

Police Detain Dozens at Protest Calling for Release of Bolotnaya Prisoners

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Police detained two dozen protesters who gathered in central Moscow on Monday to demand the release of opposition activists from prison and to denounce the publicity stunts meant to boost Russia's image ahead of the Sochi Olympic Games.

The protesters gathered on Manezhnaya Square on Russian Christmas Eve, holding banners with slogans like "Olympics — No," firing smoke grenades and chanting: "Down with the Olympic show-off."

One of the protesters held a sign that read: "Merry Christmas! I have come to preach freedom for prisoners." Russian Orthodox believers celebrate Christmas based on the old Julian Calendar, on Jan. 7.

The protesters demanded the release of opposition leaders who are awaiting trial on charges of organizing "riots" during the Bolotnaya rally in 2012, and other high-profile prisoners,

including an associate of former tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Platon Lebedev, whose prison term ends in a few months, and another former business partner Alexei Pichugin, who is serving a life sentence.

"Ahead of the Olympics, authorities are trying to pretend that political repression is a thing of the past but the fact that dozens of political prisoners remain behind bars is proof that that's just another farce and a lie," a statement by the protest's organizers said.

Police detained 28 protesters, including a dozen people who wore T-shirts with portraits of "Bolotnaya prisoners," one of the suspects in the Bolotnaya case, Sergei Udaltsov, said in a Twitter message.

The protesters were charged with "public disorder" and released, monitoring agency OVD-Info said on its website. Public disorder is an administrative offense punishable by a fine.

Several participants in the Bolotnaya case were freed under an amnesty signed by President Vladimir Putin last month. But people accused of organizing the "riots" — such as Udaltsov, who heads the Left Front organization, and his associate Leonid Razvozzhayev — are still awaiting trial.

Udaltsov, has been under house arrest since early last year. Razvozzhayev is in pre-trial detention, after supposedly trying to flee the country. They face up to 10 years in prison if convicted.

Supporters of Bolotnaya prisoners have been holding rallies at various locations in the capital every month since last summer, but most of the past actions have been limited to a series of single-person pickets in central Moscow, Grani.ru reported.

Several high-profile prisoners who were released under the mass amnesty, including Khodorkovsky and Pussy Riot member Maria Alyokhina, have expressed similar concerns that the mass release organized in honor of the 20th anniversary of the Russian Constitution could divert attention away from the many other politically motivated cases that remain unresolved.

Click [here](#) to see a YouTube video of the protest on Manezhnaya Square.

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