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Russian Minister Says Building Airliner From Scratch Could Take Over 20 Years

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Russian Industry and Trade Minister Anton Alikhanov.

Russia would need more than 20 years to build a passenger aircraft entirely from scratch without relying on existing global expertise, Industry and Trade Minister Anton Alikhanov said, underscoring the challenges facing Moscow's efforts to revive domestic civil aviation production under Western sanctions.

Russia's flagship aircraft programs have been plagued by persistent delays as the country seeks to replace foreign-made planes and components cut off by sanctions imposed after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

"If you had nothing for creating an airliner and decided to build all systems, engines, the airframe, aerodynamics and everything else from zero, even 20 years would not be enough," Alikhanov told state-run RIA Novosti news agency in an interview published Tuesday.

He added that identifying and fixing the "teething problems" of new passenger aircraft typically takes three to four years.

As an example, Alikhanov pointed to Japanese conglomerate Mitsubishi's regional jet program, which ended after billions of dollars in losses and never entered commercial service.

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Russia's own aviation projects have faced repeated setbacks.

The Soviet-designed Il-114 regional turboprop aircraft was first proposed in the early 1980s by the Ilyushin design bureau as a 60-seat passenger plane for regional routes. The aircraft completed its maiden flight in March 1990 at Zhukovsky airport near Moscow.

The plane was initially intended to be produced at an aircraft plant in Tashkent, and later in Moscow, but serial production never fully materialized after the collapse of the Soviet Union disrupted industrial supply chains.

The Il-114 project was revived in 2015, with plans to build 100 aircraft by 2030. The aircraft had been expected to receive type certification by the end of 2023, but the deadline was missed.

In early April, Alikhanov said the updated Il-114-300 had completed flight tests. Certification is scheduled for May, after which airlines are expected to begin signing contracts. Three aircraft are due to be delivered this year, he said.

Russia's other flagship civil aviation projects — the domestically produced MC-21 passenger jet and the import-substituted Superjet 100 — have also suffered years of delays.

Development of the MC-21 began in 2009 and the aircraft was originally expected to enter serial production about a decade ago.

State conglomerate Rostec now plans to complete certification by the end of 2026, though commercial operations are expected to begin only several months later.

The launch of serial production has repeatedly been postponed, first from 2016 to 2019, then to 2020, and later to 2022, 2024 and now 2026.

A government program adopted in 2022 to accelerate domestic aircraft production has also fallen behind schedule. Under the plan, Russian factories were expected to produce 18 MC-21 aircraft in 2024-2025 and increase output to 72 planes annually by 2029.

Overall, Russia's aviation industry had been expected to produce 127 aircraft of various types between 2023 and 2025, including Superjets, Il-114s and Tu-214 aircraft.

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