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Human Rights Event Attacked in Moscow

By Anastasia Bazenkova

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Guests at an event organized by Russia's leading human rights group Memorial have been attacked by nationalist activists, the organization's executive director told the Moscow Times Thursday.

Participants at the award ceremony for high-school students were pelted with disinfectant and ammonia, said executive director Yelena Zhemkova.

"Memorial was holding a very important event at Dom Kino in central Moscow, but the guests and the participants were attacked by a group of aggressive protesters who threw green disinfectant and ammonia at them as they tried to enter the building," Zhemkova said.

The protests in front of the Dom Kino building were organized by the People's Liberation Front nationalist movement (NOD), local media sources reported.

Roughly 20 NOD activists congregated outside Dom Kino, holding banners reading "we don't need alternative history," and shouting "fascists."

Among those attacked was acclaimed Russian novelist Lyudmila Ulitskaya. The writer, who headed the jury at the competition, was sprayed in the face with green disinfectant.

A number of international guests were also present, including the German ambassador to Russia Rüdiger von Fritsch, the Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported. The activists also attacked the representative from the similar school's history contest in Norway.

The NOD's youth wing coordinator Maria Katasonova denied the attack on Ulitskaya in the interview with the Govorit Moskva radio station "We don't know who sprayed Ulitskaya," she said. "I only saw her turn around and she was already covered in green disinfectant.

The high-school competition, "A person in the history: Russia in the XX century" is an annual event by Memorial. Students from around the country are encouraged to research local history by studying historical archives, interviewing witnesses and examining newspapers and other sources.

Winning students are then invited to Moscow where they attend a number of places and events organized by Memorial. The culmination of their Moscow program is the awards ceremony.

Police arriving on the scene said that the protest was a one-man picket and took no action.

"Usually, even it's a real one-man protest, the police will come and puts everybody in the back of a van. This time nothing happened, even though our college had an eye injury," Zhemkova said.

The executive director said that although there had been previously protests carried out during previous Memorial events, it was the first time counter-activists had been so aggressive.

There was a picket had been carried out in front of the Sakharov Center where Memorial held an exhibition dedicated to the first Chechen war last month, but no one had been attacked, she said.

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