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Head of Construction Firm Arrested After Visit From Putin

By Allison Quinn

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The head of a state enterprise responsible for building an oceanarium in the Far East who was detained following an inspection by President Vladimir Putin has been ordered to be put under arrest on suspicion of embezzling more than 40 million rubles ($865,000) during construction.

Andrei Poplavsky, head of the Construction Directorate for the Far Eastern Federal District, was presented with a warrant for his arrest by investigators at a Vladivostok hospital where he was taken Saturday after suffering a stroke when investigators first attempted to question him in connection with the case, news agency TASS reported.

Poplavsky was taken off of a plane at Vladivostok Airport that same day after the regional branch of the Federal Security Service began an investigation into the oceanarium's construction following a visit by Putin to the long-delayed facility.

Investigators confirmed Tuesday that the firm's head was under investigation on suspicion of embezzlement, and on Thursday a court ruled that he should remain in detention for two months while the probe is under way.

"The head doctor of the hospital where he is staying has concluded that Poplavsky can be moved to a pretrial detention center," Nina Moiseyeva, Poplavsky's lawyer, was cited as saying Thursday by TASS.

Last week, Putin visited the construction site of Vladivostok's Primorye Oceanarium, which is planned as a science center of the far-eastern branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The site was originally due to be completed in time for the APEC Summit in 2012, but its opening has repeatedly been postponed.

On Thursday, Putin demanded to meet with the officials responsible for construction after inspecting the site.

Poplavsky's company isn't the only one to have landed in hot water over the oceanarium's construction. The head of the Mostovik construction firm faces criminal charges for embezzling nearly 2 billion rubles and not completing work on time, according to the Investigative Committee's statement.

If charged with embezzlement and convicted, Poplavsky faces up to six years in prison.

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