

Two Regions' Leaders Dismissed

By [Natalya Krainova](#)

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Karachayevo-Cherkessia leader Boris Ebzeyev giving a speech last year. **Sergei Rasulov**

President Dmitry Medvedev has fired two regional leaders in a surprise move that hints of a Kremlin housecleaning aimed at ditching underperformers before December's State Duma elections.

The leaders of Kamchatka in the Far East and Karachayevo-Cherkessia in the restive North Caucasus submitted their resignations without explanation to Medvedev — a practice widely viewed as a formality that allows an outgoing official to save face.

Kamchatka Governor Alexei Kuzmitsky was the first to go, with Medvedev [approving](#) his resignation on Friday, while Karachayevo-Cherkessia leader Boris Ebzeyev followed suit Saturday, apparently as punishment for quarreling with the local elite.

Kuzmitsky was temporarily replaced by Vladimir Ilyukhin, the region's chief federal inspector, while Rashid Temrezov, 34, a local lawmaker with the ruling United Russia party, was made the acting leader of Karachayevo-Cherkessia, the Kremlin said.

Neither Ebzeyev, 61, nor Kuzmitsky, 43, commented on their resignations over the weekend.

Unidentified Kremlin sources in separate comments to Russian news agencies linked their dismissals to below-par work.

Kuzmitsky "failed to use the existing possibilities" to develop Kamchatka, in part because of his poor knowledge of the region, a source [told](#) RIA-Novosti on Friday.

Ebzeyev was removed because he failed to boost Karachayev-Cherkessia's economic and social development, Interfax reported Saturday, also citing a Kremlin source.

Alexei Titkov, a regional analyst with the Institute of Regional Politics, said Medvedev was targeting "weak governors" in preparation for the upcoming Duma vote and the 2012 presidential election.

Former Kamchatka Governor Mikhail Mashkovtsev told The Moscow Times that Kuzmitsky had failed to deal with the region's health care and communal services and improve dilapidated housing.

"Everything was handed over to unqualified experts and set adrift," Mashkovtsev said by telephone, in a reference to several reshuffles in the regional administration.

Nikolai Petrov, a regional analyst with the Carnegie Moscow Center, said Kuzmitsky was not fit for the job because of his poor knowledge of the region and a lack of public support.

Kuzmitsky, a Kemerovo region native, completed his higher education in St. Petersburg and worked in finance at various state and private companies in Moscow and St. Petersburg before moving to Kamchatka in 2005 to serve as deputy governor on orders from then-President Vladimir Putin, according to the official Kamchatka [web site](#). Putin appointed him governor in 2007.

Kuzmitsky's prospects of staying had looked bleak for months, after he was scolded by Putin, now the prime minister, in August and Medvedev in September.

Putin and Medvedev complained that he had failed to speed up the resettlement of people living in rundown buildings in the earthquake-prone region, a program that the federal government injected 3.5 billion rubles (\$115 million) into in 2008.

About 65 percent of the population of the region's capital, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, or 80,000 people, need to be relocated from dilapidated housing, but the regional relocation program covers only 4,000 people, said Boris Kagarlitsky, director of the Institute of Globalization Studies.

In an [article](#) published in Nezavisimaya Gazeta on Friday, Kagarlitsky also criticized Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky for having a large budget deficit and the region for offering low wages to state employees.

Former Governor Mashkovtsev described Kuzmitsky as a person with a "big ego" and "inability to accept criticism," adding that Kuzmitsky had asked him several times how to govern but never followed the advice.

Kyrgyzstan-born Ebzeyev was appointed by Medvedev in 2008 after serving as a Constitutional Court judge and even helping draft the current Constitution.

Contrary to Kremlin reports, the reasons for his dismissal appear to be political, not economic, because even though living standards are low in Karachayevo-Cherkessia, unemployment is declining, federal data [show](#), and the region is among the few in the North Caucasus to largely escape Islamist insurgency.

But Ebzeyev failed to uphold the delicate balance of power in the region, which has five dominant ethnic groups and a host of smaller ones, most of which have various posts in the local legislature, administration and judiciary traditionally reserved for them.

Ebzeyev tried to tackle the system, announcing shortly after his appointment that he would "fight the ethnic factor in politics." But his efforts only angered the local elite, and he has not managed to mend fences with them since, analysts said.

Staff decisions that have led to disputes include Ebzeyev appointing an ethnic Greek instead of a Circassian to head the local government in 2008 and the local legislature electing in 2010 an ethnic Russian as its speaker, a job contested by a representative of the Abazin ethnic group.

Medvedev has fired other regional leaders, mainly deeply entrenched ones, over the past two years, aiming to improve United Russia's chances in elections, and the new round of reshuffles has the same goal, analysts said.

The party will definitely perform better in Kamchatka after Kuzmitsky's ouster, said Petrov of the Carnegie Moscow Center.

It is unclear whether more regional leaders will be replaced, but one analyst said the next few days would provide a clue.

"If no more dismissals follow within the next week, the other regional governments might consider it a signal to relax for about six months," said Titkov of the Institute of Regional Politics.

Medvedev on Friday dismissed seven senior regional police officials in the regions of Chelyabinsk, Moscow and Stavropol; the republics of Tatarstan and Udmurtia; the Nenets Autonomous District; and the Urals Federal District. A senior officer with the federal Interior Ministry was also sacked. The Kremlin gave [no reasons](#) for the dismissals.

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