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Far East Eyes Plane Assembly

By The Moscow Times

November 22, 2011

Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov has backed proposals for in-country assembly of an iconic Canadian light aircraft in a bid to tackle the Far East's aviation headaches.

Shuvalov backed plans to bolt together the 19-seater De Havilland Twin Otter passenger aircraft during a visit to the Progress aviation company — based in Arsenev, outside Vladivostok — on Tuesday, Interfax reported citing a statement from Shuvalov's office.

The government of the Primorye region is considering assembly of the planes at the aviation firm, which currently specializes in production of military helicopters, in an effort to address a deficit of air links for remote communities in the Far East.

The Twin Otter was first developed by De Havilland Canada in the 1960s. British Columbia-based Viking Air, which has acquired the rights to the design, launched the new series 400 model in 2007.

Originally designed for regional routes in the Canadian north and easily fitted with skis or

floats for landing on water or snow, the aircraft earned a reputation for reliability in harsh conditions.

In July last year, Vityaz Avia acquired two of the aircraft and signed a memorandum of understanding with Viking for final assembly under license. Production is set to start at a new special economic zone near the Volga city of Ulyanovsk in 2013.

It is unclear how the arrangement with Vityaz would affect the plans for Progress. Neither Russian company was immediately available for comment Tuesday.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/11/22/far-east-eyes-plane-assembly-a10935