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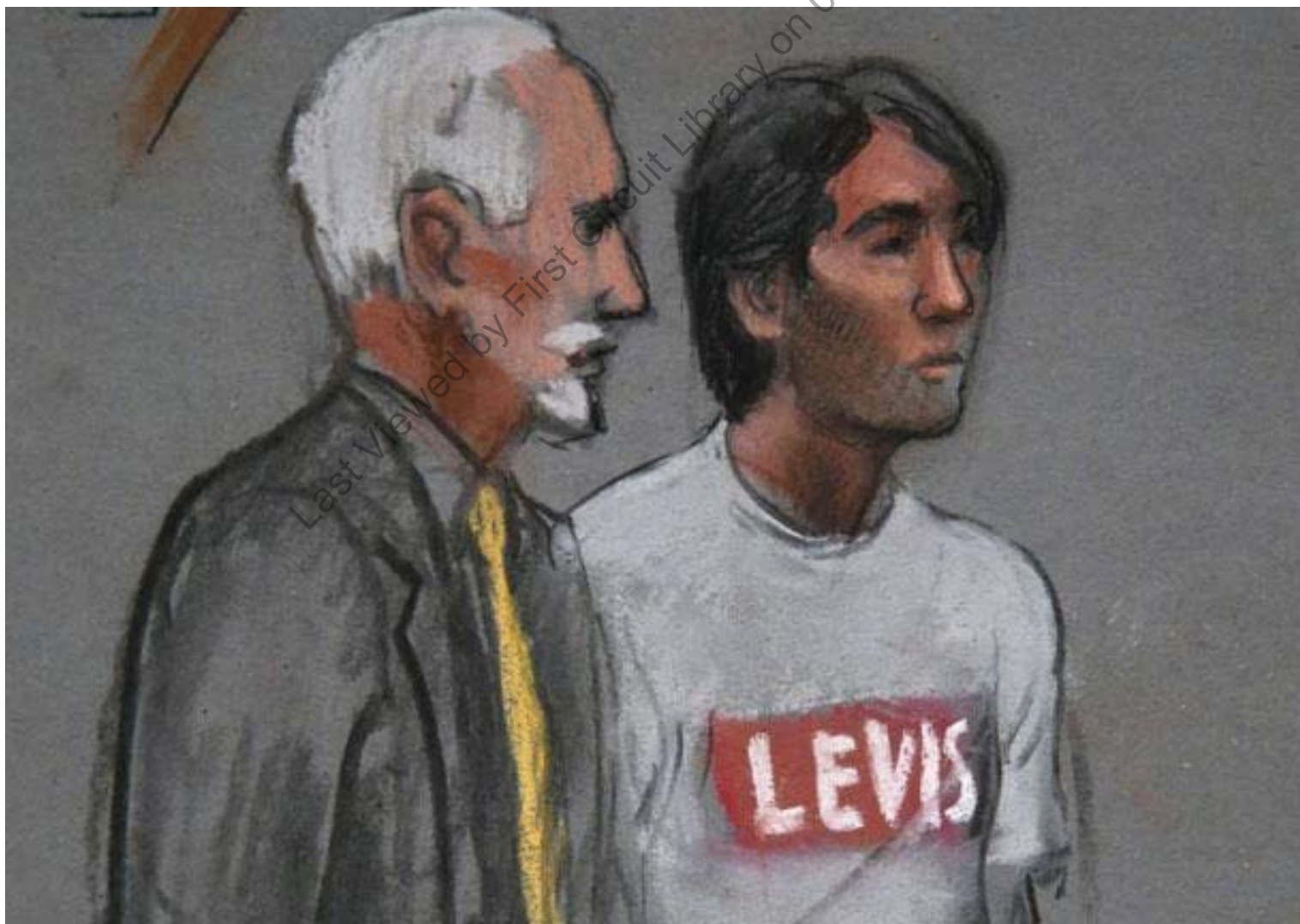
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JANE FLAVELL COLLINS/AP/FILE

Khairullozhon Matanov (depicted, right) has said in court records that he plans to plead guilty to destroying evidence related

to the investigation.

By Milton J. Valencia

GLOBE STAFF JANUARY 13, 2015

The Quincy cabdriver friend of the Tsarnaev brothers, who went to dinner with them only hours after the Boston Marathon bombings, has agreed to plead guilty to reduced charges that he lied to authorities investigating the explosions, according to court records.

The plea agreement could result in a sentence about half of what he might have received if he went to trial and was found guilty.

A federal judge on Tuesday set a Jan. 27 plea hearing for Khairullozhon Matanov, 24, who legally came to the United States from Kyrgyzstan in 2011 and befriended Tamerlan Tsarnaev, after meeting him at a Cambridge mosque.

Matanov had been indicted in May 2014 on charges of destruction of evidence that carried a punishment of up to 20 years in prison if convicted. Assistant US Attorney Scott Garland has said that Matanov faced 15 years in prison under sentencing guidelines.

But prosecutors filed an information with the court Tuesday — a day after notifying the court of Matanov's plan to plead guilty — that charges Matanov with lesser crimes of lying to investigators. That charge carries a punishment of up to five years in prison.



Tsarnaev friend plans to plead guilty

The Quincy cabdriver and associate of the Tsarnaev brothers is charged with destroying evidence.

An information is a charging document that allows prosecutors to start a case in federal court without having to go through the process of obtaining a grand jury indictment.

Matanov was scheduled to go to trial in June, but his decision to plead guilty comes just as Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's trial is beginning in federal court in Boston, suggesting he may be cooperating with authorities.

His lawyer, Paul M. Glickman, would not comment. He did not publicly state the terms of the agreement. But several of Tsarnaev's other friends have also pleaded guilty to obstruction charges in advance of his trial under agreements that they will cooperate with authorities investigating the April 15, 2013, bombings in exchange for lighter penalties.

Matanov was arrested for destroying evidence related to the bombings by deleting documents and his Internet search history from his computer hours after the FBI released photos of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev and his older brother, Tamerlan.

He allegedly later lied to authorities about when he first realized the brothers were the suspected bombers, as well as his recent encounters with them.

Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, now 21, faces multiple charges that carry the possibility of the death penalty, for allegedly setting off the bombs at the Marathon.

Three people were killed and more than 260 were wounded.

He and Tamerlan Tsarnaev also allegedly shot and killed an MIT police officer before attempting to flee the area. Tamerlan, 26, was killed in a confrontation with police in Watertown.

One of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's friends, Stephen Silva, 21, pleaded guilty in December to charges that he once possessed a Ruger pistol that has been linked in court records to the gun involved in the fatal shooting of the MIT police officer, Sean Collier.

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Correction: An earlier version of this story incorrectly referred to the charges and potential prison sentence Khairullozhon Matanov is facing.

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