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Triple Suicide Bombing in Chechnya Embarrasses Kadyrov

By Alexandra Odynova

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A serviceman directing a pedestrian away from the scene of a suicide bomb attack in Grozny on Wednesday. **Yelena Fitkulina**

A triple suicide bombing has rocked Grozny, killing nine people and badly embarrassing Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov on the final day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

The Tuesday evening attack, one of the bloodiest in Chechnya in recent years, disrupts a period of relative calm after rebels moved their operations to other provinces of the turbulent North Caucasus.

The first bomber blew himself up near Chechnya's legislature after a police patrol tried to stop him for a check, the Investigative Committee said in a statement. Two other bombers waited to strike until the area was crowded with law enforcement and emergency officials.

The dead included seven police officers, one emergency worker and one civilian, Interior

Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev said Wednesday in remarks televised on Channel One.

At least 21 people remained in the hospital Wednesday, six in grave condition. At least 18 of them were law enforcement officers, including an official with the Chechen branch of the Investigative Committee who was on his way home from work when the first bomb exploded and rushed to help the victims, only to find himself wounded in the next explosion.

The three bombs together contained the equivalent of 3 kilograms of TNT, the Investigative Committee said.

No one has claimed responsibility. The bombers might have been commissioned by local militant leader Muslim Gakayev, who has been implicated in several other suicide attacks, Kommersant reported.

President Dmitry Medvedev ordered Nurgaliyev by telephone from Sochi to "properly investigate" the attack and help the families of the victims, the Kremlin said in a statement.

Investigators identified two of the bombers as Chechen natives Adlan Khamidov, 21, a student at an oil college from the village of Staryye Atagi, and Magomed Dashayev, 22.

Kadyrov said one bomber was the brother of a bomber who staged a similar attack last year, Interfax reported. He did not give the militant's name but apparently was referring to Adam Khamidov, who blew himself up near a Grozny concert hall, injuring eight, in June 2010.

"Look at these bandits, bringing grief to dozens and hundreds of families on this most holy of days," Kadyrov said.

He added that the slain police officers had saved many lives by preventing the attackers from setting off the bombs in a place bustling with Grozny residents.

The Chechen government will offer 500,000 rubles ($17,000) to families of those killed in the blasts and 100,000 rubles to each of the injured.

"Every time we start considering softer, more condescending policies toward the rebels, they shed innocent blood in return," Kadyrov said. "This confirms to me once again that only tough, uncompromising measures can uproot this evil."

The attack deals a major blow to Kadyrov, who has been given free rein over Chechnya by the Kremlin in return for peace after two drawn-out separatist wars in the 1990s and 2000s.

Critics say Kadyrov — himself a pardoned insurgent — has achieved outward peace in the region through rampant rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, and by forcing the militants to move to neighboring regions.

Suicide attacks have declined in Chechnya over the past few years. Only four blasts were reported last year, compared with nine in 2009, according to Kavkazky Uzel, a web site for North Caucasus politics. But in Dagestan, the number of suicide attacks soared 64 percent to 112 over the same period, and in Kabardino-Balkaria the increase was 242 percent, with 41 attacks.

Chechnya is not entirely militant-free. In August 2010, a group of some 30 militants swooped in on Kadyrov's home village of Tsentoroi, killing at least seven, including residents and law enforcement officials.

Kadyrov claimed that 12 rebels were shot dead in the ensuing gunbattle, but the casualties could not be independently verified. The attack was blamed on rebel warlord Gakayev, and Chechen authorities have placed a bounty of 10 million rubles ($340,000) on his head.

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