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Russia Recruits 1,000 Student Laborers to Finish Corruption-Ridden Cosmodrome Project

By The Moscow Times

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The cosmodrome is scheduled for completion by the end of this year, but has already seen delays of up to several months.

A group of Russian students on Monday began an unconventional summer vacation laboring to help finish a much-delayed and corruption-riddled cosmodrome construction project in Russia's Far East.

The opening ceremony for the student's summer of construction work took place Monday, the Amur regional government said in a statement.

More than 1,000 students will join the construction effort, adding to the more than 8,000 builders already on site, the statement said. About 130 students have already joined the builders, it said.

Deputy Construction Minister Leonid Stavitsky said in early April that the students would be paid for their work but did not specify how much, news agency Interfax reported.

The Vostochny Cosmodrome project has become notorious over the past year for a series of corruption allegations and labor violations.

Builders at the site in April protested months of unpaid wages by painting complaints directed toward President Vladimir Putin in huge letters on the roofs of their huts.

"Four months without pay — we want to work," one message sprawled over the roof of several huts said.

Putin said during a televised call-in that he was taking the matter under his personal control. In late April around 1,300 workers received their back wages, totaling some 25 million rubles ($509,000), news agency TASS reported regional prosecutor Alexander Shcherbakov as saying.

The cosmodrome is scheduled for completion by the end of this year, but has already seen delays of up to several months. The space port has long been an important project for Russia's space industry, as the country's only major cosmodrome is currently a leased base in neighboring Kazakhstan.

Citing a source in the government, Interfax reported last week that the Federal Agency for Special Construction had requested 20 billion rubles ($410 million) in financial support to make sure the year-end deadline is met.

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