

Police Detain 50 at Khimki Forest Protest

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OMON riot police detaining protesters at an unsanctioned rally in a Khimki forest clearing on Monday afternoon. **Alexander Natruskin**

Police detained Yabloko party leader Sergei Mitrokhin and about 50 other people holding an unsanctioned rally Monday in the Khimki forest against efforts to clear it for an \$8 billion highway.

Yabloko lawyer Artur Grokhovsky said Mitrokhin was forcefully detained together with Sergei Udaltsov and Konstantin Kosyakin, leaders of the Left Front opposition group, at the rally — the latest attempt to save the centuries-old oak forest near Sheremetyevo Airport.

"Police officers, behaving rudely, forced him over to the car," Grokhovsky told The Moscow Times.

He added that Mitrokhin was taken to a court and faces 15 days detention on charges of resisting police.

Ekho Moskvyy radio put the number of detained protesters at about 50.

Mitrokhin also tussled with police while trying to stop the logging in the Khimki forest on Saturday, and he said afterward that he had suffered a minor injury.

Police, meanwhile, visited the offices of at least two newspapers for information about an attack last week on the Khimki town administrative building by a group of 90 to 300 anarchists who broke windows and wrote "Save the Russian Forest" on the walls.

Police officers asked editors at the Svobodnaya Pressa online newspaper to provide photos taken during the attack, said one editor, who asked not to be identified because the newspaper's publishers had not authorized him to speak about the incident.

"We gave them bigger-sized pictures, and they left," the editor said, adding that the officers had arrived with a search warrant.

Police visited Kommersant's offices with a similar demand, its editor Mikhail Mikhailov told the Kasparov.ru opposition news site.

Khimki police have detained two suspected attackers, Alexei Gaskarov and Maxim Solopov, after identifying them from video footage posted online. The two face up to seven years in jail if convicted on charges of hooliganism.

No arrests were made during the attack, which occurred after office hours late Wednesday evening.

The three-story Khimki administration building, freshly painted after the attack, was guarded by two police vans Monday.

Despite the protests, logging resumed in the forest over the weekend, and police have cordoned off the area from protesters. One protester, Gennady Rodin, managed to get into the restricted area on Saturday before being whisked away in a police van. He faces trial on charges of resisting police.

"I don't really care about politics. I just want to defend the forest, and they want to put me in a reservation, like an American Indian," said Rodin, a local resident and activist with In Defense of the Khimki Forest, an environmental group.

The group's leader, Yevgenia Chirikova, was detained in the forest on Wednesday night and spent the night in the Khimki police station. She said Monday that she was waiting for a summons to appear in court.

Chirikova said she would continue her fight, regardless of the outcome. "I will just feel better as a citizen," she said.

Borrowing a line from a Pink Floyd song, she said the Khimki protests were "another brick in the wall" in attempts by ordinary Russians to defend their rights.

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