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Russia Opens Criminal Cases in Navalny Protests – Monitor

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Riot police used force to disperse large crowds. **Gavriil Grigorov / TASS**

Russian authorities are opening at least 15 criminal cases amid record-setting detentions during nationwide rallies for the release of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, the OVD-Info police monitoring website reported Monday.

More than 3,700 people were detained in over 120 Russian cities as tens of thousands of protesters gathered despite police warnings and cold weather. Riot police used force to disperse large crowds, with clashes breaking out between officers and demonstrators.

Moscow investigators announced Sunday that they had launched four criminal cases into violence against the authorities for pepper-spraying and running over officers. They did not say whether any arrests were made.

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov pledged to "help" his alleged compatriot who was filmed getting into a fistfight with riot police at the Moscow rally if he made his whereabouts known.

On Saturday, Moscow investigators said they had opened criminal cases into violence against the authorities, property damage and hooliganism.

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Criminal cases have also been launched in St. Petersburg, where a man was filmed punching a traffic police officer to the ground, and the Pacific port of Vladivostok. St. Petersburg police also announced an inquiry into an officer kicking a woman to the ground.

In other cities, OVD-Info reported that law enforcement authorities are pursuing charges against protesters for blocking traffic, calling for mass unrest and violating health guidelines. Authorities have warned of a spike in coronavirus cases two weeks after the mass rallies, with reports of surveillance data spotting at least 19 infected protesters in Moscow.

Courts across the country had imposed around 150 fines, administrative arrests and forced labor rulings as of Monday morning, OVD-Info reported.

More than 40 people, including five teenagers, sought medical attention after the rallies in Moscow, the state-run TASS news agency quoted an unnamed law enforcement source as saying. They had all been reportedly discharged by Monday.

Western leaders have condemned what they called a violent crackdown on protesters and demanded their release.

Navalny, 44, called for demonstrations after being jailed under a fraud conviction he claims was politically motivated on his return from Germany, where he was recovering from an August poisoning with the Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok.

Among those detained in the Russian capital were Navalny's wife Yulia, who was later released, as well as his senior aide Lyubov Sobol. Dozens of Navalny's local organizers across the country had already been jailed or fined on the eve of the rallies.

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