

Putin's Birthday Marked With Praise and Protests

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Police officers detaining activist Roman Dobrokhotov during an unauthorized gathering on Ploshchad Ilinskiye Vorota to mark President Vladimir Putin's 60th birthday on Sunday. As more than 20 protesters were detained, senior government officials lavished praise on Putin and his leadership. **Sergey Ponomarev**

Senior government officials lavished praise on President Vladimir Putin on Sunday, his 60th birthday, paying tribute to his qualities as leader and saying he rescued the country from disaster.

Meanwhile, police detained about 25 opposition activists who had gathered in central Moscow to protest Putin's rule and poke fun at the head of state.

State Duma Speaker Sergei Naryshkin said Putin had "set the highest standards of professionalism and commitment" and alluded to polls that place him atop the list of the country's most popular politicians, RIA-Novosti reported.

Sergei Sobyenin, formerly head of Putin's presidential administration and now Moscow mayor, said Russians “link the far-reaching, positive changes in the life of the country” with Putin's presidency, according to a statement [posted](#) on the Moscow Mayor's Office website.

Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko issued a similarly fawning statement, linking Russia's development with Putin's guiding hand.

Putin's protege, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, said through his spokeswoman that he had given Putin a pre-revolutionary book on Tsarskoye Selo, a former imperial palace outside St. Petersburg, as a gift.

Foreign leaders from Russia's near abroad, including Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko and Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, were just as quick to send official telegrams congratulating the Russian president.

In particular, Lukashenko wrote that he admired Putin's “rich experience, worldly wisdom and integrity,” while Yanukovich called him “a far-sighted politician and wise leader,” Interfax said.

As well as written congratulations, Putin loyalists promised a host of celebratory events across the country, many of them coordinated by local chapters of United Russia's youth wing, the Young Guard.

But while Putin supporters showered their hero with compliments and competed in staging displays of loyalty, opponents found creative ways to express their anger at the country's leader.

In central Moscow, Rosagit activists held an unsanctioned protest on Ploshchad Ilinskiye Vorota, a location chosen for its proximity to the presidential administration building, calling on attendees to bring geriatric-themed birthday presents for Putin, who could theoretically start drawing a state pension Sunday.

Blogger Timur Khorev wrote on Twitter that police detained at least four activists carrying presents including an enema bag, a prison outfit with Putin's name, soap and a rope, a reference to committing suicide by hanging.

Unconfirmed reports said two journalists covering the event for RIA-Novosti and Slon.ru were also detained.

Khorev said two activists later escaped from a police van where they were being held but that one of them was detained for a second time. In a video posted on [YouTube](#), riot police officers can be seen chasing the escaped activists around a park adjacent to Ploshchad Ilinskiye Vorota.

In separate incidents, detention-monitoring site OVD Info said police detained 22 opposition activists later in the day. Twelve were detained near the Lubyanka metro station for wearing white ribbons, the symbol of the protest movement, and 10 were seized at another protest on Ploshchad Ilinskiye Vorota, dubbed the “Freedom Stroll.”

As with last winter's protests against rigged elections and Russia's “managed democracy,”

Putin critics took to social media to voice their anger Sunday, pointing out that top Nazi Party official Heinrich Himmler shared the same birthday as Putin and that Novaya Gazeta reporter Anna Politkovskaya was murdered Oct. 7.

At least four Putin-themed hashtags, including #СДнемРожденияВор (#HappyBirthdayThief), featured in the top 10 Twitter trends in Russia over the course of Sunday.

In a gentler dig at Putin, a pop-art exhibition depicting the president relaxing, with animals and alongside government colleagues, opened in Moscow's Flakon gallery the same day.

Putin spent his birthday, his eighth as head of state, quietly at home in St. Petersburg with family and close friends.

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