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Azerbaijan Launches Murder Probe After Autopsy Finds Brothers Died From Beatings in Russian Police Custody

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Brothers Ziyaddin and Huseyn Safarov. **minval.az**

Azerbaijan's Prosecutor General's Office on Tuesday launched a criminal investigation into what it called the "cruel and deliberate murder" of two Azerbaijani citizens during a police raid in Russia, after autopsy results showed they died from severe injuries sustained in custody.

The victims, identified as brothers Ziyaddin Safarov, 55, and Huseyn Safarov, 60, were among 50 people arrested last Friday in the city of Yekaterinburg.

Russian investigators said six ethnic Azerbaijani men with Russian citizenship — four of them with the last name Safarov — were arrested as part of murder investigations dating back to the early 2000s. They claimed one man had died of a heart attack during the raid and that the second death remained under investigation.

The two Safarov brothers' bodies were flown to Baku on Monday and examined later that night. Azerbaijani prosecutors said an autopsy showed they died from severe blood loss and shock due to extensive physical trauma, including broken ribs and internal injuries.

"A criminal investigation has been launched... concerning the torture and brutal killing of Azerbaijani citizens and individuals of Azerbaijani origin in the Russian Federation," the Prosecutor General's Office said in a statement.

"None of the brothers were killed with a sharp object or firearm. They were struck with a blunt object," Azerbaijan's chief medical examiner Adalat Hasanov told reporters.

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The incident has sparked a diplomatic dispute between Moscow and Baku, with Azerbaijan canceling visits by Russian officials and cancelling Russian cultural events in the country. In addition, Azerbaijani law enforcement authorities arrested and charged at least two Russian state media employees.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said it summoned Azerbaijan's ambassador over what it called the "unlawful detention of Russian journalists."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Tuesday that authorities in Moscow were "closely following" any updates from Baku about the arrest of the Russian state media employees, which reportedly includes two editors from Sputnik Azerbaijan.

"We're hoping that direct talks with the Azerbaijani side will help us secure the release [of the journalists] as soon as possible," Peskov said. "Such actions against media representatives are completely at odds with universally accepted norms and standards, as well as with the spirit and nature of Russian-Azerbaijani relations."

Peskov described Baku as reacting "extremely emotionally" and expressed hope that discussions with Azerbaijani authorities would help ease tensions between the two countries.

Later on Tuesday, the Azerbaijani news agency Report, citing unnamed sources, reported that law enforcement authorities in the South Caucasus nation arrested members of two Russian "organized criminal groups" accused of cyber crimes and smuggling drugs from Iran.

There was no immediate confirmation of those arrests from the authorities, but local news outlets circulated photos and a video of what was said to be law enforcement agents in Azerbaijan escorting a group of Russian men into a police van.

Moscow has not commented on those reported arrests.

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