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Chechen Resort Becomes Special Economic Zone

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Businessman Ruslan Baisarov's effort to build a ski resort in Chechnya, a region that is trying to bring life back to normal after two separatist wars, gained support from the Economic Development Ministry on Wednesday.

Born in the same area where he is building the resort, ethnic Chechen Baisarov will now get the federal government to build roads and provide utilities for the Veduchi resort, named after the local village, and receive tax discounts for the project.

Deputy Economic Development Minister Oleg Savelyev and Chechen Prime Minister Ruslan Edelgeriyev signed an agreement Wednesday to create a special economic zone for the resort, a move that enables that sort of support.

Forestalling questions about personal safety in the region known for savage cruelty during the wars and ensuing attacks on human rights campaigners, Savelyev sought to allay any fears.

“Chechnya is the safest place in the North Caucasus,” he said at the signing ceremony.

Frequent gunfights between security forces and militants are a part of life in neighboring regions of Dagestan and Ingushetia, though.

The resort will be part of the North Caucasus tourist cluster, Savelyev said. The government has set a target of allocating 60 billion rubles ($1.9 billion) to provide utility services and roads for the effort of developing the cluster's resorts, and has spent a quarter of that amount so far, he said.

Developing mountain slopes for tourists might go a long way toward improving the perception of the region ruled by President Ramzan Kadyrov, Savelyev said.

“It is one of the steps to change people's mindset about Chechnya,” he said. “War takes a very tight grip on the human mind and does not let go easily.”

Edelgeriyev's speech about the special economic zone contained a bow to his immediate boss. “This means that under the leadership of Ramzan Kadyrov we are going in the right direction,” he said.

Baisarov also owns the Tuva Energy Industrial Corporation with rights to developing one of the world's largest coal deposits in Siberia. Neither he nor his spokesperson could be located for comment Wednesday afternoon.

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