

Medvedev Addresses Duma at Noon (Live Blog)

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Moscow Times reporter Anatoly Medetsky provided a live blog of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's visit Wednesday to the State Duma, where he recapped the Cabinet's activities for the past year and offered an account of his upcoming plans.

3:45 p.m.: Medvedev wrapped up his Duma appearance after a closing speech where he remarked on the speeches by the faction leaders. That's it for this blog. Thank you for joining us, and look for our upcoming expanded coverage of the speech.

3:42 p.m.: Vladimir Vasiliyev, who heads the United Russia faction, said the faction is preparing a proposal to soften the rule on zero-tolerance to alcohol for motorists. He said

police alcohol gauges have a margin of error.

3:39 p.m.: Liberal Democratic Party leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky said the government shouldn't stop at going only after Akhmed Bilalov, who is accused of wrongdoing in his former role as one of the people in charge of preparing for 2014 Sochi Olympics. He called for sending more people to Magadan, one of the former gulag centers, if they break the law as part of Sochi preparations.

3:37 p.m.: Backing up for one moment, Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov lashed out at the government for failing to wean the economy off the dependence on the export of natural resources.

3:33 p.m.: Just Russia faction leader Nikolai Levichev lambasted the perpetual talk about the need to improve the conditions for business. He said the talk doesn't appear to be bearing any fruit, considering recent capital outflow numbers.

“I am quite fed up with the mantras about creating a favorable investment climate,” he said.

He also lamented that the farming sector is the responsibility of a Cabinet minister who doesn't have first-hand experience in the business, apparently referring to Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich.

“It's unlikely that the pulse of the rural life is something that can be felt by a city person for whom a chair is the only four-legged thing he has ever seen,” Levichev said.

2:46 p.m.: Lawmakers balked at the chance to give Medvedev an extended grilling over after he fielded 12 questions.

“Enough,” a chorus of voices called out after Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin asked if the deputies wanted to continue.

Medvedev said he was ready to go on.

Duma faction leaders are now taking turns to comment on the Cabinet's performance, starting with Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov.

2:41 p.m.: The Cyprus banking debacle didn't affect Russian state agencies and corporations and a “considerable” portion of private companies, Medvedev said. “I have purposely held several meetings on the subject,” he said.

Medvedev had earlier acknowledged that the Russian government had links to Cypriot bank accounts, and his remarks on Wednesday appeared aimed at soothing critics who had expressed fears that the Cypriot government's need to bail out the local economy could cost Russia.

2:28 p.m.: Medvedev said he would not fire Education and Science Minister Dmitry Livanov for using obscene language, which was caught on tape, and accusations that his attempts to streamline higher education have failed.

"I don't think you expect me to agree to this," he said to a deputy's suggestion to oust Livanov. "A minister isn't a ruble that appeals to everybody."

He said few education ministers — or health ministers, for that matter — have received positive feedback from the State Duma because of the complexity of the issues in their fields of work.

1:52 p.m.: Medvedev has wrapped up his speech and began taking questions from deputies.

1:50 p.m.: Medvedev said Russia saw an increase in the number of traffic accidents last year, and he wondered aloud why.

"There are more cars, but is it also that we have become less polite?" he said. "If we have become less polite, then we need to decide on forced lessons of politeness."

He appeared to be referring to prison sentences. Some Duma deputies met his comments with cheers, calling out, "Right!"

1:45 p.m.: The government is aware that many Russians are unhappy about the quality of housing maintenance services, especially given that the amount of money that they are being charged is on the rise, Medvedev said.

The prime minister appears to be trying to soothe a large portion of the population that is irate over utilities costs, which are increasing as the government tries to bring the traditionally subsidized sector into line with actual costs.

1:33 p.m.: Tackling another hot-button issue, the prime minister said Russia is capable of taking care of its orphans even though the authorities stripped 44,000 parents of custody of their children last year.

Russia banned U.S. parents from adopting Russian children from the start of this year, saying

that Americans were not safeguarding the rights of the children. The ban, however, is widely seen as a knee-jerk reaction to Washington's decision in December to blacklist Russian officials implicated in human rights violations.

1:25 p.m.: Medvedev has offered a spending alert. He warned that the budget will be under a strain in the near term. "The opportunities for building up budget revenues will be limited in the near future," he said.

1:10 p.m.: The Cabinet approved a program for the development of the Far East after having to cut the amount of funding the program originally sought, Medvedev said. "A penny saved is a penny earned," he said.

The plan, which got the green light on Tuesday, gives priority to such sectors as transport and energy, he said, adding that he was ready to consider a special law on the development of the vast area.

1:03 p.m.: The government is drafting legislation to give tax breaks for the development of oil and gas fields in East Siberia and pump high-viscosity oil, Medvedev said. The parliament will hopefully pass these laws during the spring session, he said.

