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Suspect in Budanov Murder Arrested

By Jonathan Earle

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Police have arrested a suspect in the recent murder of Yury Budanov, the former army colonel who served prison time for murdering a Chechen teenager and was a divisive symbol of the second Chechen war, Interfax reported Friday.

The suspect, Chechen native Magomed Suleimanov, 41, was charged with murder and illegal firearms possession. A Moscow court on Friday ordered him to be kept in custody until Oct. 26, a court spokeswoman said.

Investigators zeroed in on Suleimanov after tracing telephone calls in the vicinity of the downtown Moscow murder, a law enforcement source told Interfax, adding that the suspect left for Chechnya after Budanov's death but was "lured back" and apprehended.

Suleimanov's connection to Budanov remained unclear. There is no evidence that he fought in the Chechen war, and he was not a relative of the teenager slain by Budanov, which rules out a blood feud, still widespread in the North Caucasus, Kommersant reported.

He may not even have been the man to pull the trigger, according to the Interfax source, who said Suleimanov had unidentified accomplices in a murder plot that dated back to April.

Budanov, 47, was shot dead in broad daylight in June as he came out of a notary's office on Komsomolsky Prospekt.

A tank commander in the second Chechen offensive, Budanov was sentenced in 2005 to 10 years in prison and stripped of his rank for strangling to death 18-year-old Elza Kungayeva in 2000.

Budanov became a lightning rod for both ultranationalists and Chechens, many of whom, including President Ramzan Kadyrov, were angered by his parole in 2009.

In early July, Interfax cited a security services source as saying Budanov's murder was most likely connected to the Kungayeva case. Later in the month, the rebel web site Kavkaz Center cited sources who claimed that the Riyadus-Salikhin Islamist militant group was responsible for Budanov's killing.

News reports said in June that Chechen authorities — many of whom are pardoned rebels — were collecting information about army and law enforcement officers who served in Chechnya, looking to prosecute them for war crimes.

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