The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia's Bashkortostan Holds Pro-Government Rally Amid Crackdown on Protesters

January 26, 2024



Friday's pro-government rally in Ufa. **SOTAvision**

Authorities in Russia's republic of Bashkortostan on Friday held a pro-government rally amid their efforts to contain the public backlash that ensued following the imprisonment of a prominent Bashkir activist.

Last week, Bashkortostan witnessed some of the largest protests in Russia since the invasion of Ukraine as thousands gathered in the Ural Mountains region to support jailed activist Fayil Alsynov.

Police were filmed beating demonstrators with truncheons and using tear gas and smoke grenades to disperse crowds, while dozens of protesters have since been arrested.

On Friday, several thousand people gathered in the city of Ufa's central Salawat Yulayev square for the pro-government rally, which was organized under the slogans “A strong

republic is a united Bashkortostan" and "For Khabirov," referring to the head of Bashkortostan Radiy Khabirov.

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Besides a speech delivered by Khabirov himself, the rally also featured musical performances by dozens of pro-government artists, mirroring other state-organized and pro-war rallies that have become increasingly common in Russia as authorities seek to show they have the public's support.

"There are people who, for varying reasons, try to divide society, try to break apart our republic by following principles of radical extremism," Khabirov said during his speech.

"Today, we gathered here together to say: 'We won't give away our Bashkortostan,'" he continued.

Attendees at Friday's event could be seen holding both Russian and Bashkortostan flags, as well as a large banner that read: "One family! One republic! One country!"

Independent media reported that many of those present at the event were state employees and students bussed in from across the region after they faced pressure at work and university to attend.

To ensure high attendance numbers, Bashkortostan's regional government reportedly sent out mandatory attendance quotas to authorities in each of the republic's 54 districts.

News of Friday's rally, which first appeared a few days before the event was held, elicited critical and sarcastic comments online.

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Meanwhile, law enforcement authorities in the region continue to round up those who participated in last week's protests, according to the independent human rights watchdog OVD-Info.

So far, authorities have launched at least 123 administrative and 16 criminal cases in connection to the demonstrations, OVD-Info said.

On Thursday, a court in Ufa ruled to extend the pre-trial detention of prominent blogger and Alsynov supporter Ilyas Bayguskarov until March 17.

He faces up to eight years in prison on charges of "participating in mass unrest."

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