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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Dozens Detained as Protesters Relocate

By Alexandra Odynova

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People transporting a piano during an opposition procession organized by painters and artists on Saturday. **Sergei Karpukhin**

Round-the-clock anti-Kremlin protests drew hundreds of people to the streets over the weekend for another creative stroll, and the police forced the opposition's outdoor camp to relocate to another site in the city center.

Police made about 70 arrests at the opposition's Occupy-style camp, which moved from Kudrinskaya Ploshchad to the Arbat.

Following the example of a writers' march a week earlier, a group of artists took a walk Saturday along downtown Moscow boulevards, carrying and rolling works that included caricatures of President Vladimir Putin, a model tank and piano on a cart.

The event came after several prominent writers on May 13 led a crowd of more than 10,000 people on a stroll designed to be a peaceful opposition demonstration.

But the artists' stroll — dubbed the Nomadic Museum of Contemporary Art — was planned as a less politically focused event and coincided with the annual Night at the Museum, when the city's museums and galleries work late.

Organizers estimated that the art show, whose works included many made by children and teenagers studying art, attracted some 2,000 people. Well-known modern artists who participated included German Vinogradov and Nikolai Polissky, among others.

The head of City Hall's culture department, Sergei Kapkov, who was spotted at the walk, said it should not be seen as a political action.

"Culture and modern art are broader than politics, so politics have become part of modern art," Kapkov said in comments to Dozhd television.

Police didn't intervene in the artistic demonstration. Instead, they cleared the opposition camp at Kudrinskaya Ploshchad on Friday night.

The camp had settled near the Barrikadnaya metro station after protesters were forced from Chistiye Prudy early Wednesday following a court ruling. The Occupy Barrikadnaya camp was scattered without any court hearing.

About 2 a.m. Saturday, a riot police officer approached the camp of several hundred people with a loudspeaker and ordered everyone to leave "because public events are banned after 11 p.m." The campers didn't resist and started packing their belongings.

But even though the crowd was obediently leaving, some 20 people were detained by riot police, apparently at random, including several who were walking by the U.S. Embassy.

The police later issued a statement saying the camp had been cleared "because of complaints from local residents" and violations of unspecified sanitary norms on food eaten on the square.

Dozens of evicted protesters moved to the Arbat, while others settled at Nikitskiye Gates around a monument to Kliment Timiryazev, a prominent Russian physiologist.

The Nikitskiye Gates group was broken up later Saturday morning by the police, who directed the campers to walk to the Arbat, where at least 50 were detained during the day, RIA-Novosti reported, citing police. But people at the new Occupy Arbat site — located around a monument to poet Bulat Okudzhava — reported that dozens of new protesters were joining the camp on Saturday and Sunday. As of Sunday evening, the police hadn't intervened.

Another group of opposition-minded citizens arrived Sunday at the Sakharov Center, which was celebrating a city-sanctioned Festival of Freedom on the eve of what would have been Andrei Sakharov's 91st birthday.

Meanwhile, the State Duma on Friday postponed the first reading of a bill that would significantly raise fines for illegal protests. The bill, criticized as a measure to stifle dissent, would increase maximum fines for participating in illegal demonstrations from 2,000 rubles ($65) to 1 million rubles ($32,368) and for organizing them from 5,000 rubles to 1.5 million rubles.

The opposition has announced plans for what's expected to be the next large-scale rally on June 12, the Russia Day holiday.

The march is scheduled to begin at 3 p.m. near the Belorusskaya metro station and march down Tverskaya Ulitsa to Borovitskaya Ploshchad, which abuts the Kremlin walls, opposition leader Sergei Udaltsov announced via Twitter.

Staff writer Jonathan Earle contributed to this report.

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