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Russian Court Says 'Inconvenience' No Longer Cause to Deny Protests

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A top Russian court ruled that authorities cannot deny protesters permission to gather in public just because they may be a nuisance to others.

Municipal administrations across Russia have regularly used various provisions of the Administrative Code to deny permits, as well as to fine or jail protesters. Most recently, the Kremlin passed a new order to restrict protests for the duration of the football World Cup, underway in 11 Russian cities until July 15.

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"A public authority's assumption of a possible inconvenience cannot be a valid reason for changing the place and (or) the time of a public event," the Supreme Court said Thursday.

A potential loophole in the ruling allows local leaders to reject permits if they run aground of any laws regarding road safety or transportation requirements.

The court also said several single-person pickets could be considered one demonstration if prosecutors can prove in court that they share the same organizers and goals, and "geographically gravitate toward each other."

The Supreme Court's edicts came on the day Moscow City Hall rejected three requests to demonstrate against proposed pension reforms next month because they conflicted with the Kremlin's ruling against protests in World Cup cities. Alexei Navalny, meanwhile, called for country-wide protests in non-World Cup cities against the pension reform for July 1.

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