The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Fraudsters Beset Putin's Annual Call-In Show

By Peter Spinella

April 16, 2014



President Vladimir Putin's annual call-in show is expected to include video links from Crimea.

Fraudsters have set up websites that falsely claim to be shortlisting questions for President Vladimir Putin's annual call-in show on Thursday in exchange for cash, Putin's spokesman said.

Such sites are "unacceptable confirmation of the popularity" of the show, which enables the public to directly pose questions to the president, spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday, Interfax reported.

He reminded the public to use only the official telephone numbers and websites. Last week the Kremlin advised using the number +7-800-200-40-40 or the site www.moskva-putinu.ru.

"Hooligans have set up several websites and are trying to get nearly 50 rubles ($1.40) per

question," Peskov told reporters.

So far, several of the 10 most popular questions posted on the show's official website cover Ukraine and Crimea.

They include how Putin will deal with "further worsening of the crisis in Ukraine," how he can help residents of Crimea obtain Russian passports, and — with a jab at the West — how he is "able to keep a clear head amid an incoming barrage of lies and unjustified accusations."

Another question asks how construction of the Dynamo Moscow football team's new stadium is progressing. Dynamo's stadium was closed in 2008 and demolished three years later, forcing the club to play its home fixtures at the Khimki Arena in the Moscow region.

The new stadium project has been afflicted by numerous snags and delays, much to the disgruntlement of Dynamo supporters. News reports have said the $250 million project is expected to be finished in 2017.

Other questions include how seriously ill children can get monetary help from the government and how Russia's notoriously dilapidated road system can be improved.

The show will air on national television and radio stations and is expected to include video links from Crimea and the Gazprom-run Arctic oil platform that Greenpeace activists attempted to climb in a protest in September.

Last year's show, which went on for more than four hours, featured 85 questions, about 30 of which were directly posed by citizens.

During his 14 years as president and prime minister, Putin has held 11 call-in shows.

Two years ago the show was moved from December to April, to avoid making Russians wait outside in the cold for a chance to get a microphone and ask the president a question, the Kremlin said.

The Moscow Times will run a live blog on Putin's call-in show from noon on Thursday. We invite you to follow the event with us.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/04/16/fraudsters-beset-putins-annual-call-in-show-a34015