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Nashi Is Asked to Vacate Its Main Office

By Alexandra Odynova

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Senior Moscow official Oleg Mitvol has asked the pro-Kremlin Nashi youth group to vacate its headquarters in a building meant to house a kindergarten, in what analysts called a sign that Nashi was losing its clout.

Mitvol, prefect for Moscow's Northern District, petitioned Deputy Moscow Mayor Lyudmila Shvetsova to give the former kindergarten on 1st Ulitsa Yamskogo Polya near the Belorusskaya metro station back to children.

The building and its surrounding territory have been rented by the Irmos scientific and educational institution since 2000 but in fact is occupied by Nashi, Mitvol wrote in his letter to Shvetsova, Interfax reported.

He said 92 young children are waiting for slots in kindergartens in northern Moscow, and a plan by his office to restore the building would provide places for at least 80 of them.

Nashi said it had already made plans to vacate the premises, which it has used for four years,

in response to an order from Prime Minister Vladimir Putin for former kindergartens to be reopened to deal with a national shortage.

Nashi accused Mitvol of staging a publicity stunt by writing the letter. "Even though Mitvol knew about Nashi's plans to move out, he couldn't miss an opportunity to do some publicity," the group said in a statement Thursday.

Mitvol, an outspoken former federal environmental inspector, has been known to enjoy the media spotlight.

Nashi spokeswoman Kristina Potupchik said by telephone that the group would make sure that the building was converted back into a kindergarten after moving out. She denied that Mitvol's request indicated that the group was fading, saying activists planned to carry out a number of activities from next week, including crackdowns on illegal casinos, brothels and stores selling expired goods and alcohol to minors.

Vladimir Pribylovsky, an analyst with Panorama, a think tank, said the eviction request might indicate cracks in Nashi's leadership that Mitvol was aware of. He pointed to speculation among LiveJournal bloggers in late August that Nashi leader Vasily Yakemenko might be having some marital problems.

Yakemenko is widely believed to be married to a relative of Vladislav Surkov, deputy chief of staff of the presidential administration and the Kremlin's pointman for United Russia and all pro-Kremlin youth groups.

"Mitvol likes publicity and knows how to do it Western-style," Pribylovsky said, adding that Mitvol would not seek the eviction without cause.

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