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Mayoral Vote Set for Sept. 8 as Candidates Rush to Prepare

By Natalya Krainova

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The Moscow City Duma has approved the date for the city's mayoral elections for Sept. 8 with a vote of 27-2, and opposition leaders are already lining up to fight for the post.

The elections, initially earmarked for 2015, will now take place this September and see opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who received preliminary nomination from RPR-Parnas, Yabloko party head Sergei Mitrokhin, Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov, businessman and Civil Platform party head Mikhail Prokhorov and his sister Irina vie for the post voluntarily given up by Mayor Sergei Sobyanin's last week so that elections in Moscow would coincide with Russia's unified election day.

President Vladimir Putin supported Sobyanin's decision and appointed him acting mayor, saying that he hoped Sobyanin would keep the mayoral post after the elections.

Many see Sobyanin's victory against opposition leaders with legal woes as predetermined.

Sobyanin, a long-time Putin ally who worked for Putin in the government and the Kremlin, was appointed in 2010 by then-president Dmitry Medvedev for a five-year term.

Sobyanin has annexed some Moscow region districts to the capital and overseen the renovation of Gorky Park.

But he's struggled to solve the city's gridlocked traffic, and government campaigns to clear the streets of allegedly unlicensed food vendors and replace sidewalk asphalt with tiles — which have crumbled — have won him a fair share of criticism.

Being a senior member of the pro-Kremlin party United Russia, Sobyanin said earlier that he would run for the post as an independent candidate despite the party saying it would support him.

Analysts have said Sobyanin's competitors have slim chances of winning, as they would not have enough time to prepare a proper mayoral campaign in time for the elections.

In addition, Navalny is currently standing trial on charges of large-scale theft of timber from a state-owned company, Udaltsov is under house arrest on suspicion of plotting mass riots at Bolotnaya Ploshchad last May, and Prokhorov is facing a challenge to reassign his foreign assets to another person in order to be legally eligible for running.

Udaltsov has asked investigators to allow him to personally take his registration papers to the Moscow City Elections Commission, his supporters said on his Twitter microblog Saturday.

Prokhorov will have time to reassign his assets, and the process will take up to three weeks, Dozhd television reported Friday, citing an expertise conducted by a legal firm on his request.

But Irina Yarovaya, head of the State Duma's anti-corruption committee, said on Saturday that Prokhorov would have no legal right to run for mayor if he reassigned his assets in a blind trust scheme, as he plans to, because he will remain the actual owner of the assets, RIA Novosti reported.

In such circumstances, many see Sobyanin's victory as predetermined.

According to Interfax, the first stage of the election campaign — the collection of signatures by candidates — will begin on June 12, Russia Day, and candidates will have one month to gather the necessary number of signatures.

Sobyanin's campaign will feature about 100 voting points throughout the city, state-owned NTV reported.

Acting Moscow region governor Andrei Vorobyov, who is a senior United Russia official and will run in the Sept. 8 elections of the regional governor, on Friday told his voters that Sobyanin and himself were “two peas in the same pod,” Vedomosti reported.

Putin appointed former State Duma Deputy Vorobyov acting governor in November.

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