

Police Seize Activist at Khimki Presser

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Moscow region police flexed their muscle Wednesday in the conflict over the Khimki forest, detaining anti-deforestation campaign leader Yevgenia Chirikova in downtown Moscow in front of dozens of reporters.

Meanwhile, a Moscow region court has approved the arrest of two suspects in a daring attack last week on Khimki City Hall, despite what supporters said was shaky evidence against them.

Part of the Khimki forest is being cleared to make way for an \$8 billion highway connecting Moscow and St. Petersburg. Opponents of the project say the highway could be built around the woods.

“Ten riot police officers grabbed me and dragged me away,” Chirikova said by phone after her questioning ended.

She had been speaking at the Independent Press Center, not far from the Kropotkinskaya metro station.

Around 30 policemen blocked people from leaving the press center while their colleagues dragged Chirikova to a beige Moskvich sedan, Interfax reported.

Once at the police office, “I honestly told them that I know nothing [of the July 28 attack] as I was at the logging site at the time,” she said.

Investigators summoned Chirikova to return to the Khimki police building at noon Thursday to watch videos of the July 28 attack, she said.

Moscow region police said in a [statement](#) that Chirikova had to be brought in by force because she ignored numerous summons for questioning about the attack on Khimki City Hall.

The attack saw a group of 90 to 300 suspected anarchists and anti-fascists pelting the building with stones and smoke grenades and writing “Save the Russian Forest” on its walls.

Chirikova was sought as a witness, despite saying earlier that she did not take part in the incident and was not present at the time.

Two suspects in the case, Alexei Gaskarov, an expert with the left-leaning nonprofit group Institute of Collective Action, and Maxim Solopov, a Moscow student, were placed in custody for two months by a Khimki court late Tuesday, Solopov’s lawyer, Yury Yeronin, told The Moscow Times. Both suspects confirmed that they were present during the attack but denied participating in it.

Yeronin said Solopov, 21, a student at the Russian State University for the Humanities, came to Khimki because he was told a concert would be held there.

Carine Clement, a Moscow-based French sociologist who was present when Chirikova was detained, said Gaskarov only wanted to report the incident for his group. “They want to make him a scapegoat,” she said.

Two witnesses claimed to have recognized Solopov and another three pointed to Gaskarov as participants of the attack, Yeronin said. But he said the witnesses were “fake” and gave contradicting testimonies.

Police said earlier that a criminal case had been opened for gang hooliganism, which carries a maximum sentence of seven years in prison.

[Kommersant reported](#) Wednesday that an unidentified man who called himself the organizer of the Khimki attack contacted the newspaper by e-mail to give an interview.

The man said the building was attacked by political activists — not environmentalists. They were protesting the administration’s illegal actions, he said. Local residents supported the demonstration, he said, adding that he thought Khimki’s leadership would eventually be ousted over the scandal.

The legal campaign in defense of the forest is set to proceed Saturday, when environmentalists plan to stage a rally outside the Chistiye Prudy metro station to protest police’s actions, Clement said.

City Hall has not said whether it will permit the event, she said.

Meanwhile, Anton Belyakov, a State Duma deputy with A Just Russia, has asked Emergency Situations Minister Sergei Shoigu to block access to the Khim-ki forest — both for loggers and local residents — for fire safety concerns, saying that otherwise the forest may be purposefully set on fire, Interfax reported.

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