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Interior Ministry Clamps Down on Coal Cartel

By Alisa Fialko

Russia's Interior Ministry has launched a criminal case against Siberian Coal Energy, known as SUEK, and other coal miners after discovering evidence of collusion.

In late December, the ministry reported that it had uncovered a cartel, which, according to the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service, was run by SUEK, Russky Ugol and Stroiservis.

By creating conditions that restrict competition, the companies managed to bring in more than 100 million rubles (\$3.27 million). SUEK alone made 5 million rubles illegally.

Investigators' documents were transferred to the Interior Ministry, the ministry reported.

The ministry's investigation was prompted by a complaint from a power-generating company, representatives of the ministry said earlier. The investigation concerns 2009 coal

sales.

Analysts say rising prices could have spurred the company to initiate an investigation. In the past few months, the price of a ton of coal on the domestic market has climbed by between 15 percent to 20 percent, to \$40.

Aeroflot Sacks Executives for Delays

By Anastasia Dagayeva

Bonuses and premiums for the fourth quarter of 2010 will be withheld from Aeroflot executives, CEO Vitaly Saveliev said in a statement posted on the company's web site.

An internal investigation is also being conducted, and three senior managers have been fired for the disruption of services that took place Dec. 26 to 28.

Among those sacked was Aeroflot deputy director Vladimir Smirnov, who was responsible for procuring anti-icing fluid, a spokesperson for the company said. Deputy directors Konstantin Plotnikov and Alexander Andreyev also lost their jobs, a source close to the airline added.

From Dec. 25 to 29, the carrier canceled 212 flights and delayed 358 more (the airline operates between 100 and 150 flights a day to and from Sheremetyevo Airport), a company spokesperson said.

More than 25,000 people were unable to fly out of Sheremetyevo, with a minimum delay of 15 minutes.

The airline resumed normal operations Dec. 30.

Chinese Fifth-Generation Fighter Takes Flight

By Alexei Nikolsky

Photographs posted on several Chinese web sites appear to show the maiden flight of the prototype of a Chinese-made fifth-generation fighter jet. The first pictures of the new airplane, manufactured at the 132nd aircraft plant in Chengdu, appeared on the Internet late last year. By early January, photos appeared of test flights attended by a large group in both civilian and military clothing.

The aircraft, dubbed "J-20" by Chinese aviation enthusiasts, resembles both the Russian fifth-generation MiG 1.42 prototype, which made two flights in 2000 before its funding was cut, and the U.S. fifth-generation F-22 fighter.

The Chinese fighter jet uses the "duck" design with forward feathering. Judging from the published photographs, the plane is bigger than the F-22 and the Russian T-50 Sukhoi prototype, whose first flight took place a year ago.

There have been no official reports on the development of a new fighter in China, and Chinese media cite Western web sites.

A Chinese Air Force general was quoted as saying that the fighter would enter service in 2016, and U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has suggested 2020 as a likely date.

The maiden flight of the Chinese prototype marks the country's entrance into an elite club; the United States and Russia are the only other countries to have developed fifth-generation fighters.

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