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Russian Police Raid Khodorkovsky-Backed Media, Opposition Group

By AFP

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Previous raids on MBKh Media and Open Russia employees in July and September 2020 were reportedly linked to the 2003 court case against founder and exiled oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky's defunct oil giant Yukos. **Peter Kovalev / TASS**

Russian police on Friday raided the Moscow offices of an opposition movement and media outlet backed by exiled Kremlin critic Mikhail Khodorkovsky in the latest move against the former oligarch, the groups said.

The raids on Open Russia and MBKh Media came after police last weekend arrested around 200 opposition politicians and municipal councillors at a Moscow forum organized by United Democrats, another Khodorkovsky-backed group.

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MBKh Media reported that searches took place at the Moscow and St. Petersburg offices of Open Russia, which was designated as an "undesirable organization" in 2017. It added that police had also searched the home of the movement's chairwoman Anastasia Burakova.

"They left a mess but didn't take any of our equipment," the director of Open Russia, Andrei Pivovarov, told MBKh Media.

"We're already used to such unpleasantness, though there is nothing normal about this."

MBKh Media reported that police had searched its offices too.

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Lawyer Sergei Badamshin told MBKh that the searches were all in connection with a case against Nizhny Novgorod-based activist Mikhail Iosilevich. He was arrested in late January on charges of cooperating with Open Russia.

Russian news website Open Media, which is also backed by Khodorkovsky, reported Friday that the case is the same one police were investigating when they searched the home of Nizhny Novgorod-based journalist Irina Slavina in October.

She died after setting herself on fire the day after the raid.

Alexei Pryanishnikov, coordinator for the Pravozashchita Otkrytki rights group, was cited by the Kommersant newspaper as saying he believed a continuing clampdown on opposition politicians and municipal councillors was the real reason for Friday's raids.

"The Iosilevich case seems to be a formal reason. There are reports that the municipal deputies are planning to meet again for a new congress," he said.

Khodorkovsky, who owned the former oil giant Yukos before he was convicted in two controversial cases and spent a decade behind bars, now lives abroad.

Open Russia, which Khodorkovsky founded with the aim of promoting civil society in Russia, and MBKh media have both previously faced raids on their offices in connection with the Yukos case.

Russia has faced mounting criticism over its rights record, particularly linked to its recent jailing of opposition leader Alexei Navalny and crackdown on protests in support of him.

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