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# U.S. Cites Human Rights Problems in Russia

By The Moscow Times

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WASHINGTON — The U.S. State Department has expressed concern about increasing crackdowns on civil liberties in Russia in an annual report that was released as U.S. authorities searched for Boston bombing suspect and ethnic Chechen Dzhokhar Tsarnaev.

But Uzra Zeya, the acting assistant secretary of state for human rights, declined to discuss whether the Tsarnaev case might change the way the State Department viewed the human rights situation in the North Caucasus.

In its annual survey of human rights around the world, the State Department noted in a long section on Russia that in the last year Moscow had approved new restrictions on nongovernmental organizations such as human rights groups — particularly those that get funding from abroad — as well as large increases in fines for unauthorized protests.

Russian authorities selectively detained and prosecuted members of the political opposition,

the report said, including Alexei Navalny, an anti-corruption whistleblower.

The State Department criticizes new NGO rules and bigger fines for rallies.

Three criminal cases were opened against Navalny in 2012. Last week, he went on trial in one of the cases in which he faces theft charges that could result in a 10-year prison sentence. Russian investigators then increased the pressure by opening a fifth criminal probe against him on Thursday.

The State Department report said procedural irregularities and reports of vote fraud tarnished the election of Putin to his third term last year. It said Russia mostly did not punish officials who committed human rights abuses, "resulting in a climate of impunity."

It said the rule of law was "particularly deficient" in the North Caucasus, "where conflict among government forces, insurgents, Islamist militants, and criminal forces led to numerous human rights abuses, including killings, torture, physical abuse, and politically motivated abductions."

The annual reports, which have been produced for nearly four decades, has upset Russia in the past, and Moscow recently issued a human rights report on the U.S.

David Kramer of Freedom House, a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization, said that 2012 was a "downright ugly year" for human rights in Russia.

"When you add it all up, the report reflects the worst human rights situation in Russia since the collapse of the U.S.S.R.," said Kramer, a former assistant secretary of state for human rights.

The State Department also singled out Myanmar for praise for the second year in a row, in recognition of political and economic reforms put in place since that country's military stepped aside and a quasi-civilian government was installed in 2011.

"Because of steps toward democratic reform and stronger human rights protections, a country that had been isolated for years is now making progress," Secretary of State John Kerry said of Myanmar as the human rights report was released.

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