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24 Detained at Rally for Bolotnoye Suspects

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Twenty-four protesters were arrested Saturday on Red Square at an unauthorized rally against the ongoing investigation into violence at anti-Kremlin protests on Bolotnaya Ploshchad in May 2012.

The protest was meant to be a show of support for the 27 suspects in the case, 15 of whom are still in custody and who are seen as political prisoners by the opposition.

The rally followed one-man pickets in support of the suspects on Manezh Square and a car protest on the Garden Ring to back opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who is also currently on trial in a separate case that many consider politically motivated.

"My participation in the protest shows that people are not indifferent [to the Bolotnoye case], despite the fact that there are few of us," Sergei Shitikov, one of the protesters, told a Moscow Times reporter.

Saturday's rally was marked by some rather colorful antics by protesters, including a photo shoot at the Place of Skulls, a stone platform that was sometimes used for public executions in Tsarist Russia and which served as the place of the most famous protest in Soviet history in 1968.

One of the protesters wrote "Putin is a thief" near the platform, prompting two street cleaners to stand in front of the inscription to block people from seeing it.

A street cleaning vehicle soon arrived and washed off the inscriptions, causing the activists to quip, "Putin has been washed out."

Some activists held up posters with the formula of Newton's third law — an apparent attempt to mock the authorities for prohibiting even non-political posters.

At least one protester was detained for holding up a blank sheet of paper, an attempt to escape the ban on posters and a reference to an old Soviet joke about a person being detained on Red Square for distributing leaflets that turned out to be blank sheets of paper. According to the joke, when asked by the KGB why he had not written anything on them, the protester answered: "Isn't everything clear to everyone already?"

When the detained activists were driven away, the remaining activists followed the police van to the Yakimanka police station, where they proceeded to decorate the station's entire facade with white ribbons, the opposition's symbol.

In a bizarre episode, a Moscow Times reporter watched as one of the detainees stealthily snuck out of the station and ran off. Most were later released without charges, but two were issued misdemeanor charges, according to Ovdinfo.org, an independent website that monitors police detentions.

The police department was not immediately available for comment on Sunday.

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