

Russia Court Extends Kremlin Critic Yashin's Detention by 6 Months

By [AFP](#)

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Ilya Yashin in Moscow's Meshchansky Court on Wednesday. **Artem Geodakyan / TASS**

A Russian court on Wednesday extended by six months the detention of opposition politician Ilya Yashin, who risks being jailed 10 years for denouncing President Vladimir Putin's assault on Ukraine.

The 39-year-old Moscow city councilor is in the dock as part of an unprecedented crackdown on dissent in Russia, with most opposition activists either in jail or in exile.

He faces up to 10 years behind bars, if convicted.

Yashin refused to leave after Putin sent troops to Ukraine on Feb. 24 and regularly took to his YouTube channel, which has 1.3 million subscribers, to condemn the Kremlin's offensive.

Standing in the defendant's glass box at Moscow's Meshchansky district court, Yashin smiled and flashed a peace sign at the end of the hearing as some of his supporters clapped.

'Russian patriot'

Yashin insisted in court that he would not flee the country, but the judge extended his detention by six months.

"I love my country and in order to live here I am ready to pay with my freedom," he said.

"I am a Russian patriot," he said.

Prosecutors argued that Yashin should be kept in detention because he had "inflicted considerable damage to Russia" and "increased political tensions during the special military operation" — Moscow's term for its Ukraine offensive.

One of the opposition activist's lawyers, Vadim Prokhorov, said that extending Yashin's detention until May 10 was against the law.

Yashin sought to put on a brave face during the hearing and looked relaxed.

Wearing a dark green hoodie and jeans, he smiled to his parents in the front row. At one point he asked his father if he had watched the World Cup match between Argentina and Saudi Arabia on Tuesday night and they exchanged a laugh.

As the hearing ended and the audience was leaving the courtroom, a scuffle erupted between court employees and Yashin's father, apparently after guards told his mother to stop talking to her son.

The men tussled in the corridor for several minutes, with Yashin's father at one point held on the floor. He was taken to another room for some time before being released by the guards.

The next hearing is expected to take place on Nov. 29.

Yashin is an ally of jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny and was close to Boris Nemtsov, an opposition politician assassinated near the Kremlin in 2015.

'Shut people up'

Yashin was detained over the summer while walking through a Moscow park.

He is accused of spreading "fake" information about the Russian army under legislation introduced after Putin launched the operation in Ukraine.

In an April YouTube stream, Yashin spoke about the "murder of civilians" in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha where the Russian army has been accused of war crimes.

He called it a "massacre."

His supporters at court said authorities were using the draconian legislation to muzzle critics of the military campaign in Ukraine.

"This law is absolutely anti-legal," said Anastasia Leonova, 48.

"It's just there to shut people up."

Her 20-year-old daughter, Olga, said their family liked Yashin's Youtube streams.

"We would gather in the kitchen every Thursday to watch them," she said. "Me, mum and my 87-year-old grandmother."

Since Moscow's intervention began in Ukraine, independent media outlets have been shut down or their operations suspended in Russia.

Tens of thousands of Russians — including many independent journalists — have left the country.

Another Moscow councilor, Alexei Gorinov, was in July sentenced to seven years in prison for denouncing the Ukraine offensive.

The 61-year-old had questioned plans for an art competition for children in his constituency while "every day children are dying" in Ukraine.

Almost all of Putin's well-known political opponents have either fled the country or are in jail.

Navalny, 46, is serving a nine-year sentence for embezzlement charges, which is widely seen as politically motivated. His political organizations have been outlawed.

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