The Moscow Times
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Courts Hand Jail Terms to Dozens of Navalny Mourners

By AFP

February 19, 2024



Riot police officers are seen deployed at the monument to the victims of political repressions as people come to it to lay flowers for late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny in St. Petersburg on Feb. 17. **Olga Maltseva / AFP**

Russian courts have sentenced dozens of people detained at events commemorating Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny to short jail sentences, official court announcements showed, with 154 sentenced in St. Petersburg alone.

Details of rulings published by the city's court service on Saturday and Sunday showed 154 people had been given jail time of up to 14 days for violating Russia's strict anti-protest laws.

Rights groups and independent media outlets reported a handful of similar sentences in other cities across the country.

The 47-year-old Kremlin critic died on Friday at the Arctic prison colony where he was being

held on charges widely seen as retribution for his campaigning against President Vladimir Putin.

Police over the weekend arrested hundreds of Russians in dozens of cities who came to lay flowers and light candles in his honor at memorials to victims of Stalin-era repressions.

Anti-Kremlin demonstrations or public shows of opposition to the regime are effectively illegal in Russia under strict military censorship rules and laws against unapproved rallies.

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Police and men in plain clothes patrolled sites in dozens of Russian cities where people had gathered to commemorate Navalny over the weekend.

There were several reports of them removing the pop-up memorials overnight, and footage showed hooded men scooping up flowers into bin bags on a bridge next to the Kremlin where another leading Putin critic, Boris Nemtsov, was killed in 2015.

Putin silent

The news of Navalny's death, which came just a month before Putin is set to secure another six-year term in the Kremlin, triggered an outpouring of grief and anger among his supporters at home and abroad.

Russian authorities had still not given Navalny's mother or lawyers access to his body on Sunday, enraging his backers who had earlier called the Russian state "killers" trying to "cover their tracks."

Putin has not commented on the death of his most vocal critic and the Kremlin has not said anything since Friday evening when it criticized Western leaders for saying they held Putin responsible.

Tributes to Navalny, who narrowly survived a poisoning attack in 2020 only to fly back to Russia months later knowing he would be jailed, continued to pour in Sunday.

"Alexei Navalny wanted one very simple thing: for his beloved Russia to be just a normal country," Leonid Volkov, his chief of staff and one of his closest aides wrote on the X social media site.

"And for this Vladimir Putin killed him. Poisoned, imprisoned, tortured and killed him."

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