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Kremlin Envoy in Far East as More Protest Governor's Arrest

By AFP

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Yevgenia Pustovit / TASS

Protesters in Russia's Far East rallied again Monday in support of a popular regional governor arrested on murder charges, as a Kremlin envoy looked to ease tensions.

Several hundred supporters of governor Sergei Furgal demonstrated in the center of the city of Khabarovsk, chanting "Furgal!" and "Freedom!" as passing cars honked their horns in support.

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> Напоминаем, это ВЕЧЕР ПОНЕДЕЛЬНИКА pic.twitter.com/Ep2IocuxSX
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Local activists said between 500 and 700 people took part, after weekend protests that saw thousands on the streets of Khabarovsk, a city of nearly 600,000 near the border with China.

Furgal, of the nationalist LDPR party, was detained last week, flown to Moscow and is to be held in custody until early September on charges of ordering the killings of businessmen 15 years ago.

His supporters say the charges are political, after Furgal won the governor's seat from a representative of the ruling United Russia party in 2018.

A massive rally on Saturday saw tens of thousands pour onto the streets of Khabarovsk to protest his arrest, with estimates ranging from 10,000 to 40,000 demonstrators. Several thousand more rallied again on Sunday.

Related article: Giant Protests in Russia's Far East After Popular Governor's Arrest

It was a rare show of defiance against authorities in Moscow and came just days after President Vladimir Putin oversaw a constitutional vote that allows him to extend his hold on power until 2036.

Putin's envoy to the Far East, Deputy Prime Minister Yury Trutnev, reportedly flew in to the city at the weekend.

"People have the right to express their opinion.... (Furgal) was and is supported by a large number of people," the state-run news agency RIA Novosti quoted Trutnev as saying on Monday.

At the same time Trutnev blamed local officials for what he called the region's poor investment climate and other issues.

"I believe that the work of the Khabarovsk regional leadership has been poorly organized," he said.

The 50-year-old Furgal's arrest on Thursday sparked an outcry from members of the LDPR, whose outspoken leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky accused authorities of using "Stalin-era methods."

Russia's Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said Furgal was charged with ordering the murders and attempted murders of several businessmen in 2004 and 2005.

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