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Ex-Kursk Governor Admits to Taking Bribes in Border Defense Scandal

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Alexei Smirnov. **Kursk Region Government**

Former Kursk region Governor Alexei Smirnov has admitted to taking bribes in connection with construction projects for border defenses, Russian state media reported on Thursday, citing law enforcement sources.

Smirnov, who governed Kursk until December 2024, gave the confession as part of a plea deal with investigators, sources told the TASS news agency. His former deputy, Alexei Dedov, also faces charges.

State prosecutors accuse the two men of running an "organized group" that embezzled 1 billion rubles ($11.7 million) in public funds earmarked for defense fortifications along southwestern Russia's border with Ukraine. Investigators claim Smirnov and Dedov took roughly 30 million rubles ($350,000) in kickbacks from businessmen on the construction contracts.

The accusations come after Ukrainian forces launched an incursion into the Kursk region in

August 2024, just several months into Smirnov's tenure as governor. While Moscow had poured billions of rubles into building up defenses along the border, Ukraine still managed to occupy large swaths of territory before Russian troops supported by North Korean forces drove them out earlier this year.

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At least 11 officials and business executives have been implicated in related border construction cases, Russian media reported. Former executives of the Kursk Region Development Corporation told investigators they paid Smirnov and Dedov a 15% cut on contracts, according to the business newspaper Kommersant.

On Wednesday, a Moscow court extended the pre-trial detention for both men until mid-December. Kommersant reported that prosecutors announced new bribery charges against Smirnov during the hearing.

Smirnov's predecessor, Roman Starovoit, shot himself outside of Moscow in July amid reports he was also under investigation in the same corruption scheme. Starovoit was serving as Transportation Minister at the time of his suicide.

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