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Russian Diplomat Hospitalized in CAR After Opening Letter Bomb

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Dmitry Sitiy **Dmitry Syty / instagram**

The head of a Russian cultural center in the Central African Republic (CAR) was hospitalized on Friday after an explosive device sent to him in the mail detonated.

Dmitry Sitiy, who runs the Bangui branch of Russian House, a state-funded cultural center that promotes Russian culture around the world, collected a parcel addressed to him from a DHL office earlier on Friday, according to a source in the Russian Embassy cited by news agency RIA Novosti.

The parcel — which had no return address on it — later detonated when Sitiy opened it at his home. Sitiy was hospitalized, although the severity of his injuries remains unclear.

Local law enforcement agencies described the incident as a terrorist act and confirmed that Sitiy had reported receiving death threats prior to the attack.

“Earlier, he received the first package, and when he opened it, there were threats in it,” CAR

police head Bienvenue Zokoue was quoted as saying by RIA.

“He contacted me so that I could help him identify the person who sent it,” Bienvenue added.

The Russian Foreign Ministry said the parcel bombing was an attempt to "harm" ties between Moscow and Bangui.

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"We strongly condemn this criminal action, which is clearly intended to hinder the activities of the Russian House in Bangui and, more broadly, to harm the successful development of friendly relations between our two countries," the ministry said.

While the CAR authorities are yet to name a potential suspect, Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of Russia’s Wagner mercenary group, which maintains a significant presence in the war-torn country, immediately alleged that the French government was behind the attack.

Prigozhin said that an earlier package Sitiy received had contained a photo of the diplomat’s son with a note warning the next package would contain his son's head “unless the Russians leave the African continent and open the doors for the French.”

According to Prigozhin, Sitiy said he had seen a note in the exploding parcel saying “this is to you from all the French, Russians will get out of Africa," prior to losing consciousness.

Following the incident, Prigozhin urged Russian officials to declare France a "sponsor of terrorism," a designation recently given to Moscow by the European Parliament for its targetting of civilian infrastructure in Ukraine.

"I have already asked the Russian Foreign Ministry to initiate the procedure to declare France a state sponsor of terrorism," Prigozhin was quoted as saying in a statement released by his company Concord.

AFP contributed reporting

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