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Miss Russia to Be Photographed by Murder Suspect

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Sofia Nikitchuk, the new Miss Russia

Days after the Miss Russia competition was rocked by claims that the master of ceremonies brutally beat up his girlfriend, news reports said Monday that a famous photographer suspected of murdering his wife has been asked to take photos of the contest's winner.

Dmitry Loshagin, who was previously acquitted of his wife's murder but is now to be retried, told state media that newly crowned contest winner Sofia Nikitchuk's representatives had contacted him for a photo shoot.

But Loshagin said he doesn't have enough time for the job because he is "busy with court proceedings practically every day," state news agency TASS reported.

Loshagin was one of the most respected photographers in Nikitchuk's hometown of Yekaterinburg until his wife was found murdered in a forest and he was named as the main

suspect.

The photographer shared a $1 million penthouse apartment with his wife, model Yulia Prokopyeva, where they were seen arguing at a party shortly before her strangled and severely burned body was discovered in August 2013, media reports said, citing investigators.

Loshagin, who spent more than a year in custody until he was acquitted in December, has adamantly denied any involvement in the murder. However, in February a local court overturned the ruling and initiated a new trial.

Last week the girlfriend of the Miss Russia competition's master of ceremonies Alexander Belov claimed in a report carried by sensationalist media agency LifeNews that he had beaten her up days before the finale.

The girlfriend — Anna Anisimova, a model and singer who performs under the stage name Anna Callucci — was shown in photos with a black eye and a large bruise on her back.

The report said Anisimova was hospitalized for the injuries on April 11 and has notified police, but it added that Belov denied the claim and intends to sue her for defamation.

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