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Citing Political Persecution, Japanese Journalist Takes Root in Moscow Airport

By Ingrid Burke

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A source at Sheremetyevo told RIA Novosti that the journalist is not breaking any laws by residing in the airport, and that he is believed to have communicated his desire to remain in Russia with the relevant authorities.

A Japanese journalist who claims to have been driven from his home country by a dire free speech situation has been living in the secure zone of Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport for upward of two months, hoping ultimately to receive Russian citizenship, according to local media reports.

Tetsuya Abo, 36, claimed in an interview last week with Russian state-owned news channel NTV that it had become "impossible to tell the truth" in Japanese media, and in particular that he had grown "tired of lying about Russia."

Abo said that he has "suffered for the truth" and endured persecution at home, NTV reported. It was not clear from the report what exactly the purported persecution and suffering entailed.

Disenchanted with Japan, Abo flew to Moscow in early May as the city celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Allied forces' defeat of Nazi Germany, NTV reported. Abo reportedly made up his mind to stay in Russia after witnessing Moscow's Victory Day parade, conducted every year with great pomp and ceremony.

He headed to Sheremetyevo on May 29, and after checking in for his flight to Tokyo, he made his way through security and passport control. He then failed to get on his flight, however, and instead hunkered down in a desolate corner between the gates of Sheremetyevo's Terminal D, which he has since transformed into a cozy makeshift home complete with walls comprised of suitcases, a blanket and a coat bearing a St. George ribbon — a symbol loved by Russian patriots and nationalists — and a Russian tricolor pin.

RIA Novosti news agency cited the journalist as saying he had been advised against speaking with the press by police, who warned that doing so could imperil his prospects of receiving citizenship in Russia.

A source at Sheremetyevo told RIA Novosti that the journalist is not breaking any laws by residing in the airport, and that he is believed to have communicated his desire to remain in Russia with the relevant authorities.

Sheremetyevo Airport has made international headlines in recent years after its transit zone served as a refuge for more than a month for U.S. intelligence leaker Edward Snowden after he went on the run with a cache of state secrets in May 2013.

Snowden has been granted asylum in Russia. In the United States, he was charged with violating the Espionage Act and theft of government property.

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