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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Navalny Supporters Risk Reprisals With Memorial Events a Year After Death

By AFP

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People lay flowers at the grave of Navalny in Moscow on Feb. 16, 2025. **ALEXANDER NEMENOV/AFP**

A year after Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny died behind bars, his supporters were set to hold memorial events on Sunday, with some risking reprisals by visiting his grave in Moscow.

Remembrance events will take place as Russia's opposition movement — driven into exile by unprecedented repression — has been plagued by infighting and badly weakened since the loss of its figurehead.

Exiled in various countries, its leading members have tried to revive the fight against President Vladimir Putin's long reign, including in Russia where criticism of authorities is severely punished.

Navalny – Putin's main opponent – was declared an "extremist" by Russian authorities, a

ruling that remains in force despite his death in an Arctic penal colony on Feb. 16, 2024.

In Russia, anybody who mentions Navalny or his Anti-Corruption Foundation without stating that they have been declared "extremist" is subject to fines, or up to four years in prison for repeated offences.

Navalny's former top aide Leonid Volkov wrote on Telegram that "Alexei's supporters will hold memorial events all around the world."

"In some places there will be rallies or marches, in others showings of the documentary 'Navalny,' in others, memorial services," he added.

Navalny's widow, Yulia Navalnaya, is set to share memories of her husband at an event in Berlin, where many Russian opposition supporters have settled.

"Wherever you are, in Russia or abroad, we hope very much that you will meet like-minded people on February 16," Volkov wrote, giving opening hours of Moscow's Borisovskoye cemetery where Navalny is buried.

But Russian pro-Kremlin Telegram channels warned supporters against going to the cemetery.

Embed:

> Люди на Борисовском кладбище скандируют: «Россия будет свободной!»
> Им по-прежнему никто не мешает. pic.twitter.com/iIYFNt3CrY
>
> — SOTA (@sotaproject) February 16, 2025

Related article: Navalny's 5 Biggest Investigations

'Big Brother' warning

"We give brief advice to those who plan to go there but are not yet sure – don't go!" said a post shared by pro-Kremlin journalist Dmitry Smirnov and other channels.

The message warns of "Big Brother and his ever-watchful eye," with a photo of a security camera sign at the cemetery gates.

Russia has not fully explained Navalny's death, which came less than a month before a presidential election that extended Putin's more than two-decade rule, saying that it had happened as he was walking in the prison yard.

Until his death, the 47-year-old continued to call for Russians to oppose the Kremlin and denounced Moscow's Ukraine offensive, even from behind bars.

"I took the decision not to be afraid," he wrote in his autobiography, published after his death in several languages.

Russia has branded Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation and the regional offices Navalny set up as "extremist organizations."

Participation in an extremist group is punishable by up to six years in prison and many who campaigned in support of Navalny have been jailed or fled the country.

Supporters also risk fines or stints in police cells for publicly displaying "symbols" of an extremist organization, which has been applied to photos of Navalny or just his name.

Four independent journalists are currently on trial for "participating in an extremist group," accused of preparing photos and video materials for Navalny's social media channels.

Last month, Russia sentenced to several years in prison three lawyers who defended Navalny on an extremism charge for passing on his messages from prison, prompting international condemnation.

Related article: Timeline: Alexei Navalny's Final Hours

Call for death probe

Yulia Navalnaya has blamed the Kremlin for her husband's death — which Moscow has denied.

Amnesty International has called for an "investigation conducted by independent and impartial international experts" into his death.

Navalny was arrested in 2021 after returning to Russia following medical treatment in Germany for poisoning with Novichok nerve agent.

In December 2023 he was transferred to a remote penal colony above the Arctic Circle.

After Navalny's death, it emerged that talks on his inclusion in a prisoner exchange had been under way.

Putin said in March 2024 that "a few days" before Navalny's death, he was told of an "idea to exchange" the prisoner.

A White House official later confirmed such talks.

Navalny made his name with rousing speeches at huge opposition rallies in Moscow in 2011-13.

While Russia's opposition has never had an overall leader, he became its most prominent figure.

Navalny faced an avalanche of legal action and received multiple sentences after establishing

a network of regional offices and the Anti-Corruption Foundation, which made widely-watched video exposes about officials.

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