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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Police Want Money to Offer Rewards

By Natalya Krainova

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The Interior Ministry has asked the Cabinet to allocate 280 million rubles ($10 million) per year to pay for information that will allow police investigators to solve crimes, Izvestia reported.

The ministry plans to offer rewards of up to 300,000 rubles ($11,000) for people to come forward with information about crimes that they might have witnessed or otherwise know about, the report said, without citing anyone.

Interior Ministry spokesman Oleg Yelnikov declined comment on the report Tuesday.

But former police officials predicted that the reward money, if approved by the government, would be partially pocketed by rank-and-file police officers, while the rest would help boost the crime-solving rate.

Mikhail Pashkin, who leads a Moscow police trade union, said police officers would split the money between themselves and friends who pretend to provide information for criminal

cases.

Even so, he said, the pocketed money could prove positive, because it might cause police officers to protect witnesses instead of criminals, who often bribe officers to get information about witnesses in order to put pressure on them.

A significant reward may also attract witnesses who are reluctant to testify for fear that police officers will pass their identities to criminals, Pashkin said.

He suggested that the responsibility for reward payouts be overseen by the State Duma instead of the Interior Ministry's audit department in order to reduce corruption.

Currently, the government allocates small sums to pay regular anonymous informers who are recruited by police officers, another former police officer said.

"Not just anyone can come to police and ask to be paid for information," he said, asking not to be identified because he didn't want to offend his current employer.

Currently, police officers don't embezzle the money allocated for informers and often have to pay them out of their own pockets because of the meager financing offered and the necessity to solve criminal cases, he said.

For a poor crime-solving rate, police officers are stripped of bonuses to their salaries, which are small as it is.

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