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Archived Live Blog: 'March of Millions' and People's Front Rally

By Ezekiel Pfeifer

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Two major demonstrations are planned in Moscow for Sunday ahead of Vladimir Putin's inauguration as president on Monday: the opposition "March of Millions" from Kaluzhskaya Ploshchad to Bolotnaya Ploshchad with a rally at Bolotnaya; and a pro-Kremlin event sponsored by the All-Russia People's Front across town at Poklonnaya Gora. The opposition event is scheduled to start at 4 p.m. and last until 7:30 p.m., while the pro-Kremlin event is set to run from 6 to 7 p.m. City Hall gave permission for an attendance of 5,000 people at the opposition event; organizers of the pro-Kremlin event said they expect up to 50,000 participants.

We will be posting the latest reports on both events throughout the day and into the evening. Refresh the page to see the latest updates.

8:49 p.m., Demonstrators Largely Dispersed: Demonstrators from the opposition event at Bolotnaya Ploshchad have been herded away from the square by riot police and remain on

surrounding streets only in groups of dozens of people, Moscow Times correspondent Roland Oliphant reported from the scene.

This will wrap up the blog for now. Check our website later this evening for an article covering all the action from today's demonstrations, and for now you can read about the events in the blog below.

8:19 p.m., Bolotnaya Ploshchad Cleared of Demonstrators: Police have cleared demonstrators off Bolotnaya Ploshchad, Moscow Times reporter Roland Oliphant said from the scene. People remain on the embankment across from the square and the surrounding areas but are gradually dispersing.

8:12 p.m., Putin Aide: Police Should Have Been Rougher With Demonstrators: Vladimir Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said police acted too mildly and said he would have liked them to be rougher with demonstrators at Bolotnaya Ploshchad, Kommersant-FM reported, citing Dozhd television.

Police have reportedly beat demonstrators with batons while herding them out of Bolotnaya Ploshchad.

Meanwhile, blogger Roustem Adagamov tweeted that demonstrators have overturned portable toilets for use as barricades.

7:57 p.m., More Than 250 Demonstrators Arrested: More than 250 opposition demonstrators at Bolotnaya Ploshchad have been detained by police, RIA-Novosti reported. Riot police have largely cleared people out of the eastern and central parts of the square and the surrounding embankment and are now gathering on the western end, Moscow Times correspondent Rachel Nielsen reported from the scene.

7:48 p.m., Thousands Remain on Bolotnaya, Police Being 'Brutal': An update from Moscow Times reporter Roland Oliphant at Bolotnaya Ploshchad: "Riot police are being extremely brutal. A woman near me was struck in the head and is badly injured. The atmosphere is deteriorating quickly, turning violent. Riot police are repeatedly charging, retreating, then charging demonstrators again, who are shouting 'One for all and all for one.'"

Moscow Times reporter Rachel Nielsen said riot police look as though they are raiding the square, herding people out and using their batons repeatedly against people.

Thousands of people remain on and around Bolotnaya Ploshchad, Kommersant-FM reported.

Blue Buckets activist Danila Lindele posted a picture of a woman being arrested on his Twitter account:



7:32 p.m., Udaltsov, Nemtsov, Navalny Could Receive 15 Days in Jail: Police told detained opposition leaders Sergei Udaltsov, Alexei Navalny and Boris Nemtsov that they will be charged with refusing police orders, a charge that carries a sentence of up to 15 days administrative arrest, Udaltsov told Interfax.

7:25 p.m., Riot Police Forcing Demonstrators Away From Bolotnaya: An update from Moscow Times reporter Rachel Nielsen at Bolotnaya Ploshchad: "At the west end of the square, riot police have begun herding people out. Riot police came after some demonstrators holding onto the embankment railing, forced them away from it. On the east side of the square it's a bit emptier but there is still a huge number of people" in and around the square."

7:16 p.m., Bolotnaya Ploshchad Still Filled With Demonstrators: A photo from above posted on Twitter by blogger Tonia Samsonova:



7:12 p.m., Demonstrators Setting Up Tents, Journalist Says: Guardian correspondent Miriam Elder tweets: "There is some blood and tear gas and now people setting up tents."

