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Kadyrov's Envoy Says 'Ready to Testify' by Phone After Evading Arrest in Moscow

By Allison Quinn

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A botched attempt by Moscow police to detain Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov's envoy to Ukraine last week has triggered a flurry of corruption accusations and the alleged dismissal of a legendary Moscow detective, but the fugitive envoy seemed unruffled on Monday as he said "his phone was on" if investigators wanted to talk.

Ramzan Tsitsulayev, who detectives reportedly wanted to speak to in connection with a fraud case, managed to evade police after his bodyguards knocked them onto the floor during a special operation at a Moscow hotel last Wednesday. Tsitsulayev then left the country and his bodyguards were taken into custody for attacking police officers, Kommersant reported.

Despite his dramatic exit, Tsitsulayev told journalists after the incident that he had not been

aware the men who tried to detain him were undercover police officers.

"They were both in plain clothes, they screamed something, but I couldn't make out exactly what they wanted," Tsitsulayev was cited as saying by Kommersant on Saturday.

The Chechen official's lawyer on Monday assured that he would fully cooperate in the investigation. According to Kommersant, Tsitsulayev himself faces charges of fraud, and his bodyguards and cousin have been arrested for assaulting police officers.

"My client is not planning to hide from anybody. His location is known to law enforcement authorities, and his mobile phone is always on. We are ready to meet with investigators and answer their questions at any moment," Shamsudin Tsakayev, Tsitsulayev's lawyer, was cited as saying by Kommersant.

Tsakayev said his client needed legal assistance because the pair believed there were "elements of provocation" in last week's botched sting operation — in other words, they think Tsitsulayev was set up.

The operation went down at a Moscow hotel where Tsitsulayev was set to meet with the wife of a businessman currently behind bars for extortion and abduction, Andrei Novikov. Tsitsulayev said in comments to Kommersant that he had been meeting with Maria Novikova to assist her in finding a lawyer to get her husband out of prison, but investigators say he was meeting her to accept part of a bribe to arrange for Novikov's release.

Meanwhile, media reports broke Monday that the senior detective who had organized the sting operation for Tsitsulayev's capture, Oleg Galich, was dismissed over the incident — though that claim was quickly denied by an unidentified source in the Interior Ministry cited by Interfax news agency.

Galich had gained renown for his work in cases against high-ranking figures in organized crime.

Tsitsulayev has been Chechnya's envoy to Ukraine since 2010. He shot to fame in May, when he secured the release of two LifeNews journalists who were being held by Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine.

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