

Shein Turns up Juice in Astrakhan

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Astrakhan mayoral candidate Oleg Shein, right, drank a cup of juice Thursday while on hunger strike, in a goodwill gesture to the elections commission. **Dmitry Gudkov**

Hunger-striking former Astrakhan mayoral candidate Oleg Shein tempered his fast Thursday by drinking a glass of orange juice, but the post-election situation in the city remains at an impasse.

Shein, a former State Duma deputy and the leader of A Just Russia in Astrakhan, has been on a hunger strike since March 16 along with several supporters to demand a revote.

He drank some juice Thursday in response to the handover of webcam footage from the city's polling stations.

Central Elections Commission chairman Vladimir Churov called on Shein to stop "his useless hunger strike" and "watch the footage together" with him, Interfax reported.

But Shein said he is not ready to give up yet.

According to official election results, Shein won less than 30 percent of the vote in the March 4 mayoral race with United Russia candidate Mikhail Stolyarov, who got 60 percent.

Shein insists that the results were massively rigged and says he can partially prove that with the webcam evidence.

On Thursday, Astrakhan's regional legislature held a special session attended by several State Duma deputies, including A Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov and United Russia's Alexander Khinshtein, who took the floor.

Regional prosecutor Oleg Dubak delivered a report telling lawmakers that the inquiry into Shein's complaint has found only a few minor violations, making an election redo unwarranted, Kommersant reported.

But the hearing ended without any progress on the deadlock.

The legislature issued a conclusion saying "all the expressed views will be taken into account," and officials called on the mass media to "be more objective" in covering the conflict, RIA-Novosti reported.

Pictures from the scene show several rows of police cordoning off the building to prevent Shein's supporters from coming closer.

On Wednesday, speaking at the State Duma, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin declined to intervene in the Astrakhan conflict, saying Shein should appeal to the court.

That prompted a group of Just Russia deputies to walk out.

Former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin said Thursday that he is following the conflict but does not plan to interject himself into the situation.

"I support those going there. It's important to sort out the situation with political forces," Kudrin said, Interfax reported.

Just Russia Deputy Dmitry Gudkov, who came to Astrakhan but wasn't allowed to speak during the legislature's meeting, called for a mass rally Saturday evening in the city center and said the party's entire Duma faction plans to attend.

Dozens of people have indicated their support for the protest by organizing a Facebook group, which listed some 280 members as of Thursday.

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