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Putin Says Fake Coronavirus Rumors 'Organized From Abroad'

By AFP

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Putin's charges come after U.S. State Department officials said that thousands of Russia-linked social media accounts were being used to fuel alarm over the virus. **Kremlin.ru**

False rumors about the new coronavirus circulating in Russia are being directed from abroad, President Vladimir Putin claimed Wednesday at a government meeting.

He told ministers the country's FSB security service had reported to him that false information was being planted to create panic, while in reality the situation is not critical.

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"As for these provocative fake stories, the FSB reports they're mainly organized from abroad... The aim of such fake stories is clear: to spread panic among the public."

He said Russia had to fight this by releasing "timely, comprehensive and trustworthy information."

"So far, thank God, nothing critical is happening in our country but people have to know about the real situation."

Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova also spoke out against recent "fake posts" on social media about the new coronavirus.

These posts have claimed there are "quite large numbers of sick people in Russia and that the official authorities are hiding this information," she said at the meeting.

"I want to tell you once again that this doesn't correspond to reality."

The official total of confirmed cases in Russia is six so far, she reiterated.

Moscow's charges come after U.S. State Department officials told AFP in February that thousands of Russia-linked social media accounts were being used to fuel alarm over the virus.

Philip Reeker, the U.S. acting Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia, said in February that "Russian malign actors" were "spreading disinformation about coronavirus" and posing a threat to public safety.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova responded by condemning his comments as a "deliberately false story."

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