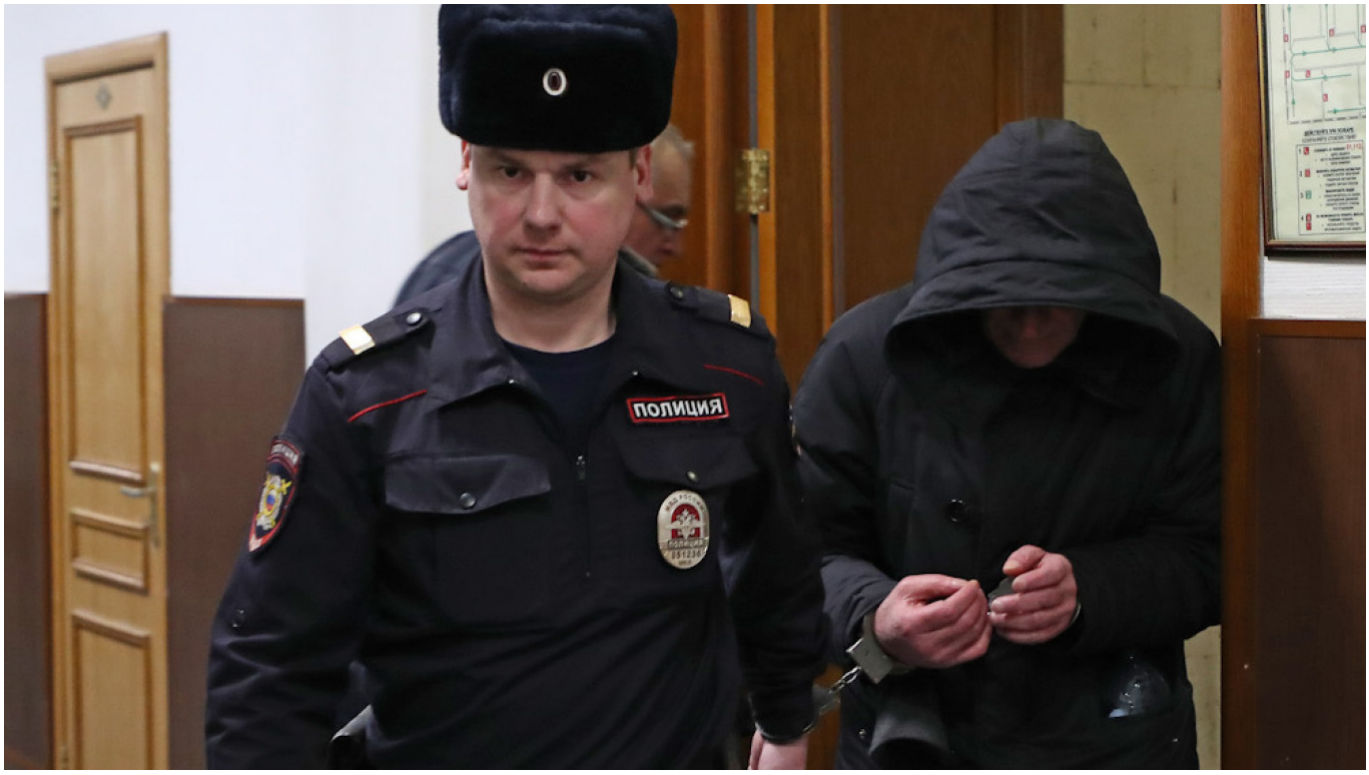
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Russia Charges 3 Over Mobster's Murder in 2009

By AFP

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Anton Novoderezhkin / TASS

Russian prosecutors on Friday charged three men over the 2009 murder of one of the country's most notorious gangsters and drug traffickers who had served time in both Russian and U.S. prisons.

Vyacheslav Ivankov, alias Yaponchik or The Little Japanese, was shot in the abdomen in July 2009 by sniper fire as he left a glitzy Thai restaurant in the Russian capital. He died from his wounds several months later, aged 69.

The Prosecutor General's office said Friday that it had charged Kakhi Gazzayev, Murtazi Shadanii and Dzhambula Dzhanashii in Ivankov's murder, saying they had carried out the killing at the behest of a rival mobster to Ivankov.

"In April 2009, a previously convicted resident of the Moscow region, Ilya Simoniya,

organized the murder of Ivankov in order to redistribute the spheres of influence in the criminal community," the Prosecutor-General's office said in a statement.

It said that another two men, Nugzar Papava and Astamur Butba, were involved in the murder, and that Butba was the triggerman. It added that both men, like Simoniya, had fled Russia.

The men are subject to an international warrant for their arrest.

Simoniya, known as Makho, was arrested in absentia by a Moscow court last year, charged with organizing Ivankov's murder.

The Prosecutor General's office said Gazzayev, Shadanii and Dzhanashii have been taken into custody and that they have also been charged with the illegal possession of weapons and ammunition.

They face up to 20 years in prison on murder charges and up to eight on the weapons charges.

Ivankov was nicknamed "The Little Japanese" because of his short stature, facial features and expertise in the martial art of ju-jitsu.

He began a career of racketeering, robbery, arms smuggling and drug trafficking in the 1960s and served long jail terms before his release in 1991.

He fled Russia the next year, beginning a reign over the Russian community of Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, New York.

After serving a nine-year sentence in a U.S. prison, Ivankov was released in 2004 and deported to Russia.

His close ally Aslan Usoyan, known as Grandpa Hassan, was shot and killed by a sniper in Moscow in January 2013, having survived four previous assassination attempts.

Simoniya left Russia after an attempt on his life in the wake of Usoyan's murder.

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