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# Just Russia Eyes Tiger Power

By Alexander Bratersky

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A Just Russia is considering adopting the endangered Siberian tiger as its symbol as it steps up its fight to dislodge United Russia — which uses the bear — from its pedestal as the party of power in upcoming State Duma elections.

“A tiger symbolizes might and power. This is a symbol that can help increase the party's popularity,” A Just Russia spokesman Dmitry Gudkov said by telephone Tuesday.

Gudkov said the Siberian tiger is one of several options under consideration, and the left-leaning, pro-Kremlin party would make a final decision at a summer conference. He did not identify other proposals.

The party's flag, a red banner with Russia's national colors, will also be changed, Gudkov said.

So far, A Just Russia has been associated with less impressive animals, in particular, the muskrat, the mascot for the Party of Life, which merged with two smaller parties to create A Just Russia in 2007.

Federation Council Speaker Sergei Mironov, who headed Party of Life and is the current leader of A Just Russia, promised at one point to campaign for the preservation of the muskrat. But the attempt to win positive publicity failed spectacularly, bringing much ridicule in the opposition media.

Many party members were surprised by the decision to look for a symbol, and there is doubt that even a tiger — an animal favored by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who received a cub for one of his birthdays — could help the party compete against United Russia in December elections, a party staffer told The Moscow Times.

“I don't think that a symbol might change the attitude toward the party,” said the staffer, who spoke on condition of anonymity since she was not authorized to speak to the media.

A United Russia politician accused A Just Russia of trying to cash in on Putin's popularity by associating itself with his attempt to save Siberian tigers from extinction. Putin chaired a tiger summit in St. Petersburg last year.

“Since Prime Minister Putin has taken tigers under his personal control, this topic has become fashionable and A Just Russia is trying to use it,” Timur Prokopenko, leader of Young Guard, a United Russia youth movement, said in a statement Tuesday.

Analysts agreed that the tiger would not save A Just Russia at the ballot box. The party currently holds only 38 of the 450 seats in the Duma.

“In regions, the party relies on the few charismatic leaders it is able to get," said Alexander Kynev, a regional politics analyst.

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