

Transportation Ministry Officials to Be Questioned Over Vnukovo Crash

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Government officials from the Transportation Ministry will be questioned in a criminal investigation into a fatal plane crash that occurred at Vnukovo last month, the Investigative Committee said Thursday.

Five people were killed in the accident on Dec. 29, when a Red Wings Tu-204 returning from the Czech Republic with eight people on board overshot the runway and crashed at the edge of the airfield, scattering debris over a nearby highway.

As well as interviewing those at the Transportation Ministry responsible for overseeing all Tu-204 flights, the Investigative Committee will also check the Red Wings airline for its safety procedures, the committee said in a statement on its website.

Contrary to media reports and a statement from the Moscow-based Interstate Aviation Committee suggesting that the cause of the crash was a mechanical failure on landing, the Investigative Committee said that it was too early to determine the cause of the tragedy.

Investigators are also looking into whether the decision not to ground all Tu-204s and not to confiscate Red Wings' operating license in the wake of the crash was justified.

Aviation company Red Wings is owned by billionaire Alexander Lebedev, who says he is the victim of a Kremlin witch hunt because of his criticism of President Vladimir Putin and perceived support for the political opposition.

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