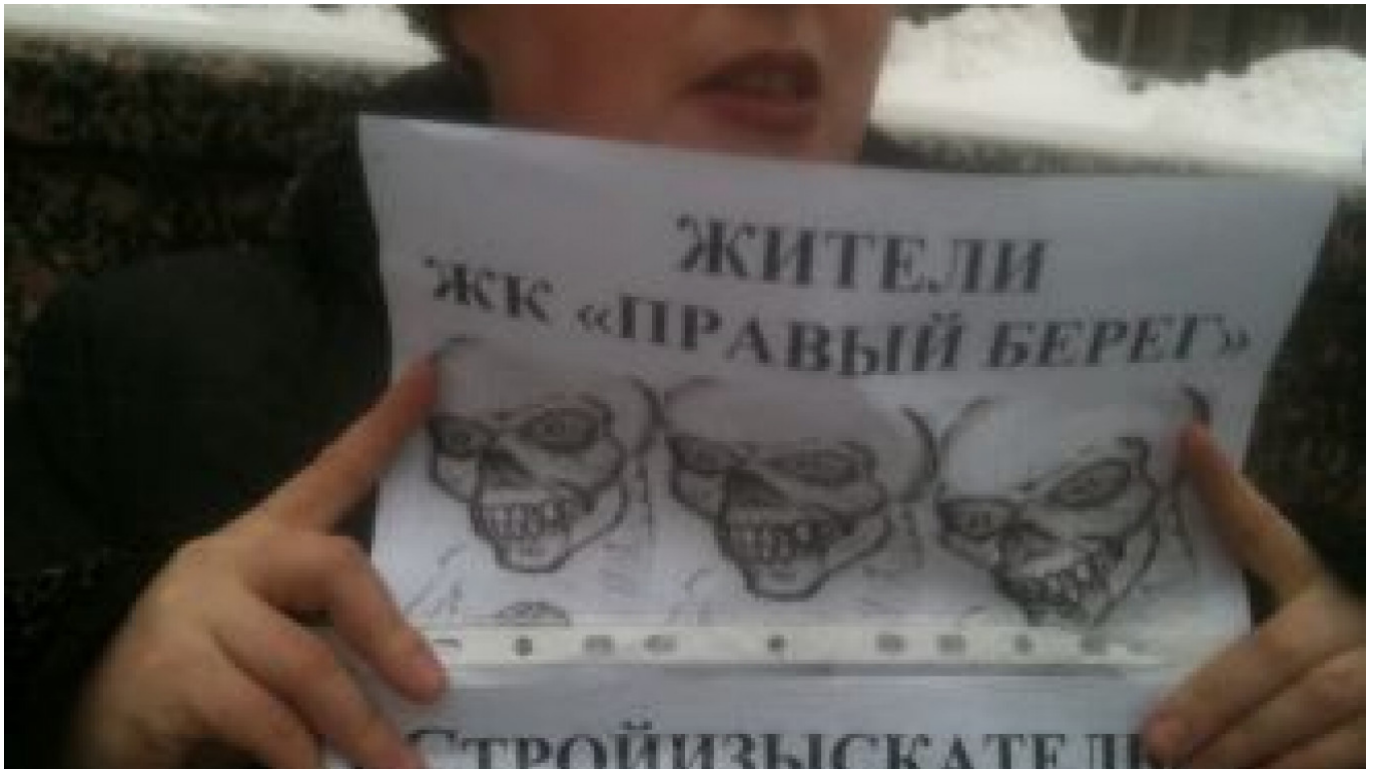


Khimki Activist, Kids Detained

February 10, 2011



Alla Chernyshyova, seen with a poster during a protest rally in January.

An environmental activist was detained Thursday with her children, colleagues said, claiming that she is the latest victim in a campaign to silence opponents of a new Moscow-St. Petersburg highway that is tearing up the ancient Khimki forest.

Following a wave of public protests, President Dmitry Medvedev in August ordered the highway construction suspended so the route could be reassessed, but in December the Kremlin decided to allow the highway to go ahead along the original route. Those involved in the construction are reported to have high-level government connections, and highway construction is one of the most corrupt industries in Russia.

Alla Chernyshyova's detention Thursday with her daughters, aged 3 and 6, came on the same day that authorities announced a March start date for the highway.

Chernyshyova, 35, was arrested on suspicion of taking a fake bomb to a Feb. 1 protest rally, according to police. Her supporters said she is innocent and called the detention the latest attempt to make sure the start of the construction isn't threatened.

"It's all a lie," said Yevgenia Chirikova, leader of the group defending the Khimki forest. "We are seeing the start of a new trend against our movement. ... Only Hitler would use such tactics."

Police spokesman Yevgeny Gildeyev told The Associated Press that Chernyshyova was in custody but hadn't been officially arrested.

"It's not an arrest, it's just her delivery to the police station for clarification," he said, adding that Chernyshyova wasn't cooperating. "She's playing the fool."

Gildeyev said the children were in attendance at their mother's insistence only.

Chirikova said police dispersed the Feb. 1 rally, which both she and Chernyshyova attended, because of a bomb threat. Chirikova said there was an unattended plastic bag at the protest but no one at the rally came near it.

A police spokesman said later Thursday that Chernyshyova was released from a precinct after questioning, but that the group's leader may also be brought in to speak about the story. No charges were filed.

Journalists reporting on the Khimki forest have been brutally beaten, their skulls cracked and limbs broken. Environmentalist Konstantin Fetisov has remained hospitalized and unconscious since being severely beaten in November.

Kommersant reporter Oleg Kashin was hit some 50 times by two thugs in a stomach-turning attack last year that was caught on a security camera and outraged the nation.

Mikhail Beketov, founder and editor of a Khimki newspaper, was among the first to raise the alarm about the destruction of the forest and suspicions that local officials were profiting from the project. In November 2008, Beketov was beaten so viciously that he was left brain damaged and unable to speak.

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