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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin Opponents Mount Protests Across Russia Ahead of Vote

January 28, 2018



(Bloomberg) — Several thousand Russians braved sub-zero temperatures to protest against President Vladimir Putin, who's seeking to prolong his almost two-decade-long rule in March elections.

Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who's been barred from taking part in the March 18 vote, was dragged roughly by police into a bus shortly after he arrived at the demonstration on Moscow's central thoroughfare, Tverskaya Street, according to a live video feed from the scene.

"I've been detained. That doesn't matter. Come to Tverskaya. You're not coming out for me, but for yourself and your future," he wrote on Twitter moments afterward.

Embed:

> Задержание одного человека теряет малейший смысл, если нас много. Кто-нибудь, придите и замените меня pic.twitter.com/TODVdF5lEm

— Alexey Navalny (@navalny) January 28, 2018

He had called on his supporters to rally in more than 100 cities in a bid to put more pressure on the Kremlin after a series of mass protests last year. Police reported protests in more than two dozen cities, according to official media.

About 90 people were detained in cities in eastern and central Russia by 2 p.m. Sunday in Moscow, according to OVD-Info, a monitoring group.

Related article: Hundreds Detained at Navalny's Boycott Rallies Across Russia — Live Blog

Protesters marched along Moscow's Tverskaya Street, chanting "Putin leave" and defying cold weather and warnings by police that they could face arrest for participating in an unsanctioned demonstration.

After authorities refused to register his candidacy in the election, Navalny has called on supporters to boycott the vote.

"It's absolutely clear that the most important thing that any person can do now is to go and protest," Navalny, 41, said on his blog ahead of Sunday's demonstration. "Because that's the only path open to us in Russia, where we're kept out of elections and the media and you can't win in court."

While Putin, 65, is assured of victory with popularity ratings of more than 80 percent, his most prominent opponent is counting on dissatisfaction at stagnant growth and living standards after the longest recession this century has fueled the protest mood. Since two rallies in March and June 2017 attracted tens of thousands of people in up to 100 cities across Russia, enthusiasm has waned somewhat.

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