

Opposition Holds Latest 'March of Millions'

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Demonstrators standing on Ulitsa Akademika Sakharova, the site of Saturday's opposition rally. **Artyom Sizov**

Tens of thousands of opposition activists marched through downtown Moscow on Saturday afternoon in the first major anti-government protest in over three months.

The march and rally appeared to be smaller than similar events held in May and June, a possible sign that splits in the opposition and frustration with limited reforms have sapped people's will to demonstrate.

Opposition leaders estimated the crowd at 100,000 or more, while police said 14,000 took part. Protest organizers and police have given similarly disparate estimates of the crowd size at past opposition events.

As at earlier events, protesters spanned the political spectrum from anarchist to ultra-nationalist, and included campaigners for gay rights, the environment, and numerous other causes. Some groups held signs, and in one case a giant yellow balloon, bearing the slogan

"Free Pussy Riot," referring to jailed members of the anti-Kremlin punk band.

There were no reports of violence or lawlessness at Saturday's event except long after most demonstrators had dispersed, around 10 p.m., when opposition leader Sergei Udaltsov and several other activists were detained at the rally site on Prospekt Akademika Sakharova, Interfax reported.

Earlier in the day, Udaltsov had announced his intention to stay at the rally site and to set up a tent city, an undertaking he has attempted at several past demonstrations.

But the detentions were nothing like those seen at the May 6 "March of Millions" at Bolotnaya Ploshchad, where violence broke out between the crowd and riot police, who arrested over 400 protesters.

Speaking from a makeshift stage at the rally Saturday, opposition leaders including Alexei Navalny, Boris Nemtsov, and Yevgenia Chirikova repeated a set of demands that have changed little since December, when the protest movement seemed to erupt spontaneously in response to allegations of widespread fraud during State Duma elections.

They called for the resignation of President Vladimir Putin, early presidential and parliamentary elections, and for the government to release over a dozen activists arrested in connection with the May 6 rally, when protesters clashed with riot police on the eve of Putin's inauguration.

In an apparent effort to widen the appeal of the protest cause, which the Kremlin has construed as a fringe movement spurred on by nebulous foreign forces, opposition leaders included socio-economic demands, such as a utility-price freeze and additional investment in education.

The next "March of Millions" is scheduled for Oct. 20, Udaltsov announced.

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