

Belarus Seeks Death Penalty For 2 Metro Blast Suspects

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MINSK — A Belarussian state prosecutor asked a court Monday to sentence to death two men charged with organizing a deadly bomb blast at a metro station in Minsk.

Dmitry Konovalov and Vladislav Kovalyov are on trial on charges of planning the explosion, which killed 15 people and injured dozens more on April 11.

Justice officials in Belarus have also linked the two men to other blasts, including one on Independence Day in 2008 and several explosions in the town of Vitebsk in 2005.

Konovalov and Kovalyov stood in a steel cage inside the courtroom, which was packed with police and security guards, as state prosecutor Alexei Stuk addressed the court on Monday.

"I am asking for capital punishment," he told the court, which is expected to deliver its verdict in the coming days.

Belarus is the only nation in Europe that practices capital punishment.

The bomb attack, on a packed platform at evening rush hour, took place against a background of political tension and a currency crisis in the republic of 10 million people.

Authorities now say they do not see any political overtones to the attack. But President Alexander Lukashenko, the country's autocratic leader who has ruled since 1994, said at the time that he saw it as an attempt to destabilize the country.

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