

Pressure Ratchets Up on Protesters

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Bakhov

As hundreds of opposition supporters rallied Thursday on behalf of a dozen people arrested in connection with violence at a May 6 demonstration, investigators signaled that the Kremlin was hardening its stance toward the opposition, detaining two more people and searching their homes.

A total of 13 people are now in custody, and three others are under investigation. The suspects include rank-and-file opposition activists together with seemingly random people who, according to relatives and friends, rarely attend rallies and never speak publicly about politics — raising questions about whether the arrests are a warning to the opposition to stay off the streets.

Hundreds of people chanted, "Freedom to political prisoners!" and "Russia Without Putin!" on Thursday evening near Pushkin Square at a City Hall-authorized rally demanding the release of people jailed on charges of participating in violence at the sanctioned opposition rally on Bolotnaya Ploshchad on May 6, the eve of President Vladimir Putin's

inauguration.

Rally organizers said 3,000 people turned out to protest Thursday, while police put the figure at 800, Interfax reported.

At least four people were detained, including three Left Front activists who handed out leaflets urging people to attend a Sept. 15 opposition rally in Moscow. New legislation bans organizers from announcing a rally about first notifying the authorities.

Another person, a young man, was detained as he tried to carry a knife, a telescopic baton, and fireworks through a metal detector leading into the cordoned-off rally area, Interfax said.

Among the people who addressed the crowd were Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov; a suspect in the May 6 case, Maria Baronova; and veteran human rights activist Lev Ponomarev.

Friends of the latest detainees in the May 6 case, leftist activist Nikolai Kavkazsky and Moscow student Alexei Polikhovich mingled in the crowd.

Kavkazsky is "a good guy, a pacifist and vegetarian," leftist activist Nikita Yechkov told a reporter. "I don't believe he would have beaten anyone."

"They arrest the most peaceful of us," said a 19-year-old female acquaintance of Polikhovich who refused to give her name.

Rallies were also planned for at least 11 other Russian cities, as well as in London, New York, Paris and Tel Aviv.

The Investigative Committee said in a statement that it would ask a court to sanction the arrest of Kavkazsky and Polikhovich on charges of taking part in the May 6 violence. Investigators also searched their homes and confiscated computers and clothes supposedly worn by the suspects on Bolotnaya Ploshchad.

A Moscow district court ordered that Kavkazsky be held in custody for two months late Thursday, rights activist Eduard Rudyk said by telephone from the courtroom.

More detentions and arrests may follow, investigators said, adding that district police were helping them to identify and trace other suspects.

Kavkazsky, a lawyer in his mid-20s, is an activist with the Left Socialist Action group and the Committee for Civil Rights, while Polikhovich, 21, is a student of Russian State Social University, according to Bolotnoedelo.info, a website opened by opposition supporters.

The rights group Memorial labelled the new detainees political prisoners, senior member Oleg Orlov told Interfax.

Because of the new detentions, Left Front leader Udaltsov cancelled a weekend trip to the pro-Kremlin summer camp at Lake Seliger in the Tver region, where he had planned to present the political opposition's program. "In the current situation where the authorities are cynically continuing to fill prisons with opposition representatives, I don't belong at Seliger," Udaltsov tweeted.

The 16 suspects are aged 18 to 36, while 14 are men, according to Bolotnoyedelo.info and Rosuznik, a project set up by opposition leader Alexei Navalny to help the suspects.

Most are accused of involvement in the May 6 unrest, either with or without using violence against police. Each charge is punishable by up to 10 years in prison. Kavkazsky, in addition to using violence against police, is accused of hooliganism.

At least seven of the suspects are political activists, either leftist, nationalist or environmental. They include: nationalists Rikhard Sobolev and Yaroslav Belousov, both in their early 20s; leftist activist Vladimir Akimenkov; Alexander Kamensky, in his mid-30s, an activist of The Other Russia group led by Eduard Limonov; antifascist Stepan Zimin, in his early 20s; civil activist Maria Baronova, in her late 20s; Alexandra Dukhanina, 18, a civil and environmental activist and Moscow State University student.

