



Headmistress guilty of sexual abuse at Australian school

Trial over fatal Paris synagogue attack opens after 43 years

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SAINT PETERSBURG: Municipal workers clean the debris in the aftermath of the April 2 bomb blast in a cafe in Saint Petersburg on April 3, 2023. Sunday's explosion in a Saint Petersburg cafe wounded dozens and killed Russia's top military blogger Vladlen Tatarsky. — AFP

Russia makes arrest in blogger killing

Moscow blames Ukraine, opposition for death of top military blogger

MOSCOW: Russia alleged on Monday the "terrorist attack" that killed a top military blogger the day before was orchestrated by Ukraine with the help of supporters of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. Russian investigators detained 26-year-old Darya Trepova, who was said to have links to Navalny, and posted a video in which she said she heard saying she brought to the cafe a statuette rigged with an explosive device.

Ukraine has blamed Russia's domestic infighting for the blast in a Saint Petersburg cafe that wounded dozens and killed Vladlen Tatarsky, an active promoter of the Ukraine offensive. "The terrorist attack was planned by Ukrainian security services with the help of agents working with the so-called Anti-Corruption Foundation," Russia's anti-terror committee said, referring to Navalny's banned organisation.

A spokeswoman for Navalny's foundation rejected the accusation. "Alexei will soon be on trial for extremism. He is facing 35 years. The Kremlin thought: 'It's great to be able to add the terrorism charge'," Kira Yarmysh said.

Russian state-run news agency RIA Novosti reported Trepova had been arrested for 10 days for

taking part in a protest on February 25, 2022, a day after the launch of the offensive in Ukraine. The Russian interior ministry published a video of Trepova admitting to bringing a statuette that exploded. Asked on camera who gave it to her, she said she would answer "later".

Blood and glass

Tatarsky was reportedly killed after receiving a gift statuette rigged with an explosive device during a talk at "Street Food Bar No. 1", located along the Neva river not far from the historic city centre. "They put (the figurine) somewhere in the back without a second thought... and all of a sudden there was an explosion," Alisa Smotrova, who was at the cafe, told AFP. "There was blood and pieces of glass," she added.

The police were called at around 6:13 pm (15:13 GMT) on Sunday and cordoned off the street outside the building. Around 20 police cars, six ambulances and several fire engines were at the scene, according to an AFP journalist there.

The venue used to be owned by the head of Wagner paramilitary group Yevgeny Prigozhin. Prigo-

zhin said on Telegram he "gave the cafe to patriotic movement Cyber Front Z and they organised various seminars there". Cyber Front Z, which refers to itself on social media as "Russia's information troops", said it had hired out the cafe for the evening. A local media outlet, Fontanka, said there were at least 100 people at the event.

Prigozhin however said he believed the responsibility for the attack did not lie with Kyiv but with "a group of radicals that is hardly related to the (Ukrainian) government". The Kremlin condemned the "terrorist attack" and said "there is evidence... that the Ukrainian special services may be related to its organisation".

'Kill everyone'

On Sunday evening Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhaylo Podolyak said the attack happened as a result of Russian infighting. "(The) question of when domestic terrorism would become an instrument of internal political fight was a matter of time," he said on Twitter. Prigozhin said he hoisted the Russian flag with an inscription honouring the deceased blogger

over the city administration of Bakhmut, which he claimed to have seized. The Russian foreign ministry on Sunday paid homage to the blogger and his "service to the Fatherland, which aroused Kyiv's hatred".

Tatarsky, whose real name is Maxim Fomin, made his name early in the Ukraine offensive by publishing videos analysing the situation on the ground and offering advice for mobilised troops, according to TASS news agency.

The 40-year-old came from the Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine, which Russia claims to have annexed and which is currently mostly held by Russian troops. After spending time in prison for robbing a bank, he escaped and went to take part in armed combat in the Donetsk region in 2014, Russian newspaper Kommersant reported.

Kommersant said he retired from military service in 2019 and founded his popular Telegram channel, which had more than 500,000 followers at the time of his death. Last September, he told the media at a ceremony in the Kremlin: "We will defeat everyone. We will kill everyone. We will rob everyone as necessary. Just as we like it." — AFP

Kosovo ex-president denies guilt as war crimes trial starts

THE HAGUE: Former Kosovo president Hashim Thaci led a violent campaign of murder and torture against opponents during the 1998-1999 independence war with Serbia, prosecutors told the start of his war crimes trial on Monday. Thaci and three other leaders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) rebel group all pleaded not guilty to crimes against humanity and war crimes as the trial got underway at a special tribunal in The Hague.

