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Russians Protest Repressive New Anti-Terror Laws

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Protests against repressive new anti-terror legislation have taken place in major cities across Russia.

Activists gathered on Tuesday to protest the "Yarovaya Package," a series of hard-hitting anti-terrorism laws authored by ultra conservative United Russia deputy Irina Yarovaya. The bill was approved by president Vladimir Putin last month.

The legislation has drawn criticism from both ordinary Russians and human rights groups, with whistle-blower Edward Snowden describing the package as being "Big Brother laws."

The laws tighten restrictions on Russian terror suspects, introduce harsher penalties for inciting or justifying terrorism online, and increase the number of crimes with which children aged between 14 and 17 can be charged.

Communications companies will also need to monitor the content of phone calls

and messages and to keep them on file for six months. All messaging apps and internet services which use encryption will also be required to add additional code allowing access to the Russian security services.

The largest protest took place in Russia's third largest city, Novosibirsk. The rally was attended by 200 people, local media reported.

Smaller demonstrations were held in five other provincial cities in Russia.

Officials in St. Petersburg refused to give permission for an official protest although 150 people did attend a sanctioned "people's assembly." Police arrested a woman selling plastic bags emblazoned with the words "Yarovaya Package" during the gathering. She was accused of breaking trading laws, local media reported.

A Moscow district court yesterday supported City Hall's decision to revoke permission for a planned protest in the capital against the new laws. A demonstration organized by opposition politician Leonid Volkov had previously been approved by authorities, but officials later revoked the permit, citing inaccuracies in the application.

A second application by Volkov was also rejected on grounds that the area had already been booked for an animal rights picket.

Writing on his website Tuesday, Volkov called the court's decision "absurd" and claimed that the decision to revoke their protest permit was "illegal." He vowed to re-apply for a permission to hold a protest on Aug. 9.

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