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Head of Russia's Bashkortostan Blames 'Separatists' for Unrest

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Bashkortostan head Radiy Khabirov. **glavarb.ru**

The governor of Russia's republic of Bashkortostan said Thursday that violence between protesters and police in his region the day before was provoked by separatists living abroad.

Authorities launched criminal cases into what they described as mass riots and violence against law enforcement officials after clashes erupted on Wednesday over the imprisonment of activist Fayil Alsynov.

At least 40 people were said to have been injured amid reports of riot police beating protesters and using tear gas to disperse crowds.

Bashkortostan's head Radiy Khabirov accused Alsynov and his allies of stoking separatist feelings, "disguising [themselves] as environmental activists and patriots."

"A group of people, some of whom are abroad, who are in fact traitors, are calling for the separation of Bashkortostan from Russia. They are calling for guerrilla warfare here,"

Khabirov said.

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Khabirov named two activists — one of whom lives in exile in Lithuania — who he said have a criminal past and are designated by Russian authorities as extremists, but he did not otherwise expand on the accusations.

"You can put on the mask of a good eco-activist and patriot, but in reality, the situation is not like that at all," Khabirov claimed.

Khabirov, who is believed to have personally pushed for Alsynov's prosecution, suggested that officials were also partly to blame for Wednesday's unrest as they did "not fully disclose the essence and substance" of those he claimed were behind the protests.

"As the head of the republic, I will defend the republic," he said.

Alsynov, 37, was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of inciting ethnic hatred against migrant workers during a speech he gave last year. Alsynov denies the charges and maintains his words were mistranslated from his native language of Bashkir into Russian.

Meanwhile, a court in Bashkortostan's capital of Ufa jailed six protesters for 10-13 days on misdemeanor charges of violating protest rules, the investigative news website Vyorstka reported late Wednesday, citing one of the six protesters.

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