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20 Years On, Russia Remembers Budyonnovsk Attack

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A statue "Mother Homeland" in Budyonnovsk

Russia marked Sunday the 20th anniversary of an attack on the southern town of Budyonnovsk that left more than 100 people dead and some 500 injured.

The attack, led by Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, and subsequent hostage crisis at a hospital about 150 kilometers from the Chechen border was a key turning point in the First Chechen War launched by then-President Boris Yeltsin.

A ceremony was held in Budyonnovsk on Sunday outside the local police station to remember the officers who died during the fighting, the TASS news agency reported.

"Time does not heal; these wounds have scarred. But [the victims] lie in all of our hearts," local police chief Alexander Oldak told the gathering of survivors, witnesses and relatives, according to TASS.

The attack began on June 14, 1995 when about 200 heavily armed Chechen fighters arrived in Budyonnovsk and stormed a police station.

They then occupied the local hospital, taking an estimated 1,600 people hostage. Several attempts by Russian special forces to retake the building during a five-day siege ended in bloody failure. Eventually, Basayev negotiated an end to the standoff with then-Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, and his fighters left with guarantee of safe passage.

Russia continues to search for those who took part in the raid and officials said last week that two people had recently been charged with participation — Magomed Mazdayev and Ramzan Belyalov.

Mazdayev was arrested in December in Russia's southern Volgograd region, while Belyalov was detained on June 2 in the republic of Chechnya, Russia's Investigative Committee said last week.

Basayev, who continued to lead Chechen resistance to Moscow troops after the Budyonnovsk raid, was killed in a 2006 blast. Six other participants in the attack have been killed, 26 sentenced to prison terms and 23 are still being sought, according to the Investigative Committee.

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