

Shocked Muscovites Gather at Scene of Boris Nemtsov's Murder

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People visit the site where Boris Nemtsov was shot dead near the Kremlin and Red Square in central Moscow, Feb. 28, 2015.

The Kremlin's crimson walls glisten in the freezing rain. Red Square is still illuminated with holiday season lights. The multicolored domes of St. Basil's Cathedral soar skywards.

Just a few steps away from this iconic backdrop, opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, a virulent critic of President Vladimir Putin, was fatally shot in the back in a drive-by shooting on Friday night while crossing Moscow's Bolshoi Moskvoretsky Bridge on foot.

Boris Nemtsov for The Moscow Times

Boris Nemtsov wrote a number of opinion pieces for The Moscow Times.

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By 2:30 a.m. Moscow time on Saturday, Nemtsov's body had been removed from the scene. Traffic on the bridge, which spans the Moskva River, had resumed. A municipal worker hosed the bloodstained asphalt, washing away the last traces of a shocking assassination. Passersby, policemen and journalists milled through the area, sparking fears among some observers that the quick clean-up of the crime scene could hamper the investigation into the murder.

An orange traffic cone marking the spot where Nemtsov lost his life was swiftly surrounded with flowers, condolence messages and flickering candles in the dark Moscow night.

Officials from Russia's Investigative Committee arrived at the scene in a row of jet-black vehicles. They dismissed journalists' questions, walking through a crime scene that had already been cleared.

Muscovites came to pay their respects to Nemtsov, a political figure they had known since the early 1990s. Many mourners at the scene expressed shock and horror that a long-time political figure could be gunned down just a few steps from the Kremlin, in the very heart of the Russian capital.

"It is unbelievable that someone can be killed in the center of Moscow," said 30-year-old Alexander, a Moscow IT engineer who declined to give his last name. "It is simply outrageous."

Alexander said he would pay tribute to Nemtsov on Sunday at a vigil in his honor, an event thousands are expected to attend. A planned anti-government rally, initiated by jailed opposition activist Alexei Navalny, will be replaced with a tribute to the fallen politician.

Some Russians remember Nemtsov as the first governor of the Nizhny Novgorod region,

a position he held from 1991 to 1997, or as first deputy prime minister under President Boris Yeltsin, when he forged his reputation as a liberal reformer. Others may recall his time in the State Duma and his growing disenchantment with the regime. But for Muscovites disgruntled with the Kremlin's policies, Nemtsov was a much-needed voice for change.

"One of Russia's greatest people has been killed here," a man shouted at the scene as policemen looked on. "Glory to the heroes of Russia! This is someone who will be written about in history books."

Mourners continued to pay their respects at the scene well into the small hours of Saturday morning, laying flowers or simply bowing their heads, many with tears in their eyes.

A young couple embraced. A middle-aged woman broke down in tears. Some barhopping Muscovites cut their Friday night revelry short, arriving en masse in taxis.

A deliveryman parked his run-down car on the curb, and began frantically asking journalists and mourners for matches to light his damp candles.

People continued to come to the scene well through the night, and many were still there when dawn broke over a city now home to one less critical voice than the day before.

Click here for the photogallery [Boris Nemtsov Killed in Moscow](#)

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