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New NTV Documentaries Likely to Cause a Stir

By Jonathan Earle

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Putin's closely guarded personal life has long been the subject of intense interest and speculation.

State-controlled NTV television is scheduled to air two new politically themed documentaries this weekend: an opposition expose Friday and a feature about the day-to-day life of President Vladimir Putin on Sunday, his 60th birthday.

The channel has a history of producing controversial documentaries about Kremlin foes — from former Mayor Yury Luzhkov to Pussy Riot — and Putin's closely guarded personal life has long been a subject of intense interest and speculation.

"Anatomy of a Protest 2," like its predecessor, will portray opposition leaders as foreign agents plotting revolution, judging by a trailer released Tuesday on NTV's website.

"Who's taking the money, how much and for what?" an ominous voice says over footage of protest leaders Sergei Udaltsov and Alexei Navalny giving impassioned speeches.

Opposition activists denounced the first program in the series as a pro-Kremlin hatchet job. After it aired in March, about 100 protesters were detained outside NTV's headquarters.

The channel is billing the new Putin documentary as a "never-before-seen" look at the president's everyday life, featuring scenes shot over a week at an investment forum, at his residence and inside his car.

The production will be at least the second such "intimate" Putin documentary released this year.

But unlike "I, Putin. A Portrait," by German filmmaker Hubert Seipel, which memorably showed a laconic, solitary leader practicing his slap shot on an empty ice rink, NTV's program appears likely to bolster the virile, witty and commanding persona Putin has long cultivated.

A clip on NTV's website showed Putin doing laps in an indoor pool. Another clip, which briefly appeared on YouTube, showed host Vadim Takmenyov milling about with presidential advisers before being led into a cavernous room, where Putin waits at the end of a long table.

Past attempts to humanize Putin, including on numerous outdoor adventures, have had a mixed reception.

Critics snickered at a September video in which he donned a billowing white suit and piloted a motorized hang-glider in an attempt to lead endangered Siberian cranes southward to wintering grounds.

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