

Chirikova to Run for Khimki Mayor

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Yevgenia Chirikova at a winter protest calling for fair elections on Bolotnaya Ploshchad.

Yevgenia Chirikova, a leader of the protest movement against the destruction of Moscow region forestland, announced Sunday that she would run for mayor of Khimki.

"I hope our country's rebirth will start with this city," Chirikova, who rose to fame by opposing the construction of a Moscow-St. Petersburg highway set to bisect the Khimki forest, said after announcing her candidacy, *Gazeta.ru* reported.

She was endorsed by Alexei Navalny, an anti-corruption blogger who has shot to the forefront of the opposition movement. Two other prominent opposition leaders, Ilya Yashin and Sergei Udaltsov, have also given their support.

The city of 200,000 just north of the capital was thrust into the media spotlight when the government approved the construction of the \$8 billion toll road and protests, many led by Chirikova, subsequently flared.

The Khimki administration's top job opened up last week when former Mayor Vladimir Strelchenko, accused of corruption and suppressing political opponents, resigned voluntarily.

Some say Strelchenko was forced out by the newly appointed Governor Sergei Shoigu, who has been replacing loyalists of his predecessor, Boris Gromov.

Chirikova ran against Strelchenko for mayor in 2009 but got only 15 percent of the vote. Previously, she expressed reluctance to run in the upcoming election, scheduled for October.

"I can't take part in the election because it is a big responsibility, because the mayor has to be fully dedicated to the city," Chirikova said last week.

Sergei Mitrokhin, a Yabloko party leader who supports former Deputy Mayor Igor Belousov's candidacy, told Itar-Tass on Wednesday that "it would be bad if two opposition candidates take part in the election."

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