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Chaika's Son Sought in Gambling Inquiry

By Alexey Eremenko

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The Investigative Committee said Wednesday that it would question the son of Prosecutor General Yury Chaika in connection with an illegal gambling case, significantly raising the stakes in an ongoing turf war between investigators and the Prosecutor General's Office.

A spokesman for the Investigative Committee said Artyom Chaika would be questioned "soon" over the gambling ring that purportedly operated in the Moscow region under the protection of local police and prosecutors, RIA-Novosti reported.

People working for Artyom Chaika are suspected of acting as middlemen between prosecutors and the gambling ring's owners, Kommersant reported Wednesday, citing an unidentified witness whose testimony was read out at a Tuesday court hearing in Serpukhov, one of 15 Moscow regional towns where illegal casinos are said to have operated.

A lawyer for the ring's suspected mastermind, Ivan Nazarov, denied that his client had any ties to Artyom Chaika. "I asked my client yesterday, and he only gave me a surprised look," lawyer Alexander Dobronravinsky said Wednesday, Interfax reported.

"Investigators are doing this to raise fear and to spit on the Prosecutor General's Office," Dobronravinsky said.

Nazarov says he is the victim of a flare in tensions between the prosecutor's office and the Investigative Committee, which feuded for years as a single agency before being separated in January. He has appealed to President Dmitry Medvedev to intervene.

Medvedev has not commented on Nazarov's appeal, but he rebuked prosecutors and investigators in February for going public with the clash.

Prosecutor General Yury Chaika has not commented on his son being summoned for questioning, but his office told Kommersant that it would not comment.

Artyom Chaika, 35, has pursued multiple business interests, co-founding two law firms, a now-defunct wholesaler and an equestrian club, Kommersant said. He also has been linked in media reports to the purchase of a salt mine in his native Irkutsk region last year.

Investigators say the gambling case was opened in 2009, but they only identified the first suspects in February. The Federal Security Service, which is also involved in the case, said the gambling ring raked in a profit of $5 million to $10 million a month.

The main suspect, Nazarov, is in custody, and investigators have accused several local prosecutors, including the Moscow region's chief prosecutor, Alexander Mokhov, of allowing the gambling ring to operate in exchange for free trips abroad and other gifts.

All suspects have denied wrongdoing, and the Prosecutor General's Office has closed several criminal cases targeting its officials that were opened by investigators. The Investigative Committee is pushing to reopen the cases.

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