State Duma deputy Ilya Ponomaryov tweeted that Bolotnaya Ploshchad is still filled with people and that he is standing in the area with Solidarity leader Ilya Yashin.

7:02 p.m., Opposition Demonstrators Staying Put Around Bolotnaya Ploshchad: An update from Moscow Times reporter Rachel Nielsen, standing on the southern embankment across from Bolotnaya Ploshchad: "Riot police with helmets are occasionally coming into the crowd on the southern embankment. There appears to be a riot police helmet in the river. Every once in a while, a group of 100 or 200 people run in a group, apparently away from riot police, and shout 'Shame!' and 'Fascists!' There is a helicopter over the embankment opposite Bolotnaya Ploshchad and has been there for at least half an hour in the same spot."

She said the square and the surrounding areas that are visible to her are all still filled with people.

6:54 p.m., NTV Journalists Beaten by Demonstrators, Police Say: Two journalists for pro-Kremlin television channel NTV were beaten by demonstrators, who also attempted to flip

over the TV station's van, according to a news release posted on the Moscow police website.

Confrontations between police and demonstrators continue, with demonstrators beginnings to break asphalt and throw pieces of it at riot police, Kommersant-FM reporter Nikita Batalov wrote on Twitter.

6:40 p.m., Nemtsov, Udaltsov Detained by Police: Along with anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny, opposition leaders Boris Nemtsov and Sergei Udaltsov have been arrested by police, Kommersant-FM reported.

6:35 p.m., Confrontation Between Police, Demonstrators: Police are detaining demonstrators, who they say are refusing to gather on the previously agreed upon site of the rally, Bolotnaya Ploshchad.

Police said a criminal case may be opened in connection with the actions of demonstrators and rally organizers, Interfax reported, citing a police spokesman.

Moscow Times reporter Rachel Nielsen said riot police have come into the crowd gathered around Bolotnaya Ploshchad, while demonstrators yell, “Shame! Shame!” Demonstrators said police used a chemical substance against them, Interfax reported.

6:28 p.m., Navalny Arrested: Police have detained opposition leader Alexei Navalny, lawyer Nikolai Polozov wrote on Twitter, attaching the photo below — Navalny is in the gray shirt in the center:



6:22 p.m., Pro-Kremlin Rally Begins With Concert: A rally at Poklonnaya Gora sponsored by pro-Kremlin group the All-Russia People's Front has begun with a concert by various musical

groups, Kommersant-FM reported.

The Twitter account of ruling party United Russia posted a photo showing demonstrators wearing shirts and waving flags of the party:



6:15 p.m., Police Make Arrests, Hit Demonstrators, Journalists Say: Opposition activist Oleg Kozlovsky tweeted that he has been detained after breaking through the police line blocking Bolshoy Kamenny Bridge.

Journalist Julia Ioffe tweeted: “Batons fly, crowd chants, 'Fascists! Fascists!'”

A photo of demonstrators being detained from Blue Buckets activist Danila Lindele's Twitter account:



6:05 p.m., Demonstrators Attempt to Break Police Line: Blue Buckets activist Danila Lindele tweeted that demonstrators have attempted to break through the police cordon blocking the Bolshoy Kamenny Bridge toward the Kremlin and police have begun detaining people.

"Cops are immediately coming with their fists — I was hit a few times in the head," Lindele tweeted.

5:59 p.m., Udaltsov Says Opposition Will Demand to Appear on National Channels, Cancellation of Putin's Inauguration: Left Front leader Sergei Udalstov said the opposition is preparing demands for ending the sit-in that has begun near the police cordon around Bolotnaya Ploshchad, including to be given time on national television channels and the cancellation of Vladimir Putin's inauguration as president scheduled for Monday at noon, Interfax reported.

"We will not leave!" Udaltsov said, the news agency reported. "We have decided not to go anywhere; [we will] stand until victory."

He said the opposition will also demand new parliamentary and presidential elections.

