

Rallies in St. Petersburg and Moscow Yield Varied Results

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The  Moscow Times

Activists accused of trying to disrupt an opposition rally were arrested during a sanctioned event in St. Petersburg Saturday, while a "press conference" style rally in Moscow hosted a discussion about the future of the protest movement.

Four people were arrested at the beginning of the opposition rally in St. Petersburg after organizers informed police a group of pro-Kremlin activists that included a person dressed as a penguin were trying to disrupt the protest, police told Vedomosti. The group attempted to join a column of marchers with signs reading "Hamsters? Penguins? Who are we?" referring to names pro-Kremlin groups have used to label opposition protesters.

Protesters demanded free elections, including calls to hold an election for governor of St. Petersburg "without a Kremlin filter," Vedomosti reported. Participants also called for political prisoners to be released.

Estimates for attendance at the rally varied. Organizers said 2,000 attended, while police said 1,000 attended the rally and 800 participated in the march. The application for the event,

organized by political party Yabloko, unregistered party Other Russia, and opposition movement Solidarity, was approved for 15,000 people.

Moscow was also the site of a protest meeting organized as an "open press conference" Saturday, as opposition leaders Sergei Udaltsov, Boris Nemtsov and others met with a group of supporters on Pushkin Square Saturday to discuss the "March of a Million" event planned for May 6.

Speaking at the rally, Udaltsov said discussions for organizing events by the For Honest Elections campaign should be public, calling the idea a "good and democratic format," and also called for rallies to be held on Pushkin Square every Saturday, Vedomosti reported.

Udaltsov said opposition activists have submitted an application to City Hall to hold a rally on the square Saturday, March 31 to draw attention to Article 31 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of assembly.

Nemtsov said without elaborating that he believes a number of "famous political prisoners" will be pardoned before the May 7 presidential inauguration.

Police stated 50 people participated in the event on Pushkin Square, which ended without incident, Interfax said.

In a separate incident Sunday, police said 16 people were arrested for trying to hold an unsanctioned rally in Moscow, while Solidarity activist Olga Shorina told Interfax 33 people, mostly members of Solidarity had been detained for wearing white ribbons near Red Square.

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