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Hackers Crash Site Promoting Putin's Election Web Cameras

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Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's project to install web cameras at polling stations nationwide in time for the March presidential election faced a setback Tuesday after a web site created for public discussion of the idea was paralyzed by a hacker attack.

The site, webvybory2012.ru, crashed overnight amid a denial of service attack.

"It seems that someone doesn't want the task set by the government to be resolved in the near future," said Naum Marder, a deputy communications and press minister, Itar-Tass reported.

Putin first aired the plan Thursday during his annual live call-in show in an effort to dispel worries that the March vote might be rigged. The Dec. 4 State Duma elections were dogged by accusations of mass violations, which have triggered the largest opposition protests since Putin ascended to power 12 years ago.

"I propose setting up web cameras at all the country's polling stations. They should work 24 hours, day and night, so that all sorts of falsifications can be completely dismissed," Putin said.

On Friday, Putin issued orders to the Finance Ministry, the Communications and Press Ministry and the Central Elections Commission to draw up a plan of action to ensure that each of Russia's roughly 95,000 polling stations is equipped with up to three web cameras by Feb. 15.

But government officials have questioned whether such a plan is feasible, with many reacting coolly at a Monday meeting of the project's expert advisory council.

"There aren't 300,000 cameras in the whole of Russia," said Ilya Massukh, also a deputy communications and press minister, Kommersant reported.

"Thank God there's no Christmas in China," he joked.

Observers also criticized the project's hefty 15 billion ruble ($470 million) preliminary price tag and cautioned that such an overload of information could bring down Russia's Internet.

This is not the first time a Putin-sponsored surveillance program has met with criticism. Some people whose homes burned down in 2010 summer wildfires said cameras set up to monitor construction work were pointed at empty fields and complained that their replacement houses were substandard.

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