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Kursk Region Deputy Governor Arrested in Border Defense Probe

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Acting Kursk region Deputy Governor Vladimir Bazarov. **bazarov_vv / VK**

Law enforcement authorities have arrested the acting deputy governor of Russia's southwestern Kursk region, officials said on Monday, with media reporting that he is suspected of embezzling funds meant for border fortifications in the neighboring Belgorod region.

Acting Kursk region Governor Alexander Khinshtein confirmed the arrest of his deputy, Vladimir Bazarov, in a Telegram post, saying the case concerns Bazarov's earlier tenure as Belgorod's deputy governor for construction. "Preliminary information suggests the case concerns the construction of defensive structures," Khinshtein wrote.

Bazarov was appointed deputy governor of the Belgorod region in 2020 after earlier serving as the deputy governor and chairman of the government of Sevastopol in annexed Crimea. He was appointed acting deputy governor in the Kursk region in February of this year.

Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, has not yet commented on his

arrest.

The state-run news agency TASS, citing law enforcement sources, reported that Bazarov faces charges similar to other former Belgorod officials accused of embezzling funds earmarked for fortifications along the Ukrainian border. He is expected to be transferred to Moscow for further questioning.

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Moscow allocated billions of rubles for fortifications in the Belgorod and Kursk regions amid concerns that Ukrainian forces could launch an attack into Russian territory. Those fears materialized in August 2024, when Ukraine launched a surprise offensive into Kursk, capturing large swaths of territory.

Ukrainian forces did not mount a similar push into Belgorod, but they have carried out frequent small-scale raids there, raising doubts over the effectiveness of the costly defenses.

Total damages in the Belgorod embelzzment case are estimated at 1 billion rubles ($12.4 million).

Last month, reports linked another former deputy governor in the Belgorod region, Rustem Zainullin, as well as several businessmen and construction firms, to a large-scale fraud scheme involving border defense projects in Belgorod. Prosecutors are seeking nearly 925 million rubles ($11.9 million) in damages from the accused.

The Kursk region has also been drawn into border defense investigations. Former Governor Alexei Smirnov and his first deputy, Alexei Dedov, were arrested earlier this year on large-scale fraud charges.

Smirnov's predecessor, Roman Starovoit, who went on to become transportation minister, allegedly killed himself outside Moscow in July amid reports that he, too, was being investigated in the same embezzlement case.

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