

Beleaguered Russian News Site Ura.ru Goes Silent

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The  Moscow Times

Yekaterinburg-based news site Ura.ru, known for its run-ins with government officials, said Wednesday it was revamping its format, prompting speculation it has been pressured to change its editorial line and may shortly close.

"Having analyzed the relevance of our publication, we have come to the conclusion that we do not want to be hostage to our [usual] format, to work to get more clicks and receive malignant comments by anonymous readers, to be classified as tabloid press and unfairly push an agenda contrary to our beliefs," read a statement published on Ura.ru on Wednesday and attributed to "the Ura.ru team."

The Meduza news website cited an unnamed staff member at Ura.ru as saying that the editorial team had not penned the statement and that they had gone to work Wednesday but were not publishing stories.

"There was an order not to publish anything outside the new concept. I can't say whose order it was," Meduza cited the source as saying.

The last article published by Ura.ru was uploaded late Tuesday.

The outlet had recently been asked by a shareholder to remove materials pertaining to corruption scandals involving the acquisition of property by Yekaterinburg City Hall, Meduza cited the source as saying.

Ura.ru has already undergone management changes since it was founded in 2006. The site's founder and editor-in-chief, journalist Aksana Panova, was removed from her position in 2012 after being accused of embezzlement, fraud, extortion and money laundering by Sverdlovsk region investigators.

In January of last year, a Yekaterinburg court found Panova guilty of extortion and handed her a two-year suspended sentence.

Panova, who had a miscarriage in 2012, reportedly because of the stress caused by the legal proceedings, has said she believes the charges against her were fabricated by Yevgeny Kuivashev, governor of the Sverdlovsk region, in revenge for the site's coverage of corruption scandals and other stories that reflected badly on local authorities.

She was reportedly romantically involved with Yevgeny Roizman, the opposition activist who was elected mayor of Yekaterinburg in 2013.

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