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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin Out-Earns Medvedev, Again

By Alexandra Odynova

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's income rose last year to $180,000, again surpassing that of President Dmitry Medvedev but far behind the $13 million declared by the wife of First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, according to income declarations released Monday.

Medvedev earned 3.3 million rubles ($120,000) last year, while Putin raked in 5 million rubles ($180,000) — a boost of more than 1 million rubles from 2009, when he reported 3.9 million rubles.

Officials and their families are releasing declarations for the third year in a row, but anti-corruption experts said the disclosures still amounted to little more than a publicity stunt because officials do not have to report their spending and face no punishment for lying. The declarations also do not provide sources of income, so it is unclear why Putin's earnings grew.

Still, the declarations contain eye-grabbing trivia, revealing, for example, that Putin's wife suddenly started earning money last year. Lyudmila Putina reported a housewife's income

of 582 rubles in 2009, but made 146,000 rubles in 2010.

Putina, who is rarely seen in the public eye, raising questions about how she spends her time, listed no assets, the same as she did the previous year.

"It's clear that the sum is laughable and has nothing to do with Lyudmila Putina's real income," Stanislav Belkovsky, an independent political analyst, said by telephone Monday.

He suggested that Putina might have been paid for organizing charity events, while Putin's own income might have grown because the improving economic situation might have boosted his official salary and bonuses.

Putin's spokesman could not be reached for comment Monday afternoon.

First lady Svetlana Medvedeva, known for her charity activities, reported no earnings in 2010 and said she still drives an old 1999 Volkswagen Golf car.

Putin reported owning three Russian-made vehicles — two vintage Volga sedans and a Niva — as well as an old Skif trailer inherited from his father. Putin also has an apartment covering a modest 77 square meters. He declared the same property in previous years as well.

Medvedev has a sole car, a vintage Pobeda, and co-owns a 367-square-meter apartment with his wife.

The ruling tandem has little compared with some of their subordinates, however.
The Cabinet's top earner, Natural Resources Minister Yury Trutnev, reported an income of 114 million rubles ($4 million).

But even he was trumped by Shuvalov's wife, businesswoman Olga Shuvalova, who declared 373 million rubles ($13.3 million). Her husband added another 14 million rubles to the family budget, and the couple own seven cars, including a Jaguar.

Income declarations have been published since 2009 as part of a Medvedev-ordered campaign to crack down on corruption. But so far only one official has been fired for providing incorrect information: Army General Viktor Gaidukov was sacked by Medvedev in September for not listing all his bank accounts.

The Prosecutor General's Office reported discovering 41,000 violations in declarations submitted in 2009. Some 6,000 officials were reprimanded over them, but only Gaidukov faced harsher sanctions.

Moreover, officials do not have to report their spending — which can exceed earnings by several dozen times. Even Putin and Medvedev are regularly seen riding in luxury limousines and sporting wristwatches worth tens of thousands of dollars.

Last month, Putin ordered the State Duma to draft a bill requiring officials to disclose spending, but no bill has surfaced since.

Russia accepted the obligation to look into officials' incomes in 2003, when it signed the UN Anti-Corruption Convention. But, incidentally, it has refused to ratify a chapter of the

convention about cracking down on bureaucrats' illegally obtained assets or spending that they cannot account for.

By personally submitting declarations, Putin and Medvedev indicate to bureaucracy that the move is mandatory, corruption analyst Kirill Kabanov said by telephone. But he added that the effort is not effective because it is not enforced.

"The executive and law enforcement bodies are merged in the same corrupt bureaucracy system," said Kabanov, who heads the nongovernmental National Anti-Corruption Committee.

Yelena Panfilova, head of Transparency International in Russia, said declarations that exclude spending give "only a feeling of transparency" to the public.

Kabanov said declaring expenses would be a vital move because it would pave the way for regulations allowing prosecution of officials with murky incomes and the confiscation of illegally obtained assets.

But Panfilova said even this would not be enough. While the measure would "add some more transparency, it won't answer the main question" of where the money for Jaguars, wristwatches and other expensive property comes from, she said.

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