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'What the Hell Is Going On?' Russia Reacts to Shock Detention of Economy Minister

By The Moscow Times

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AP/Alexander Zemlianichenko

Reports of the sudden arrest of longstanding Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev in the early hours of Tuesday have come as a shock to Kremlin insiders and pundits.

Ulyukayev was detained late on Monday for allegedly accepting a $2-million bribe to approve a bid by the state-controlled oil giant Rosneft to acquire government shares in Bashneft, Russia's Investigative Committee said Tuesday.

Kremlin officials quickly jumped on the news as evidence of Russia's fair law enforcement system, while independent commentators scratched their heads over what had caused the

prominent politician to fall foul of the Kremlin.

Here's a compilation of reactions from Kremlin officials, analysts and commentators that will be updated throughout the day.

Read our full article here: Economic Development Minister Alexei Ulyukayev charged with corruption.

Anatoly Chubais, head of state technology firm Rosnano: "For people like us, who have known Alexei Ulyukayev for more than 30 years, this has all come as an absolute shock. But even if we try and do away with all emotion, all sympathy, all politics, we still must remember that there are two sides to every story. One side of that story says that Ulyukayev threatened Rosneft and took a bribe. The other side of that story, we still haven't heard."

(Ekho Moskvy)

Grigory Yavlinsky, leader of liberal opposition party Yabloko: "Ulyukayev is one official who is absolutely loyal to the President. As head of the Economic Development Ministry, he has supported war against Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, the war in Syria, and all manner of repressive laws. Putin's logic in arresting the loyal and high-ranking Ulyukayev was to demonstrate his power over all government officials. The overnight arrest of a minister lets everyone know that anything can happen at any time."

(Ekho Moskvy)

Russian Communist Party Leader, Gennady Zyuganov: "This has long been expected. Our economic and financial policy is destructive, it's robbing people down to the bone. The budget which Ulyukayev prepared is generally useless. Apparently, he decided to profit from the state coffers, which he squandered left and right. It's shameful. If this had happened in China, he would be executed."

(LifeNews)

Dmitry Peskov, Kremlin spokesman:

"The president, of course, has been aware since the beginning of the operation, that is, he received all the information."

"These are very serious charges, that demand very serious proof. In any case, only the court can decide."

(Interfax)

Vyacheslav Volodin, State Duma Speaker, and Putin's former deputy chief of staff:

“In the eyes of the law, everyone is equal.”

(Interfax)

Alexander Shokhin, head of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs:

"You would have to be crazy to threaten Rosneft and extract a $2 million bribe from Igor Sechin, one of the most influential people in this country, a month after the deal [between Rosneft and Bashneft] was given legal and political clearance (...) That's why, to put it mildly, these charges are not rational and have not been strongly proven. It is another matter that, unfortunately, there's often the principle: give me the person, and the charge will be found. Ulyukayev has been in politics for 25 years, and he is being portrayed as some kind of boy who is acting as if he only just came into this sphere. I cannot understand who a person of that level, not just a minister, but someone with such experience in official and political life, could end up in this kind of situation."

(Radio Business FM)

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, former Oligarch and anti-Putin activist

“I might be underestimating how low the Russian government has sunk, but I cannot believe Ulyukayev would have solicited a bribe from [Rosneft CEO] Sechin. Could he have commissioned it from Sechin? Easily.”

(Twitter)

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Business ombudsman Boris Titov:

“In our eyes there's no correlation between Ulyukayev and corruption or bribetaking.
His views were more about developing the economy, we had certain hopes for that. But if his guilt is proven in court, then there should be no forgiveness for such things.”

(RIA Novosti)

Alexei Pushkov, senator and former head of the Duma's committee on international affairs:

“The experience of several governors, and now it seems the minister, shows that [taking] bribes in Russia is becoming ever more dangerous. Russian roulette.”

(Twitter)

Natalya Poklonskaya, Duma deputy:

“This shows the position of our government: in Russia there are no untouchables. All secrets are uncovered. Officials who commit corruption-related crimes, even extorting bribes, should understand perfectly that punishment is inevitable.”

(LifeNews)

Nikolai Kovalyov, former head of FSB: “I'm not surprised, I was expecting something like this after reading [Ulkyukayev's] poems, calling upon his son to flee Russia: “Leave, my son, leave this place.”

(Gazeta.ru)

Unidentified source involved in Ulyukayev's detention cited by Lifenews.ru tabloid: “When they took him, he initially didn't understand what was going on. Initially he thought it was some kind of mistake. He started phoning several highly placed colleagues. He asked everyone: 'what the hell is going on.' No one could answer, some just hung up on him.”

(LifeNews)

Abbas Gallyamov, analyst speaking to The Moscow Times:

“According to my information, after acquiring [the government's stake in] Bashneft, Sechin's team found evidence of serious embezzlement while the stakes were in government hands. I think this was reported to Putin, who then gave the green light to uncover this material. So possibly Ulyukayev is not the last person to be charged in this case.”

Gleb Pavlovsky, analyst:

“Everyone is considering the rumors, not the facts. The fact is that the Russian president for six months was involved in detective work against the Russian government.”

“When the Kremlin decides to get involved in politics, it calls the police.”

(Facebook)

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