

Pressure Growing on Serdyukov With New Allegations

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Former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov

The net appears to be closing on former Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov after military investigators opened an investigation into extravagant improvements at a dacha belonging to his brother-in-law, a news report said Monday.

Serdyukov resigned in disgrace last month amid allegations that several of his close associates had enriched themselves via the fraudulent sale of Defense Ministry real estate, but investigators have yet to level accusations at Serdyukov himself.

The latest investigation, reported in Kommersant on Monday, relates to extravagant upgrades to a Volga-delta summer house belonging to Valery Puzikov, who is married to Serdyukov's sister.

Serdyukov spent so much time at the dacha in the Astrakhan region in the summer of 2011 that it became known in the Defense Ministry as "Serdyukov's Dacha."

Then-President Dmitry Medvedev and then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited the dacha for a fishing trip that summer.

Serdyukov's stay coincided with extensive redevelopment at the site, including building a road and landscaping projects, allegedly carried out by military personnel.

According to prosecutors' information, conscripts from a long-range aviation unit laid turf and planted poplar trees, while a railway unit built a paved road from the dacha toward the Caspian Sea shore to ease access for fishing trips.

An entire battalion was allegedly assigned to the road-building project, which, including the eight-kilometer road, two bridges and land beneath it, allegedly cost the Defense Ministry 100 million rubles (\$3.3 million).

Investigators believe that Serdyukov approved the order for the conscripts to landscape the grounds and personally supervised the project.

Prosecutors may remain reluctant to charge Serdyukov, however, because of the high burden of proof required to charge officials with abuse of office.

Serdyukov has given a written explanation of the road-building case to investigators, his lawyer, Genrikh Padva, told Vedomosti.

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