

Bomb Hoax Interrupts Day 4 of Pussy Riot Trial

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Pussy Riot supporters have caused a sensation more than once while expressing their support for the three jailed punk rockers. **Andrei Makhonin**

A bomb hoax interrupted the fourth day of the trial of the Pussy Riot female punk band, and the judge rejected a request from the defendants to recuse herself from the case for allegedly violating their rights.

The father of one defendant also told the court that his daughter didn't take part in the impromptu performance at Christ the Savior Cathedral, for which the three defendants face up to seven years in prison on felony charges of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred.

In the performance, several masked women danced and sang a song denouncing President Vladimir Putin and Patriarch Kirill at a part of the cathedral that is off-limits to the general public. The three band members standing trial are Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, 22; Yekaterina Samutsevich, 29; and Maria Alyokhina, 24.

British Prime Minister David Cameron expressed his concern over Pussy Riot during London talks with Putin on the protection of human rights in Russia, Cameron's office said.

Also, a dozen rock musicians, including members of The Who, Pulp and the Pet Shop Boys, published an open letter in Britain's The Times newspaper urging Putin to give Pussy Riot a fair trial.

The trial resumed Thursday in Moscow's Khamovnichesky District Court with Alyokhina reading out a plea on behalf of the three defendants to replace the judge, Marina Syrova, over the alleged violation of their rights.

Alyokhina accused the judge of giving preferential treatment to the prosecution, refusing to ask witnesses questions raised by defense lawyers and neglecting to ensure that the court secretary included them in the trial record, rejecting the defendants' plea for more time to study the 2,800-page case against them, neglecting their complaints about feeling ill, making "offensive remarks about the mental abilities" of the defendants, and refusing to read aloud the transcript of investigators' interviews with church witnesses, which the defendants suspect was falsified because investigators attributed identically worded testimony to multiple witnesses.

Alyokhina read out the request for a new judge in a trembling voice while bending toward the window of the defendants' cell in the courtroom.

The judge called for a recess to consider the request. Three dozen journalists, several supporters of the band and a few other trial participants gathered on the courthouse stairs to wait.

About 15 minutes later, a court marshal barked at the crowd: "Leave the court immediately!"

Court spokeswoman Darya Lyakh later explained that an anonymous caller had phoned the judge's chamber with a bomb threat. Before disconnecting, the caller had shouted: "Free Pussy Riot!" she said.

The trial resumed more than an hour later, after police officers and a sniffer dog searched the premises.

Syrova rejected the request to step aside — the fifth time she has insisted on staying on the case — and started questioning the prosecution's witnesses, including the father of Samutsevich, who was called to testify against his daughter in connection with a conversation that he had had with an investigator in the case.

But instead of supporting the prosecutor's case, the father, Stanislav Samutsevich, 72, said his daughter had not participated in the February performance. Samutsevich said a video of the performance shown to him by an investigator depicts his daughter entering the cathedral and then being escorted out by private guards before she had reached the altar. She was arrested, as the investigator explained, because she "had intended to commit a crime" and because she had refused to cooperate with investigators.

The prosecution was left red-faced when two of its witnesses left the court Thursday before testifying, one without notifying anyone and the other after she explained that she felt

unwell.

The court rejected a request by the defense to hear its witnesses, defense lawyer Nikolai Polozov tweeted. The witnesses were supposed to be, among others, opposition leaders Alexei Navalny and Sergei Udaltsov, Islamist leader Geidar Djemal and popular writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya, another defense lawyer, Mark Feigin, tweeted.

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