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No Answers as Thousands Pay Boris Nemtsov Last Respects

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Boris Nemtsov's mother, son and other relatives stand at the murdered opposition leader's coffin during his wake at the Sakharov Center on Tuesday.

As thousands of Muscovites and international politicians flocked to the Sakharov human rights center in Moscow on Tuesday to pay their last respects to the slain opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, little has yet been ascertained about who was behind the brutal killing that sent shockwaves throughout Russia and beyond.

The wake for Nemtsov, 55, a former deputy prime minister-turned-Kremlin critic shot dead in Moscow on Friday, was a rare occasion at which government members mingled with long-time critics of President Vladimir Putin, human rights activists and journalists, reflecting Nemtsov's ability to maintain good personal relations with people across Russia's political spectrum.

Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich was the highest-ranking government official to lay

flowers at Nemtsov's open coffin, which stood in the middle of the room.

Putin, who in an earlier statement called the killing "a pure provocation," sent his envoy to the State Duma, Garry Minkh, to lay a funeral wreath.

The widow of Russia's first President Boris Yeltsin, who promoted Nemtsov to the post of First Deputy Prime Minister in 1998 and reportedly considered naming him his successor, made a rare public appearance.

"They were both very courageous, stately, and hopelessly crazy," Naina Yeltsina said of her late husband and Nemtsov.

U.S. Ambassador John Tefft, former British Prime Minister John Major and representatives of many other countries were present. Numerous Russian businessmen, including Alfa Bank chairman Pyotr Aven and Onexim Group founder-turned-politician Mikhail Prokhorov also came to pay their respects.

Senior officials from Poland and Latvia who attempted to visit the wake were denied entry into Russia.

"Nemtsov's killing is a dramatic page in Russia's history because we have seen that a political opponent can be stopped with arms. This is a new, unacceptable reality that makes the country's government responsible for preventing it," former Finance Minster Alexei Kudrin told reporters after laying flowers at the coffin.

Kudrin said it should have been an occasion for leaders of Russian political parties represented in the State Duma to show their solidarity, and that it was regrettable they were not present at the ceremony.

Investigation Stalled

Despite Putin's assurance to Nemtsov's mother that everything would be done "to ensure that the perpetrators of this foul and cynical crime and those who stand behind them are properly punished," the investigators had failed to produce any concrete results four days after Nemtsov was shot dead on a busy bridge a stone's throw from Moscow's iconic Red Square.

The key witness to the crime, Nemtsov's female companion Anna Duritskaya, who was walking across the bridge with the opposition leader when he was killed, returned to her native Ukraine on Monday night after questioning.

In addition, it is still not clear whether CCTV cameras at the site of the killing were operating on Friday night, or even who is responsible for the cameras, after Moscow City Hall and the Federal Guards Service responsible for the Kremlin made conflicting claims Monday.

Cameras installed on the nearest 46-meter-tall Kremlin tower were pointing toward the crime scene when journalists arrived there two hours after the killing. The only video footage of the murder to have been made public, provided by the TV Center television channel, was indistinct and did not provide any conclusive evidence.

Investigators have also been unable to locate the getaway car in which the killer escaped

immediately after the shooting. Ren-TV channel said Monday that investigators had found a Ukraine-produced ZAZ Chance car that was used by the killers, but the Investigative Committee has not officially confirmed this claim.

On Monday, investigators offered a reward of 3 million rubles ($48,300) for any information about the killing.

'Heroes Don't Die'

More than 1,000 people were still standing in line outside the Sakharov center when the mourning ceremony was declared over. They began clapping when the coffin was carried outside, and threw flowers on it, shouting "Heroes don't die" and "Russia will be free."

Over the years, pro-government forces have labeled Nemtsov a representative of a "fifth column" allegedly seeking to undermine the foundations of the Russian state at the instructions of Western governments.

Many at the mourning ceremony said it was this atmosphere of hatred and aggression that had prompted the killers to commit such a shocking crime in the very heart of the country's capital.

While some of those present spoke of Nemtsov's role as a politician, it was clear that many people there had lost a friend, a relative or a parent on Friday.

Nemtsov's mother, Dina Eidman, spent her 88th birthday standing in front of the open casket of her son.

"For us he was first and foremost our father, not a politician," Nemtsov's son Anton said at the end of the ceremony.

"He was a very pure and honest man," he said.

Nemtsov was buried at the Troyekurovskoye cemetery on the outskirts of Moscow following the wake.

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