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‘I Wanted to Cry’: Rural Russian Schools in Worse Shape Than Those in War-Torn Ukraine, Regional Official Says

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Yevgeny Varakin. **Andrei Titov / Business Online / TASS**

Some schools in rural Russia are in worse condition than those in occupied eastern Ukraine, an official in the republic of Tatarstan said in an interview published Wednesday.

“I wanted to cry after touring all the schools [in the Verkhneuslonsky district]. In some villages, it seemed that schools were in better shape in Lysychansk,” Yevgeny Varakin, a district head in Tatarstan, told the regional news website Business Online.

Varakin previously oversaw the reconstruction of the Ukrainian cities of Lysychansk and Rubizhne after Russian troops seized them, serving at the time as Tatarstan’s deputy prime minister.

Tatarstan allocated at least 1 billion rubles ($11.6 million) as of 2024 to repair schools, hospitals, roads and infrastructure in Lysychansk, according to the Govorit NeMoskva

Telegram news channel.

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In the Business Online interview, Varakin also criticized poor road conditions, water shortages, a lack of small business development and unprofitable public transportation in his district, Verkhneuslonsky, which has a population of around 15,000.

“It’s as if we’re the kind of district where people come for a barbecue, leave trash everywhere and then go home,” he said.

The Verkhneuslonsky district is home to the high-tech town of Innopolis, sometimes referred to as “Russia’s Silicon Valley.”

Varakin said the presence of Innopolis, along with the district’s proximity to the regional capital of Kazan, has fueled economic inequality and brain drain, as average monthly wages in the district are nearly 30% lower when Innopolis is excluded from calculations.

Business Online lists Varakin as Tatarstan’s most openly pro-war public figure.

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