

Two Go on Trial Over Minsk Bomb Blast

September 15, 2011



Vladislav Kovalyov being led by four policemen into a holding cage before court hearings in Minsk on Thursday. **Vasily Fedosenko**

MINSK — Two men went on trial on Thursday on terrorism charges connected with a bomb blast at a central station of the Minsk metro in April that killed 15 people and injured scores of others.

Dmitry Konovalov and Vladislav Kovalyov, who were arrested three days after the April 11 explosion, could face the death penalty if convicted.

Apart from the Minsk metro blast, Belarussian justice officials have linked the two men to other blasts, including one on Independence Day in 2008 and several explosions in the town of Vitebsk in 2005.

Authorities positioned scores of police, special forces and state security agents around the Minsk courthouse for the opening of the trial. The two accused were held in a steel cage inside the courtroom.

The Minsk bomb attack, on a packed metro station platform at evening rush hour, took place

against a backdrop of political tension and a currency crisis that was just then emerging in the nation of 10 million people.

Authorities now say they do not see any political overtones to the attack. But President Alexander Lukashenko, the autocratic leader who has ruled since 1994, said at the time that he saw it as an attempt to destabilize the country.

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