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Top Staff of Russian VIM Airlines Detained in Fraud Investigation

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Alexander Kochnev **Tatyana Belyakova / TASS**

Two top figures at Russia's tenth largest airline VIM Airlines have been detained after thousands of people were left stranded and investigators opened a fraud case.

The Investigative Committee said Thursday in an online statement that VIM Airlines general director Alexander Kochnev and chief accountant Yekaterina Panteleyeva had been detained.

VIM Airlines' fleet has been grounded and placed under outside crisis management after investigators opened a criminal case into the airline for owing money for fuel deliveries and airport fees.

Thousands of passengers were left stranded after the company delayed or canceled dozens of charter flights this week.

The Investigative Committee said it is working to establish the whereabouts of VIM Airlines' co-owner Rashid Mursekayev, who reportedly fled to Istanbul, Turkey, earlier this week.

President Vladimir Putin formally reprimanded Transportation Minister Maxim Sokolov on Wednesday for “poor performance” and chided Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich for neglecting the crisis.

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