

'Showman' Accused of Cocaine Trafficking

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A prominent Russian impresario is accused of preparing a drug trafficking route to deliver 100-kilogram shipments of cocaine from the United States, Federal Drug Control Service chief Viktor Ivanov said Monday, without identifying the man.

A six-month joint operation by Russian and U.S. drug police allowed anti-narcotics agents to bust the plan before it went into full-scale operation, Ivanov said during a news conference with U.S. Ambassador John Beyrle.

A 30-year-old "showman" and concert promoter from Moscow who promoted Russian and foreign artists was involved in the scheme, Ivanov said, adding that the man had been hoping to sell the cocaine to celebrities.

U.S. officials tipped off their Russian colleagues, saying the man was looking for cocaine suppliers in the United States, Ivanov said.

"The criminals were operating by all the rules of the deepest conspiracy. The drug handoffs were done without any contact so that the courier and the recipient never ran into each other," he said, Interfax reported.

The man was arrested with three accomplices on Thursday shortly after receiving a test shipment of 10 kilograms in St. Petersburg.

The GZT.ru news portal reported that a gram of cocaine sells for 3,000 rubles to 6,000 rubles, meaning that the shipment could have been worth up to 60 million rubles, or nearly \$2 million.

The accomplices included a former law enforcement official, his wife — who tried to bribe drug police officers into releasing her husband — and a Moldovan citizen, Ivanov said, without disclosing the names of the detainees.

The former law enforcement official owned several car dealerships, Ivanov said.

He did not say whether the four faced any charges. Drug trafficking is punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

The amount of cocaine imported into Russia is growing by 25 percent annually. Police intercepted about 330 kilograms of the drug in the first six months of the year, Ivanov said.

Law enforcement agencies also confiscated 1.6 tons of heroin, 4 tons of other opiates, more than 15 tons of cannabis, 330 kilograms of synthetic drugs and 4.5 tons of other hard drugs during the same period, Ivanov said.

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