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Ufa Construction Crane Seized, 4th This Year

By Alexey Eremenko

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Cranes towering over a construction site. In Ufa, a crane operator went on strike by taking his equipment hostage. **M. Stulov**

If you can't collect your wages, seize a construction crane.

That seems to be the sentiment among some workers in Bashkortostan's capital, Ufa, where cranes have been seized at least four times this year.

In the most recent incident, a construction worker seized control of a crane this week and declared a hunger strike Thursday because he and his unit were not paid for a contract.

“I spent the whole night in the cab. They turned off the light here; it was cold,” Gafur Gabitov said, Interfax reported. "Yesterday the city prosecutor came, asking me to get down and promising to take the case under his control, but I don't believe it."

He came down Thursday afternoon after the local district prefect promised to “solve the

matter with the wages." It was unclear when the workers might be paid and whether Gabitov would continue the hunger strike until they are.

Gabitov, who climbed from the cab to the crane's arm for a while Thursday, said earlier that day that the same prefect had threatened to fine him for halting construction work at the site.

Gabitov says the construction company, SMU 1 Monolitstroi, owes him and 30 of his men more than 1 million rubles ($32,000) of salary for two months of work in 2009.

This is the fourth incident of this kind in Ufa this year. In early May, a 45-year-old mason who had not received his salary since October seized control of a crane, forcing the employer to pay him 100,000 rubles ($3,200).

The same month, construction worker Ilya Melnikov twice seized control of a crane to force the employer to cover a debt of 400,000 rubles to his colleagues, RIA-Novosti said. Local police said Melnikov himself was not owed anything and acted out of solidarity for his colleagues.

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