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New Cabinet For Putin's Eyes Only

By Anatoly Medetsky

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Medvedev handing Putin his proposals for ministerial structure and chiefs. **Mikhail Klimentyev**

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev proposed a new Cabinet to President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday — but both made it clear that details, including the names, are not yet for public consumption.

After handing over the proposal on the outline of the Cabinet's ministries, Medvedev indicated that the names of their heads were not yet final.

"We will not show the individual composition in order not to rouse excessive interest," he said in a Kremlin meeting with Putin.

He then passed Putin another folder, presumably with the names.

Medvedev said he had held consultations with the candidates and would like Putin to take over.

Putin responded that he would begin his interviews with the pre-screened people Wednesday,

Interfax reported.

The need to deal with staffing of the new government is the official reason why Putin backed out of traveling to the Group of Eight summit in the United States on May 18-19 and is sending Medvedev instead.

There is no legally mandated deadline for naming the Cabinet. Legislation prescribes only one time frame — that the prime minister proposes the Cabinet's structure within a week of assuming office.

Putin also said he would sign off on the new structure, but again gave no indication of when that could happen or a description of the proposed structure.

Interfax reported Tuesday, without any attributions, that the names would become public soon after Medvedev returns from the Group of Eight summit.

When he became prime minister, Putin announced his Cabinet on May 12, 2008, 5 days after being confirmed in the post.

Medvedev and Putin formally began sharing their thoughts on the future ministers in March after Putin won the presidential election.

Two months would have been enough time to iron out all the wrinkles if it hadn't been for the protests, said Olga Mefodyeva, an analyst at the Center of Political Technologies, a think tank.

"The delay means that these are not the best times in Russia for making and fulfilling decisions," she said.

In addition, Medvedev needs to make choices that would reinforce him as a political leader after he ceded the presidency back to Putin, Mefodyeva said.

"Medvedev needs to make a political comeback," she said. "People consider him weak."

Medvedev said earlier that the Cabinet would consist of 80 percent newcomers.

While the composition of the new Cabinet remains a secret, Interfax on Tuesday reported a slate of ministers who were on the way out.

Acting First Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov is definitely leaving, it said, citing an unnamed government source.

Acting Deputy Prime Minister Anton Vaino, who is in charge of Cabinet staff, will land a Kremlin job, the source said. Vaino was one of the people Medvedev conferred with about the Cabinet on Monday.

The source confirmed the longtime rumor that acting Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin will not be part of the new Cabinet.

Natalia Timakova, the Kremlin spokeswoman, will "absolutely" follow Medvedev to the Cabinet, also as a spokeswoman, the report said.

Kremlin economic aide Arkady Dvorkovich is certain to make a similar transition, becoming a minister or deputy prime minister, the source said.

Acting First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov and acting Deputy Prime Ministers Vladislav Surkov, Dmitry Kozak and Dmitry Rogozin are likely to stay, the source said. Surkov will take the chief of staff position with the rank of a deputy prime minister, Kommersant reported Tuesday.

It looks like acting Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and acting Finance Minister Anton Siluanov will also stay put, the source said.

Another source that Interfax didn't identify said acting Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev, acting Natural Resources and Environment Minister Yury Trutnev, acting Agriculture Minister Yelena Skrynnik, acting Education Minister Andrei Fursenko, acting Energy Minister Sergei Shmatko, acting Culture Minister Alexander Avdeyev, acting Communications and Press Minister Igor Shchyogolev and acting Transportation Minister Igor Levitin would lose their jobs.

One participant in the Communications and Press Ministry's general meeting that took place during the SvyazExpoKomm trade show Tuesday commented that although Minister Igor Shchyogolev spoke for nearly two hours, his main focus was on the achievements of his tenure, and he created the impression that he did not anticipate he would hold on to his job.

Acting Health and Social Development Minister Tatyana Golikova may move to the Kremlin or stay with the Cabinet in a new capacity, should her ministry split in two, Interfax's second source said.

The same source estimated that acting Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov's chances of retaining his position are 50-50.

Economic Development Minister Elvira Nabiullina could either stay or get promoted to the rank of deputy prime minister with the remit for social development, the source said.

Staff Writer Justin Lifflander contributed to this report.

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