

Hundreds Join Fresh Protests in Support of Jailed Activist in Russia's Bashkortostan

January 19, 2024



Riot police seen at Friday's rally in support of Fayil Alsynov. **SOTAvision / Telegram**

Scores of demonstrators gathered in the capital of Russia's republic of Bashkortostan on Friday to protest the jailing of prominent Bashkir activist Fayil Alsynov.

According to the independent news outlet SOTAvision, around 1,500 protesters [gathered](#) at Salawat Yulayev Square in Ufa, singing songs, dancing and calling for the release of Alsynov, who this week was sentenced to four years in prison on charges of "inciting interethnic hatred," which the activist denies.

Embed:

Authorities encircled the area before the rally was scheduled to start and warned attendees over a loudspeaker that they would be arrested for holding an unauthorized event.

Videos of the protest shared on social media showed riot police arresting several protesters and bringing them into police vans.

At least 10 people had been [arrested](#) by the time the rally ended at 1:00 pm local time, according to independent media.

There were also reports of outages across the region for the WhatsApp and Telegram messengers, and multiple sources inside Bashkortostan confirmed with The Moscow Times that neither of the two apps appeared to work for them as of Friday evening.

Embed:

Meanwhile, Bashkortostan's Interior Ministry launched two criminal cases over protests held earlier this week in the town of Baymak, where Alsynov was handed his jail sentence.

Authorities warned that participants of those protests could face up to 15 years in prison for "organizing and participating in mass unrest," or up to 10 years for "violence against a government official."

An Ufa court on Thursday jailed six protesters from Baymak for 10-13 days on misdemeanor charges of violating protest rules.

On Friday, nine more protesters were [placed in jail](#) on similar charges.

When asked by reporters later on Friday about this week's protests in Bashkortostan, the Kremlin [sought to play down](#) the growing discontent in the region.

"I would not agree with the wording 'mass unrest' or 'mass protest,'" Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"These are separate events that fall solely within the purview of local authorities and law enforcement," he added.

Related article: [Explainer: How an Activist's Arrest Sparked Protests in Russia's Bashkortostan](#)

Alsynov has been [engaged in activist work](#) in Bashkortostan, one of Russia's 21 ethnic republics, for over 15 years, speaking in defense of the region's sovereignty and the political and linguistic rights of its indigenous Bashkir peoples.

He has held membership in several Bashkir national organizations and movements, including serving as chairman of the Bashkir national organization Bashqort, which was outlawed by the Russian government in May 2020.

Alsynov was on Wednesday found guilty of "inciting interethnic hatred" toward migrant workers during a speech he gave last year. He denies the charges and maintains his words were mistranslated from his native language of Bashkir into Russian.

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