

Investigators Turn on Moscow's Domodedovo Airport

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Domodedovo's website boasts the status of Russia's largest airport by passenger turnover.

Privately owned Domodedovo Airport faced the latest in a series of legal battles Monday as Russian investigators opened several criminal cases against former senior executives over alleged security lapses in the run-up to a deadly 2011 bombing that killed 37 people.

The purported owners of Domodedovo Airport, Dmitry Kamenshchik and Valery Kogan, will be questioned in connection with new criminal cases launched against former managers Svetlana Trishina, Andrei Danilov and Vyacheslav Nekrasov, Russia's Investigative Committee said in a statement.

"The actions of the named individuals made the airport more vulnerable," the Investigative Committee said. "As part of the criminal case, the investigation will check information about whether Dmitry Kamenshchik and Valery Kogan are among the real owners of the airport."

A lucrative, privately owned business coy about publicly revealing its owners, Domodedovo has faced repeated investigations by law enforcement authorities over the last decade. Critics characterize the investigations as attempts to force a sale.

"There are certain interests that want to get their hands on this very liquid and highly profitable business," said Roman Gusarov, chief editor of aviation portal Avia.ru.

Last year, a Moscow court sentenced Islam and Ilez Yandiyev and Bashir Khamkhoyev to life imprisonment and Akhmed Yevloyev to 10 years in prison for their roles in the 2011 suicide attack in the arrivals hall of Domodedovo Airport in which 37 people were killed and 172 wounded.

Investigators have said that the attack was ordered by Islamic militants based in the North Caucasus leading an insurgency against Moscow.

If convicted of negligence, Domodedovo executives Trishina, the former head of Airport Management Company Limited; Danilov, the former head of Domodedovo Airport Airline Security; and Nekrasov, the former head of the airport complex, could each spend up to 10 years behind bars.

Domodedovo experienced raids by Russian security services in the wake of the 2011 attack and was criticized by then-President Dmitry Medvedev for its opaque ownership structure — but the airport remained in private hands and conflict over the issue appeared to have eased in recent years.

"Now it is possible it will all flare up again," according to Avia.ru's Gusarov.

Russian President Vladimir Putin will be informed about the investigation into Domodedovo, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Monday, the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

Domodedovo Airport's press service said in the early afternoon that they were preparing a response to the accusations, but had not yet released a statement by Monday evening.

The airport has grown rapidly in recent years, handling over 33 million passengers in 2014 compared to 22.3 million in 2010. In an October interview with Russian business daily Vedomosti the chairman of Domodedovo's board of directors, Dmitry Kamenshchik, said the airport was worth about \$8.6 billion.

Domodedovo's website boasts the status of Russia's largest airport by passenger turnover. It differs from Moscow's two other air transport hubs, Vnukovo and Sheremetyevo, because it is not state-owned.

Russian investigators have repeatedly expressed concerns over Domodedovo's ownership structure, which they claim is opaque, and said Monday that, as well as the named individuals, criminal cases could also be faced by "unidentified people from within the number of real owners."

Kamenshchik said last year that he was the sole beneficiary owner of Domodedovo but there are rumored to be other shareholders, including secretive billionaire Valery Kogan. Forbes magazine estimates Kamenshchik to be worth \$3.8 billion and values Kogan at \$2.5 billion —

listing both men as deriving their fortunes from Domodedovo Airport.

Domodedovo executives, who previously refused to comment on the airport's ownership structure, have always maintained that it does not violate any Russian laws.

Earlier in 2011, the pressure on Domodedovo's owners even took the form of a leaked sex tape in which Kogan was apparently pictured with two boys.

Domodedovo's holding company, DME, is registered on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus.

While most of the airport's infrastructure is owned directly by DME, some objects, including the runways that could be required in a national emergency, are leased by Domodedovo from the state.

State ownership of some of parts of the airport mean that the state takes the role of an investor, according to Andrei Rozhkov, a transportation analyst at Metropol brokerage in Moscow. "There is a conflict between the owners and the investors," he said.

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