Protesters rallied in The Hague to support Thaci, who resigned in 2020 and has been detained by the court ever since, while thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in Pristina on the eve of the trial. Thaci is widely seen as a guerilla hero in Kosovo, but prosecutors said he openly oversaw a brutal reign of violence as the ethnic Albanian KLA tried to tighten their grip on the during and after the war.

"Why did they do it? The evidence will show that it was to gain power," prosecutor Alex Whiting told the EU-funded Kosovo Specialist Chambers Court. "We intend to prove hundreds of detentions across Kosovo, usually under terrible conditions of abuse, and over 100 murders."

The Kosovo war, the last of the 1990s conflicts that

tore apart the former Yugoslavia, claimed some 13,000 lives. It ended after a NATO bombing campaign forced Serb forces to withdraw.

Thaci, wearing a blue tie and charcoal grey suit and listening through headphones, confirmed the plea he entered when he first appeared before the court in 2020. "I'm fully not guilty," the 54-year-old Thaci told the tribunal. His fellow defendants, former KLA spokesman Jakup Krasniqi, Thaci's closest political ally Kadri Veseli and key KLA figure Rexhep Selimi, also denied the charges. Dubbed the "George Washington of Kosovo" by then-US vice president Joe Biden, Thaci was the young nation's first prime minister and president after it declared independence from Serbia in 2008.

But he has long been dogged by allegations of crimes during and after the war, along with accusations of corruption in a country where KLA commanders retain a key role in public life. "These four men were without any doubt the principal leaders of the KLA and they have been celebrated and honoured for it," Whiting told the court. "But there was a darker side to their leadership." The KLA leaders had in fact for years had a "clear and explicit policy to target collaborators and perceived traitors, including political opponents."

Most of the victims were fellow Kosovo Albanians, while Serbs and ethnic Roma were also killed. "In their zeal to target and eliminate those persons they deemed to be opponents the accused... also victimised their own," said Whiting. The KLA's methods were "not a secret at all" but were publicly endorsed by the group in a "drumbeat that said political opponents posed an existential threat." — AFP

rooted in the notorious Paternelle housing estate in northern Marseille. "This estate is linked to almost all the killings in Marseille over the last months, with two sides that are fighting over the dealing spots and which have probably entered into a cycle of vendettas," she said.

Most of the victims were "extremely low" in the networks which control the narcotics trade, she said, with the city serving as an important gateway for drugs such as cocaine and marijuana into Europe. Two young men in their early 20s suffered fatal gunshot wounds overnight, two of them in the Castellans neighbourhood in northern Marseille where around 50 bullet casings were found by police, the local prosecutor's office said.

A 16-year-old boy died just north of the historic centre of the city in the gritty La Joliette district, while another with him is fighting for his life in inten-



PRISTINA: Kosovo Albanians wave Albanian flags as they take part in a march in Pristina on April 2, 2023. Thousands of Kosovo Albanians marched on April 2, 2023 protesting against announced opening of the war and crimes against humanity trial of former guerrilla leader and president Hashim Thaci and his three close associates on April 3, 2023 in The Hague. — AFP

Three killed in night of Marseille drug gang violence

MARSEILLE: At least three people were shot dead and another eight were wounded during an overnight flare up in drug gang violence in the crime-plagued French port of Marseille, police said Monday. Three separate shooting incidents have increased fears that tit-for-tat violence between rival gangs is spiralling after a series of fatal shootings over the last month.

Regional police chief Frederique Camilleri told AFP on Monday that a turf war was underway

sive care, local police said. A 14-year-old was also wounded at the scene.

'Easy money'

Last year, 32 people were shot dead in gang violence in Marseille, the highest level since 2016, according to the local prosecutor's office. In just three months, 13 have died so far this year, including the latest victims, according to a toll from AFP.

While the southern port city is renowned for its spectacular Mediterranean setting, its northern districts are some of the most deprived urban areas in France. The Paternelle housing estate is composed of a series run-down low-rise buildings where drugs are openly sold and the police are unwelcome.

"The conflict began last summer and accelerated at the end of 2022 for unknown reasons," Camilleri added. "Each gang has interests in other estates --

Micocouliers, Font Vert, Kalliste -- where there have been other shootings these last few months." French President Emmanuel Macron unveiled a 1.5-billion-euro (\$1.6-billion) plan to help Marseille tackle crime and deprivation in September 2021, calling such efforts a "duty of the nation". During a three-day visit to the city, Macron called drug networks "parasites" and said traffickers would now be "harrassed" by the authorities.

Rudy Manna, a spokesman for the Alliance police union, said extra officers had been put on the ground in Marseille but local associations and the justice system were needed to solve the underlying problems. "If you put 10,000 police officers, you'll still have drug-dealing," he told the BFM channel on Monday. "Unfortunately there's easy money raining down on Marseille estates and it's attracting far too many young people." — AFP