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Chechen Leader Threatens Journalist Who Investigated Region's Harsh Virus Quarantine

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Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov called Novaya Gazeta an "anti-Russian newspaper whose corrupt journalists receive awards in the West and the United States." **Mikhail Metzel / TASS**

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov has threatened an investigative journalist Monday for a "provocative" story on the Russian region's strict anti-coronavirus measures, the independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported.

The story, authored by Novaya Gazeta journalist Yelena Milashina, cited quarantined Chechens as saying Sunday that they stopped reporting coronavirus symptoms for fear of being labeled "terrorists." Kadyrov reportedly accused "that woman, if you can call her that," of writing "nonsense."

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Says

“I’m fed up! If you want us to commit a crime and become criminals, then say so!” Kadyrov said, according to Novaya Gazeta’s transcript of his Instagram Live session.

“Someone will take on this burden of responsibility and will be punished under the law,” he was quoted as saying in an apparent threat. “He'll spend time in prison and get out.”

Milashina was attacked in Chechnya earlier this year. In 2017, she broke the story of alleged gay purges in the conservative, predominantly Muslim region which made international headlines.

Kadyrov’s reaction to Milashina’s report was more subdued on his Telegram channel, where he labeled Novaya Gazeta an “anti-Russian newspaper whose corrupt journalists receive awards in the West and the United States.”

He accused the paper of abusing freedom of speech “to label my people as hardened criminals, medieval heathens and stranglers of freedom with their myths.”

“How long will this provocative and explosive anti-Chechen harassment brazenly and shamelessly organized by Novaya Gazeta continue?” he asked. “Why is the powerful stronghold of our sovereignty, the FSB, practically condoning the activities of a foreign agent?”

Chechnya, which has imposed strict regionwide border controls during Russia’s coronavirus outbreak, reported 64 coronavirus cases and five deaths since the outbreak began. Russia reported a total of 21,102 cases and 170 deaths as of Tuesday.

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