

Leniency Bid Fails in Belarus Plot

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MINSK C Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko has refused to pardon two men sentenced to death for a deadly bomb attack last April at a metro station in Minsk, Belarussian state television said.

Belarus is the only country in Europe to retain the death penalty, and rights organizations had urged authorities not to carry out the execution of factory workers Dmitry Konovalov and Vladislav Kovalyov.

They were condemned to death in November for carrying out the attack at the Oktyabrskaya metro station, which killed 15 people and wounded scores.

"The decision was based on the extreme danger and serious consequences for society caused by the crimes committed," state television news said, announcing Lukashenko's decision.

A pardon by Lukashenko was the last resort for the two men, both aged 25, since the death sentence was passed by the Supreme Court and so could not be appealed.

Judicial execution in Belarus is carried out by shooting from a pistol.

Kovalyov's mother, Lyubov, who says her son was framed for an act he did not commit, wept on the phone on Wednesday night when news broke of Lukashenko's decision.

"They did not allow a lawyer in to see him," she said.

Earlier this year, she went on a mission to Western Europe to generate support for her son's case and spoke in Strasbourg to the Council of Europe, an international organization promoting human rights, and appeared at the European Parliament in Brussels.

The bomb explosion took place last April during evening rush hour on the platform of one of Minsk's busiest metro stations. Apart from the final death toll of 15, about 200 people were wounded.

Kovalyov and Konovalov, who were arrested just a few days later, are childhood friends from the town of Vitebsk and, the court was told at their trial, had been involved in other explosives offenses apart from the metro attack.

Five months later, when the trial started, Kovalyov told the court that he had never confessed C and had only agreed to testify against his friend after hearing his screams from a nearby jail cell.

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