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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Medvedev Acts on Arrest of Activist

By Roland Oliphant

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President Dmitry Medvedev on Thursday ordered prosecutors to examine the case of Suren Gazaryan, the environmentalist arrested in the Krasnodar region while trying to take photographs of a dacha allegedly built in a protected area.

Medvedev apparently gave the order after speaking to representatives of Russian environmental groups during a session of the presidential council on human rights dedicated to environmental affairs.

"The council spoke about Gazaryan more than once, and the president said he is ordering prosecutors to examine the case in the utmost detail," council chairman Mikhail Fedotov told reporters after the meeting in Novokuibyshevsk in the Samara region, Interfax reported.

Representatives of green groups including Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund Russia, or WWF, and Baikal Environmental Wave had drafted a report detailing the problems, including the "de-environmentalization" of Russian legislation over the past 10 years, said Katya Khmylova of WWF Russia, who contributed to the document.

"This report isn't about the 10 most polluted spots in Moscow but about whether citizens are able to defend their environmental rights. This part of the report will be very critical," Greenpeace Russia's Sergei Tsyplenkov told Interfax ahead of the meeting.

Lobbyists went into the meeting promising to raise the case of Gazaryan, an activist from NGO North Caucasus Environmental Watch, who was jailed for 10 days Wednesday for disobeying police orders.

Gazaryan and his lawyer Viktor Dutlov were detained on Tuesday when they tried to take photographs of the fence of a luxurious property rumored to belong to regional governor Alexander Tkachyov.

Gazaryan is accused of destroying part of the fence during a protest in November last year, and faces five years in jail if found guilty. The photographs were reportedly to be used as evidence in his defense.

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