

Luzhkov Gets the Ax

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Mayor Yury Luzhkov shouting at a May Day labor union gathering in this file photo. The mayor was kicked out of office Tuesday by the president. **Igor Tabakov**

President Dmitry Medvedev on Tuesday sacked veteran Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov, a powerful political opponent who criticized the Kremlin and then defied pressure to resign.

Luzhkov, who has not made public comments about his dismissal, was seen leaving the mayor's office five hours after the news broke.

His firing may not be the only political shift under way: Interfax reported that he had submitted his resignation from United Russia, the country's dominant party and a political powerhouse that he helped to build.

Luzhkov had ruled the capital since 1992, but he angered Medvedev by suggesting that the country needed a stronger and more decisive leader — a remark that seemed to favor favoring Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

Famous for his working man's flat caps, billionaire second wife and blunt manner, Luzhkov used the \$37 billion city budget to keep pensions and public services high, maintaining

popularity despite corruption allegations that he has denied.

The clash, a rare public battle among the nation's elite, was widely seen as a test of Medvedev's resolve ahead of the 2012 presidential election, in which either he or Putin is expected to run again for the office.

While on a state visit to China, Medvedev issued a decree stripping Luzhkov of his post. Russian news agencies reported that Luzhkov was in his office when the news broke and found out about the dismissal through a television report.

"As the president of Russia, I lost my trust in Yury Mikhailovich Luzhkov as the mayor of Moscow," Medvedev told journalists during his visit to Shanghai.

"I will decide who will lead Moscow," he said. Medvedev's decree named a long-time Luzhkov ally, First Deputy Mayor Vladimir Resin, as acting mayor of Moscow. Resin has held the first deputy's job since 2001 and oversees the city's construction sector.

While the Constitution allows the president to sack the Moscow mayor and regional governors at will and appoint a successor without elections, senior officials typically resign before they are fired.

Just Monday, Luzhkov, 74, had returned from a week's vacation abroad vowing not to resign of his own free will — a challenge that the Kremlin could not ignore.

Luzhkov's tenure as mayor was tainted by repeated allegations that his construction boss wife, Yelena Baturina, benefited from his post, allegations that the pair strenuously deny.

Suggestions of corruption were the focus of mud-slinging programs broadcast by state-run television earlier this month after Luzhkov had targeted Medvedev with thinly veiled criticism in a state newspaper article.

Luzhkov had criticized the effectiveness of Medvedev's administration and had written that "the Russian government needs to recover its true authority and meaning" in the Sept. 6 article in Rossiiskaya Gazeta.

"It has been unprecedented in the past decade for the internal tensions of the elite to become so public," said Maria Lipman, an analyst with the Moscow Carnegie Center. "The question is whether the decision makers can push their conflicts back behind the scenes."

The mayor's current term had been due to expire in June 2011, but analysts said the Kremlin wanted to give a successor time to settle in and ensure a strong vote for United Russia in parliamentary elections later in 2011.

Medvedev and Putin have said they will decide jointly which of them will run in the presidential election in March 2012, though most insiders believe the last word will be Putin's.

Appointed by Boris Yeltsin months after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Luzhkov's time in office spanned the presidencies of Yeltsin, Putin and his protege Medvedev.

Riding a wave of petrodollars, Luzhkov oversaw a construction boom that helped turn the

drabness and grayness of central Moscow into a vibrant, open-24-hours capital for Russian business and society.

But the real estate boom has left Muscovites crawling through some of the world's worst traffic and cursing a power grid that has suffered two big blackouts.

Luzhkov's control over coffers in the city, which accounts for one-fifth of the nation's gross domestic product, or roughly \$320 billion, allowed him to keep the capital's pensions and public services among the highest in the country.

Medvedev's firing decision appeared to have little impact on financial markets in Moscow, which had been widely expecting the move.

See images from Yury Luzhkov's 18 years in office in [our photo gallery](#) from Moscow Times photographer Igor Tabakov.

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