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Yevkurov Denies Persecuting Opposition Leader

By Nikolaus von Twickel

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Yevkurov has ruled Ingushetia since 2008, when then-President Dmitry Medvedev appointed him to replace the increasingly unpopular Murat Zyazikov.

Ingush leader Yunus-Bek Yevkurov on Tuesday dismissed allegations that his administration is persecuting a local opposition leader.

Magomed Khazbiyev was sentenced to 15 days in jail in the region's capital, Nazran, last Friday for disobeying police orders. Authorities accused him of resisting police officers during a Sept. 1 search at a Nazran clinic.

Relatives and supporters of Khazbiyev have called the allegations groundless and suggested that he was being punished for his political activities. His wife, Leila Khazbiyeva, told Kommersant in an interview published Monday that he was detained immediately after returning from Moscow, where he had organized protest pickets against Yevkurov.

Yevkurov said that he could not comment on what Khazbiyev's relatives had said but that authorities had not acted wrongly.

"Everything was within the framework of the law," he wrote in a Twitter message to a Moscow Times reporter.

A long-standing local activist, Khazbiyev has been the leader of the Ingush branch of the oppositional Republican Party/People's Freedom Party since its official registration earlier this year.

Yevkurov, however, suggested that Khazbiyev had little support among the local population.

"The so-called leader, that's how Khazbiyev is usually referred to," he wrote on Twitter.

Ingushetia, the smallest North Caucasus republic, has been riddled with a violent insurgency by radical Islamists. Early on Tuesday, a suicide bomber killed a policeman and injured several others when police stopped his car at a checkpoint in Chermen, an ethnic Ingush village in neighboring North Ossetia.

The car had just crossed the border from Ingushetia and contained some 50 kilograms of explosives, North Ossetian Interior Minister Artur Akhmetanov said, Interfax reported.

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Two months earlier, Ingushetia's most prominent opposition figure, Magomed Yevloyev, was shot by a police officer who wanted to arrest him as he stepped out of a plane from Moscow. The opposition accused Zyazikov of ordering the killing, but authorities said Yevloyev had been shot accidentally.

Zyazikov, who went on to serve as a Kremlin adviser until January, reappeared Tuesday when national media reported that he had been appointed a deputy of Alexander Beglov, the Kremlin's envoy for the Central Federal District.

Zyazikov's name appeared on the list of Beglov's four deputies on the federal district's official website Tuesday.

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