

Opposition Applies for 50,000-Strong Rally June 12

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Protesters and police clash near a barricade during the May 6 March of a Million rally. **Igor Tabakov**

Opposition activists have submitted an application to hold their next rally June 12, asking city authorities to approve the attendance of up to 50,000 people in a protest that may serve as the first test of a tough new rally law that could be approved as early as next week.

"We submitted a notice to City Hall about holding a 'March of a Million' event on June 12 in the form of a march and a rally. We'll gather at 2 p.m., and the beginning of the procession is at 3," Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov wrote in Twitter.

The march is planned to start from the Belorussky Station and move along Tverskaya Ulitsa to end at Borovitskaya Ploshchad near the Kremlin, Udaltsov said.

The opposition leader told Interfax that organizers of the event arrived at City Hall the evening before submitting the application and had stayed all night to ensure they would have the first spot in line in the morning.

In February, conflict arose when a pro-Kremlin group was allowed to submit an application before opposition activists, despite opposition claims that they had arrived first. They said the pro-Kremlin group had unfairly used administrative privileges to cut the line.

Protesters' demands initially focused on free elections, but they've since branched out into broad democratic reforms and the resignation of newly inaugurated President Vladimir Putin.

The first March of a Million event was held May 6 to protest the inauguration, but a bottleneck in the crowd created by police near the rally site contributed to mounting tensions that erupted into violence. About 450 were arrested after clashing with police, and at least two dozen protesters and around 30 police officers were injured.

Federal lawmakers have been considering a bill that would greatly increase penalties for violating rules at rallies and could be ready in time for the June 12 event. The State Duma last week tentatively approved the bill, which would increase fines from 2,000 rubles to 1 million rubles (from \$65 to \$32,400), with penalties for organizers climbing from 5,000 rubles to 1.5 million rubles. The second reading of the bill is set for June 5, and the third reading can be held the same day, Kommersant reported.

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