

Bilalov Investigated Over Tax Evasion During Hajj

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Russian Muslims, like those seen here praying at Moscow's central Mosque, go on hajj via the Najm-Tur agency. **Vladimir Filonov**

Investigators are conducting a preliminary check into whether Akhmed Bilalov, a former vice president of the Olympic Committee, could be implicated in a tax evasion scheme involving the pilgrimage, or hajj, of Russian Muslims to Mecca, Kommersant reported Wednesday.

The Interior Ministry is checking whether Bilalov, a former representative of the Council for Hajj and a member of the government commission for religious organizations, could have co-authored a scheme that allowed the Najm-Tur travel agency to evade 36 million rubles (\$1.1 million) in taxes between 2008 and 2010. The agency organizes the hajj of Muslims to Mecca, the most prominent holy place in Islam.

An unidentified spokesman for Bilalov declined to comment.

In early April, Bilalov, former chairman of North Caucasus Resorts' board of directors, was accused by investigators of spending corporate money on lavish trips to London and across Russia.

In February, President Vladimir Putin publicly scolded Bilalov over delays and cost overruns at the Krasnaya Polyana ski resort in Sochi. He was subsequently dismissed from his posts.

In late March investigators charged Najm-Tur CEO Ammar Khidzhdzhavi, who holds Russian and Jordanian citizenship, in the criminal probe. The Investigative Committee opened the criminal case in early March.

Khidzhdzhavi faces up to six years in prison if convicted.

According to the investigators, the travel agency's management deliberately understated its revenues in tax returns.

To gain extra profit, Khidzhdzhavi and his associates "illegally converted money received from hajjis into U.S. dollars according to the current rate, getting an additional 3 to 7 percent from it," according to the investigators, Interfax reported.

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