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Senior Defense Official Jailed 6 Years Over Russian Military Theme Park Fraud

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Vladimir Shesterov. **Russian Defense Ministry**

A military court on Wednesday sentenced former senior Defense Ministry official Vladimir Shesterov to six years in prison for large-scale fraud tied to state contracts for Russia's sprawling military theme park.

Shesterov, who served as deputy head of the Defense Ministry's Main Department for Innovative Development, was arrested last August over the alleged embezzlement of more than 40 million rubles ($510,000) allocated for construction work at Patriot Park.

Investigators claimed that Shesterov, along with Patriot Park's former director Vyacheslav Akhmedov and ex-Deputy Defense Minister Pavel Popov, siphoned off more than 25 million rubles ($319,000) between 2022 and 2024, causing what they described as "significant damage" to both the ministry and the park.

Shesterov and Akhmedov reportedly pleaded guilty and were moved to house arrest after testifying against Popov, a high-profile figure still under investigation on multiple charges

including bribery, abuse of power, fraud and illegal weapons possession.

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A military court found Shesterov guilty of large-scale fraud and forgery, according to Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes. In addition to his six-year prison term, he was fined 500,000 rubles ($6,400), banned from holding public office for two years and stripped of his rank of major general and all state honors.

The case against Akhmedov is ongoing, while Popov remains in pre-trial detention. Their arrests last year were part of a broader anti-corruption crackdown within the Defense Ministry that began with the arrest of former Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov in April 2024.

Ivanov was sentenced to 13 years in prison earlier this month.

Patriot Park, located in the town of Kubinka 60 kilometers (37 miles) west of Moscow, is a military theme park and exhibition center featuring interactive exhibits and displays of weapons and equipment. In addition to live-firing ranges, the park hosts a grandiose Orthodox cathedral dedicated to the country's armed forces.

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