

# Demonstrators Opt For Flash-Mob Rally

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Opposition leaders called on their supporters Tuesday to join Sunday's Maslenitsa festivities downtown to burn effigies symbolizing the end of "[Putin's political winter](#)."

They were forced to change their plans after City Hall refused to authorize an opposition rally for that day.

"Today, in talks with City Hall officials, it became completely clear that we would be denied permission for a Feb. 26 rally ... on Ploshchad Revolyutsii," Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov said, Interfax reported.

So instead, opposition activists will join holiday festivities at 4 p.m., stage a flash mob and burn effigies, although they will not carry any banners, Udaltsov told Interfax.

"Let's join [the festivities] and fill them with a merry political meaning!" Left Front's website urged.

The group called on supporters in other cities to do likewise. Several State Duma deputies will be invited to join the flash mob, Udaltsov said.

Left Front, Solidarity and White Ribbon, a large public coalition protesting the conduct of the December Duma elections, planned to stage a rally of about 10,000 participants on Ploshchad Revolyutsii on Sunday.

City Hall proposed moving the rally to the deserted Naberezhnaya Tarasa Shevchenko on the outskirts of the city center, but the organizers refused.

As of late Tuesday, more than 1,300 people had signed up for the flash mob on Facebook and more than 230 on Vkontakte.

On Thursday, the Defenders of the Fatherland holiday, supporters of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and his presidential bid expect up to 40,000 participants for a march along Frunzenskaya Naberezhnaya and up to 100,000 participants for a rally at Luzhniki Stadium.

More than 7,600 people had signed up for the pro-Putin events on Vkontakte as of late Tuesday.

The march will start at 11:30 a.m., and the rally will be from 1 to 2 p.m., according to the website of the All-Russia People's Front, which co-organizes events with Putin's presidential election headquarters.

Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that Putin will very likely show up at Luzhniki, Itar-Tass [reported](#), citing Dozhd television.

"The aim of the event is to ... show resistance to the forces that are trying to ruin the country," the All-Russia People's Front website said, referring to anti-Putin protesters.

Bloggers, citing previously reported cases, speculated that participants in the pro-Putin rallies will be paid or pressured to take part.

Adding to the speculation is a [report](#) on Sverdlovsk region news website Ura.ru about a train that left Yekaterinburg late Monday carrying about 600 workers to the capital for Thursday's pro-Putin rally.

Also, directors of the Moscow Academy of Finance and Law were sending messages to students' mobile phones calling on them to attend Thursday's pro-Putin rally, one of the students [wrote](#) on her Twitter feed.

But Anastasia Ivanova, aide to the academy's rector, told Interfax that it was "only an invitation, which they can turn down anytime."

Other political groups will hold rallies in Moscow on Thursday in celebration of Maslenitsa and Defenders of the Fatherland Day.

The Liberal Democratic Party will stage a rally on Pushkin Square starting at 12 p.m., its leader, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, [wrote](#) on his Twitter microblog.

The Communist Party will gather supporters on Teatralnaya Ploshchad from 1 to 3 p.m. to protest rival party United Russia as well as promote its agenda and the presidential bid of party leader Gennady Zyuganov, its website said.

Sergei Kurginyan, a political analyst and leader of an obscure movement called Sut Vremeni, or the Essence of Time, will sponsor a rally "against everything," including the ruling regime, in front of the All-Russia Exhibition Center from 2 to 4.30 p.m., Interfax [reported](#).

Pro-Kremlin youth groups Nashi and Stal said Tuesday that 20,000 of their supporters will patrol Moscow streets to "resist any illegal attempts by opposition activists to destabilize the situation and cast doubt on the presidential election results," Nashi [said](#) on its website.

In addition to the plans for Thursday, opposition leaders are organizing a weekend gathering of supporters.

At 2 p.m. Sunday, they will join the League of Voters to form a silent [human chain around the Garden Ring](#).

More than 6,300 people had responded on the event website as of late Tuesday. The site said almost 32,000 more would be needed to form the chain.

"This is not a children's game aimed at making a circle by any means. This is more serious. This is a political demonstration of unity," organizers said on the League of Voters [website](#).

Political activity is ramping up as the presidential campaign enters the home stretch. Putin is poised to win the March 4 vote.

On Monday, City Hall refused permission for a March 5 opposition rally downtown and granted permission to pro-Kremlin youths to rally on all major squares in the city center on election day and the following day.

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City Hall may drop its policy of granting rally permits to the first applicant.

Officials began to reconsider after pro-Kremlin and opposition activists jockeying for position Monday got into fistfights with each other, a City Hall source told Interfax on Tuesday.

Under the new policy, permits would be granted based on individual circumstances, the source said.

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