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Kremlin Critic Navalny in ‘Good Mood’ on Third Birthday Behind Bars

By AFP

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Protesters gather outside the Russian Embassy in London to mark Alexei Navalny's 47th birthday. **Justin Tallis / AFP**

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny said Sunday he was in good spirits on his third birthday behind bars, despite tougher prison conditions and yet another spell in solitary confinement.

It came as police arrested at least 45 people taking part in pro-Navalny demonstrations in Russian cities — including Moscow and St. Petersburg — on Sunday, according to specialist NGO OVD-Info.

Navalny's team says he has been harassed in prison and kept in a "punishment cell" for minor transgressions. His supporters say the authorities are trying to crush his morale.

The arch-foe of Russian President Vladimir Putin said he woke up in a punishment cell on his 47th birthday, adding in a message published on social media that it was his 16th such stint.

"On the morning of your birthday you have to be honest with yourself, so I ask myself the question: am I really in a good mood, or do force myself to feel that way?

"My answer is: I really am. Let's face it, of course I wish I didn't have to wake up in this hellhole and instead have breakfast with my family, receive kisses on the cheek from my children, unwrap presents...

"But life works in such a way that social progress and a better future can only be achieved if a certain number of people are willing to pay the price for their right to have beliefs."

Authorities are taking the crackdown on freedoms in Russia to new levels following Moscow's military campaign in Ukraine, with independent media shut down and most key opposition figures behind bars or in exile.

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In his message, Navalny said he believed "the day will come when speaking the truth and advocating for justice will become something commonplace and not at all dangerous in Russia."

Navalny, who used to mobilize massive protests against the Kremlin, is serving a nine-year prison sentence on embezzlement and other charges.

He shot to global prominence after barely surviving a poisoning with Novichok, a Soviet-designed nerve agent, which the opposition politician blames on the Kremlin.

He was arrested in January 2021 upon returning from Germany after recovering from the poisoning.

He is in jail near the town of Vladimir around 200 kilometers outside Moscow, and has been communicating with the public and sending messages through his legal team.

Navalny is soon set to go on trial in a new "extremism" case, and faces a further 35 years in prison.

He believes the authorities are trying to keep him in jail for life.

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