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150 Detained at Anti-Kremlin Rallies

By Alexandra Odynova

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A police officer detaining a gay rights activist during an attempt to hold a rally at the Mayor's Office on Sunday. **Mikhail Metzel**

About 150 people were detained Sunday as scores of people gathered for a series of anti-government demonstrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Police detained some 40 people outside the Mayor's Office, where gay rights activists gathered to protest anti-gay legislation passed in several Russian cities and waiting for a vote in the capital.

YouTube footage from the rally showed the protesters — who also demanded the right to hold a gay pride parade — being approached by a group of radical Orthodox activists carrying crosses and icons and chanting "Stop Sodom!"

"I will not allow perverts to bring the wrath of God onto our city," one gay rights opponent, Dmitry Tsarionov, told the gathering. He held a sign that said "Moscow is not Sodom."

"I want our children to live in a country where a sin that so awfully distorts human nature is not preached in schools," he said, The Associated Press reported.

Fierce arguing between gay rights activists and their opponents descended into violence, which ended with the police swooping in and detaining 40 people from both sides.

Another group of protesters organized a rally dubbed “White DefilO,” calling for people to dress in white clothes and walk around Red Square. Several hundred people showed up, waving white ribbons, the symbol of the opposition.

The White DefilO participants then walked to the Arbat, where about 100 people were detained, Kommersant reported on its website.

The Yabloko party, meanwhile, held a sanctioned rally near the Pushkinskaya metro station against a bill that would increase fines for illegal protests. A few party activists dressed in costumes resembling prison garb, Interfax reported.

In St. Petersburg, opposition activist Olga Kurnosova was held by the police minutes before an anti-Kremlin stroll in the city center, Interfax reported. Four more activists were detained during the walk.

Separately, six police officers will be awarded free apartments as compensation for injuries suffered during a May 6 opposition rally in Moscow that ended in violence and some 450 detentions.

The four OMON riot police officers and two regular policemen will receive deeds for the apartments in Moscow, a police spokesman said Friday. Earlier, the police said about 30 officers had been injured in the clashes.

News of the free apartments sparked irritation from opposition-minded bloggers, who pointed out that hundreds of war veterans and people with special needs have been waiting for similar apartments for years.

Also Sunday, socialite-turned-opposition activist Ksenia Sobchak wrote on Twitter that she had been told that she will no longer host a Muz-TV music award ceremony next Friday. Sobchak, who has hosted the ceremony for the past four years, said the decision came from top government circles and was in response to her support of the anti-Kremlin protesters.

It wasn't immediately clear who would replace her.

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