The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Airline Delays Flight for Its Tardy Executive

By Alexandra Odynova

October 10, 2011



The Tatarstan airline acknowledged on Monday that its Kazan-Moscow flight was delayed for about an hour on Sept. 30 because the plane was waiting for a tardy senior executive.

Tatarstan transportation prosecutors said Friday that the airline faces a fine of up to 50,000 rubles ($1,500) after 68 passengers and the crew had to wait for the arrival of the airline's commercial director, Lazar Aliyev.

The delay might have never attracted the attention of prosecutors but for former Central Bank Deputy Chairman Sergei Alexashenko, who was on the plane and published an angry account on his LiveJournal blog.

Aliyev — whom Alexashenko described, using crude Russian slang, as an impolite person — "thinks that the airline where he works is his private property, and he greatly spoiled my impressions of my trip to Kazan, which were generally good," wrote Alexashenko, a senior

researcher with the Higher School of Economics. His trip to Kazan was arranged by the city's administration, and he met with local students.

Alexashenko also took several pictures of Aliyev, who was driven right up to the door of the plane in a minivan. Apparently annoyed by his camera, Aliyev pretended to be a foreigner, saying, "Do you speak English?" and accused Alexashenko of breaching his privacy.

"I had to reply in English, which I thankfully know. It turned out that he barely understands English, but speaks and understands Russian much better," said Alexashenko, who also serves as a board member of Aeroflot, Russia's biggest airline.

On Monday, the Tatarstan airline said the flight was delayed for "43 minutes," but added that it arrived at Sheremetyevo Airport only 26 minutes later than scheduled.

"The reason for the delay was apparently an urgent need to deliver company documents," the airline said in a statement. "The Tatarstan airline realizes that the mentioned reason cannot excuse the inconvenience caused to the passengers."

The airline called the incident "an exception" and promised to offer the passengers a discount on a future flight.

The incident is the latest violation of flight safety rules by VIP travelers. In June, an Aeroflot jet was delayed for an hour on orders from Irkutsk Governor Dmitry Mezentsev, who was running late for the flight. Other governors have also held up commercial flights.

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