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Navalny Testifies at Bolotnoye Riot Trial

By The Moscow Times

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Contrary to investigators' claims, organizers did not intentionally orchestrate riots at the demonstration on Bolotnaya Ploshchad on May 6 last year, opposition leader Alexei Navalny told a Moscow city court on Monday.

"Officials intentionally instigated the crush so as to claim there were riots," Navalny, who was present at the protest as a member of the event's organizing committee, said..

Navalny was called as a witness in the case where twelve protesters are now on trial. The majority of them face between eight and 13 years imprisonment on charges of rioting and attacking police officers.

The organizers had agreed with authorities on a plan for the protest, in which demonstrators were to stand on Bolotnaya Ploshchad and along the embankment next to it.

"When we came towards Bolotnaya Ploshchad, we saw that the public garden, and that was 80 percent of the area for the demonstration, was blocked off," Navalny said, Interfax reported.

The demonstrators at the front of the march then halted, waiting for an explanation from law enforcement, and sat on the ground so that the ranks further back could view what was happening, he said.

"And then the police blockade took a step forward and the crush suddenly increased. So everyone who had gathered stood up, and the head of the column was in spontaneous motion, like in the metro at rush hour, and logically the blockade burst," Navalny said.

Over 400 people were detained at the rally, with twenty-eight subsequently accused of participating in the alleged riots.

Although he has not been charged, Navalny said that he had been questioned and his apartment searched in connection with the case.

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