

City Hall Bans March But Offers Alternatives

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City Hall has rejected a request by opposition leaders to lead a 50,000-people march to the Kremlin walls on Feb. 4 over safety concerns but offered alternative routes and a date.

The opposition said one of the alternatives would be acceptable as long as they were allowed to hold both a march and a rally to demand a fair presidential election.

March organizers, who attracted tens of thousands of people to two authorized rallies against vote fraud in Moscow in December, requested permission Friday to march from the Oktyabrskaya metro station along the Garden Ring to Manezh Square on Feb. 4, Interfax reported.

The date falls on a Saturday — the same day of the week that December's two large rallies were held — and is exactly a month before the March 4 presidential election.

But Deputy Mayor Alexander Gorbenko said the timing and location of the planned march would interfere with traffic and suggested that organizers change the date to Feb. 5 or select an alternative route for the march and rally in the city's outskirts, including on Prospekt Akademika Sakharova, Frunzenskaya Naberezhnaya or Luzhniki.

"With the large number of participants, it could be held somewhere on the city's outskirts or downtown on Feb. 5 and in the first half of the day so as not to inconvenience other citizens," Gorbenko told reporters.

City Hall was specifically worried that marchers would interfere with the traffic on the Garden Ring; that the venue for the start of the march, Kaluzhskaya Ploshchad, did not have the capacity for 50,000 people; and that the turn from the Garden Ring to the Arbat along the route was too narrow to accommodate the marchers, Interfax reported, without elaborating.

"It's good that City Hall did not reject our request outright, but now we have to find a decision that satisfies all sides," co-organizer and opposition leader Boris Nemtsov told Interfax.

He stressed, however, that organizers would not agree for a rally instead of a march.

A main reason the opposition says it wants to march is to help keep protesters warm in the cold. Moscow temperatures sank to a chilly minus 16 degrees Celsius on Sunday and are forecast to fluctuate between minus 11 and minus 19 this week.

Applicants to City Hall included Solidarity co-leader Sergei Davidis; Left Front activist Anastasia Udaltsova; Yelena Lukyanova, a member of the Public Chamber and the Communist Party; journalist Sergei Parkhomenko; and writer Dmitry Bykov.

Rally organizers also include Nemtsov, opposition leader Vladimir Ryzhkov, Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov and Gennady Gudkov, a senior member of A Just Russia.

By Sunday afternoon, about 21,000 people had [signed up](#) on Facebook to attend the demonstration.

Several hundred people had signed an [alternative](#) Facebook page demanding that organizers not give in to City Hall and march according to the original plan.

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