1:01 p.m.: Trains carried 6.6 percent more passengers last year than the previous year, Medvedev said. Such traffic growth spurs the development of railway-related industry. The Tikhvinsky Railcar Plant, one of the biggest in Europe, started operation last year.

12:55 p.m.: Medvedev said the country made big strides in building roads in the Far East for the APEC forum last September. He said Moscow and its surroundings remain an area clogged with traffic, and the government is taking steps to rectify the situation.

Moscow traffic jams are notoriously bad. In fact, a study released earlier this month found that Moscow's traffic is the worst in the world, with a trip that should take one hour during peak periods actually taking 2 hours and 14 minutes on average. Read our report [here](#).

12:47 p.m.: The crop harvest last year was 25 percent less than in 2011, Medvedev said. "The weather doesn't treat us well," he said, adding that the government is allocating an additional 42 billion rubles (\$1.3 billion) this year to support farmers.

12:41 p.m.: Russia's 27 special economic zones are a “good mechanism” for developing the economy, Medvedev said.

12:37 p.m.: Russia needs to improve the environment in higher education, Medvedev said. The Soviet Union had half as many higher learning institutions as Russia has now, but its population was double the size of Russia's.

Observers have been waiting for Medvedev to mention education as calls mount for the dismissal of Education and Science Minister Dmitry Livanov.

12:31 p.m.: By the way, you can watch the speech live on the Duma's website [here](#).

12:29 p.m.: As Medvedev continues talking about the economy, he said no other country in the world has raised salaries for public sector workers lately, as many leading economic powers are struggling with economic woes. He also said more Russians are receiving high-tech medical assistance now.

12:23 p.m.: Building kindergartens is important, Medvedev said, adding that waiting lists have shortened lately.

12:22 p.m.: Medvedev pointed out that the country's birth rate grew last year. There was applause as he trotted out the numbers, saying women gave birth to almost 2 million babies last year, or 102,000 more babies than in the previous year.

12:20 p.m.: Medvedev said the Russian financial system is stable and inflation relatively low.

12:14 p.m.: Medvedev has opened his speech with a review of the Russian economy.

Interestingly, the Duma hall was silent when he walked onto the podium. Medvedev started to speak after being given a short introduction by Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin.

12:05 p.m.: Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov has lashed out at the leak of a closed-door government meeting as “unethical.”

“Putin asked for the camera to be turned off,” Peskov said, according to Interfax. “It's unethical to publish the closed portion of the meeting.”

He added that the Kremlin intended to investigate the leak and might ban LifeNews journalists from covering Kremlin events.

12 p.m.: Medvedev has begun speaking in the Duma.

11:53 a.m.: Just minutes before Medvedev enters the Duma, a video has been leaked to LifeNews showing President Vladimir Putin scolding senior government officials for their poor performances during a closed-door meeting that he chaired in Kalmykia on Tuesday.

The video and the timing of its release raises the specter that Cabinet ministers and governors might be fired.

“How are we working?” Putin rants in the [video](#) after asking journalists to turn off the cameras. “The quality of the work is contemptible.”

The meeting was dedicated to a nationwide effort of resettling people living in dilapidated homes. The effort is the focus of one of Putin's key policy decrees, which he issued right after his inauguration in May.

Putin said in the video footage that if the Cabinet and governors don't comply with his decrees, the logical conclusion will be that either Putin or they are not doing their jobs well and someone will have to step down. “I am leaning toward the latter option,” he said, referring to the possible dismissals.

Among the Cabinet ministers who attended the meeting were Finance Minister Anton Siluanov, Economic Development Minister Andrei Belousov and Regional Development Minister Igor Slyunyayev.

10 a.m.: The annual speech, which prime ministers have given since 2009, comes as the country teeters on the brink of a recession, and the price of oil — a key export commodity — has taken a dip.

Medvedev, who is scheduled to speak for 1 1/2 hours, will also field questions and then listen to comments from Duma faction leaders. The entire Cabinet will attend the event as well, with the exception of some ministers who are away on trips.

President Vladimir Putin gave rather neutral-sounding approval to Medvedev's performance earlier this week, saying his record for that past year "generally wasn't bad."

Medvedev's spokeswoman Natalia Timakova said the prime minister was "ready for criticism" at the Duma.

☒ Medvedev is set to face calls to fire Education and Science Minister Dmitry Livanov from the Communist and A Just Russia factions.

Several topless young women rallied in front of the Education and Science Ministry on Tuesday demanding Livanov's ouster in a protest resembling those by Femen, the Ukrainian feminist movement. Femen said they had nothing to do with the rally, Gazeta.ru reported.

In the Duma, United Russia, which is led by Medvedev, is expected to ask the prime minister questions about battling poverty, developing pre-school education and supporting cattle farming and bakeries, among other things.

The Communists will want Medvedev to expand on issues like pension reform and the development of Siberia and the Far East.

A Just Russia will press him on the future of residential construction, education and the consequences of the country's entry into the World Trade Organization last August.

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