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Parents of Boston Suspect Describe His Trip to Dagestan and Chechnya

By The Moscow Times

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Journalists walking near the apartment building where the father of the bombing suspects, Anzor Tsaraev, lives in Makhachkala. The sign says Dentistry. **Sergei Rasulov**

MAKHACHKALA — The parents of Tamerlan Tsarnaev insisted that he came to Dagestan and Chechnya last year to visit relatives and had nothing to do with militants.

But the Boston bombing suspect could not have been immune to the attacks that savaged the region during his six-month stay.

Tsarnaev, 26, and his 19-year-old brother, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, are accused of setting off the two bombs near the finish line of the Boston Marathon on April 15 that killed three people and wounded more than 180 others.

Tsarnaev's father said his son stayed with him in Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, where the family lived briefly before moving to the U.S. a decade ago. The father had only recently

returned.

"He was here, with me in Makhachkala," Anzor Tsarnaev said in a telephone interview Sunday. "He slept until 3 p.m., and you know, I would ask him: 'Have you come here to sleep?' He used to go visiting, here and there. He would go to eat somewhere. Then he would come back and go to bed."

He said his son went to the mosque for prayers but would not have come under the influence of radical imams, who he said stay up in the mountain villages.

A woman who works in a small shop opposite Tsarnaev's apartment building said she only saw his son during the course of one month last summer. She described him as a dandy.

"He dressed in a very refined way," Madina Abdullayeva said. "His boots were the same color as his clothes. They were summer boots, light, with little holes punched in the leather."

Anzor Tsarnaev said they traveled together to neighboring Chechnya. "He went with me twice, to see my uncles and aunts. I have lots of them," the father said.

He said they also visited one of his daughters, who lives in the Chechen town of Urus-Martan with her husband. His son-in-law's brothers all work in the police force under Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, he said.



Anzor Tsarnaev speaking with a Russian reporter in his Makhachkala apartment on Friday. (Reuters)

In February 2012, about a month after Tamerlan Tsarnaev's arrival in Dagestan, a four-day

operation to wipe out several militant bands in Chechnya and Dagestan left 17 police and at least 20 militants dead. In May, two car bombs shook Makhachkala, killing at least 13 people and wounding about 130 more. Other bombings and shootings targeting police and other officials took place nearly daily.

Despite the violence in Dagestan, Anzor Tsarnaev said his son did not want to leave and had thoughts on how he could go into business. But the father said he encouraged him to go back to the U.S. and try to get citizenship. Tamerlan Tsarnaev returned to the U.S. in July.

His mother said he was questioned upon arrival at New York's airport.

"And he told me on the phone, 'Imagine, Mama, they were asking me such interesting questions as if I were some strange and scary man: Where did you go? What did you do there?'" Zubeidat Tsarnaeva recalled her son telling her at the time.

Both parents insist that the FBI continued to monitor Tamerlan Tsarnaev and that both of their sons were set up.

Their mother went so far on Sunday to claim that the FBI had contacted her elder son after the deadly bombs exploded at the marathon. If true, it would be the first indication that the FBI considered him a suspect before Boston descended into violence on Thursday.

At FBI headquarters in Washington, spokesman Michael Kortan stood by an earlier statement, in which the bureau described a 2011 FBI interview of Tamerlan Tsarnaev. Kortan said the 2011 interview was the only FBI contact with Tamerlan Tsarnaev. The earlier FBI statement says the FBI did not learn of the identity of Tamerlan and his brother until Friday after the gun battle, in which Tamerlan was killed.

The mother's claim could not be independently confirmed, and she has made statements in the past that appeared to show a lack of full understanding of what occurred in Boston.

Tsarnaeva said her elder son told her by telephone that the FBI had called to inform him that they considered him a suspect and he should come in for questioning.

She said her son refused. "I told them, what do you suspect me of?" Tsarnaeva quoted her son as saying. "This is your problem, and if you need me you should come to where I am."

He then told her he was going to drive his younger brother to the university, she said, speaking by telephone from Chechnya. Tsarnaeva claimed that her son later called his wife to tell her they were being chased and fired upon.

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