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Belarus Activist Returned to Jail After Stabbing Himself in Court

By AFP

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Stepan Latypov had rammed a pen into his neck at a hearing seen by government critics as part of a sweeping crackdown on the opposition. **Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty / AFP**

A Belarusian activist who was hospitalized after stabbing himself in the neck in court has been returned to prison following surgery, the Viasna rights group said Wednesday.

Stepan Latypov, 41, on Tuesday rammed a pen into his neck on the first day of his trial on several protest-related charges during a hearing seen by government critics as part of a sweeping crackdown on political opposition.

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Viasna, citing Latypov's relatives, said Wednesday the activist was returned to prison and that family had been able to deliver him a parcel there.

Latypov was detained last September and went on trial in the capital Minsk on several charges including creating protest symbols and resisting law enforcement.

Viasna said he appeared in court with bruises and that after his father was questioned Latypov climbed on a bench and stabbed himself in the neck with what appeared to be a pen.

Belarus was gripped by months of demonstrations that erupted after a disputed presidential election last August saw Alexander Lukashenko claim a sixth term.

Security forces cracked down hard on protests, detaining and imprisoning thousands of demonstrators and pushing opposition leaders into exile. Several people died in the unrest.

Another Belarusian political activist, 50-year-old Vitold Ashurok, died in jail in the east of the country last month, reportedly of cardiac arrest.

Belarus has faced a global outcry after Lukashenko's government ordered the diversion of a European flight over its airspace last month and arrested dissident Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend who were on board.

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