5:51 p.m., Navalny Announces Sit-In: Opposition leader Alexei Navalny tweeted: "Everyone: we are not rushing off anywhere. It's warm, the weather is excellent, the asphalt is warm :) we sat down and are sitting."

5:48 p.m., White Ribbons Ubiquitous; Kids, Elderly Present: An update from Moscow Times

reporter Rachel Nielsen, standing on the embankment across from Bolotnaya Ploshchad: "This embankment is full of people, though not packed tight. A whole city block past the square to the east is filled with people. Almost everyone I've seen walking has been wearing white ribbons, tied to their bags or purses, shirts, or on their wrists.

"There are many more adults with infants, toddlers, and school-age kids than at previous protests. There are also a lot of older people — I spoke with two who said they were 75 years old."

5:44 p.m., Opposition Leaders Call on Demonstrators to Occupy Square: Dozens of demonstrators have sat down on the asphalt near the police cordon around Bolotnaya Ploshchad, and Boris Nemtsov and Sergei Udaltsov have called for people not to leave the area until Vladimir Putin's inauguration as president, scheduled for Monday at noon in the Kremlin.

A photo of the scene posted on Twitter by Blue Buckets activist Danila Lidele:



5:35 p.m., Journalist Says Police Estimate 70,000 People: Correspondent for New Yorker and Foreign Policy magazines Julia Ioffe tweeted that two cops said there were 70,000 demonstrators according to an aerial count. A police helicopter has been flying above the march route.

Kommersant-FM reporter Nikita Batalov tweeted: "There are more people than [there were] at Bolotnaya on December 10," the date of the second major opposition rally following the controversial Dec. 4 State Duma elections that protesters said were tarnished by fraud.

5:22 p.m., Photographer Dies After Fall From Balcony: A man attempting to photograph the

opposition march from the balcony of an apartment building on Ulitsa Bolshaya Yakimanka fell to his death, Lenta.ru reported, citing Itar-Tass. He fell from the fifth or sixth floor and died on the scene from his wounds. The identity of the photographer has not yet been reported.

This is the first death to occur at any of the opposition protests in recent months.

5:13 p.m., Journalists Note Potential for Violence in Crowd: Kommersant-FM reporter Nikita Batalov wrote on Twitter that there are a lot of aggressive people in the crowd and predicted that there will be a confrontation. Dutch journalist Olaf Koens tweeted: "Quite some tension in this crowd." At past opposition demonstrations, there have been "provocateurs" who have aimed to start fights.

5:01 p.m., Demonstrators Continue to Join March: Moscow Times' Rachel Nielsen on the march route: "There are still some people coming from Kaluzhskaya Ploshchad through the 14 metal detectors, but not many. Police vehicles are now moving up the road [Ulitsa Bolshaya Yakimanka] to Bolotnaya Ploshchad."

Following the march, the opposition rally at Bolotnaya Ploshchad is scheduled to last until 7:30 p.m.

4:55 p.m., Crowd Estimates Range From 8,000 to 100,000: Estimates of the crowd size at the opposition march vary drastically, ranging from 8,000 by police at 4 p.m. to 100,000 by Anastasia Udaltsova, wife of Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov, writing on Twitter.

A message on the Twitter account of art group Voina estimated 40,000 participants, accompanying the estimate with this photo:



