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Russia Drops Case Against Prison Torture Whistleblower

By AFP

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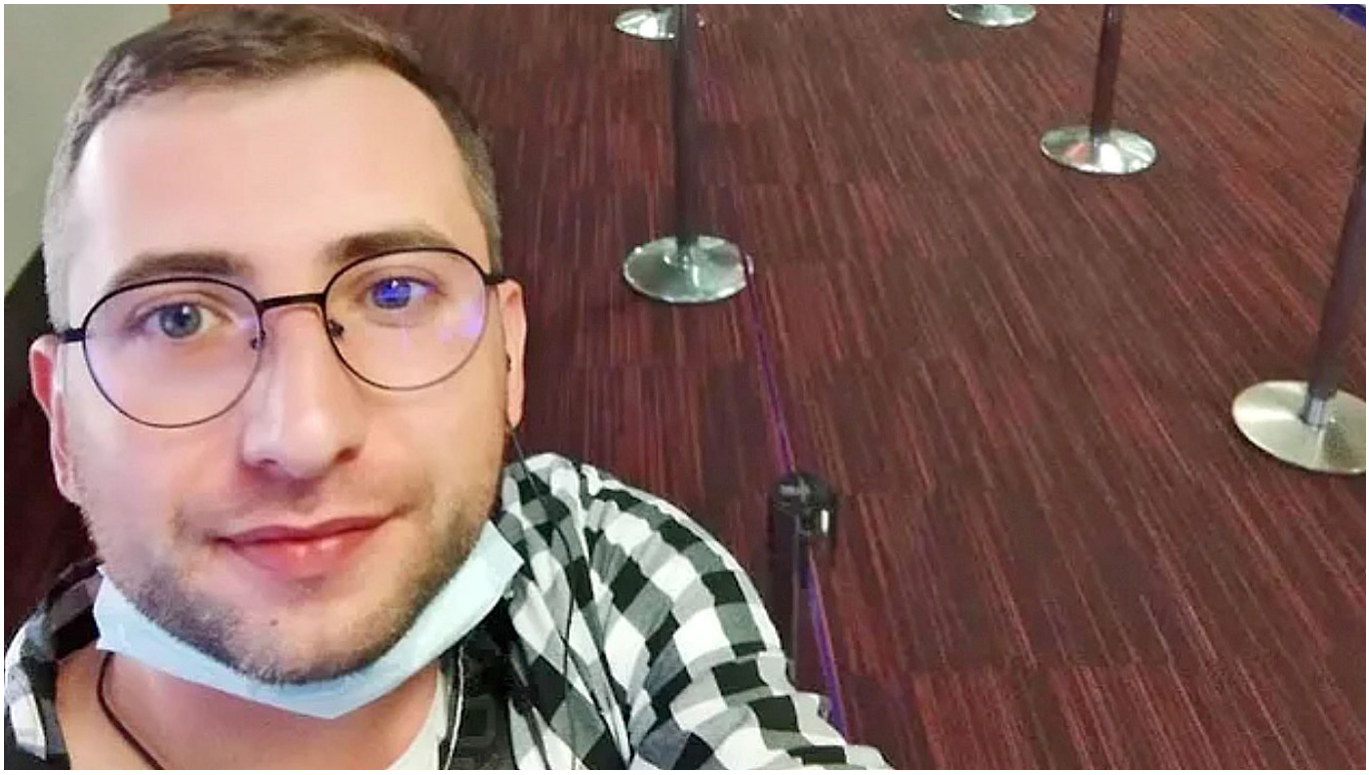

Sergei Savelyev fled Russia and asked for asylum in France after leaking videos of torture inside a Russian jail. **Facebook / vladimir.osechkin**

Russian prosecutors on Wednesday dismissed the criminal case against a former prison inmate who leaked videos of torture inside a Russian jail and is now seeking asylum in France.

Last month, the Gulagu.net NGO published footage of abuse at a prison in the central city of Saratov. The videos were leaked by Sergei Savelyev — a Belarus national who had served time there for drug trafficking.

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Savelyev fled Russia and asked for asylum in France. In October, he was charged with "illegal access to computer information" and a court ordered him arrested in absentia.

According to a document published on Wednesday by Gulagu.net, the prosecutor for the Saratov region ordered that the charges be dropped due to their "illegality and groundlessness."

Savelyev was also removed from the Interior Ministry's wanted list, the Interfax news agency reported.

Earlier on Wednesday, the head of the prison service in the Saratov region, Anton Yefarkin, said 18 officials had been fired and 11 had faced "the strictest" disciplinary measures.

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Five criminal cases have been opened in connection with the videos, he said.

"We are doing everything to work things out and draw the appropriate conclusions," Yefarkin told regional state television.

"I am sure that in the future this will not repeat itself," he said.

During his prison term, Savelyev worked as an IT maintenance officer, earning access to the prison's internal server and those of other jails, where he found surveillance footage showing abuse.

He saved them on a USB stick that he hid near the prison exit.

After NGO Gulagu.net published the videos of the abuse, the head of the jail, where prisoners needing medical attention for tuberculosis are held, was sacked, along with three regional prison officials.

Russia's vast prison system has long a place of torture and sexual violence inflicted on inmates, monitors say, but the videos have cast new light on abuses.

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