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Russian Prosecutor Blames Tajik Baby Death on 'Damp'

By Anna Dolgov

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The baby, Umarali Nazarov, had been separated from his parents when they were detained in St. Petersburg for violating migration rules last month.

The shack that housed a Tajik family whose 5-month-son died while the mother was held in police custody was "unsuitable for living," Russian prosecutors said in an official response to a lawmaker's inquiry.

"The space where the foreign citizens were staying is an annex to a residential house, [and] is unsuitable for people's living," the St. Petersburg prosecutor's office said in a letter that local municipal legislator Boris Vishnevsky published on the Yabloko political party's website on Wednesday.

Inspectors found mattresses on the floor and bunk beds in the annex, prosecutors added, suggesting there was hardly any other furniture. The space was "damp" and had no heating, the letter reported.

Vishnevsky was dissatisfied with the prosecutor's explanatory letter, writing that it contained “evasion” for the most part, and failed to answer the questions he had asked pertaining to the tragic series of events.

The baby, Umarali Nazarov, had been separated from his parents when they were detained in St. Petersburg for violating migration rules last month.

The boy's grandmother requested that the baby be released into her care — even providing birth certificate to verify the familial connection — but was denied by authorities, Vishnevsky said.

He was returned to his parents, dead, a day later. A medical examination showed the boy had reportedly died of respiratory problems caused by an acute infection.

Last week, a St. Petersburg court ruled that the incident was not sufficient reason to delay the boy's mother's deportation, the Interfax news agency had reported.

The mother, Zarina Yunusova, was flown to Tajik capital Dushanbe over the weekend, accompanying her son's dead body, Russian media reported.

A criminal investigation on charges of death by negligence has been opened into the incident. The boy's parents are also under investigation on charges of failing in their parental duties.

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