

Sobchak Promises Tickets, Mironov and Others Converge to Support Astrakhan

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Socialite Ksenia Sobchak speaks at an opposition protest in support of honest elections **Maxim Stulov**

Socialite Ksenia Sobchak has promised to pay for tickets to Astrakhan and Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov has already arrived in the city to support former mayoral candidate Oleg Shein in what is now day 27 of a hunger strike protesting a disputed election.

“To those not indifferent! To those who feel a civic duty! Friday I fly to Astrakhan. If you want to fly — and you don't have the means — I'll pay the ticket.” Sobchak wrote on Twitter.

Mironov has already reached the city, writing on Twitter about arriving to an unexpected police escort in the early hours of Thursday morning. He said authorities are trying to make life uncomfortable for the protesters, flooding lawns to create muddy conditions.

Mironov said he spoke to Central Elections Commission chief Vladimir Churov, who promised to review footage taken by special cameras installed to film the voting process.

The Astrakhan regional legislature will hold an unscheduled session to discuss the events

surrounding the election, and Mironov is expected to participate, Shein told Kommersant.

Mironov's arrival comes a day after he and other members of A Just Russia stormed out of a question and answer session with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin at which the government head denied that he or President Dmitry Medvedev would or could cancel the mayoral vote.

Other well known figures have also traveled to the Caspian city to support the protesters, including anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny and State Duma deputies Dmitry Gudkov and Ilya Ponomaryev. Left Front leader Sergei Udaltsov, who has remained in Moscow, announced he would begin a hunger strike in solidarity with Shein and his supporters.

A mass protest is planned for Saturday, and the entire Just Russia faction of the State Duma plans to attend, Kommersant reported.

In Astrakhan, Shein has reportedly lost 9 kg and looks visibly thin. He has said his hunger strike will end if there are "honest, clean elections."

According to official election results, Shein won less than 30 percent of the vote in the March 4 mayoral race with United Russia candidate Mikhail Stolyarov, who got 60 percent.

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