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Reporter Who Irked Putin Beaten

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A veteran reporter who once wrote that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin would leave his wife for a 27-year-old gymnast was beaten up Wednesday as he left his apartment in central Moscow, police said.

Two unidentified men attacked Sergei Topol, 55, at about 10 a.m. outside 1 Kotelnicheskaya Naberezhnaya, the Stalin skyscraper where he lives, a police spokesman told Interfax.

Topol was hospitalized with a concussion and multiple bruises, the report said.

Police would not comment on the motive behind the attack on Topol, who published a string of articles in 2008 saying Putin would leave his wife, Lyudmila, for Olympic champion gymnast Alina Kabayeva.

At the time Putin dismissed the reports, telling journalists to keep their "snotty" noses out of his private life. Kabayeva has denied an affair with Putin.

Shortly after the articles were published, Topol's paper, the Moskovsky Korrespondent, was shut down.

The paper's billionaire owner, Alexander Lebedev, called Topol's articles "nonsense" and said he shut the daily because it was losing money.

Topol, who has also written for the newspapers Kommersant and Segodnya and the Itogi magazine, is a well-regarded journalist who famously penned his successful negotiations with Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basayev in 1995, when he managed to free himself and others from a hostage attack.

Wednesday's attack comes six months after Kommersant journalist Oleg Kashin, 30, was savagely beaten into a coma outside his Moscow apartment building. The attack was caught on surveillance camera, but no suspects have been detained.

(Reuters, MT)

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