

Protesting Toys Able to End Red-Tape Time-Out

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An Interior Ministry officer copying slogans held by toys in Barnaul. **Andrei Kasprishin**

Protesters set up plastic elephants, toy tigers and Lego men carrying banners against Vladimir Putin's 12-year rule on Sunday in the Siberian city of Barnaul, where demonstrations have been banned ahead of the March 4 presidential election.

Local authorities have denied requests for rallies against disputed parliamentary elections in December that saw Putin's United Russia party returned with a slim majority and against Putin's plan to stand for the presidency.

The tiny toys appeared in the snow in the city's central square, the latest in a series of "nanoprotests."

An earlier request to stage a protest with toys was denied due to the fact that the toys in question were not Russian citizens, officials said.

"Our authorities have no understanding of free speech," said Sergei Mameyev, who said he

represented the Decembrists of Barnaul.

The protest highlights the restrictions faced by many groups across Russia who struggle to gain permission for rallies.

A policewoman standing over the figures with a clipboard said she was filing a report. "I'm doing my job. I'm writing down what I see," she told a crowd gathered in the square.

Putin was president from 2000 to 2008, when he was barred by the constitution from running for a third successive term. He has since remained in charge as Russia's prime minister. His re-election as president could see him stay in power for another two terms, until 2024.

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