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Russian Governor Detained on Murder Charges

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Sergei Furgal. **Anton Novoderezhkin / TASS**

A sitting Russian governor has been detained on suspicion of organizing murders in the early 2000s, investigators said early Thursday.

Sergei Furgal, 50, is a former timber and scrap metal metal merchant and member of the far-right Liberal Democratic Party, which has the third-most seats in the Russian parliament. Furgal handed a rare defeat to the pro-Kremlin United Russia party incumbent in the 2018 elections for governor of the Far Eastern Khabarovsk region.

"Sergei Furgal organized an attempted murder and the murder of multiple entrepreneurs," said Russia's Investigative Committee, which deals with major crimes.

It published a video showing Investigative Committee and Federal Security Service (FSB) officers apprehending Furgal as he was entering his SUV.

The governor is suspected of ordering the killing of several businessmen in the Khabarovsk

and Amur regions in 2004-05, the investigators said.

The charges against Furgal carry a sentence of up to life in prison.

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At least four other members of an alleged organized crime group have been arrested prior to Furgal, the Investigative Committee said.

An unnamed law enforcement source told the state-run TASS news agency that Furgal was detained after the suspects testified against him.

The Liberal Democratic Party's branch in Khabarovsk said it doesn't plan to expel Furgal without a decision from its leadership. Furgal's replacement will be named by a decree from President Vladimir Putin, the governor's office said.

Almost 20,000 people have signed a Change.org petition in Furgal's support in the few hours since it was launched.

Furgal's arrest comes 14 months ahead of the next vote where he would have sought re-election.

He is the fifth active head of a Russian region to face arrest in the past five years. Three of them have been sentenced on charges of either corruption or organized crime, while the fourth ex-governor is awaiting a verdict.

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