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Governor of Sakhalin Charged With Large Scale Bribery

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Karsakov, Sakhalin

The governor of Russia's oil and natural gas-rich island of Sakhalin in the country's far east has been charged with large-scale bribery involving an energy company, investigators said on Friday.

The Investigative Committee, which reports directly to President Vladimir Putin, said Alexander Khoroshavin received more than $5.6 million in bribes as governor to facilitate business activities for an energy company called Energostroi.

Under Russia's Criminal Code, he could be fined or jailed for up to 15 years.

Khoroshavin, whose term as governor began in 2007 and is due to expire in 2016, was arrested last week in Sakhalin and flown handcuffed to Moscow. He declared his innocence in a pre-trial hearing and asked to be released on bail under house arrest.

The case comes as Russia's two top energy giants, Rosneft and Gazprom, have been engaged

in a court battle over access to Gazprom's pipelines for a liquefied natural gas (LNG) plant in Sakhalin that Rosneft wants to build with ExxonMobil.

Investigators said raids on his houses, including one in Moscow, had found large sums of money, jewellery, expensive watches and phones.

Corruption has long been rife in Russia, even under Soviet rule. Transparency International ranked the country 136th in its 2014 Corruption Perception Index, just behind Nigeria.

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