

Transport Safety Boss Out After Bombing

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Gennady Kurzenkov was removed as head of the Federal Transportation Inspection Service on Tuesday as Prime Minister Vladimir Putin continued to mete out retribution for security failures leading up to the Jan. 24 suicide bombing at Domodedovo Airport.

Putin relieved Kurzenkov of his duties “at his own request,” according to a statement on the government web site Tuesday.

Kurzenkov was singled out as a scapegoat for the Domodedovo security failures on Jan. 27 when Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov said his dismissal had been proposed by Transport Minister Igor Levitin.

At the time of Ivanov’s comments, Kurzenkov said he had heard nothing about his impending ouster.

He joins four other Transportation Ministry officials fired by Levitin and four senior police

and security officials fired by President Dmitry Medvedev in the immediate aftermath of the bombing.

Kurzenkov's departure came a day after Chechen rebel leader Doku Umarov claimed responsibility for the blast, which killed 36 people and injured scores.

On Monday, Russian media reported a new government decree introducing a single universal set of rules for airport security to replace confusing and contradictory regulations.

All airports will have entry checkpoints with metal detectors and luggage screening systems, and a passport or driver's license will be required to enter the premises.

Kurzenkov is a decorated military pilot who enjoyed a distinguished Air Force career, rising to deputy commander of the Air Force and Air Defense in the Ural-Volga military district.

He was plucked from a plum job as deputy chief of the Yury Gagarin Air Force Academy to head the transportation watchdog in January 2007. In October 2008, he was transferred to head the Federal Air Transportation Agency, but returned to his post at the Federal Transportation Inspection Service in December 2009.

He gained notoriety in the role for the apparently cavalier use of the traffic privileges granted to officials. Pictures of his car driving in the wrong lane with a migalka, or flashing blue light, became a trope of the Russian blogosphere in late 2010.

In October he gave an interview to the web site Gazeta.ru in which he defended the use of the migalka as a necessary tool for reaching the scenes of serious incidents and government meetings.

Nor was he necessarily a great success in his civilian career. A Transportation Ministry source told Kommersant on Monday that there had been speculation about Kurzenkov's ouster for sometime because of the "low efficiency of his activities." Interfax cited an anonymous source who claimed that Kursenkov was outed for using agency funds to pay costs associated with his dissertation. The accusation could not be confirmed.

The Transportation Ministry has not named his successor.

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