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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Organizer of Nord-Ost Siege Arrested in Moscow After 12 Years on Run

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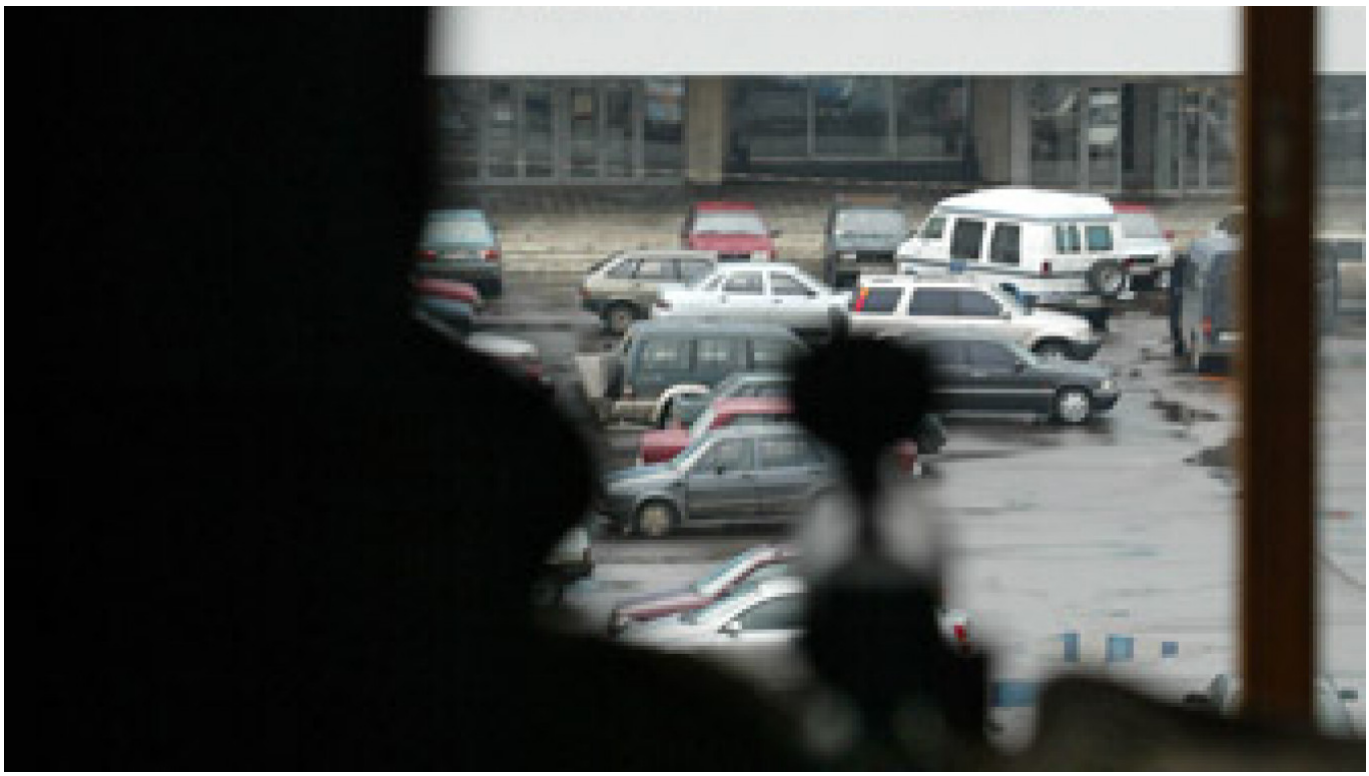

The siege, conducted by an insurgent group led by militant leader Shamil Basayev, lasted for 2 1/2 days and ended with chaos.

One of the organizers of the devastating 2002 attack on Moscow's Dubrovka Theater has been arrested in the Russian capital, 12 years after the hostage crisis sent shockwaves throughout the world.

Khasan Zakayev, a 41-year-old Chechen native, has been detained in Moscow and will be held until at least February, when investigators are expected to officially charge him for the two-day siege that claimed more than 130 lives.

The Kommersant business daily cited a lawyer for the victims of the attack who confirmed that the case against Zakayev has been reopened after hitting a dead end in 2007.

Zakayev faces charges of preparing a terrorist act, attempted murder, participation in a criminal organization and illegal weapons possession, all of which combined carry a maximum punishment of 44 years behind bars.

The trial against Zakayev will be closed to the public because it is connected with terrorism, the Interfax news agency reported Wednesday, citing the Moscow City Court. Zakayev's lawyer, Suleiman Ibragimov, declined to disclose any details about the case to Kommersant, citing a gag order.

According to Kommersant, Zakayev stands accused of providing suicide vests, guns and explosive devices to a group of 40 to 50 Chechens who stormed the Dubrovka Theater on Oct. 22, 2002, during an evening performance of "Nord-Ost." Nearly 900 people were taken hostage by the group, which demanded the withdrawal of Russian forces from Chechnya.

The siege, conducted by an insurgent group led by militant leader Shamil Basayev, lasted for 2 1/2 days and ended with chaos. Russia's security services attempted to knock the terrorists unconscious and free those trapped by pumping toxic gas into the theater, but about 130 of the hostages died from the chemical.

All 40 of the attackers were killed in the rescue operation, and Basayev was killed later, in 2006. Six other individuals found to be accomplices of the terrorists received sentences of between 8 1/2 and 20 years in prison from 2003 to 2007.

Prosecutors had closed the case in 2007 after being unable to locate Zakayev, who is believed to have been the most active in organizing and planning the attack.

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