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Bureaucrats Block Protesting Lego Men

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Unprecedented protests have been held across Russia in recent months at which tens of thousands of demonstrators have been allowed to verbally lambaste the government.

But in the Altai region city of Barnaul, the city administration has turned down an application for a silent protest to be attended by far less-threatening figures: Kinder toys, Lego men and stuffed animals.

A Barnaul opposition group calling themselves The Decembrists submitted an application to the city administration requesting permission for a rally of the toy figures for Saturday.

The rally was to have the slogan "For Honest Elections," the same rallying cry heard at many human-attended opposition protests across Russia in recent months against alleged falsifications in last year's State Duma elections.

The demonstration application specified the likely participants as 100 Kinder Surprise toys, 100 Lego men, 20 toy soldiers, 15 stuffed animals and 10 toy cars. The opposition group

planned to attach signs to the toys with slogans denouncing violations of elections law.

Barnaul's administration denied approval for the rally on the grounds that only Russian citizens could be considered participants in a demonstration.

"Approval could not be granted due to a confusion in the understanding of the law regulating public demonstrations. The organizers of a public event can only be Russian citizens," read the official refusal, Sergei Andreyev, local head of elections watchdog Golos, told Interfax.

"Objects expected to be used must be viewed just like signs and banners, strictly as a means of visual propaganda used by participants, but not as the participants themselves," Andreyev quoted the official refusal as saying.

Last month, activists attempted a similar demonstration, but police told them that they had to get approval from the city.

"Now it turns out that the authorities are demanding the participation of people in the rally," Andreyev said, Interfax reported.

He added that activists will still hold the rally Saturday, if they can think of a lawful way to do so.

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