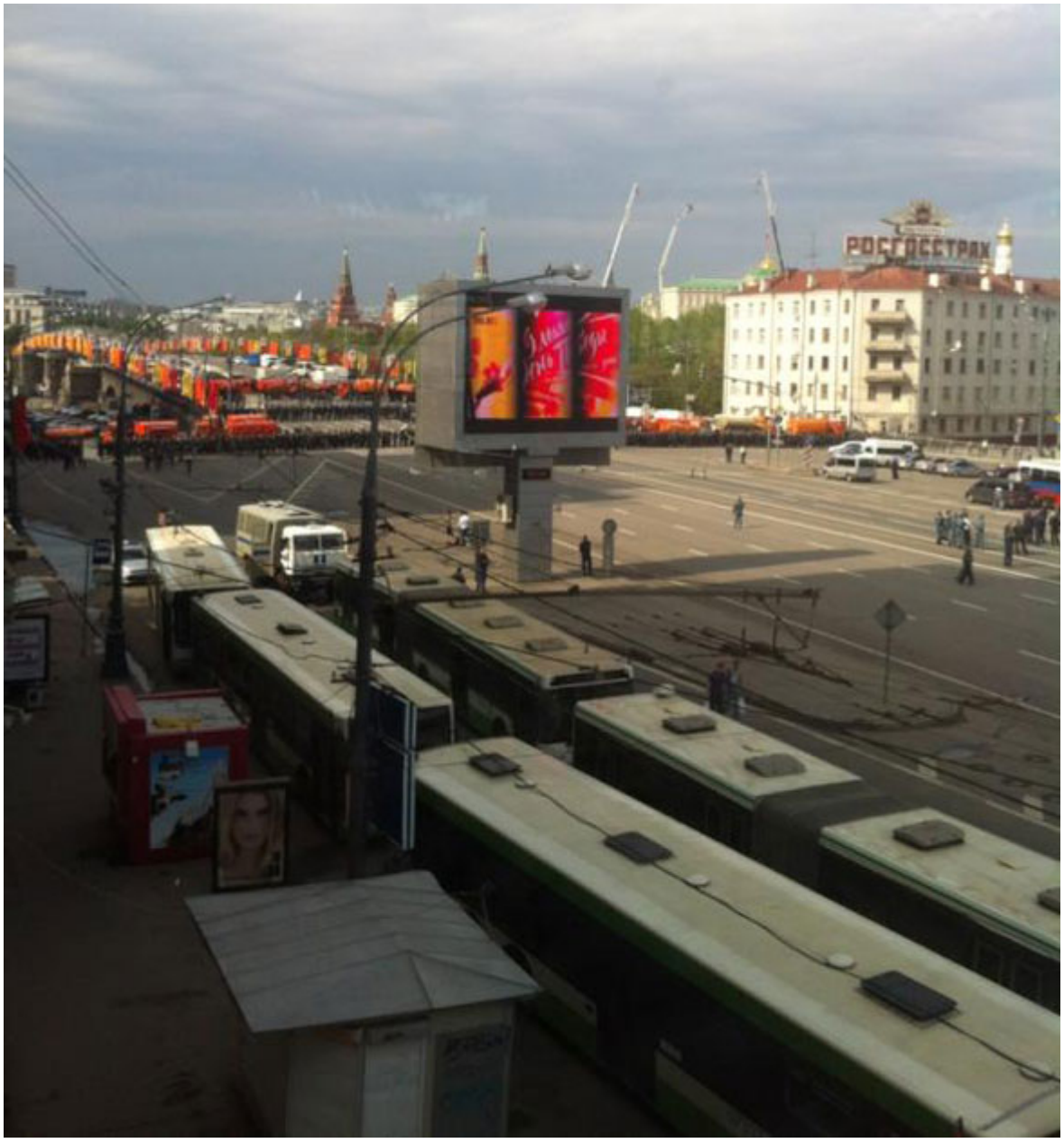
4:42 p.m., Opposition Leaders Lead Line of Marchers: Leaders of the burgeoning opposition movement Alexei Navalny, Sergei Udaltsov, Boris Nemtsov, Garry Kasparov, Mikhail Kasyanov, Yevgenia Chirikova and Ilya Yashin are at the front of the column marching toward Bolotnaya Ploshchad, Interfax reported.

A police helicopter is hovering in the skies above the march route, the news agency said.

4:37 p.m., Police Gathered Outside Bolotnaya Ploshchad, Blocking Bridge Toward Kremlin: Police forces have created a double line of officers blocking the bridge next to Bolotnaya Ploshchad. Blogger Tonia Samsonova took the photo below from above the area. Bolotnaya

Ploshchad is located out of sight to the right. At the bottom of the photo are city buses, which in the past have been used to transport police forces to mass demonstrations.

