

Belarus Police Detain Protesters, Prevent Opposition Rally

By [AFP](#)

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Belarusian policemen detain a man during Freedom Day in Minsk, March 25. Freedom Day, an unofficial holiday in Belarus, commemorates the creation of the Belarusian People's Republic (BPR) on March 25, 1918. People celebrated Freedom Day to show support to imprisoned protesters and to protest against the government of Belarusian President Lukashenko. **EPA / TASS**

Police in Belarus on Saturday detained more than 100 people, including five journalists, a rights group said, as the opposition resumed rallies against strongman Alexander Lukashenko.

Protests erupted in the ex-Soviet country last August after Lukashenko claimed a sixth presidential term in a vote the opposition and Western diplomats said was rigged.

Related article: [Belarus Opposition to Restart Protests as Crackdown Widens](#)

But they died down over the winter in the wake of a violent crackdown that saw thousands of protesters detained, several killed and hundreds receive lengthy prison sentences over the unrest.

The opposition Telegram channel Nexta that mobilizes and coordinates protesters had called for a "second wave" of rallies to kick off on Saturday.

The Viasna human rights group said law enforcement officers had detained at least 110 people, including five journalists, across the country.

Almost all opposition leaders have either been arrested or forced to leave, notably Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who fled to Lithuania shortly after the August vote.

A group that represents the Polish minority in Belarus has also been singled out by police.

Opposition supporters in the capital Minsk had planned on gathering Saturday in the city center by early afternoon, but were prevented from doing so by police, who cordoned off several streets, as well as a main square and park, an AFP journalist said.

Images circulating social media and published by local media showed the Minsk city center heavily guarded by military vehicles.

Embed:

Минск, район площади Бангалор. Жесткое задержание велосипедиста.

К автору видео подошел мужчина со словами «Что вы снимаете? Ни на кого не нападают». pic.twitter.com/eyU2ljKjIG

— TUT.BY (@tutby) [March 27, 2021](#)

Viasna said that among the journalists detained were two editors of the independent Tut.by news website.

Belarus earlier this month jailed a Tut.by journalist for six months for publishing leaked medical records showing a protester who died after being arrested by police had no alcohol in his system as law enforcement had claimed.

Nexta on Saturday afternoon called for protesters to regroup and organize splintered actions all over their cities.

Protesters also gathered in scattered rallies on Thursday to mark Freedom Day in Belarus, which the opposition commemorates each year on the anniversary of a declaration of independence in 1918.

Viasna said police detained at least 176 people over the course of the day.

Despite being slapped with EU sanctions over the violent crackdown, Lukashenko and his allies have held firm, with the authoritarian leader saying he has withstood a revolution directed by the West.

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