

Siberian Politician Accused of Buying Official-Sounding Award

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The Stolypin medal, awarded for contributions to Russia's economy.

If you can't add a Kremlin award to your resume, why not just buy one for \$3,000?

That's what investigators are accusing the head of a district in Siberia of doing — and of using government money to pay for the award to boot.

Anatoly Kerzik, head of the Shushensky district in the Krasnoyarsk region, is accused of paying 97,000 rubles to a private, Moscow-based company called the Committee for Awards and Ranks to purchase the official-sounding Stolypin Order.

The award sounds similar to the Kremlin's Stolypin Medal, which is awarded by the president to individuals who have contributed to Russia's socio-economic development.

"Police have established that in 2010, the head of the Shushensky District received a nongovernment award that was paid for by resources from the district's budget," local police said Tuesday in a statement carried by Interfax.

Kerzik was approached in September 2010 by the Moscow company that offered to decorate him with the award at a lavish Moscow ceremony in exchange for 97,000 rubles, the local branch of the Investigative Committee told Rossiiskaya Gazeta.

As a bonus, the company also agreed to provide three additional Stolypin Orders, which Kerzik subsequently handed out to associates, it said.

Kerzik returned the money to the district budget when he learned that an investigation had been opened into him on possible charges of abuse of office, Olga Degid, a senior local investigative official, told Interfax. She said his decision to reimburse the money would be taken into consideration but would not halt the investigation.

If charged and convicted of abuse of office, Kerzik faces up to four years in prison and a five-year ban on holding public office.

Incidentally, a similar investigation was opened earlier this month in the Evenk Autonomous District, whose leader Pyotr Suvorov, is also suspected of paying 97,000 rubles for a Stolypin award.

Recipients of the actual Kremlin award, named after Pyotr Stolypin, a reformer during the reign of Russia's last tsar, include former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, Tatarstan President Mintimer Shaimiyev and Constitutional Court chief justice Valery Zorkin.

Some politicians and business leaders are known to highlight the state awards that they have received on their official online biographies and Wikipedia entries.

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