were canceled, but all passengers and luggage were thoroughly searched, passengers said in televised remarks.

Passengers are advised to arrive at Moscow airports extra early for their flights in the upcoming days. Airport checks will be stepped up, and police will expand their checks to include the people seeing off passengers and their bags as well, the Federal Air Transport

Agency said.

U.S. President Barack Obama and European leaders offered their sympathy and support over the bombing.

Domodedovo, which prides itself for being Moscow's most modern airport, is also its busiest, serving 22 million passengers last year. It was targeted by terrorists in August 2004 when two female suicide bombers from the North Caucasus boarded two planes there after illegally buying tickets from airport staff. The planes were blown up in midair, killing 90 people.

A total of 77 airlines offer regular flights to 241 Russian and international destinations from Domodedovo, which is also Russia's largest hub for hundreds of charter flights, according to the airport's web site.

Staff writer Alexander Bratersky contributed to this report.

The following video was taken by an unidentified eyewitness. (Warning: it contains disturbing content.)

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/01/24/blast-kills-34-at-domodedovo-a4454