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Mariupol Siege Air Commander Killed in Bomb Attack

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Zaur Gurtsiyev. **stavropol.rf**

A former Russian officer who commanded air operations during the siege of Mariupol and later became deputy mayor of Stavropol was killed in an apparent bomb attack overnight, officials said Thursday.

Stavropol Mayor Ivan Ulyanchenko confirmed the death of his first deputy, Major Zaur Gurtsiyev, 34, a veteran of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Stavropol region Governor Vladimir Vladimirov had said earlier that Gurtsiyev died in a "nighttime incident," adding: "All leads are being followed, including the possibility of a terrorist attack organized by Ukrainian Nazis."

The local branch of Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said two people were killed in the explosion, identifying the second man only as a 29-year-old acquaintance of Gurtsiyev. It said the acquaintance was believed to have set off an improvised explosive device.

Law enforcement authorities launched a criminal investigation into murder and illegal weapons trafficking, adding that the explosion may have been "an act of terrorism." Alexander Bastrykin, head of Russia's Investigative Committee, ordered regional officials to report on the probe's progress.

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Surveillance footage shared by Telegram channels linked to Russian law enforcement agencies showed an explosion after one man approached another near a parking lot. The channels identified one of the men as Gurtsiyev, though officials have not commented on the video.

According to the Time of Heroes website — a state initiative for training war veterans for civilian government roles — Gurtsiyev oversaw air operations during Russia's devastating siege of the southern Ukrainian port city of Mariupol. His biography states he "implemented best practices in missile guidance technology," improving strike "accuracy and efficiency."

Human Rights Watch says that at least 8,000 people were killed during the siege of Mariupol, which lasted between March and May 2022. Since claiming military control over the ruined city, Russia has sought to rebuild homes and structures that its army damaged and destroyed.

Born in Vladikavkaz in 1990, Gurtsiyev joined the Russian Armed Forces in 2007 and graduated from the S. M. Budyonny Military Academy of the Signal Corps in 2012. He received the Order of Courage and other military honors.

Gurtsiyev became Stavropol's first deputy mayor in September 2024.

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