

Duma Approves Bribe Bill

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A proposal to fine corrupt officials for up to 100 times the size of a bribe survived a crucial second reading in the State Duma on Tuesday, Itar-Tass said.

The bill, proposed by President Dmitry Medvedev in February as part of his anti-corruption crusade, sets up a four-tier system of fines for graft depending on the size of the bribes.

The lowest category, applicable to bribes under 25,000 rubles (\$880), introduces fines of 12 to 60 times the bribe size. The top-tier covers graft cases upward of 1 million rubles (\$35,500), which would carry fines of 80 to 100 times the amount of the bribe, but not more than 500 million rubles.

The bill also allows prosecutors to pursue charges against middlemen in graft cases and alleged bribe-taking foreign nationals based abroad.

The fines will complement jail terms, not replace them, which dismisses fears that the new practice will allow rich offenders to buy their way out of conviction, the report said. Corrupt officials may be jailed for up to 15 years for accepting bribes.

No date for the third and last hearing was announced Tuesday. The bill will have to be approved by the Federation Council and signed into law by Medvedev after passing the Duma.

Sixty percent of graft cases investigated in 2010 fall under the smallest of the four bribe categories, while only 3 percent qualify for top tier bribery, Garry Minkh, presidential envoy to the Duma, told RIA-Novosti on Tuesday.

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