The Moscow Times
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Russia to Investigate Space Center Fraud After Putin Rebuke

By Reuters

November 21, 2019



Vladislav Larkin / Wikicommons

Russian investigators said on Thursday they had opened two criminal cases into the management of a company involved in building the Vostochny Cosmodrome, a space center in the country's Far East.

The announcement came less than two weeks after President Vladimir Putin complained to government officials about corruption at the facility and called for further investigations.

Construction of the Vostochny Cosmodrome began in January 2011, part of a plan for Russia to reduce its dependency on the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, which Russia leases from the former Soviet Republic for space operations.

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But Putin told government officials earlier this month he was dismayed by the level of graft there.

"Hundreds of millions have been stolen. Hundreds of millions. Several dozen criminal cases have already been initiated. There have already been court decisions, people are in prison," said Putin.

His spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said later that 11 billion rubles ($172.45 million) of a total 91 billion rubles allocated to the project had been stolen.

Investigators said on Thursday that they were looking into allegations that fraudulent financial documents had led to the theft of 240 million rubles ($3.8 million) between November 2018 and May 2019.

Top officials at the Cosmodrome said they were in control of the situation and that any violations would immediately be passed to law enforcement officers, the state-run RIA news agency reported.

The Vostochny Cosmodrome, whose name comes from the Russian word meaning 'Eastern,' is situated in the Amur region on the border with China.

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