

Russian Official Accuses Mourners of 'Discrediting' Authorities With Protest After Kemerovo Fire

March 28, 2018



Kemerovo region governor Vladimir Chernov **Danil Aikin / TASS**

The deputy governor of the region where 60 people died in a fire on Sunday has come to the defense of his boss, claiming that the opposition is using spontaneous rallies to undermine the authorities.

Forty-one children were among the 60 people killed in the blaze that swept through the Winter Cherry shopping mall in the Siberian city of Kemerovo. A crowd of 1,500 mourners, who called on Monday for the resignation of government officials over their handling of rescue efforts, was dismissed as a group of “troublemakers” by the regions’ head in the wake of the tragedy.

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“We’re drawing the conclusion that this was a clear, planned action aimed at discrediting the authorities,” Kemerovo region’s deputy governor Vladimir Chernov [said](#) at a briefing on Wednesday.

“There were a lot of ‘charged youths’ present, which is the scariest. Many of them, including those standing near me, were young men who were acting strangely, not even understanding what they’re yelling out or what they’re raising their hands for,” Chernov said.

Russia’s federal officials have expressed similar anti-opposition views in the wake of the deadly tragedy.

Human rights ombudswoman Natalya Moskalkova accused demonstrators of “using any possible chance to destabilize the situation,” Dozhd television [reported](#).

Conservative senator Yelena Mizulina [called](#) the deadly fire a “stab in Putin’s back.”

At the spontaneous rally in Kemerovo on Monday, deputy governor Chernov’s colleague Sergei Tsivilev was [heard](#) accusing one of the demonstrators, who lost his wife, sister and three small children, of “self-promotion.”

An earlier version of this article stated that 64 people died in the fire, according to Russian authorities. The official death toll was later revised to 60, the Investigative Committee [said](#) in a statement.

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