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Patriot Park Deputy Director Arrested for Allegedly Accepting Bribe

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Still image from an investigation video showing agents emptying a bag of ruble bank notes. **Video grab @sledcom_press / Telegram**

The deputy head of Russia's military theme park was arrested for allegedly accepting a bribe from a private contractor, making him the latest park official to face criminal prosecution amid a wider shakeup in the country's defense establishment.

Vitaly Melimuk, deputy director of Patriot Park, is accused of accepting a bribe of 18 million rubles ($240,000) from the CEO of Hermes, a technical and mechanical engineering firm.

In exchange for the cash, investigators claim Melimuk promised "general patronage" and help securing lucrative maintenance contracts for the park's main site outside Moscow and its branch in St. Petersburg.

The Investigative Committee, Russia's top investigative body, released a video showing plainclothes law enforcement agents emptying a bag of 5,000-ruble notes onto a table following a sting operation in the Moscow region on Saturday.

Melimuk faces up to 15 years in prison for bribery. According to the St. Petersburg outlet Fontanka, he allegedly demanded a 10% kickback on maintenance contracts worth a combined 1.4 billion rubles ($18.6 million).

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The arrest is just the latest in connection to contracts at Patriot Park, a pet project of the country's military establishment designed to showcase Russian hardware and boost national pride.

Melimuk's former boss, Vyacheslav Akhmedov, who served as director of Patriot Park until August 2024, was sentenced to five years in prison last year for fraud related to construction at the theme park.

Earlier this month, former Deputy Defense Minister Pavel Popov received a 19-year sentence on charges that included diverting materials and labor intended for Patriot Park to help develop his personal properties.

Melimuk was placed in pre-trial detention as investigators look for potential accomplices. Authorities did not immediately say whether the CEO of the contracting firm Hermes also faces criminal charges.

Russia's Defense Ministry said it was cooperating with investigators.

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