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Putin Blasts Cabinet for Poor Performance

By Anatoly Medetsky

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President Vladimir Putin

President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday berated the Cabinet for poor execution of his landmark decrees where he sought to make good on his campaign promises.

He started out a Kremlin meeting by acknowledging several achievements, but then poured cold water on the ministers for most of his speech.

The meeting was to review how Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's Cabinet worked to implement the decrees that Putin signed on the day of his return as president last May.

"It's understandable that it took time to appoint the Cabinet and get this quite complicated mechanism underway," Putin said, referring to the implementation of the decrees. "But now is the time to slog away in order to achieve the goals that we set before ourselves."

Putin endorsed the Cabinet about two weeks after his inauguration. His decrees seek

to increase government support for families, health care and education and streamline bureaucracy to spur economic growth, among other things.

As the Cabinet's successes, Putin on Tuesday listed "good demographic metrics," greater allowances for well-performing students, higher real incomes and increased salaries for school teachers.

He then adopted a harsher tone.

Putin accused ministers of extending inadequate support to regional authorities in implementing the decrees. Doctors staffing outpatient clinics and ambulances have largely not received the promised additional payouts of upward of 3,000 rubles ($100) because the local governments had no federally-approved procedure of dispensing the money, Putin said.

In another barb, he said the Cabinet did not back with sufficient funding the program it recently approved to develop the Far East.

"The question is why you approved the document if it's not clear how it will be implemented. It won't do to work for the sake of appearance," Putin said, according to a transcript of his speech on the Kremlin website. "Why are we deceiving ourselves?"

He also lashed out at inefficient government services, officials that manipulate numbers to make for rosy performance reports, and delays in implementing the decrees.

Putin also noted that he would not accept complaints that the worsening global and domestic economy hampered progress on the decrees. "We need to do everything we planned," he said.

Medvedev did not sound offended by the upbraiding.

"The goals stated in the presidential decrees, which were signed one year ago to the day, are really very ambitious and very complicated," Medvedev said at the meeting. "We'll have to work very hard to achieve them, a point that Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin] made absolutely well."

Medvedev continued by saying that various branches of government must help each other and use all available means in moving toward the goals.

"The existing shortcomings must be remedied — and again, in a consolidated, collaborative way," he said.

On a more practical note, Medvedev said he supported a call to give one more year to Russians who are still undecided about their pension savings. People now have until next year to decide whether they will deposit a portion of their pension contributions with asset management companies, or make them part of the government's Pension Fund.

He also said he was confident the government would meet the goals on building more kindergartens. The federal budget is giving regional authorities a total of 50 billion rubles ($1.61 billion) this year for this sort of construction, he said.

Wrapping up the meeting, Putin again needled the Cabinet, saying it took its time in following his orders.

"Many things have been started," he said. "But let me be straight with you, there are still very few specific changes."

Putin said he would hold one-on-one meetings with every minister at the end of the year to look at their performance.

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