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Echoes of Magnitsky In Principal's Death

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Investigators announced Tuesday that a criminal inquiry has been opened into the death of a Moscow school principal awaiting trial on corruption charges, in a case that has drawn comparisons to that of Sergei Magnitsky.

Andrei Kudoyarov, 48, died in jail on Saturday of an apparent heart attack. He had been held since May on charges that he took a 240,000 ruble bribe in exchange for accepting a student into Moscow School No. 1308.

A preliminary investigation into his death raised enough concern that the case has been turned over to the federal Investigative Committee to determine whether negligence had played a role.

"Investigators will establish whether there was a causal link between the actions of officials, health workers and the prison death of the accused," the committee said in a statement.

Kudoyarov's sudden passing bears certain similarities to that of Magnitsky, a 37-year-old

lawyer whose 2009 death while in pretrial detention sparked international outrage.

Authorities initially ruled that Magnitsky died of heart failure while awaiting charges on embezzlement and tax evasion, but human rights groups argued that he had been refused medical treatment even as his health deteriorated in custody. An independent, Kremlin-ordered investigation found this summer that Magnitsky was badly beaten by prison guards shortly before his death.

The case led the United States to impose a visa ban on dozens of Russian officials implicated in Magnitsky's arrest.

"Clearly, they have not learned a thing," Valery Borshchyov, who spearheaded the Kremlin-ordered investigation, said by phone. "This situation is exactly the same as with Magnitsky."

"This is yet another symptom of improperly using the justice system as a weapon and it must be changed," said Borshchyov, a veteran lawyer and human rights activist. "It is a real pity we must continue having this conversation."

Kudoyarov, who had worked in education for nearly 20 years, had insisted he was innocent, and many parents of children at his school came forward in his defense.

His lawyers argued that the money in question had been used for repairs at the school and that Kudoyarov had been framed, Kommersant reported.

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