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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

# Protest Demands Release of Activists Jailed for Anti-Putin Rally

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One of the activists who were convicted for organizing the alleged "riots", Sergei Udaltsov.

Dozens of protesters gathered in central Moscow to demand the release of prisoners sentenced over the mass anti-Kremlin rallies on Bolotnaya Square in 2012.

Participants in the rally on Tuesday afternoon held up portraits of the prisoners and unfurled a banner that read: "Bolotnaya, May 6, 2012: Beaten, Slandered, Jailed," according to media reports and photographs posted online.

The rally had been approved by the authorities, so police looked on without interfering, opposition-minded news portal Grani.ru reported.

In a nod to this year's symbol under the Chinese astrological calendar, which is widely celebrated in Russia around New Year's, another sign called on Russians to speak out with the slogan: "The year of the goat is being met with the silence of the lambs."

Independent television station Dozhd estimated that the protest drew about 50 people, while

radio station Ekho Moskvy put the number at around 25-30.

The 2012 rally on Bolotnaya Square in Moscow, held on the eve of President Vladimir Putin's inauguration for a third term as president, marked one of the largest public protests against his rule.

The rally erupted in clashes between police and protesters, for which Russian authorities charged nearly 30 of the participants with involvement in "mass riots."

Protesters and opposition activists maintain that the clashes were stoked by police aggression.

Two of the activists who were convicted for organizing the alleged "riots" — Sergei Udaltsov and Leonid Razvozzhayev — have been sentenced to 4 1/2 years in prison each, and several other protesters also received prison terms. Critics have said the cases are part of a wider Kremlin crackdown on political opposition.

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