

# Medvedev Orders Rioters Punished

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OMON riot police officers keeping an eye on Manezh Square on Monday evening amid fears of a repeat of Saturday's clashes at the site near the Kremlin. **Alexander Zemlianichenko**

President Dmitry Medvedev on Monday ordered police to identify and punish those responsible for violent, racist rioting just outside the Kremlin's walls over the weekend that stunned the country.

"The rioting should be qualified as a crime, and the people who committed it should be punished," Medvedev told a televised meeting with law enforcement officials.

Medvedev denounced Saturday's gathering as an attempt to provoke religious and ethnic hatred and labeled such rallies as "the most dangerous."

Eleven suspects are under investigation on suspicion of beating up a group of Caucasus natives who happened to pass by the unsanctioned rally on Manezh Square, Moscow deputy prosecutor Alexei Zakharov said, Rossiiskaya Gazeta reported Monday.

The rally turned violent when the crowd of about 5,500 football fans and nationalists spotted the Caucasus natives and attacked them. The rally aimed to put pressure on the authorities in the killing of football fan Yegor Sviridov, 28, who was shot dead in a scuffle with Caucasus natives on Dec. 5.

Images posted online of the mob holding flares, raising their arms in Nazi-like salutes and assaulting bleeding Caucasus natives — all in clear view of the Kremlin's red-brick walls — have sent shockwaves around the country.

Medvedev offered assurances that the authorities remained in control. “Everything in Moscow and in Russia is under control,” he wrote on his Twitter blog on Sunday.

Thirty-two people were injured during the rioting, including five police officers, and seven remained hospitalized Monday, Interfax reported.

Police have detained four people in connection with Sviridov's death, including the suspected gunman, Aslan Cherkessov. The Zamoskvoretsky District Court on Monday sanctioned the arrest of a fourth suspect, Artur Arsibiyev.

Football fans first rallied on Leningradsky Prospekt last Tuesday, furious that police initially only kept Cherkessov in custody and released three other suspects after questioning.

The Moscow prosecutor's office has opened an investigation into the police officer who freed the three suspects, Vesti television reported Monday.

Also Monday, the police were investigating reports that nationalist and Caucasus youth groups were planning to meet for a showdown, Interfax reported. But the police downplayed fears that a meeting might take place.

The police, who have faced criticism for not breaking up the Manezh Square rally before it turned violent, were on alert Monday, blocking access to Manezh Square and closing the nearby Okhotny Ryad metro station. The police promised to use a water cannon and teargas against football fans if they tried to rally again, Interfax said.

Their fears appeared to be well founded. Kyrgyz native Alisher Shamshiyev, 37, was badly beaten and stabbed to death by a group of young people, including a woman, on Kronshtadsky Bulvar near the Rechnoi Vokzal metro station in northern Moscow on Sunday night, Gazeta.ru reported.

Moscow police chief Vladimir Kolokoltsev blamed nationalists for the attack and promised to oversee the investigation.

Nationalist sentiment is high, and some observers say the Kremlin is at least partially responsible for nurturing the pro-Kremlin, nationalist-minded youth groups that were created during Vladimir Putin's presidency to actively oppose the opposition.

Galina Kozhevnikova, a researcher at the Sova center, which studies xenophobia, called the rioting an “attempted mini-Nazi putsch” by a group of people whose ideas enjoy widespread support in society.

“The problem is not in the existence of Nazi groups. The problem is the phrase 'Russia for Russians,' which is supported by the general public,” she told The Moscow Times.

But racist violence is on the decline after Medvedev ordered the police to stamp it out. A total of 167 people were victims of hate crimes in Russia in the first half of this year, and 19 of them died, compared with 297 victims and 52 deaths in the same period in 2009, according to Sova.

Up to 10,000 members of various ethnic groups are ready to protest the weekend violence at a rally Wednesday if City Hall grants permission, said Azamat Mintsayev, a leader of a student organization, Interfax reported. He stressed that the rally would not seek revenge for the Manezh beatings.

Some ultranationalist groups have taken steps to warn their members to stay off the streets. The Movement Against Illegal Immigration is urging its members and representatives of various ethnic communities to “stop violence and not to take part in riots,” according to a statement on its web site.

State Duma Deputy Gennady Gudkov, a Just Russia member who sits on the Duma's Security Committee, said the authorities should learn from the rioting that they cannot rely on police force alone. “If we aren't able to defend the rights of citizens, they will go and defend themselves,” he said by telephone. “A political struggle needs to take place, but within the political parties.”

The violence prompted Andrei Isayev, a United Russia member and head of the Duma's Labor and Social Policy Committee, to suggest at a party congress Monday that Kremlin critics “who aim to destroy Russia” should abandon liberal politicians like Boris Nemtsov and Valeria Novodvorskaya and support nationalists “who really deliver a blow.”

Public Chamber member Iosif Diskin said the authorities needed to wake up while the nationalist movement remained too weak to damage the government.

“In Russian society, you cannot be heard if you don't crash through a door because social institutions are not functioning and today's agenda is being directed by the street,” he said.

Staff writer Nikolaus von Twickel contributed to this report.

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