

Opposition Activist Remains in Critical Condition

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(L-R) Mikhail Kasyanov, Grigory Yavlinsky, Sergei Mitrokhin, Vladimir Kara-Murza and Boris Nemtsov during the opposition rally in central Moscow, Mar. 5, 2012.

A Russian opposition activist with close ties to murdered Kremlin critic Boris Nemtsov remains in a coma after having been diagnosed with severe renal failure, a condition some of his associates have said could have been induced by poisoning, Russia media reported Sunday.

The 33-year-old activist, Vladimir Kara-Murza, is a member of the political council of Nemtsov's RPR-Parnas party and serves as the coordinator of Open Russia, a pro-democracy group founded by former oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who was jailed for a decade on charges widely viewed as politically motivated.

Kara-Murza suddenly fell ill last Tuesday after Open Russia made headlines for releasing a documentary critical of Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and was rushed to a Moscow

hospital. Doctors said that he suffered from severe kidney failure caused by acute intoxication, Khodorkovsky said in a statement.

He slipped into a coma and as of Sunday remained on life support, the RIA Novosti state news agency reported.

Typically-outspoken activist Ilya Yashin, also a close associate of Nemtsov, wrote on Twitter last week that Kara-Murza had been poisoned. Yashin did not say who he believed was behind the alleged crime, nor how it could have taken place.

After Kara-Murza's father, a prominent journalist also named Vladimir, speculated in comments to the RBC news site that bad yogurt could have been to blame, the head of RPR-Parnas Mikhail Kasyanov tweeted, "Expired kefir [a fermented milk drink] does not lead to acute intoxication."

Doctors have been unable to confirm or deny the theory that Kara-Murza was poisoned, though the activist's father has downplayed the likelihood of that scenario in comments to the media. "I don't think there is anything criminal about this," the elder Kara-Murza said in comments carried by the Interfax news agency. "If there was, we would not be here talking to you today."

Khodorkovsky has also been reluctant to comment on the poisoning theory, saying he would wait for the results of Kara-Murza's medical examinations before making any statements.

Investigative newspaper Novaya Gazeta reported last week that a request by Kara-Murza's family to have his test samples sent abroad for analysis had been denied by the hospital administration. The hospital later agreed to the family's request and allowed the opposition activist to be examined by an Israeli toxicologist in Moscow, Russian media reported. Medical personnel have said Kara-Murza himself was too ill to be transported to a treatment facility abroad.

Kara-Murza's father told Interfax on Sunday that his son's medical condition had remained consistent for the past three nights. Khodorkovsky also tweeted on Sunday that there was "hope" concerning Kara-Murza's medical condition, but did not elaborate on the nature of the positive developments.

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