

## **Uzbek Officials Blamed for Systemic Failures**

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The Uzbek government has roundly criticised senior officials for failing to deliver on a housing construction programme. However, analysts say the problems are systemic and

Meeting on October 19, the cabinet took to task the governors of seven regions – Tashkent, Bukhara, Syrdarya, Surkhandarya, Khorezm, Fergana and Namangan – plus the heads of a rural construction bank and an associated investment company, accusing them of poor management of a housing construction programme for the countryside.

The authorities seem to be making a concerted effort to pinpoint officials responsible for either mismanagement or actual wrongdoing.

Since the beginning of the year, three district heads and deputy heads in the capital Tashkent alone, plus the heads of construction and maintenance in the city government have been dismissed and then arrested.

Some believe the campaign was launched by a speech which President Islam Karimov made in March telling local government leaders they must operate within the law and be more responsive to their constituents.

"After those remarks, police were instructed to keep a close eye on lower-level officials and to jail as many of them as possible," a member of the Uzbek parliament said on condition of anonymity.

Observers say the real reason why the government's economic plans so often fail is that neither the funding nor the labour force is in place. Large numbers of construction workers go abroad to Kazakstan and Russia to do seasonal jobs there.

The cabinet plan announced a new housing programme for 2013, but experts say it is likely to face similar obstacles.

"There isn't the money in the budget to carry it out," one Tashkent-based analyst said, noting that housing shortages and high utility prices were a major source of public discontent.

Another analyst, Bahodir Safoev, said the threat of imprisonment was unlikely to prompt officials to take action.

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