The Moscow Times
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Bill Backed by Kremlin Gives Police Officers 'Manna'

By Alexander Bratersky

March 22, 2011



President Dmitry Medvedev on Tuesday submitted to the State Duma a long-awaited bill to provide the police with social security, a measure aimed at reducing rampant corruption.

A lieutenant — one of the lowest police ranks — will earn about 40,000 rubles ($1,400) a month, double what he makes now, Medvedev told Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev at a ministry meeting.

Medvedev did not elaborate on other important benefits such as health care or real estate allowances.

No date for a first reading in the Duma has been scheduled.

Low income is widely believed to be one of the main reasons behind corruption and abuse of office in the police force. Medvedev-initiated legislation to reform the police came

into force March 1, but until Tuesday the president had not indicated how the state intended to reward honest officers for their service.

"Police officers are waiting for this law like manna from heaven," Duma Deputy Alexei Volkov, himself a former police general, told The Moscow Times.

He said the Duma's Security Committee, of which he is a member, had not yet received the draft from the Kremlin but hoped to start reviewing it next week.

The police reform changes the title of the agency from the Soviet-era "militia" to the pre-revolutionary "police." It also orders a 20 percent personnel cut to the 1.2 million-member force.

About 50,000 senior officers have been laid off in the past three weeks, Nurgaliyev said Tuesday. He named no names but said some lost their jobs due to retirement.

All police officers in the country — including Nurgaliyev himself — will have to pass re-evaluation tests by June 1.

"We are not yet police officers. For now we're still militia men," a Tver region policeman said by telephone, asking not to be identified because he was not authorized to talk to the media.

Reforms linked to the police rebranding will end only by 2012, when officers will even get new uniforms worth 28,000 rubles ($990) apiece, Vesti.ru reported Tuesday. The uniforms include summer and winter items.

Nurgaliyev acknowledged Tuesday that it was easier to change a police officer's appearance than his habits. Fighting corruption is the hardest task, and criminals within the force are becoming increasingly "sophisticated" in their actions, he said, RIA-Novosti reported.

Nurgaliyev, in office since 2004, also said half of all serious crimes committed in the country remain unsolved, although the overall number of crimes fell 14 percent year on year in 2010.

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