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Still in Hot Water, Prosecutors Fight Back

By Alexander Bratersky

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The Prosecutor General's Office has launched a counteroffensive in its turf war against the Investigative Committee, demanding that a criminal case against a main whistleblower in the scandal be reopened.

But the prosecutor's office remained in hot water, with four of its officials resigning or facing new accusations last week, news reports said.

A deputy prosecutor for the Moscow region, Viktor Nasedkin, has demanded that the Investigative Committee reopen an inquiry into a regional district head, Alexander Shestun, on suspicion of real estate fraud in 2005.

Shestun was cleared earlier, but a spokeswoman for the Moscow region prosecutor's office said by telephone Friday that "the previous investigation was incomplete."

The Investigative Committee did not respond to the request over the weekend.

Shestun, who heads the Serpukhov district, is a crucial witness in a case about a network of illegal casinos in the Moscow region that purportedly operated under the protection of local prosecutors and police. The Investigative Committee announced the gambling case in February, just weeks after becoming an agency independent of the Prosecutor General's Office.

Shestun dismissed the real estate allegations and denounced the call for a renewed investigation as "revenge" and "retaliation from the prosecutors," news site Rusnovosti.ru reported Friday.

Last month, prosecutors asked that bribery charges be brought against another whistleblower, former Moscow region prosecutor Stanislav Buyansky, who was fired last year and later reported to the Investigative Committee in connection with suspected wrongdoings by his employees. It was unclear whether a criminal case was ever opened.

Meanwhile, a detained prosecutor seeking a plea bargain has accused a colleague, Moscow city deputy prosecutor Alexander Kozlov, of tipping off the casino operators about looming police investigations last year, Gazeta.ru reported.

The detained prosecutor, Dmitry Urumov, also admitted in court Friday to helping "solve" the problem by meeting with police officers and convincing them to not press charges in exchange for bribes of $5,000 per casino, the report said.

Kozlov, the first senior Moscow official directly implicated in the scandal, did not comment on Urumov's accusations. But Kommersant reported Friday that he might be forced to resign. Three Moscow region prosecutors have resigned in recent days, also in connection with the scandal, the report said.

The Moscow City Prosecutor's Office was unavailable for comment Friday.

Meanwhile, the Investigative Committee has also expanded its inquiry to include the Moscow region police, whose office was searched and whose chief, Nikolai Golovkin, was questioned Wednesday, Moskovskiye Novosti reported.

Moscow's Basmanny District Court sanctioned on Thursday the arrest of former Moscow region police officer Oleg Sudakov, who is accused of acting as a middleman between the gambling ring and the police, Kommersant said Friday. The report said Sudakov kept his office in the police station even after resigning, apparently in an indication of his close relationship with former colleagues.

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