

Ethnic Tensions Flare After Fatal Moscow Stabbing

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Ethnic tensions have flared in Moscow after investigators freed a Chechen native who admitted to killing an ethnic Russian in a brawl earlier this month.

Thousands of people have flocked to three rallies — the latest on Monday night — to call for justice in the death of Yury Volkov, a 23-year-old Moscow resident who was stabbed to death during the brawl between Russian and Chechen youth on July 10.

Fueling the anger, Volkov's supporters say investigators freed the Chechen suspect, who has since disappeared, under pressure from leaders in the city's Chechen diaspora.

"Police will keep a petty thief in detention for months and years, and here we are talking about a killer, or at least an accomplice," prominent lawyer [Alexei Navalny said on his blog Monday](#).

The authorities will be eager to keep the public anger in check to avoid a repeat of the ethnic riots that broke out in the Karelian town of Kondapoga in August 2006 after a group of Chechens killed two ethnic Russians following an argument in a restaurant.

The fight erupted at about 1:30 a.m. on July 10 outside the Chistiye Prudy metro station after a young man with a group of ethnic Russians who had been drinking made a racial slur against a member of the group of Chechens, said Abusupyan Gaitayev, a lawyer for two Chechen suspects in the brawl.

But Volkov's friend Maxim Domnitsky, who was with Volkov at the time of the fight, told [Vesti state television on July 15](#) that it was the Chechens who had started the fight and that Volkov had defended him against a Chechen who tried to stab him.

Volkov, an assistant editor at the state sports channel Russia 2, was knifed to death in the fight, and two other ethnic Russians suffered serious injuries, investigators said.

Police detained three Chechens shortly after the incident, and one of them, Magomed Suleimanov, 24, admitted to stabbing Volkov, said Gaitayev, who represents the other two Chechen suspects.

Suleimanov turned over to the police the knife with which he said he had stabbed Volkov, Gaitayev said.

But investigators with Moscow's Basmanny District Prosecutor's Office decided that he was taking the blame for someone else and released him, he said.

"They had to at least verify his words and take his fingerprints and DNA samples. But that wasn't done as far as I know," Gaitayev said in a telephone interview.

Suleimanov was supposed to return for further questioning but subsequently disappeared, he said.

The chief investigator in the case, Roman Motitsyn, refused to comment on the telephone Monday and asked for questions to be sent by post.

In a video posted on [YouTube](#) on July 15, Volkov's friends accused two senior members of the Chechen diaspora of pressuring investigators in the case. They identified the diaspora members as Aslambek Paskachev, head of the Russian Congress of the Caucasus Peoples, and Khasan Khadzhimuradov, president of Green Ray Group, which produces and trades fruit and vegetables.

Paskachev and Khadzhimuradov, in telephone interviews with The Moscow Times, denied any involvement in the investigation. They also expressed their condolences to Volkov's family and friends.

Paskachev called the accusations against himself and Khadzhimuradov "a provocation aimed at inciting ethnic hatred and destabilizing society."

The other two suspects in the brawl, Akhmedpasha Aidayev, 22, and Bekhan Ibragimov, 24, have been jailed in a pretrial detention center on Vilyuiskaya Ulitsa in northeastern Moscow.

Aidayev faces up to 15 years in prison on charges of killing Volkov, while Ibragimov faces eight years if convicted of seriously injuring two of Volkov's friends.

Their lawyer, Gaitayev, said he hoped that fingerprints on the knife Suleimanov handed over and a recording from the street camera outside the metro station would prove the innocence of his clients, although investigators have told him unofficially that the camera was out of order.

In another twist, a Vkontakte.ru user nicknamed Gorny Tsvetok, or Mountain Flower, who identified herself as Ibragimov's fiancée, wrote on a Wahhabi group's page on the social network on July 17 that Suleimanov was released because he has "powerful friends and money," and that he arrived in Grozny on July 16.

The Vkontakte.ru post was reported by LiveJournal blogger [Yevgeny Valyayev on July 20](#).

Gaitayev could not comment on the validity of the claim. Ibragimov and his other client, Aidayev, have maintained their innocence.

Volkov's supporters gathered for a third rally outside the Chistiye Prudy metro station at 8 p.m. Monday. It was not immediately clear how many people showed up. The first rally, on July 14, attracted 700 people, while 3,000 attended the second on July 17.

Alexander Vavilov, who worked with Volkov at Rossia 2, said the rallies were needed to keep Volkov's killing in the media spotlight because murders in Russia often remained unsolved.

"If we don't take any actions such as rallies, everything will quiet down," Vavilov said by telephone.

Vavilov said Volkov, who had worked at the channel for about six months, was the kind of person who would "spring to someone's defense," not "provoke a conflict that would turn into a slaughter."

Vavilov has garnered a lot of support for Volkov on his LiveJournal blog, where he wrote under the [nickname D2om on July 12](#) that he "will not be surprised if the killer gets away with a suspended sentence."

The post has received more than 400 comments, many of them decrying Suleimanov's release.

"It looks like the authorities provoke fights and slaughter with their connivance," blogger Pycckux wrote.

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