

\$1M Seized in Opposition Leaders' Homes on Eve of Rally

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Corrections appended

Investigators seized computers, anti-Kremlin materials and at least 1 million euros worth of cash stuffed in dozens of envelopes during raids of apartments belonging to four leading opposition activists on the eve of a mass anti-Kremlin demonstration.

The four opposition leaders — Alexei Navalny, Sergei Udaltsov, Ilya Yashin and Ksenia Sobchak — were ordered to appear for questioning on Tuesday an hour before protesters are scheduled to begin gathering on Pushkin Square, raising the possibility that they would not be able to attend the march and rally.

The developments came after President Vladimir Putin signed on Friday a law that drastically raises fines on illegal protests and seemed to show an increasing urgency on the part of the government to defang the opposition.

“There are Kremlin-friendly elements within the opposition. The Kremlin wants to make sure that they're the ones running the show,” said Mark Feigin, a senior member of the Solidarity opposition organization.

Investigators appeared at Navalny's door at about 8 a.m. Monday. "Awesome. A search is under way in my home. Regarding the case of mass riots. They practically sawed my door off," Navalny tweeted.

Investigators seized electronics, "even discs with children's photographs," and searched through the toys of his two children, he said.

Investigators confiscated a “large amount of propaganda,” “literature with anti-government slogans,” electronic databases and computers, the Investigative Committee said in a statement.

Family members and associates appeared to be fair game, with investigators searching the homes of Udaltsov's parents; Navalny's in-laws; Alexei Sakhnin, the creator of Navalny's Rospil anti-corruption organization; and an aide to opposition ally and State Duma Deputy Ilya Ponomarev of A Just Russia.

Sobchak, a TV host who has stood by the opposition since mass rallies first erupted over disputed Duma elections in December, accused investigators of personally humiliating her by reading her personal letters aloud after they burst into her apartment.

She also wrote on Twitter that officers had robbed her, without specifying what they took.

Investigators said U.S. dollars and euros worth “at least 1 million euros” were confiscated in more than 100 envelopes in Sobchak's apartment, where Yashin is currently lodging. They vowed to determine the origin and purpose of the money.

“My yearly income is more than 2 million. Don't I have the right to keep it at home if I don't trust banks?” Sobchak wrote on Twitter.

The Investigative Committee said the searches were being conducted in "strict accordance with investigative and procedural legal norms, with the participation of witnesses."

It said the searches were part of an investigation into a criminal case against opposition activists accused of attacking riot police at a "March of Millions" rally on May 6 at Bolotnaya Ploshchad.

The blogosphere reacted quickly to the news, with the hashtag `privet37god` becoming a worldwide trend at one point Monday, a reference to the Stalinist purges of 1937.

A journalist for Kremlin-controlled NTV television accused Udaltsov of illegally locking her in his apartment. Udaltsov wrote on Twitter that the journalist entered his apartment without permission.

The accusation could prove a further headache for Udaltsov, who already faces allegations that he assaulted a female journalist with Kremlin ties during a rally in Ulyanovsk earlier this year.

Investigators also raided the offices of Rospil on Monday, while a search of veteran opposition leader Boris Nemtsov's apartment was called off because he wasn't home, investigators said.

Adding to the tense atmosphere, the editor of privately owned Dozhd TV accused the authorities of pressuring apartment owners along Tuesday's march route not to allow television camera crews to use their balconies.

“The day before yesterday, one of them admitted that an 'official' had paid a visit, ” Dozhd editor Mikhail Zygar wrote on his Facebook page.

Tuesday's "March of Millions," which is sanctioned by City Hall, is scheduled to begin at 1 p.m. with a march of up to 50,000 participants starting at Pushkin Square and going east along the Boulevard Ring to Turgenyevskaya Ploshchad.

A rally will then be held on Prospekt Akademika Sakharova from 3 to 6 p.m.

It was unclear whether the raids might attract more participants to the event, but some Kremlin-friendly observers, including Russia Today editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan, expressed fear that they would.

Stanislav Belkovsky, an independent political analyst, said the Kremlin was only helping the opposition. “What's happening is a very unwise tactic by the Kremlin,” he said. “These mosquito bites will only make the ones being bitten even more angry.”

Staff writers Ezekiel Pfeifer and Alexander Bratersky contributed to this report.

Corrections: An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated that investigators had seized more than \$2 million in cash during the searches; in fact, it should have read "at least 1 million euros" in cash. Also, an earlier version stated that the June 12 opposition rally at Prospekt Akademika Sakharova was scheduled to last until 4 p.m.; in fact, it is set to finish at 6 p.m.

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