

# Why Russia Wanted That UC Student

By John P. Wallach

Examiner Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — If anyone wondered why the Soviet Union was in such a hurry to get back Merab Kurashvili, the University of California exchange student who was caught shoplifting and then tried to commit suicide at Kennedy International Airport, several clues to the answer became available today.

Kurashvili wasn't exactly the Russian equivalent of America's man-in-the-street. His father-in-law, it was disclosed, is a deputy premier of Soviet Georgia, one of the more conservative union republics.

"Dad" must have been more than a little upset when son-in-law was arrested for stealing about \$6 worth of hors d'oeuvres in a Berkeley supermarket.

#### Suicide Clue

There is another fascinating clue that may help explain why Kurashvili attempted suicide in the first place and then became the object of intensive Russian efforts to get him out of the United States without first submitting to a "humiliating" interview with U.S. immigration officials.

"Dad" may have gotten his post, which carries considerable wealth, through his friend and fellow Georgian Dzherman Mikhyalovich Gvishiani, none other than Premier Alexei Kosygin's son-in-law.

Gvishiani is deputy chairman of the State Committee of Science and Technology and a leading member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

#### Not Typical

Nor has Kurashvili been treated as the typical Soviet student of chemical engineering. Only a very select, small group of Soviet students get the chance to come to the United States for graduate training — last year there were 35.

When the new model of the Volga Russian-built automobile, with a new Italian Togliatti engine, rolled off the assembly line two years ago,

guess who was the first person in Georgia to receive one of the prized status symbols.

Kurashvili drove one of only 20 experimental Volga "Gulls," as the new models were called, replete with a heavy-duty Fiat shock absorber — literally the first products of Moscow's then-concluded trade pact with Italy.

The growing evidence of Kurashvili's standing among his colleagues in Georgia appears to substantiate the belief of policymakers here that when he attempted suicide on the way to the airport, he may in fact have been overcome with shame for the shoplifting incident and understandably, not eager to return home to face the music.