

Ingush Ski Slope Opens Without Snow

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Yevkurov, right, with Tyagachyov, left, cutting a ribbon Wednesday to mark the opening of the Armkhi ski resort.

After months of delays, Ingushetia's first ski slope has finally opened.

But no skiing took place when Ingush leader Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and former Olympic Committee chief Leonid Tyagachyov opened the 1,200-meter-long slope in the Caucasus mountain resort of Armkhi, news reports said late Wednesday.

Skiers who arrived from neighboring republics for the opening could test the chairlift but couldn't go down the slope due to a lack of snow, the Kavkazsky Uzel news site reported.

Timur Bokov, an aide to Yevkurov, said that snow had fallen recently but that most of it had melted away, according to the news site.

Photos posted on the [Ingush government website](#) showed Yevkurov riding up the lift wearing a ski suit but regular shoes and no skis.

The ground under the chairlift was covered with a thin layer of snow, while trees and surrounding slopes had no snow on them.

The opening had originally been planned for December but was postponed several times because of unusually warm weather. Wednesday's temperature in Armkhi, which lies 1,500 meters above sea level, was 15 degrees Celsius, Kavkazsky Uzel said.

One of the North Caucasus' most volatile regions, Ingushetia regularly sees clashes between Islamist rebels and security forces. Just last weekend, seven rebels were reportedly killed in an operation in mountainous territory near the border with Chechnya.

Yevkurov has praised the resort as an important image-booster for his republic and has promised to spend some 27 billion rubles (\$900 million) to develop a sprawling full-year resort stretching east to the border with Chechnya.

The resort's location has caused concern because it is close to Georgia and inside the country's border zone, which is accessible only with special permits. Most Western countries advise their citizens against traveling to the region because of security concerns.

Yevkurov has said that the resort would be safe and that he aims to attract local tourists first and foremost.

Armkhi is part of an ambitious plan devised under former President Dmitry Medvedev to develop tourism in the troubled North Caucasus. The government hopes to one day attract up to 10 million visitors per year.

North Caucasus Resorts, the company in charge of the overall development, has been hit by a leadership crisis, however, after its president, Akhmed Bilalov, was forced to resign after criticism from President Vladimir Putin.

In neighboring Chechnya, strongman Ramzan Kadyrov recently unveiled his own ambitious plans to develop a \$500 million winter-sports complex in the mountain village Veduchi.

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