

Kirov Governor Belykh Remains Witness in Corruption Case

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Nikita Belykh

Kirov region Governor Nikita Belykh, whom police investigators questioned for four hours on Wednesday over corrupt dealings at a state-owned distillery, said afterward that he remained a witness in the criminal case.

A day earlier, special forces officers searched Belykh's office and official residence in the region northeast of Moscow, raising fears that the Kremlin was preparing to oust Belykh, a liberal appointed by former President Dmitry Medvedev in 2008.

Investigators said the searches were connected with an investigation into state property theft allegedly involving a subordinate of Belykh and three others.

The four are accused of participating in a scheme that saw shares in the state-owned Urzhumsky Distillery sold at about 90 million rubles (\$3 million) below their market value in 2010.

Speaking after Tuesday's raids, Belykh told journalists that he saw nothing unusual in investigators' actions.

"Over the four years that I've been governor, I've been questioned about 10 times for different reasons. Whenever a check is being run and criminal cases are opened, questioning is a normal procedure," Belykh told RIA-Novosti, adding that law enforcement officers behaved professionally during the searches.

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