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SOVIETS WANT INFORMATION ON DEFECTOR

A Soviet newspaper on Wednesday printed an "appeal" to the Italian government for information on journalist Oleg Bitov, who reportedly defected to the West and is now in London.

The newspaper, Literary Gazette, said there had been no information about the fate of Bitov, who went to Venice to cover a film festival for the paper.

But it was not clear if the article had been written before British officials announced in London Tuesday that Bitov had defected. The British Home Office identified Bitov as foreign editor of the weekly paper.

Bitov disappeared Sept. 7, and Literary Gazette said in an earlier story that it feared he had been kidnapped by Western agents. That story claimed the CIA often captures loyal Marxists and "parades" them before the world public, an indication the Soviets expected Bitov to turn up in the West.

"Since the moment of the vanishing of O. Bitov, 47 days have passed," wrote Literary Gazette. "Despite the appeal of the newspaper, of his mother and relatives, nothing substantive of what has happened to him was said ...

"That is why the Literary Gazette once again appeals to the competent organs of Italy with an appeal to react at least to the tears of the mother and to understand the worries of the relatives of Bitov and to announce what has happened to him... Tell us what's happened."