

# Mayor of Astrakhan Detained on Suspicion of Taking Bribe

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Mikhail Stolyarov, the mayor of Astrakhan.

Law enforcement officers on Wednesday detained the mayor of Astrakhan, Mikhail Stolyarov, in connection with a criminal investigation, a police spokesman said.

"We can confirm that the mayor of Astrakhan has been held as part of a criminal case," the spokesman said, Interfax reported. The Investigative Committee is currently examining documents relating to the case, he said, declining to give any further information.

However, an unidentified law enforcement official said that Stolyarov, a member of United Russia, was detained on suspicion of taking a bribe. The bribe was worth 200 million rubles (\$6 million), a police official told Itar-Tass. He was unable to say who the bribe came from.

He was apprehended by a rapid response unit in the center of Astrakhan at the intersection of Ulitsa Trediakovskogo and Ulitsa Krasnogo Znameni, the official said. Shirvani Avtarkhanov,

head of the city's Kirov district, was reported to have been detained along with Stolyarov, but Avtarkhanov denied these reports late Wednesday.

The regional investigative department said that “it was not aware that the mayor had been detained” and that they had not sent any of their staff to participate in the operation.

“It is a pity that some people don't heed the warnings,” Alexander Zhilkin, the Astrakhan region's governor, wrote on his Twitter account. “Follow the information, it will be unpleasant, but it will be just,” he wrote without going into detail.

In October, an anti-corruption research institute published a report titled “Corruption Hot-Spots in Russia” in which Stolyarov was mentioned as someone whose actions “could soon become the subject of high-profile investigations.”

United Russia will only kick Stolyarov out of the party if he is officially charged, said Sergei Neverov, the secretary of the party's general council. “We always maintain the tradition that everyone is equal in the eyes of the law, and the mayor is no exception,” he said.

Oleg Shein, a deputy of the regional legislature and a member of A Just Russia, said that he will put forward his candidacy to be mayor if a snap election is called in the near future.

“If the situation develops the way we expect, and as it has already started to develop, I will of course run for mayor,” he said.

In March 2012, Stolyarov defeated Shein in the mayoral election, according to the official results. The election triggered protests that drew thousands of people — the largest in the city's recent history — after Shein said that the results were heavily rigged and claimed victory.

Stolyarov was chief executive of power company Astarkhanenergo from 1999 to 2009, a deputy of the regional legislature from 2001 to 2009 and a deputy mayor from 2009 to 2011.

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