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Kremlin Refuses to Comment on Azerbaijani Plane Crash Until Investigation Complete

By AFP

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The crash site of Azerbaijan Airlines Flight 8432 near the city of Aktau. **Isa Tazhenbayev / TASS**

The Kremlin said Friday that it would not comment on the deadly crash of an Azerbaijani passenger plane until an investigation into its causes was completed.

Azerbaijan Airlines Flight 8432 crashed near the city of Aktau in western Kazakhstan early Wednesday after veering off from a scheduled flight path to Grozny in Russia's republic of Chechnya. Kazakh authorities said 38 of the 67 people on board were killed.

"An investigation is underway, and until there are conclusions from that investigation, we do not believe we have the right to make any comments and we will not do so," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

The Embraer 190 aircraft was supposed to fly northwest from the Azerbaijani capital of Baku

to Grozny but instead diverted far off course across the Caspian Sea.

Azerbaijani media, citing unnamed government officials, reported Thursday that preliminary findings suggest the passenger plane was shot down by a Russian surface-to-air missile.

Azerbaijan Airlines said Friday that it was suspending flights to several Russian cities, "taking into account flight safety risks," after earlier saying it had stopped flights to Grozny and Makhachkala in the republic of Dagestan, which neighbors Chechnya.

Rasim Musabekov, an Azeri lawmaker, called on Russia to apologize for the incident.

"They have to accept this, punish those to blame, promise that such a thing will not happen again, express regrets and readiness to pay compensation," Musabekov told AFP in an interview. "We are waiting for Russia to do this."

He said the plane "was damaged in the sky over Grozny and asked to make an emergency landing," adding that "according to all the rules of aviation, they should have allowed this and organized it."

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Instead, the plane was not given permission to land at Grozny or nearby Russian airports and was "sent far away" across the Caspian Sea to Kazakhstan with "GPS switched off," Musabekov said.

Some aviation and military experts said the plane might have been accidentally shot by Russian air defense systems since it was flying in an area where Ukrainian drone activity had been reported.

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