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Prominent Russian Investigative Reporter Brutalized After Mafia Investigation

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Alexander Krutov

An acclaimed investigative journalist has been hospitalized in his native Saratov after being assaulted by baseball bat- and stiletto-wielding thugs, apparently acting with the intent to kill.

Alexander Krutov sustained a concussion, numerous bruises and a stab wound to the leg after he was attacked on Tuesday, his publication Obshchestvennoye Mnenie, or Public Opinion, said Wednesday.

The targeted assault was likely an attempted murder, foiled only by passers-by witnessing the incident, Kommersant newspaper said Wednesday.

Police have opened a case on battery charges and said they are considering the possibility the assault may be related to Krutov's activities as an investigative journalist.

Krutov's editor-in-chief said he had been investigating an attempted hit on a Saratov city lawmaker accused of ties to the mafia at the time of the beating, Saratovnews.ru reported.

He had also been investigating the former mayor of the major industrial city of Engels, who is currently being tried for graft, organized murder and running a criminal gang.

The 54-year-old Krutov has attained a legendary status in the field of regional journalism thanks to his investigations into organized crime and corruption in the regional capital on the Volga River.

His work has earned him numerous journalism awards — including Russia's top award for investigative journalism, the Artyom Borovik Prize, which he received three times.

Regional investigative reporting is one of the most risky forms of journalism in Russia, with journalists often being physically harassed or sued in what many consider to be fabricated cases.

Before Tuesday's attack, Krutov had been targeted three times, according to Sarinform.ru.

In 2000, a street beating nearly left him blind, and in 2003, a thorough kicking by thugs damaged his hearing. In the most recent act of intimidation in 2007, someone stuck a smoke pellet into his apartment door while he was out.

All the cases remained unsolved.

In a separate bizarre incident, an outspoken defender of the Khimki forest on the outskirts of Moscow and ardent critic of the local authorities, the late Mikhail Beketov, was left crippled by a street beating and then sued for damages for the beating by the Khimki mayor.

Beketov died in 2013 from choking on a piece of food he was unable to chew properly after the attack left him severely brain damaged.

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