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Kazan Cop Torture Scandal Yields Its First Convictions

By Jonathan Earle

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Ilshat Garifullin being led into the courtroom Tuesday. He was later sentenced to 2 1/2 years' jail time.

Two former police officers in Kazan became the first punished in connection with the brutal death of a 52-year-old detainee in March.

Ramilya Nigmatzyanov and Ilshat Garifullin were respectively sentenced to two and 2 1/2 years behind bars for exceeding their authority when they unlawfully detained Sergei Nazarov and brought him to the Dalny police station, Interfax reported, citing the Volga District Court of Kazan.

Four other former officers are suspected of fatally torturing Nazarov, including sodomizing him with a champagne bottle. Nazarov died at a local hospital.

Nigmatzyanov and Garifullin were cleared of the charge of "forgery by an official," although the court did rule that they fabricated documents accusing Nazarov of petty hooliganism, the

report said.

At Tuesday's court hearing, Garifullin apologized to Nazarov's family and asked for a suspended sentence and the opportunity to pay restitution.

Nazarov's brother, Igor, has filed a civil case seeking 500,000 rubles ($16,000) from each officer.

Pavel Chikov, a human rights activist with the Agora Center, said officers in similar cases tend to get suspended sentences. This case is high-profile, so the punishments were relatively harsh, he said.

"If the sentence signals a change in how the government treats similar abuses of power ... then it's a welcome event. But if this is an isolated sentence and judicial practice doesn't change, then it's just another example of selective justice," he said by telephone Tuesday.

In the aftermath of Nazarov's death, at least 28 other citizens have complained of lawbreaking by Kazan police. Rights groups have maintained that torture is used widely to extort confessions and that many cops feel pressure to "apprehend" criminals to meet unrealistic performance targets.

The Dalny precinct scandal led to the resignation of Tatarstan's police chief and was seen as a major embarrassment to then-President Dmitry Medvedev, who had initiated reforms aimed at curtailing widespread lawlessness in the police force.

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