

Buinaksk Bombers Jailed

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Dagestan's Supreme Court convicts two separate Wahhabi gangs of terrorist attacks

Two Dagestanis were jailed for life last week for their part in the September 1999 bomb attack on a Buinaksk army base which killed 58 people and wounded more than 150.

Isa Zainudinov and Alisultan Salikhov - the ringleaders of a group of six Wahhabi extremists - were reportedly promised \$300,000 by Chechen warlord Khattab for planting the bomb.

The terrorist attack, together with similar blasts in Moscow and Volgodonsk, played a major role in triggering the Russian invasion of Chechnya on October 1, 1999.

During the four-month trial, prosecutor Rashidhad Magomedov told Dagestan's Supreme Court that the terrorist gang had first seen action in the August 1992 Wahhabi uprising in the Kadaraskaya region.

They had subsequently forged links with Islamic rebels fighting in Chechnya and had taken their orders from the Jordanian-born Emir Khattab.

The six men originally planned to drive their truck packed with explosives into the centre of the Buinaksk military settlement where the blast would have destroyed four large apartment blocks.

In the event, they parked the truck on Levanevskaya Street and the force of the explosion caught a single building on the edge of the settlement. Of the 58 dead, more than 20 were children.

According to Magomedov, Khattab subsequently paid the terrorists only half of the promised sum on the grounds that they had failed to plant the bomb in the agreed location.

All six men were arrested in Azerbaijan last November and handed over to the Russian authorities. They subsequently pleaded not guilty to all charges.

The prosecutor demanded the death penalty for Zainudinov and Salikhov, 25-year sentences for their accomplices, Abdulkadyr Kadyrov and Zainudin Zainudinov, and 20 years for Magomed Magomedov and Makhatch Abdusametov.

However, Judge Baguzha Anzholov handed down life sentences to Zainudinov and Salikhov and nine-year terms to Kadyrov and Zainudinov. The remaining two conspirators were freed under the terms of an amnesty to commemorate Victory Day.

The four-month court case coincided with the trial of five Buinaksk Wahhabis who plotted the assassination of deputy prosecutor Kurban Bulatov in 1999. The men were also found guilty of attempting to kidnap Colonel Georgy Iliadze, commander of the 136th Motor Rifle Regiment.

The prosecution claimed that Bulatov was targeted because of his crackdown on the Islamic stronghold of Karamakhi.

At the time, Bulatov was leading a police investigation into the 1996 killing of village leader Magomed Ataev. Investigators believed that Ataev's murder was orchestrated by his cousin, Khalip Ataev, who hired Ruslan Buniaminov, Vladimir Vyalov and Yusup Aselderov to shoot the prosecutor.

The three men also recruited Karamakhi resident Djabrail Suleimanov - currently at large - and Gadjimagomed Magomedov, who was killed during the fighting in the Botlikh region.

The assassins ambushed Bulatov on Khasavyurt Street on the evening of March 31, 1999. Dressed in camouflaged uniforms, they sprayed the prosecutor's Volga with machine-gun bullets killing both Bulatov and his driver, Victor Kobylansky.

Three days later, the same gang was offered \$5,000 to abduct Colonel Iliadze and smuggle him into Chechnya.

However, their plan was thwarted by Abidin Karchigaev, deputy head of the Buinaksk police department, who single-handedly arrested the would-be kidnappers as they lay in ambush.

Judge Mavletgerey Ataev - also a relative of the murdered Karamakhi leader Magomed Ataev - found all the defendants guilty as charged and handed down jail terms ranging from 25 to four years.

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