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Court Extends House Arrest Over Pro-Ukrainian Stunt on Moscow Skyscraper

By Allison Quinn

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A Moscow court held that a group of suspects facing prison time for a high-visibility pro-Ukraine protest in the Russian capital will remain under house arrest for at least another two months, the Interfax news agency reported Tuesday.

On Aug. 20, a Ukrainian national flag was strung from the top of an iconic Moscow skyscraper, and half of the spire's yellow star was painted blue, to match the flag. The stunt immediately made headlines, with observers interpreting it as a show of support to Ukrainians amid flaring tensions between Moscow and Kiev.

The suspects — Yevgenia Korotkova, Anna Lepeshkina, Alexandra Pogrebova and Alexei Shirokozhukhov — claim they had simply been base-jumping from the tower. If convicted of having carried out the stunt, they face up to seven years behind bars on hooliganism charges.

The case has courted controversy from the get-go, as the suspects in custody have denied any

involvement, maintaining they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

A Ukrainian roofer known by the nickname "Mustang Wanted" took credit for the act of politically-tinged vandalism shortly after the suspects were detained in late August, claiming Moscow police detained the wrong people. A Moscow court has issued an in absentia arrest warrant for him as well.

On Monday, Moscow's Tagansky District Court granted a request by investigators to extend the detention of the four suspects currently being held in connection with the case until March 20.

Investigators argued that more time was needed to conduct line-ups with witnesses, and furthermore, that the suspects could influence judicial proceedings against them if released from custody.

Defense lawyers said there was insufficient evidence to suggest that the suspects had been the ones responsible for painting the rooftop.

"[Base-jumping] as a sign of hooliganism isn't in the [investigators'] statement, and in the petition that you are now reading it says they completed the jump out for hooliganistic reasons, expressing their disrespect for society. There is no mention in the petition of painting [the building] and setting up a flag," Interfax cited one of the defense lawyers as saying.

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