

Journalist Killed in Dagestan

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MAKHACHKALA — The founder of a newspaper critical of Dagestani authorities has died after he was gunned down in a hail of bullets outside his office, police said Friday.

Khadzhimurad Kamalov's leading independent weekly paper Chernovik (Rough Draft) has reported extensively on police abuses in the fight against an Islamist insurgency that originated in neighboring Chechnya and has spread across the region.

Kamalov founded the weekly in 2003, worked as its editor for several years and remained its publisher until his killing late Thursday. He was 46.

Vyacheslav Gasanov, a spokesman for the Dagestani interior minister, said a masked gunman riddled Kamalov with bullets outside the office in the provincial capital, Makhachkala. Kamalov died of his wounds at a local hospital shortly after.

Biyakai Magomedov — the editor of Chernovik, who witnessed the attack — said on NTV television that Kamalov fell on the pavement as he was struck by the first round, and then covered his head with hands when the assailant approached to finish him off.

"They deliberately killed him in front of the newspaper's office to scare the staff," Magomedov said.

Kavkazsky Uzel (Caucasian Knot), a leading online news resource on the region, said Kamalov's name figured on a list of militants and their "accomplices" that has been released since 2009 by anonymous authors vowing to avenge the dead police and security officers.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists granted Chernovik's editor Nadira Isayeva its 2010 International Press Freedom award. CPJ hailed the paper's relentless reporting on the heavy-handed tactics of security agencies in the fight against Islamist militancy. It said Isayeva and the newspaper were regularly harassed with official summonses, financial audits and state-commissioned "linguistic analyses" that label content as extremist.

In 2008, authorities brought a criminal case against Isayeva and several other Chernovik journalists under anti-extremist legislation after she published an interview with a former guerrilla leader. A court acquitted them earlier this year.

"The corrupt structures have been afraid of us," Chernovik editor Magomedov said Friday. "They couldn't defeat us in courts, because we won practically all the cases."

Russia's Union of Journalists voiced its indignation about the killing of Kamalov and demanded that authorities track down and punish the perpetrators.

International media watchdogs have ranked Russia among the world's most dangerous countries for reporters. Most attacks on journalists have remained unsolved, including the 2006 slaying of Anna Politkovskaya, who exposed atrocities against civilians by Chechnya's Moscow-backed authorities.

"Just as Politkovskaya's death meant the loss of information about Chechnya, Kamalov's death will mean that to a large extent we will stop to understand what's going on in Dagestan," Yulia Latynina, an author and an expert on the Caucasus region, said on Ekho Moskvyy radio. "People will simply be scared to write anything."

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