

Russia's Interior Minister Warns Budget Cuts Could 'Undress' Police Force

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Riot police stand guard in central Moscow.

A planned 10-percent reduction of the Interior Ministry's budget in a bid to save costs amid Russia's economic crisis threatens to “paralyze” the country's police force, the agency's chief warned.

Interior Minister Vladimir Kolokoltsev told State Duma lawmakers who are reviewing amendments to the federal budget that the planned slash of 10 percent for his ministry's overall funds would lead to sharp cuts in expenses such as fuel and uniforms, the Regnum news portal reported.

“This means that in essence, the work of our agency may simply be paralyzed, because undressed and shoeless officers cannot fully [tackle] their tasks,” Kolokoltsev was quoted as saying in the Monday meeting.

Finance Minister Anton Siluanov on Monday urged parliament to reduce the budget deficit and warned that unless expenditures are slashed, Russia will burn through its emergency

Reserve Fund and have to start printing money, Reuters reported.

Printing money to cover the 3.7-percent budget shortfall expected for this year would increase the risk of inflation, which is already at a 13-year high.

Siluanov earlier proposed cutting all government spending by 10 percent, with the exception of the defense sector. Several state bodies obliged and took a 10-percent pay cut, including the presidential administration and government, and both houses of the Russian parliament.

To cut costs, the Interior Ministry has already suspended the hiring of new employees since Feb. 1, business daily Vedomosti reported.

Budget cuts may also force the ministry to lay off nearly 100,000 of its employees, an unidentified lawmaker quoted Kolokoltsev as telling the chamber during a closed-door meeting Monday, the report said.

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