The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

As It Happened: Russians Protest in Support of Navalny

Putin's most outspoken critic has been on hunger strike in prison for three weeks, demanding to see his own doctors for a host of ailments.

April 21, 2021



Protesters hold up cellphone flashlights in Russia's third-largest city of Novosibirsk. **Kirill Kukhmar / TASS**

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny's team called for protests across the country on the day President Vladimir Putin gave his annual address to the nation.

Putin's most vociferous critic has been on hunger strike for three weeks, demanding to see his own doctors for a host of ailments. They have said he "could die any minute" from cardiac arrest.

Navalny was jailed in January immediately after his return to Russia from Germany, where he had spent five months recovering from a near-fatal nerve agent poisoning he blames on the

Kremlin. He was sentenced to two and a half years for violating parole on 2014 fraud charges that he calls politically motivated.

U.S. President Joe Biden, who imposed a new round of anti-Russian sanctions last week, said on Saturday that Navalny's plight was "totally, totally unfair, totally inappropriate." EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Monday that the bloc holds Russia "responsible" for Navalny's health.

Wednesday's protests are set to take place in nearly 200 cities and towns nationwide.

Here's a look at the events as they happened:

10:28 p.m.: Police have detained at least 1,004 protesters across Russia, OVD-Info reported. In St. Petersburg, which saw police forcefully disperse those who had gathered in support of Navalny, 351 people were detained. In Moscow, 20 detentions were reported.

10:20 p.m.: Pockets of protesters remain on the streets of Moscow. Navalny's team thanked the "hundreds of thousands of beautiful people in Russia and across the world" for their "solidarity and support," in a post on the Kremlin critic's telegram channel, reiterating their demand that Navalny be given access to his doctors.

9:55 p.m.: Many organizations have started to publish estimates of attendance. Navalny's team have claimed 60,000 people attended the protest in Moscow, while Open Media estimated 25,000 were on Moscow's central Tverskaya street alone. Russia's Interior Ministry earlier estimated turnout at 6,000 in Moscow and 4,500 in St. Petersburg, while the Ekho Moskvy radio station said there were 10,000-15,000 in Moscow and 7,000-9,000 in St. Petersburg. "It is impossible to count accurately, people were stretched out in columns, moved and intertwined," said Ekho Moskvy editor Alexei Venediktov.

9:35 p.m.: Protesters in Moscow have started to disperse, although hundreds remain on the streets, chanting protest slogans in support of Navalny and against Putin. Police have started to close some streets in the city center.

Embed:

> Протестующие у Центрального рынка зажгли фонарики перед цепью силовиков.
>
> Видео: «Медиазона» pic.twitter.com/9MWCSfb07x
>
> — Медиазона (@mediazzzona) April 21, 2021

9:20 p.m.: OVD-Info reports 459 people have been detained across Russia today. The highest number of detentions in a single city was 82 in Ufa. In Moscow, 10 detentions have been reported.

8:55 p.m.: Mass detentions have started in St. Petersburg as police move to break up the protests, according to the independent Open Media news site.

8:47 p.m.: Kira Yarmysh, Navalny's Press Secretary, has been sentenced to 10 days in a detention center, her lawyer wrote on Twitter. Police arrested Yarmysh on Wednesday morning, accusing her of promoting an unsanctioned protest. Yarmysh was already serving house arrest, the conditions of which barred her from communicating online.

8:37 p.m.: Russia's Interior Ministry said 6,000 people are participating in the protest in Moscow, and 4,500 in St. Petersburg. Other independent estimates claim turnout in Moscow in the tens of thousands.

Embed:

> Crowds stretching all the way towards Lubyanka. I'm surprised myself at the high turnout. High, tens of thousands perhaps in Moscow alone. All risking serious consequences. pic.twitter.com/UwfFJuEK7z
>
> — Oliver Carroll (@olliecarroll) April 21, 2021

8:22 p.m.: A line of police vans is driving down Moscow's Tverskaya Street toward the protest, a Moscow Times journalist reports.

Video posted to social media shows hundreds of protesters in St. Petersburg holding up their cellphone flashlights in unison as they walk down a central street.

8:19 p.m.: Moscow's protest spreads to other streets throughout the city center, according to videos posted to social media.

8:05 p.m.: Navalny's wife Yulia has arrived at the Moscow protest, according to the Proekt investigative news site.

8:01 p.m.: OVD-Info reports that 413 people have been detained nationwide so far.

Embed:

> Scores of pro #Navalny protesters marching through central Moscow pic.twitter.com/VxUa1Gm5h1
>
> — Frederik Pleitgen (@fpleitgenCNN) April 21, 2021

7:57 p.m.: The protest in Moscow now stretches along Tverskaya Street from Manezh Square to Pushkin Square, according to a Moscow Times journalist.

