

September 4, 2008

2 More Journalists Are Attacked in Caucasus

By ELLEN BARRY

MOSCOW — A television reporter was mortally wounded and a newspaper editor was severely beaten Tuesday in Russia's north Caucasus region, bringing to three the number of attacks on journalists this week in the volatile area.

Telman Alishaev, a reporter for Islamic TV in Dagestan, died Wednesday after being shot on Tuesday while sitting in his car, an Interior Ministry spokesman said. Miloslav Bitokov, who edits a weekly newspaper in Kabardino-Balkaria, a region in southern Russia, was hospitalized for head injuries after being attacked outside his home on Tuesday.

The assaults followed the killing on Sunday in nearby Ingushetia of Magomed Yevloyev, a journalist and prominent critic of Ingushetia's president. Mr. Yevloyev was arrested and fatally shot in the head in what the police called an accident. A rights official from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe called the killing an "assassination."

There was no obvious connection between the attacks, but they all occurred along Russia's southern border, where local authorities, aided by Moscow, have battled separatist movements for years.

The area is still plagued by violence, much of it by Russian security forces, despite the Kremlin's suppression of an Islamic separatist movement in Chechnya.

The region has been further unsettled by the war between Russia and Georgia, and Russia's recognition of two separatist regions in Georgia, which could breathe new life into several long-simmering disputes.

Dzhamilya V. Khagarova, who was a reporter at Mr. Bitokov's newspaper, said the timing of the attacks was suspicious.

"My own opinion is that this is a provocation that aims to destabilize the situation in the Caucasus," said Ms. Khagarova, now the chief of the presidential press service in Kabardino-Balkaria. "A coincidence can happen once, or maybe twice, but when it happens three times, it is no longer a coincidence."

Twenty journalists have been killed in Russia since 2000, according to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Elsa Vidal, who leads the Russian program at the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders, said local journalists faced particularly intense pressure if they criticized authorities, and that the situation in Russia's south has grown more intense.

“It’s just as if the Caucasus were entering a new phase of instability,” she said. “The fact that journalists are being targeted clearly indicates that the situation is worsening for common individuals.”

The three men were in vastly different businesses. Mr. Yevloyev, a former prosecutor, ran a Web site, Ingushetiya.ru, which was the single outlet that dared to criticize President Murat M. Zyazikov, a former general with Russia’s Federal Security Service.

Mr. Yevloyev and his father received death threats early this year, but “simply wanted to stay there to report what was going on,” said Clothilde Le Coz, who is in charge of Internet Freedom for Reporters Without Borders. “He was aware it was dangerous.”

Mr. Bitokov is the editor of Gazeta Yuga, a popular independent newspaper published in Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria. Muslim insurgents raided the city in 2005, and more than 100 people were killed in two days of skirmishes with Russian security forces.

Colleagues told Interfax that Mr. Bitokov, 56, had received threats two months ago in response to articles in the newspaper. He was attacked as he returned home from his office, and his son found him badly beaten. Mr. Bitokov was hospitalized for head injuries.

President Arsen Kanokov, who was appointed by Vladimir V. Putin in 2005, issued a statement on Wednesday expressing “indignation at the actions of the bastards trying to achieve their nasty goals by such mean methods,” and adding that “freedom of speech is one of the greatest achievements of our time.”

The third attack occurred in Dagestan, where Russian troops have battled sporadically with insurgents since 2000. On Tuesday, Mr. Alishaev, who reported on Wahhabism, a strict Sunni sect, was shot in his car, said Mark Tolchinsky, a spokesman for Dagestan’s Interior Ministry.

A news radio station, Ekho Moskvyy, reported that two unknown men shot him in the head and shoulder while he was sitting in his car, and that he died of his wounds early Wednesday. The report cited police sources who said that Mr. Alishaev became a target because of his criticism of Islamic extremism in Dagestan.

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