

Suicide Bomber Kills Islamic Leader, 5 Others in Dagestan

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Sufi Muslim cleric Said Atsayev **Sergei Rasulov**

A female suicide bomber killed an Islamic spiritual leader and at least five other people on Tuesday in Dagestan in the North Caucasus, a police source said.

Said Atsayev, a leading Sufi Muslim cleric in the mostly Muslim region, was killed along with five followers and the bomber at his home in the village of Chirkey, the source said.

Meanwhile on Tuesday, a border guard killed eight fellow servicemen in a shooting spree at a frontier post also in Dagestan, Interfax reported.

There was no indication the shootings were related to the suicide bombing.

The attacks came as President Vladimir Putin visited Tatarstan, a mostly Muslim region far to the north, and called for religious tolerance following attacks on mainstream Muslim leaders there last month.

"Religious tolerance has been one of the foundations of Russian statehood for centuries,"

Putin said before granting a state award to Tatarstan's chief mufti, who survived a car bombing in July on the same day one of his deputies was shot dead.

"Those who want to destroy this statehood are taking aim at this [tolerance]," Putin said. "But the criminals will never achieve their dirty goals. They have no future. They will not succeed — not here in Tatarstan and the Volga region, not in the North Caucasus, not in any region of our big country."

It was not clear whether Putin knew of the latest bombing attack in Dagestan before he made his comments.

Militants fighting to carve an Islamic state from the North Caucasus stage attacks on officials and law enforcement personnel almost daily but have also increasingly targeted mainstream Muslim leaders backed by the authorities.

Atsayev was also known as Sheikh Said Afandi.

Putin is eager to prevent the militant Islam that fuels the insurgency in the Caucasus from gaining ground in long-peaceful Tatarstan and neighboring Bashkortostan, also heavily Muslim.

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