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Co-Owner of Troubled VIM Airlines Reportedly Flees Russia

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Mikhail Japaridze / TASS

The co-owner of VIM Airlines, Rashid Mursekayev, has reportedly fled the country after investigators opened a case into the troubled airline.

Russian authorities have grounded VIM Airlines planes and placed it under outside crisis management because the company owes money for fuel deliveries and airport fees.

Hundreds of domestic and international passengers have been left stranded after the company canceled dozens of charter flights this week.

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The Investigative Committee has opened a fraud investigation into the indebted airline, but law enforcement reportedly could not reach Mursekayev and "all his phones have been shut off," Interfax earlier reported a law enforcement official as saying.

Mursekayev was invited by aviation officials to a meeting on Wednesday morning but failed to appear. A source familiar with the situation told the news agency Interfax that Mursekayev on Wednesday flew from Moscow's Vnukovo Airport to Turkey, likely to Istanbul.

Russian Transportation Minister Maxim Sokolov has said it is "pointless" for the government to bail out VIM Airlines since it has "virtually ceased operations."

President Vladimir Putin issued a formal reprimand to Sokolov on Wednesday for "poor performance" and also chided deputy prime minister Arkady Dvorkovich for neglecting the crisis, Vedomosti reported.

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