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Investigators: Razvozzhayev Stole 500 Fur Hats

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Opposition activist Leonid Razvozzhayev, jailed after a national television show accused him of plotting to destabilize Russia, was charged on Wednesday with robbing a Siberian fur trader of 500 hats and a videocamera 15 years ago.

While the statute of limitations for robbery cases is 15 years, the alleged incident occurred on Dec. 4, 1997, so the charge was made two weeks before the deadline.

The Investigative Committee said in a statement that the Angarsk businessman's wife had recently reminded authorities about the incident and that "the perpetrators had not been brought to justice."

"Razvozzhayev and accomplices armed with a hunting rifle and two pistols broke into the businessman's apartment, tied him up with tape and, beating and threatening him, demanded that the victim give up the property," the statement said.

The property was valued at 95 million rubles — 95,000 rubles after the 1998 re-denomination. Media reports have said the hats were made of marmot fur.

Razvozzhayev's lawyer, Dmitry Agranovsky, said in comments carried by Interfax on Wednesday that his client maintained his innocence and considered it yet another addition to the mounting pressure on him.

Agranovsky emphasized that local authorities had earlier refused to open a criminal case into the purported theft.

Lawyer Sergei Klimenko of Yukov, Khrenov & Partners said by phone that there could be difficulties with evidence because the matter happened quite a while ago.

Razvozzhayev, a member of the Left Front opposition movement, was taken into custody last month in Kiev after applying to a United Nations agency for political asylum.

His defense team has said he was abducted and tortured into confessing to riot-plotting accusations made in the "Anatomy of a Protest 2" television exposé, which aired on state-controlled NTV.

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