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Putin Tightens Fines for Protesters, 'Biased' Social Media Giants

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Observers have described legislators' recent activity as part of the Kremlin's efforts to tighten restrictions on dissent ahead of this fall's parliamentary elections. **Sergei Yermokhin / TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed a handful of new laws Wednesday that impose heavy fines on protesters and "foreign agents," as well as on social media giants accused of "discriminating" against Russian media.

Observers have described legislators' recent activity as part of the Kremlin's efforts to tighten restrictions on dissent ahead of this fall's parliamentary elections, which will take place amid simmering public anger over falling incomes.

Here's a look at some of the laws that Putin approved in a post-holiday signing spree:

— Unruly protesters

Putin increased fines for protesters who are found guilty of disobeying law enforcement orders to between 2,000 and 4,000 rubles ($27 and $55, respectively). Repeat violations are

subject to fines of 10,000-20,000 rubles ($135-270) or up to 30 days in jail.

Putin also imposed fines of up to 20,000 rubles for violating fundraising rules while organizing protests, including for money transfers by nonprofits labeled as "foreign agents."

— 'Foreign agent' mentions

Russians can now be fined up to 2,500 rubles for sharing information about "foreign agents" or republishing their work without referring to them with the designation.

The "foreign agents" themselves, including politically active individuals or organizations, can be fined up to half a million rubles ($6,800) for publishing their own materials without the "foreign agent" label.

The law takes effect March 1.

— 'Prejudiced' IT giants

Social media giants YouTube, Facebook and Twitter can now be fined up to 1 million rubles ($13,600) for ignoring government warnings about prejudice toward Russian users. Repeat violations are subject to fines of up to 3 million rubles ($41,000).

Previously passed legislation already allows Russia to block platforms that are found to "discriminate" against Russian media.

A separate piece of Putin's newly signed IT law also imposes fines of up to half a million rubles for first-time violations of Russia's push toward internet "sovereignty." Repeat violations carry fines of up to 1 million rubles.

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