The rest, according to public information and accounts from relatives or friends, have no links to political, environmental or rights groups and include: Artyom Savelov, a former metro worker in his early 30s; Oleg Arkhipenkov, general director of a travel agency in his mid-20s; Fyodor Bakhov, department head at an innovations company linked to a research institute; Mikhail Kosenko, an unemployed and mentally disabled person in his mid-30s; Denis Lutskevich, a cultural studies student who is barely 20; Andrei Barabanov, a freelance painter who is also about 20; and Maxim Luzyanin, an entrepreneur and bodybuilder in his mid-30s.

Twelve suspects have been charged, including Sobolev, Akimenkov, Arkhipenkov, Savelov, Bakhov, Kosenko, Zimin, Belousov, Lutskevich, Barabanov, Luzyanin and Dukhanina. Dukhanina is under home arrest, while Kamensky spent 10 days in detention but was unexpectedly released without explanation.

Relatives of several suspects described their loved ones as peaceful by nature and disinterested in politics, saying they had turned up at the rally by accident.

Viktor Savelov, father of former metro worker Artyom Savelov, said his son was a "conflict-free" person and "all his friends were surprised that he had been targeted." May 6 was the first rally Artyom had ever attended, his father said, adding that his son could not have shouted slogans because he stuttered.

Twenty-five photos of Savelov at the rally that his father found on the Internet showed his son behaving ordinarily and, even when a policeman tried to hit with a baton, he "purposely stood still, his arms at his side," his father said.

Savelov does physical exercises regularly, and his height is above average.

Alexandra, girlfriend of antifascist activist Stepan Zimin, said her boyfriend was a "gentle, modest and mild" person. Online photos show Zimin is stout, and Rosuznik says he stands 2 meters, 5 centimeters high.

Yekaterina, girlfriend of freelance painter Andrei Barabanov, said her boyfriend never spoke to her about acting "aggressively" toward the police, so he probably hadn't because they had no secrets from each other. A video that investigators presented as a proof of Barabanov's guilt was inconclusive, she said.

Maria Troshina, sister of innovations expert Fyodor Bakhov, called him "a good person who would not walk by if he saw the police beating someone."

Pavel Salin, an analyst with the Center for Current Politics, said that authorities are targeting ordinary people to frighten opposition-minded people within the elite like socialite Ksenia Sobchak, State Duma Deputy Gennady Gudkov, and former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin.

But Alexei Mukhin, an analyst with the Center for Political Information, said the suspects probably had acted aggressively toward the police and suggested that the police had evidence of their guilt since the arrests occurred weeks after the rally. "Random people are usually caught on the spot," Mukhin said. "The fact that [some] suspects are not members of any political groups proves the objectivity of the police," he added.

Police detained more than 400 people on May 6 but all were released within one to 15 days.

Olga Mefodyeva, an analyst with the Center of Political Technologies, said the arrests aimed to show that police are working and are tough on protesters.

Also Thursday, prominent environmentalist Yevgenia Chirikova was summoned by investigators for questioning in connection with the May 6 case, she tweeted.

Meanwhile, investigators refused to return to Sobchak about \$1.7 million in cash that they confiscated from her apartment on June 11 as part of an investigation into the May 6 case, Sobchak tweeted. Investigators cited fear that she might "use the money to finance mass disorders," she said.

Moscow's Basmanny District Court backed investigators' request to keep the money as evidence, she said.

On Tuesday, investigators searched the home of Khimki forest activist Pavel Shekhtman in connection with the May 6 case, confiscating computers, discs, modems, notebooks and documents belonging to Fronde-TV, which has covered opposition rallies and has its office in Shekhtman's apartment, according to the website of Ecooborona, a Moscow region environmental group.

Also Tuesday, investigators questioned Eduard Limonov, leader of the unregistered The Other Russia party, over the May 6 case, asking whether he knew who was behind the mass disorder, Limonov wrote on his blog. Limonov, who wasn't among the rally's organizers and didn't take part in it, said he had no information and was allowed to leave.

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