Some opposition activists have called for a march to the Kremlin, seen off in the distance in the photo below, following the rally at Bolotnaya Ploshchad, something the police clearly intend to block.



4:28 p.m., Police Say 8,000 Participants; Diverse Groups Represented: Moscow police said 8,000 people have gathered for the "March of Millions," while an organizer earlier put the number at 10,000. The march toward Bolotnaya Ploshchad has begun, and reports on Twitter indicate that people are still entering the metal detectors at the entrance to the march route.

As at previous recent opposition events, a range of different political groups is on hand, including contingents of nationalists holding black and yellow imperial Russian flags and members of the liberal Yabloko party and of the Communist Party.

4:13 p.m., March Begins, Activists Carrying 50-Meter White Ribbon: The opposition march

along Ulitsa Bolshaya Yakimanka has begun, with participants singing songs "from the war years," Interfax reported. Demonstrators have also extended a 50-meter-long white ribbon, the symbol of the nascent opposition movement.

As at past rallies, demonstrators have brought with them signs with various messages. One man held a sign reading "There's no 3rd term in our constitution," referring to controversial language in the constitution regarding the number of presidential terms allowed. Vladimir Putin will be inaugurated as president for a third term Monday.

Another demonstrator held a sign reading "My president is in this crowd." Another held a multicolored sign reading "Free Pussy Riot," referring to members of the punk group whom have been jailed for a "protest prayer" against Putin at Christ the Savior Cathedral in February.

4:01 p.m., 2 Activists Detained, Reportedly Were Carrying Tents: Two activists from the group Solidarity were detained by police on Bolotnaya Ploshchad, where a rally is set to take place upon the conclusion of the opposition march, Interfax reported. Police did not reveal the reason for their arrest. Solidarity leader Ilya Yashin wrote on Twitter that two activists were detained with tents.

Several opposition activists have said they will attempt to set up a tent city Sunday.

3:57 p.m., Organizer Says 10,000 Participants Gathered for Opposition March: March co-organizer Sergei Davidis told Interfax that he estimated the crowd size at around 10,000 people. The march is scheduled to begin within the next half hour. Police have not yet issued an estimate on the number of people gathered.

3:46 p.m., Website of Prominent Newspaper Kommersant Suffers DDOS Attack: The website of leading daily Kommersant fell victim to a DDOS attack that made the site go down Sunday morning and early afternoon, Kommersant-FM reported. The website underwent cyber attacks before the March 4 presidential election and the December 4 parliamentary vote as well.

The websites of opposition news outlets Ekho Moskvy radio and Dozhd television were also down for stretches of time Sunday morning, as was the site of news site Slon.ru. Ekho Moskvy has suffered a number of DDOS attacks that have shut down the site in recent months.

3:36 p.m., Rollerbladers, Musicians Gather on March Route: Rollerbladers and cyclists managed to enter the march route on Ulitsa Bolshaya Yakimanka and were riding around the broad expanse of open asphalt, Interfax reported.

Musicians also set up sound equipment and began playing on the march route as participants continue to gather at the starting point, Blue Buckets activist Danila Lindele wrote on Twitter, attaching this photo:



3:25 p.m., Argument Over Stage Setup; Sobchak Will Not Attend: Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov said police were preventing opposition activists from setting up equipment for a stage from which leaders will give speeches at Bolotnaya Ploshchad, but the two sides have come to an agreement regarding what structures will be used for the stage, Interfax reported. Police were concerned about unsecured metal structures being used on stage.

The march from Kaluzhskaya Ploshchad, near Oktyabrskaya metro station, is set to begin around 4 p.m. or 4:30 p.m., a Kommersant-FM reporter said on air, citing organizers. The march will conclude at Bolotnaya Ploshchad, where a rally will be held.

Recent mainstay of opposition events Ksenia Sobchak, a popular television personality and the daughter of former St. Petersburg mayor and Vladimir Putin mentor Anatoly Sobchak, wrote on Twitter that she will not be attending today's event. It has not been announced who will speak at the rally.

