

Moscow Court Jails Activist Navalny for Promoting Opposition Rally

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Alexei Navalny, one of Russia's opposition leaders, wears handcuffs as he is escorted after attending a court hearing in Moscow, Feb. 19, 2015.

A Moscow court late Thursday jailed prominent Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny for 15 days for breaching a law that restricts demonstrations, barring him from a planned rally on March 1.

Two days earlier another court had ended house arrest terms for Navalny and upheld a suspended three-and-a-half-year prison term for the protest leader over a theft case he says is politically motivated.

Navalny left the courthouse on Thursday evening handcuffed and was whisked away in a police car. He appealed nonetheless to his followers to turn up for the rally against President Vladimir Putin's policies.

"To ease the economic and political crisis we have to pressure the authorities. Let's go to the anti-crisis rally," he said in a video posted on his Twitter account.

The court ordered Navalny jailed for 15 days for handing out leaflets in the Moscow metro last week to promote the so-called "Spring" protest rally on March 1.

Although he has scant chance of mounting a serious challenge to Putin, Navalny had promised to lead 100,000 demonstrators on March 1 against Kremlin policies he says are leading Russia deeper into economic crisis.

Putin's popularity ratings have soared since the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea territory and what Russians see as the leader's tough stance against the West over eastern Ukraine.

But Navalny had hoped to tap into public anger over a faltering economy that is expected to contract this year in the face of falling oil prices and Western sanctions.

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