

Putin Stays Firm on Fulfilling Promises

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President Vladimir Putin looming large on a screen in the press center at his meeting on Thursday with the All-Russia People's Front in Moscow. Putin answered questions from supporters and reaffirmed his commitment to fulfill spending promises made on the day of his inauguration. **Alexander Zemlianichenko**

President Vladimir Putin on Thursday said the government would have to improve the country's economic performance in order to fulfill his campaign promises.

He also complained that his tap water was sometimes brown from rusty pipes.

Putin's decrees from May last year, which seek to raise living standards, have put a strain on the slowing economy. The president has repeatedly berated the Cabinet for being behind on the schedule that the decrees set forth.

The economy must grow more and become more competitive to produce enough revenues to spend on the measures ordered, he said, such as raising salaries for school teachers.

"Can we do this? Of course, we can," Putin said at a conference of People's Front For Russia, the latest pro-Kremlin movement, according to a copy of the speech posted on the Kremlin website. "We need to get rid of all the things that ... are ineffective and costly, and do not produce due results for both individual citizens and the state as a whole."

Putin said he would ask the group to look into reports by the Cabinet about its progress on fulfilling the decrees.

The three-year budget plan that Putin signed into law earlier this week foresees a decline in revenues. Vedomosti reported that the government could fall short of 1.6 trillion rubles, revenues that would be hard to collect in a slowing economy.

The reason why the money is formally accounted for in the budget plan is the need to show the Kremlin that the Cabinet has the means of funding the implementation of the decrees, the report said.

Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev said earlier this week that the country's economy would have to accelerate to a growth rate of 5.3 percent a year in order to reach the goals that Putin defined in the decrees.

The ministry has predicted that growth of gross domestic product would remain virtually unchanged next year from this year's expected 1.5 percent.

Putin's inauguration day decrees also called for better health care, education and utility services, among other things.

Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said in September that the budget plan for 2014-16 set aside a total of 2.1 trillion rubles for the decrees.

Putin might have a personal reason to push for improvements in utility services. He said at the people's front conference that tap water in his house, presumably in Novo-Ogaryovo just outside Moscow, did not look good.

"Can you imagine that I have rusty water at my place, too," he said. "It is ridiculous but it is a fact. It is a shame to mention it."

"And that happens at state property. Or, maybe this is exactly the reason why it happens. I do not know."

Putin asked the civic group to draft a bill that would increase public supervision in the utility services business.

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