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Governors Face Deadline to Give Homes to Veterans

By Irina Filatova

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President Dmitry Medvedev shaking hands with World War II veterans who took part in the Battle of Stalingrad during a visit to Volgograd on Thursday. **Mikhail Klimentyev**

Nineteen regions are at risk of failing to provide free apartments to World War II veterans before a deadline coinciding with the 65th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany in May, the Regional Development Ministry said.

Governors in those regions, which include Leningrad, Stavropol and Udmurtia, face "very serious consequences" if they miss the May 1 deadline imposed by President Dmitry Medvedev, a Kremlin envoy said.

More than 60,000 veterans are lining up for the promised apartments, including 2,800 veterans who signed up for a waiting list by March 1, 2005, Regional Development Minister Viktor Basargin said at a meeting Thursday dedicated to preparations for the 65th anniversary.

About 59,000 veterans missed the 2005 deadline but are eligible for apartments under a second list being compiled by the government, Basargin said.

Medvedev promised in May 2008 to provide housing by the 65th anniversary of the end of the war for all World War II veterans, as well as family members of those already dead who were on the waiting list before March 1, 2005.

Medvedev said in his state-of-the-nation address in November that providing apartments for the veterans, regardless of whether their names were on the waiting list, was a key task for the government.

But Basargin warned that developers in 19 regions might not meet the deadline to complete apartment buildings where the government has bought homes for the veterans.

"We've found a number of possible delays to the deadlines for completing the houses," he said, RIA-Novosti reported.

"The Udmurtia republic and the Stavropol and Leningrad regions are causing the biggest concerns," he told Medvedev, who chaired the meeting in Volgograd, the site of the Battle of Stalingrad, widely seen as a turning point in World War II.

Medvedev promised that all veterans who were on the waiting list before the 2005 deadline would get housing. He also said the list of those who missed the deadline would be completed soon.

Ilya Klebanov, presidential envoy to the Northwestern Federal District, which includes the Leningrad region, hinted that regional officials who failed to meet Medvedev's May 1 deadline might get fired.

"The consequences will be very serious for leaders who don't fulfill this task, even though I realize its complexity," Klebanov said.

He singled out Leningrad Governor Valery Serdyukov as a regional official who must speed work on providing apartments.

Serdyukov denied that his region was experiencing delays, firing off a telegram on Friday to Basargin, Klebanov and Konstantin Chuichenko, head of the Kremlin's control department, that darkly suggested Medvedev had been given incorrect information.

"The governor expressed his confusion regarding unreliable or false information being provided to the president of the Russian Federation," the Leningrad regional administration said in a statement published on its web site.

The statement said 78 out of the 317 veterans and their families included on the region's waiting list before March 1, 2005, had not received apartments but would get them by April 27.

Serdyukov also promised that 167 veterans and families who had missed the 2005 deadline would get apartments this year or in 2011.

"We have no serious concerns about not being able to meet the deadline for providing

housing," regional administration spokeswoman Yulia Slutskaya told The Moscow Times.

In Arkhangelsk, another of the 19 problem regions mentioned by Basargin, 30 veterans on the 2005 list are waiting for apartments, regional administration spokeswoman Svetlana Antufyeva said.

She said the region was not providing new apartments but depositing 1.035 million rubles ($35,000) into veterans' bank accounts for an apartment on the secondary market.

She said some veterans had balked at the regional program, demanding the homes without the hassle of having to go apartment-hunting. "The veterans said, 'Give us the keys to the apartment,'" she said by telephone.

Social workers intervened, and now only three veterans are refusing to use the Arkhangelsk program, she said.

The 30 veterans who have not made a final decision on which apartment to buy still have a month to do so before the May 1 deadline, she noted.

Basargin said 21 of Russia's 83 regions have already provided apartments to all veterans on the 2005 waiting list.

Russia will celebrate the 65th anniversary of the Allied victory over Nazi Germany on the Victory Day holiday on May 9.

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