The Moscow Times
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St. Petersburg Man Sets Himself on Fire Holding 'Happy Birthday, Mr. President' Sign

October 08, 2020



megapolisonline.ru

An elderly man wearing a "Happy Birthday Mr. President" sign set himself on fire on a crowded street in central St. Petersburg on President Vladimir Putin's 68th birthday Wednesday, media reported.

The unnamed 71-year-old businessman was hospitalized in serious condition after his self-immolation witnessed by dozens of passersby outside a shopping mall. The Sobaka.ru outlet said the victim suffered first- and second-degree burns to 45% of his body surface.

Eyewitnesses described hearing him scream out "something about President Putin's birthday and a gift" before committing the act, the Megapolis news website reported.

Videos later showed a half-burnt sign reading "...Birthday Mr. President" next to the man writhing in pain surrounded by police and passersby.

According to the Fontanka.ru news site, the victim has operated a commercial real estate firm located near the site of his self-immolation for nearly 20 years.

Police said the burn victim had been under observation at a psychiatric institution, according to St. Petersburg's Business News Agency.

This is the second self-immolation act to take place in Russia within a week. On Friday, independent journalist Irina Slavina died after setting herself on fire in front of the Nizhny Novgorod police headquarters.

Her final social media post told followers to "blame the Russian Federation" for her death, which occurred the day after police raided her home for evidence of her role within the opposition.

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