

Azerbaijan Says Russia Pledged To Punish Those Responsible for Plane Crash

By [AFP](#)

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A man lays flowers to Azerbaijan's embassy in Moscow. **ALEXANDER NEMENOV / AFP**

Azerbaijan said on Monday that Moscow had promised to punish those responsible for the downing of an Azerbaijan Airlines plane that Baku says was shot at by Russian air defenses.

The AZAL Embraer 190 jet crash-landed in Kazakhstan on Dec. 25, killing 38 of the 67 people on board.

The incident prompted several airlines to cancel flights to Russia, including Israel's El Al, which announced Monday it was suspending flights to Moscow until the end of March.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has demanded that Moscow accept responsibility for mistakenly firing on the plane as it tried to make a scheduled landing at Grozny airport in southern Russia.

Russia has not confirmed that one of its air defense missiles hit the plane. However, President Vladimir Putin told Aliyev in a phone call over the weekend that the systems were active at the time and that he was sorry the incident took place in Russian airspace.

Azerbaijan's prosecutor general reported on Monday that the head of Russia's Investigative Committee had told Baku: "Intensive measures are being carried out to identify the guilty people and bring them to criminal responsibility."

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Russia has opened a criminal inquiry into the incident.

But it has not said whether it agrees that the plane was hit by one of its air defense missiles and has not itself said anything about finding or bringing any perpetrators to justice.

Aliyev had issued a rare forthright condemnation of Moscow — a close partner of Baku — on Sunday.

He said the plane was "hit by accident" but was angry that Russia had apparently tried to hide the cause of the crash.

Demanding that Putin admit responsibility, Aliyev also accused Russia of putting forward alternative theories that "clearly showed the Russian side wanted to cover up the issue."

Russia said Grozny, in the southern Russian republic of Chechnya, was being attacked by Ukrainian drones when the AZAL airliner approached to make its landing through thick fog.

Survivors have described hearing explosions outside the plane, which then diverted more than 400 kilometers (250 miles) across the Caspian Sea toward the Kazakh city of Aktau, where it crash-landed.

Kazakhstan said on Monday it had sent the plane's black boxes to Brazil, where Embraer is based, to be analyzed by the Aeronautical Accidents Investigation and Prevention Center, a unit of the Brazilian air force.

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