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Police Seize 30 Tons of Amber From Trader in Kaliningrad

By The Moscow Times

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More than 30 metric tons of amber estimated to be worth about 2 billion rubles ($57 million) have been seized from an amber trader near Russia's Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad, police said.

The seizure was made in the office of a local company that controls a vast share of the local amber market.

"Two locked rooms in the basement contained 30 metric tons of different types of amber, packed in 1,450 sacks," a regional police spokesman said Tuesday.

The office was searched as part of a criminal case against the company's owner Viktor Bogdan, known as the region's "Amber King." Investigators are yet to establish whether the mineral was extracted legally.

Bogdan, who is currently on an international wanted list, is accused of attempting

to fraudulently obtain about 250 million rubles ($7 million) in illegal VAT refunds. He and his alleged accomplices have fled Russia.

This is not the first seizure made as part of the case. Recently, police found a stash containing five metric tons of amber in another office of Bogdan's company. Experts estimated it was worth about 1 billion rubles, while some pieces of the amber in the trove could be worth up to $100,000 apiece.

It is estimated that 60-100 metric tons of amber is illegally mined every year in the Kaliningrad region. The area is believed to hold over 80 percent of the world's total known amber reserves and is home to the world's only strip-mined natural amber deposit.

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