

Reporter Kashin Comes Out of Coma

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Oleg Kashin, the Kommersant reporter who was savagely beaten by unidentified attackers last weekend, has regained consciousness after lying in an artificially induced coma for almost a week, his wife said Friday.

In the early hours of Saturday, Nov. 6, two men had used an iron pipe hidden in a bouquet of flowers to attack Kashin near his Moscow apartment, which is just a few minutes' walk from the Kremlin.

They fractured his skull, smashed his legs and bludgeoned his fingers in the attack, just one of a long line of such attacks, sometimes fatal, on the country's journalists.

"Oleg saw me for the first time, we held hands ... He is still in a difficult condition, but he was fully conscious," Kashin's wife, Yevgenia Milova, told Reuters by telephone after visiting her husband in the hospital.

"I told him about how much support he was getting from everyone. He is still on a respirator and can't talk, but I could tell by his reaction that he was pleased. He smiled," Milova said.

Hundreds of journalists and bloggers rallied in support of Kashin, 30, in central Moscow on Thursday, demanding that authorities find and prosecute those responsible for a series of attacks on reporters.

There have been 19 unsolved murders of journalists in Russia since 2000, including the 2006 killing of Kremlin critic Anna Politkovskaya, according to New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

CPJ lists Russia as the world's eighth most dangerous country for journalists.

The attack on Kashin, who blogged against plans to build a highway through the Khimki forest on the edge of Moscow, was captured on closed-circuit television.

President Dmitry Medvedev has pledged in the days following the attack to hold the attackers responsible. "Whoever contributed to the crime will be punished regardless of his position or place in society and regardless of his other merits, if there are any," Medvedev said Monday.

Kashin's wife said doctors refused to give a timeline for her husband's potential recovery.

"He is conscious, but the doctors are very cautious and hesitant in their prognosis. They will not give us a timeline yet," she said.

Kommersant publishes mild criticism of the authorities, but Kashin angered people with his investigative reports about extremist groups, as well as opposition and pro-Kremlin youth movements, for both the newspaper and his popular blog.

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