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Russia’s Online Voting System Briefly Crashes on First Day of Election

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Yaroslav Chingaev / Moskva News Agency

Russia's online voting system briefly crashed on Friday, the first day of the March 15-17 presidential race, with independent election observers saying the likely cause was "huge numbers" of workers being forced to vote.

"The system has temporarily switched to electronic line management due to the unprecedented number of people wishing to vote online," read a message on the e-voting platform.

Stanislav Andreychuk, a member at the independent election watchdog Golos, said a "huge number" of workers had been pressured to cast their votes in the first hours of the election.

"The remote electronic voting portals can't handle the load. The system's operators mention a great 'interest,' but we understand its nature well — beginning in the morning, people are voting at their workplaces under the watchful eye of their superiors," he said.

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Russia's Ministry of Digital Development, Communications and Mass Media said the remote online voting system was restored later on Friday morning, adding that 1.6 million Russians had already voted online by that time.

Overall, 4.76 million out of 112.3 million Russian voters in dozens of regions including Moscow are expected to cast their ballots online during the three-day voting period.

Russia adopted its controversial e-voting system for all national elections after Putin ordered troops to invade Ukraine in February 2022.

Critics have said online voting in Russia makes it easier for the authorities to falsify results.

Russia's elections chief Ella Pamfilova said Friday that 2.6 million people have voted early, including those in partially occupied Ukrainian regions where fighting continues.

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