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Politkovskaya Suspect 'Names' Mastermind in Plea Agreement

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A key witness-turned-suspect in the 2006 killing of Novaya Gazeta reporter Anna Politkovskaya has struck a plea bargain with investigators and identified the murder's mastermind, Kommersant reported Saturday, citing unidentified sources.

The sources did not name the mastermind but said he is living abroad.

As part of the plea bargain, Dmitry Pavlyuchenkov, who was detained in connection with the killing last week, has admitted involvement but said he was only a middleman, not the organizer of the crime, the newspaper said.

Pavlyuchenkov, who worked as a senior police investigator at the time of the killing, said he ordered his subordinates to map Politkovskaya's daily routines. He also admitted to having procured the weapon with which she was shot.

He named Chechen businessman Lom-Ali Gaitukayev as an organizer but not mastermind of the shooting. Gaitukayev already had a criminal record by 2006 and is currently serving

a 15-year jail term on unrelated charges of staging a failed murder attempt in Ukraine.

Gaitukayev has denied involvement, but said he estimated the contract for Politkovskaya's murder to be worth $2 million, Kommersant said. He has not been charged in connection with the case.

The Investigative Committee said Friday in a statement that Gaitukayev contracted Pavlyuchenkov, former policeman Sergei Khadzhikurbanov, and three nephews, the Makhmudov brothers.

Khadzhikurbanov and two Makhmudovs were tried for Politkovskaya's murder but acquitted by a jury in 2009. Pavlyuchenkov was a "secret witness" for the prosecution at the trial.

Pavlyuchenkov was charged Friday, but the plea bargain will allow him to avoid the maximum 20-year sentence for murder, the newspaper said.

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