Embed:

> Митингующие на Тверской зажгли фонарики, цепь огоньков растянулась вдоль улицы, насколько видит глаз — и выглядит это впечатляюще. Полиция меж тем вещает про несанкционированный митинг, но машины заглушают всё сигналами
>
> Фото и видео: @OpenMedia_io pic.twitter.com/eNsyDs3xp7
>
> — Открытые медиа (@OpenMedia_io) April 21, 2021

7:28 p.m.: Riot police in St. Petersburg are dispersing protesters near St. Isaac's Cathedral, the Dozhd broadcaster reports.

7:14 p.m.: A few thousand people have gathered near Manezh Square, the planned protest site next to the Kremlin, according to a Moscow Times journalist at the scene. Protesters are shouting slogans like "Putin is a thief" and "Let him go," while passing cars honk their horns in support.

7:09 p.m.: A small crowd has gathered at Moscow's Lenin Library near the Kremlin, according to Navalny's Moscow office.

7:08 p.m.: In St. Petersburg, a few hundred protesters are marching near the statue of the Bronze Horseman, according to video posted by Navalny's team. Hundreds of other protesters march along the Moika River that runs through the city center, footage posted by the Dozhd broadcaster shows.

6:51 p.m.: Moscow's Tverskaya Street, the main roadway leading to the Kremlin, has been blocked off by police, video on social media shows.

6:31 p.m.: A group of UN rights experts expressed alarm at Navalny's deteriorating health and called for his urgent medical evacuation from Russia. "We believe Mr. Navalny's life is in serious danger," said the four independent experts, who do not speak on behalf of the UN, calling on Russian authorities to ensure he "has access to his own doctors and to allow him to be evacuated for urgent medical treatment abroad."

6:12 p.m.: Video posted to social media shows a heavy riot police presence in St. Petersburg's Palace Square.

Embed:

View this post on Instagram

A post shared by @navalnytoday

6:05 p.m.: Police in Russia's fourth-largest city of Yekaterinburg have estimated the protest size at 5,000 people while Navalny's local office estimated the crowd size at 13,000-14,000, local media reported.

5:30 p.m.: Authorities have opened a case against Lyubov Sobol, a close Navalny ally and lawyer for his Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK), for repeat violations of protest rules, Interfax reported, citing lawyer Vladimir Voronin. She faces up to 30 days of administrative arrest or a fine of up to 300,000 rubles ($3,900).

4:51 p.m.: Video posted to social media shows plainclothes security officers scuffling with and detaining protesters in the Irkutsk region city of Bratsk.

3:39 p.m.: Manezhnaya Square, the planned site of the Moscow protest, has been completely cordoned off by police, a BBC Russian journalist said.

3:29 p.m.: Efim Khazanov, a physicist from the Russian Academy of Sciences, has been detained in the city of Nizhny Novgorod and charged with organizing an unauthorized public event, OVD-Info reported, adding that his detention likely stems from a pro-Navalny Facebook post he republished.

3:18 p.m.: An estimated 4,000 people have gathered in Novosibirsk, the Tayga.info news website reported. Video published to social media shows protesters chanting "Down with the tsar."

2:51 p.m.: The protest in the Siberian city of Irkutsk has begun, with an estimated 2,000 people in attendance, Tayga.info reported. Police are letting protesters gather freely, the outlet added.

2:47 p.m.: Videos published to social media show convoys of police vans driving through central Moscow.

Embed:

2:01 p.m.: The independent monitor OVD-Info said 57 people have been detained nationwide so far.

1:50 p.m.: Between 500-1,000 people have turned up to protest in the Far East port city of Vladivostok, local media reported.

1:16 p.m.: At least five Navalny supporters have been detained in the Siberian city of Irkutsk 5,000 kilometers east of Moscow, according to the Mediazona news website. The outlet also reported raids in Navalny offices in Yekaterinburg and Samara, as well as the detention of staff and volunteers in Khabarovsk and Ufa.

12:04 p.m.: At least eight protesters were detained in the Far East port city of Magadan, according to the Znak.com news website. Footage from other Far East cities including Vladivostok, Khabarovsk and Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky showed heavy police presence and low turnout among Navalny's supporters.

Embed:

> В Магадане на акции протеста задержали минимум 8 человек, по оценкам издания «Весьма»https://t.co/fAGJc1Erwj
>
> Видео: «Весьма» pic.twitter.com/VZcIV3FSew
>
> — Новая Газета (@novaya_gazeta) April 21, 2021

11:27 a.m.: The independent monitor OVD-Info said that police had conducted searches and detained activists in at least 20 cities across Russia, with Navalny's team planning protests in more than 100 cities.

11:00 a.m.: In the center of Moscow, police have blocked off streets near Red Square, Alexandrovsky Garden and Manezhnaya Square where the protest is scheduled for 19:00, Dozhd TV channel reported.

10:55 a.m.: Lybov Sobol**,** one of Navalny's closest allies, was detained near a metro station in Moscow, the BBC reported citing Sobol's lawyer Vladimir Voronin.

10:50 a.m.: In Moscow, Navalny's spokeswoman Kira Yamish has been detained by police, her lawyer Veronika Polyakova tweeted.

AFP contributed reporting.

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