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Gambling Suspect Caught in Turf War Appeals to Kremlin

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A turf war between prosecutors and investigators flared anew over the weekend, with the chief suspect in a criminal case asking the Kremlin to protect him.

Businessman Ivan Nazarov, suspected of running an illegal gambling ring in the Moscow region under the patronage of local prosecutors, said he has became a "victim of a political fight between two respected law enforcement agencies," Interfax reported Saturday.

Nazarov, currently in pretrial detention, said in an open letter to President Dmitry Medvedev that the unidentified chief investigator working on his case told him that he was "a friend of their enemies and therefore ... will never be released."

Nazarov asked Medvedev to "end his stay in detention on unfounded charges."

The Kremlin offered no comment about the request Monday, nor did the Prosecutor General's Office or the Investigative Committee.

The gambling case had been in the works since 2009, but the Investigative Committee only named the suspects in February — a month after it was separated from the Prosecutor General's Office, with which it has a long history of tension.

Investigators said Nazarov ran the gambling ring under the protection of top local police officials and prosecutors in exchange for various perks from him. He is accused of financing their trips abroad, among other things.

The Prosecutor General's Office fired back last week, saying it found no evidence that Nazarov financed prosecutors' trips. It dismissed other related accusations as well, and closed several cases against its officials and a Nazarov aide.

The Investigative Committee will ask Prosecutor General Yury Chaika to reopen these cases and related criminal inquiries into top prosecutors from Moscow region towns of Noginsk and Klin also linked to Nazarov, committee spokesman Vladimir Markin told Interfax on Saturday.

Chaika's agency also closed eight criminal cases involving its Moscow region employees between February and March, Markin said.

The Prosecutor General's Office refused to comment on Markin's claims, Interfax said.

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