3:08 p.m., Demonstrators Gather at Metal Detectors, Chant 'Putin Is a Thief': The Times reporter Tony Halpin, at the starting point of the opposition march, tweets: “Police presence at Oktyabrskaya metro very light, as are the crowds emerging from it. Nothing like the scale of February.” By “February,” Halpin was apparently referring to an opposition march and rally on Feb. 4 that went along the exact same route as that being held today. Some observers said as many as 50,000 demonstrators participated in that event.

Demonstrators are yelling “Let us through!” according to a tweet by Pussy Riot lawyer Nikolai Polozov. “Putin is a thief!” is also being chanted, tweeted Kommersant-FM reporter Uliana Malashenko.

Demonstrators located at the metal detectors waiting to enter the march area (photo by

blogger Oleg Kozyrev):



2:51 p.m., Exits at Central Metro Stations Closed; Activists Plan to Pitch Tents: The exits of 12 metro stations in the city center will be closed from 2 to 7 p.m. Sunday "due to the range of mass events taking place," a metro spokesman told Interfax. Those stations are: Biblioteka Imeni Lenina, Lubyanka, Kitai Gorod, Kuznetsky Most, Okhotny Ryad, Teatralnaya, Ploshchad Revolyutsii, Aleksandrovsky Sad, Borovitskaya, Kropotkinskaya, and both Arbatskaya stations. The stations will be open only for incoming passengers and for transferring lines.

On Sunday morning, Ekho Moskvy reporter Vladimir Varfolomeyev wrote on Twitter that Manezh Square next to the Kremlin and the nearby Teatralnaya Ploshchad were closed to pedestrians by police. A rehearsal of Wednesday's Victory Day parade down Tverskaya Ulitsa and onto Red Square was scheduled for Sunday.

Opposition activists from the group RosAgit said they planned to pitch tents in the city center on Sunday, most likely on Manezh Square, and camp out at least until Vladimir Putin's inauguration on Monday, Gazeta.ru reported, citing RosAgit member Vadim Korovin.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin has said the city will not allow activists to camp out in public areas, a tactic opposition leaders have repeatedly attempted without success in recent months.

2:32 p.m., Demonstrators, Journalists, Police Begin to Gather: Journalists and demonstrators

are gathering outside Oktyabrskaya metro station for the opposition march, Kommersant-FM reporter Uliana Malashenko said on the radio station, reporting from the scene. Ulitsa Bolshaya Yakimanka, on which the march is set to take place, has been closed off from traffic. Police officers and vans are stationed at Kaluzhskaya Ploshchad, the starting point of the "March of Millions."

2:18 p.m., Opposition Event Called 'Political Circus': Pro-Kremlin activists are calling the opposition event a "Political Circus," and someone even created this colorful poster with the faces of prominent opposition leaders and U.S. Ambassador Michael McFaul (photograph via Ksenia Sobchak's Twitter account):



Those pictured include, from top left, Solidarity leader Ilya Yashin, McFaul, anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny, and television host Ksenia Sobchak; and from bottom left, A Just Russia parliamentarian Dmitry Gudkov, former Astrakhan mayoral candidate Oleg Shein, and A Just Russia parliamentarian Ilya Ponomaryov.

The hashtag "#политцирк," or Political Circus, has made it into the top ten trends on Russian-language Twitter.

2:04 p.m., Activists From Regions Deterred From Coming to Opposition Event: Beginning Friday evening, reports began coming in that activists trying to travel to Moscow for the "March of Millions" were being blocked from doing so by authorities. In Ufa, three opposition activists were detained for hooliganism and given a three-day jail sentence, Interfax reported Friday. The news agency quoted reports on blogs and social networks that said the activists were pulled off a train sitting in the Ufa train station and arrested. Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov told Interfax that a bus transporting opposition activists from Astrakhan was turned back upon exiting the city. Other media reports cite similar efforts by law enforcement in

Nizhny Novgorod, Rostov-on-Don, St. Petersburg, Volgograd and elsewhere to prevent activists from traveling to Moscow.

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