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Moscow University Chancellor Dies Inside Head of Motherland Calls Monument

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The chancellor of Moscow's State Academy of Physical Education died inside the head of the towering Motherland Calls World War II memorial in southern Russia's Volgograd region, local media reported Thursday.

Nikolai Chesnokov, 68, fell ill during an excursion inside the 85-meter (279-foot) statue, according to the news outlet V1.ru, which cited unnamed sources. He was reportedly accompanied by colleagues who attempted but failed to resuscitate him.

The Telegram news channel Baza, which has purported links to Russian security services, claimed the visit inside the monument had not been authorized. Baza described the interior of the statue's head as a small room with a wooden floor and a bench, accessible by a hatch.

Investigators launched a preliminary investigation into Chesnokov's death but said there

were no signs of foul play.

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Chesnokov was in Volgograd to take part in a nationwide university sports festival, media reported. He was said to have laid flowers at an eternal flame near the Motherland Calls before entering the monument.

The Motherland Calls stands at Mamayev Kurgan, the site of the Battle of Stalingrad — the bloodiest battle of World War II — where Soviet forces repelled Nazi Germany's advance at the cost of more than 1 million casualties.

Volgograd was known as Stalingrad during the war. In the lead-up to this year's Victory Day, marking 80 years since the end of the war, public calls intensified for President Vladimir Putin to formally restore the city's Soviet-era name in honor of Josef Stalin.

Authorities have temporarily revived the name Stalingrad during national holidays and military commemorations in recent years.

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