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Russian Prosecutor Claims Nemtsov's Killers Paid $240,000 for Murder

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Boris Nemtsov addresses demonstrators in Moscow on December 10, 2011. **Zurab Zavakhadze / Golos Ameriki**

The five men accused of murdering Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov received at least 15 million rubles ($240,000) to kill the opposition politician, the prosecutor in the case told the court on Monday.

Nemtsov was gunned down on a bridge in central Moscow on Feb. 27 last year, and all suspects were detained within several days of the murder.

The trial of the five suspects, all from the republic of Chechnya, began Monday at a Moscow military court. The men are accused of killing Nemtsov, as well as illegally acquiring, possessing and storing a firearm.

All five pleaded not guilty to all charges.

"They were offered 15 million rubles to kill Nemtsov. They agreed [to do this] and formed a

gang," prosecutor Maria Semenyenko said.

Semenyenko also said that investigators had been unable to locate the murder weapon.

Zaurbek Sadakhanov, lawyer for the presumed killer, Zaur Dadaev, told the court that the accusations against the men were baseless as none of the money supposedly paid for the murder had ever been found.

The investigation into Nemtsov's murder in December named Ruslan Mukhudinov, in hiding, as the mastermind behind the murder. Nemtsov's family members and former associates however, have dismissed the idea that Mukhudinov, believed to have been the personal driver of a commander of a battalion of internal troops, was behind the killing.

Many claim the order for the murder came from high up in the government of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, who has never been questioned in the investigation.

Sadakhanov today also rejected the idea that Mukhudinov ordered Nemtsov's death, asking "can a driver order a deputy battalion commander [Dadaev] to commit a crime?"

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