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Putin Defends State Support for Industry

By The Moscow Times

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NIZHNY NOVGOROD — Prime Minister Vladimir Putin on Tuesday defended his use of state money to prop up struggling companies during the global financial crisis, saying Russia had no future if it allowed its industry to die.

"We often hear people say: Why bother with our own production when we can buy everything abroad — planes, ships, cars and even some weapons?" Putin told activists from his ruling United Russia party.

"Yes, we can, by selling oil and gas. We will even save money," Putin said. "But I am deeply convinced that the de-industrialization of Russia is a dead end."

Putin's comments indicate that Russia will keep spending high to help growth and soothe social tensions ahead of the 2012 presidential elections.

Putin promised to allocate 14 billion rubles ($456.6 million) to extend into 2011 a car scrappage scheme that helped Russian automakers survive the crisis.

But Putin criticized the head of truck maker KamAZ, Sergei Kogogin, saying truck drivers he met recently in the Far East had complained about the quality of KamAZ trucks.

"I promised to the guys that I will take their complaints to you personally. I am now doing it publicly," Putin said.

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