# Election Watchers Create IT Windfall

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Rallies against election fraud delivered an unforeseen bonus of at least $137 million to IT manufacturers such as Lenovo and Fujitsu, as the government moves full steam ahead to ensure online monitoring of the March presidential vote, an official said Friday.

The Communications and Press Ministry shortlisted "primarily" Lenovo and Fujitsu to supply some 100,000 personal computers — one for each polling station — as part of the government's effort to allow people to watch elections via the Internet, Deputy Minister Ilya Massukh said. The effort also stipulates delivery of two web cameras for every polling station, but Massukh declined to name the manufacturers.

Planeloads from China and Taiwan and truckloads from a Fujitsu plant in Germany will start arriving Monday, Massukh said.

"In terms of the number of computers and their gigabytes, the project is unrivaled in the world," he said at a news conference, apparently implying deliveries to a single customer over a tight timeline. "Not a single Russian assembler is able to make a decent amount of this

equipment in the time we required."

Deliveries are starting after a testing commission worked through the New Year's holidays, which ended last week, to select the most reliable PCs and cameras for the type of service they will provide, Massukh said. Shipments from Asia will be on their way to Russia by Jan. 23, the day of the Chinese New Year.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin ordered web cameras to be installed at polling stations following the first of two rallies where staggering crowds of Muscovites last month protested against ballot-stuffing and other vote-rigging at the Dec. 4 elections to the State Duma. Cameras will feed images to a computer at the station that will upload the video to a web site that, the ministry expects, will draw at least 20 million people wanting to keep a watchful eye on election officials, Massukh said.

Detractors have said the measure, which will cost 26 billion rubles ($838 million) — to pay mostly for the laying of transmission lines — still leaves a lot of room for abuse. The federal budget and Rostelecom, the government's contractor for the project, will split the costs.

Procurement of 100,000 personal computers is "quite large" for a one-time deal, said Mikako Kitagawa, an analyst at Gartner, a U.S.-based information technology research company. It would measure almost 3 percent of the total number of PCs shipped to Russia in the third quarter of last year, she said.

On a global scale the equipment supplies are not impressive, compared with worldwide PC shipments of 353 million units last year, as estimated by Gartner. But they could provide a backstop for the world's slowing PC market, in which shipments increased a mere 0.5 percent last year as consumers looked more to multimedia tablets such as the iPad.

"Our suppliers are opening separate assembly lines for the contract," Massukh said. "Usually, January provides for a lull in sales."

Coming in at this sluggish time, the government was able to win a discount, he said without specifying its size. Of the federal budget's 13 billion ruble contribution to the project, a quarter will pay for the PCs, cameras and Internet servers.

The Moscow offices of Lenovo and Fujitsu declined comment Friday. A spokeswoman for Fujitsu only confirmed that the company is participating in the project.

The Communications and Press Ministry and Rostelecom initially planned to buy only laptops but couldn't find that many on the market, Massukh said. That's why Fujitsu will supply 25,000 desktop computers, while Samsung will deliver as many monitors from its Russian plant near Kaluga.

Laptops are lighter and smaller, which makes them easier to deliver, Massukh said. He declined to name the other suppliers.

Spokespeople for Samsung in Moscow requested e-mailed questions but didn't respond Friday.

Massukh said the servers will have a total disk capacity of 5.4 million gigabytes, or double

what major international telecoms operator AT&T uses per day. About 247 years' worth of video footage will be filmed by the cameras throughout the day, dwarfing YouTube's daily average upload volume of about four years' worth of video.