

Primorye Officials Face Heat After Hong Kong Trip

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A luxurious hotel in Hong Kong

Investigators have detained three officials in Vladivostok on suspicion of spending state funds on a lavish vacation in Hong Kong.

Searches are still being conducted at the Primorye region administration building and suspects' homes for information on others involved in the scandal, a local Investigative Committee official told RBK daily on Saturday.

The officials, identified only as an adviser to the head of the Primorye administration, the deputy head of the local housing fund and his assistant, reportedly spent 250,000 rubles (\$7,700) relaxing in the Southeast Asian city after receiving budget money to visit an exhibition in March, the business newspaper reported.

A criminal case has been opened on corruption charges, which carry a maximum sentence of six years' jail time or a fine of up to 500,000 rubles.

Huge budget flows have been channeled to Vladivostok from state coffers in recent years as the city prepares to host the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in September. A new ministerial post has even been created to oversee development of Russia's Far East.

Volgograd officials caused similar controversy in April after newly inaugurated Governor Sergei Bozhenov flew to Italy in a chartered jet with 45 members of the local legislature at a reported cost of 70,000 rubles per person.

Although criminal charges were never brought, observers questioned the trip's stated goal of showcasing Volgograd's economic potential, as Italian businesses were closed for Easter weekend at the time.

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