



Ilias Baiguskarov at the Baymak protests. 17 January 2024. Photo: OVD-Info

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ARTICLES

“They took my Mom away.” How the Russian authorities persecute protestors in Bashkortostan

It's been weeks since the mass protests in Bashkortostan. Since then, police have been investigating, conducting mass arrests and random searches. Some of those arrested were abused. At least one man, Rifat Dautov, was found dead in police custody in unclear circumstances. Bashkortostanis have created support groups to help potential victims of persecution. People are seriously scared. We spoke to the relatives of those arrested, here's what's happening:

ОБ ЭТОМ НИКТО НЕ УЗНАЕТ

Если об этом никто не напишет. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы плохие дела не оставались в тишине.

ПОДПИСАТЬСЯ

Текст на русском

Баш Кортса у Кырға

The protests started after Fail Alsynov's trial on 15 January. Thousands of people come to Baymak (a small town in Bashkortostan) to support the activist. Alsynov is among the most important figures in Bashkortostan: in 2020 he defended Kushtau — a mountain sacred to the indigenous Bashkir — from a Russian business operation. He also served as the head of the indigenous peoples' organisation «Bashkort».

Alsynov was charged after giving a speech against gold-mining in the Irandyk mountain range. In his speech, he used the words «kara khalyk» (meaning «common folk» but **translated** literally as «black people»). The criminal case was opened in a statement by the head of Bashkortostan, Radiy Khabirov. According to Alsynov, his words were mistranslated from Bashkir and were meant to refer to labourers.

After 5,000 people arrived at the Baymak district courthouse on 15 January, the court decided not to announce the verdict. Two days later, the court sentenced Alsynov to four years in a penal colony. 10,000 protestors soon arrived at the courthouse; they were met by the police.



Detentions at Baymak protests 17 January 2024 / Photo: OVD-Info

The next day, protests spread to Ufa, the capital of Bashkortostan. Around 2,000 people gathered in the city centre, danced, and sang songs in the Bashkir language.

«THEY DIDN'T EVEN KNOCK, JUST BROKE DOWN THE GATES»

On the evening of 23 January, OVD-Info received a call from a person who was interviewed at the protests. She begged for all footage of the protestors' faces to be deleted. Everybody was terrified: riot police were searching the villages, looking for the protestors. «They came here twice already», she said.

In response to the persecution, the people of the Republic organised chats on WhatsApp and Telegram to share information about lawyers, how to behave in case of detention, and to support each other.

One of the chats was created by Ilgiz, brother of activist Ilias Baiguskarov. Baiguskarov was **detained** for «taking part in mass riots». According to Ilgiz, citizens of Batmak are panicking and sharing stories.

«It's a nightmare here in Sibay» (a small town near Baymak), shares one woman. A young man was allegedly beaten at his workplace and taken away. «Another one was locked up for having a flag». OVD-Info couldn't find the man's family.

«They took my father on Monday (22 January.) The investigator contacted us only yesterday», says another citizen. She tried to find her father in different police offices. Once she finally found him, no contact was allowed and further information was withheld by the officers. «I don't even know what to do», she commented.

Rashida Fayzullina organised a demonstration to defend Russian mining operations in the Trans-Ural mountains. On 22 January, her home was **searched** by the Russian police.



Russian police at Rashida Fayzullina's home, 21 January 2024, the day before the search / Photo: RusNews

Ilyuza, whose husband was detained, was unable to find him following his arrest. On 23 January, Russian police arrived at their home. They arrived early in the morning while the family was having breakfast. Four people — one in a police uniform, the rest in masks and civilian clothes — burst in.

«They didn't even knock, they just broke down our gates and barged in, shoes on and everything», says Ilyuza.

According to Ilyuza, none of the officers explained what was happening. After repeated requests, one of the officers showed the badge of a Rosgvardiya officer (Rosgvardiya is an internal security service that reports directly to Putin — *OVD-Info*).

«They searched the whole house», she says. «They looked everywhere and took pictures of our documents. One officer spoke Bashkir and assured me my husband would be taken to Baymak. Outside, they already had seven people. When they took my husband away, I saw the broken gate and broke out in tears».

Once everyone had left, Ilyuza took their child to school and contacted a lawyer. They began to look for her husband, but he wasn't found in Baymak nor in Sibay. That evening, he called her and said he was to spend 10 days in jail for disobeying police officers. «It was slightly relieving», added Ilyuza.

On 24 January, the district court announced that Alfinur Rakhmutullina — a citizen of Salavat, a city in Bashkortostan — would spend 53 days in jail. She was **detained** for «mass rioting». Alfinur is 60 years old. According to her daughter, Laysan, she worked as a teacher for 37 years and was a Soviet labour veteran.

When Laysan entered her parents' building on the day of her mother's arrest, she saw several people in the staircase. After she entered the apartment, they knocked. They were in civilian clothes and didn't introduce themselves nor explain anything. She understood from their conversation that some of them were locals. Eventually, they showed a warrant which stated that her mother was accused of «mass rioting». They

were to search for weapons, phones, and anything else related to the protests in Baymak. Later, they explained that they didn't know the reason for the search or what would happen.

According to Laysan, her mother agreed to cooperate. The police took all the mobile phones and laptops.

Laysan asked for more information, but the men just gave her papers and promised to show everything later. Laysan kept waiting, but they pushed her out of the apartment, telling her that «she wasn't involved and had no business there». Later they packed up and took all the documents.

«They took my father's phone number and then drove away with my mother. I don't know where they went», comments Laysan.



Alfinur Rakhmatullina with Fail Alsynov at the annual Kushtau preservation meeting. 20 August 2022 / Photo: Rakhmatullina's social media

According to Laysan, her mother suffers from heart disease and is prone to fits of suffocation.

On 21 January, the RusNews telegram channel **reported** that locals in a nearby village were seen being dragged into a bus without licence plates and taken in an unknown direction.

Activist Ildar Yumagulov, whom Russian police **searched** for before the final trial, wasn't present at the protests on 17

January. On 22 January, he **posted** several videos and announced that he had left Bashkortostan.

According to Yumagolov, the protestors weren't advocating for separation from Russian, but wanted to oppose the gold mining operations in the Trans-Ural mountains, which violated environmental regulations.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND CRIMINAL CASES

According to our sources, courts in Bashkortostan have received 119 reports of disobedience since 15 January. 45 of these reports were made to the Baymak district court, and another 27 to the district court in Ufa. 47 more reports were sent to other courts in the region.

Several dozen people were detained by Russian police at the 17 January protests. Later that evening, it was **reported** that six of them were placed under arrest.

Denis Skvortsov, Fanzil Akhmetshin, Yulay Aralbaev, Radmir Mukhametshin, and Dmitry Petrov were arrested for 10 days. Ilar Galin was arrested for 13 days. They were charged for «rallying».

According to RusNews, two students from the Ufa Fuel and Energy College were detained on 18 January. More than a dozen officers came to the college and checked the students' phones. One of them was arrested because of his social media posts. Both were sentenced to 15 days in jail.

Around 10 people were **detained** in Ufa during the protests. Bashkir footballer Vildan Yamangolov was arrested for two days, his charges remain unclear.



Riot police at the monument to Salavat Yulaev — an organiser of Pugachev's rebellion — during the Ufa protests. 19 January 2024 / Photo: Vlada Makeichik, SOTAvision

Yuldash Timerbaev, who was detained in Ufa, was administrator of the local telegram channel «Alga Bashkortostan». On 18 January he posted a message about the protests, scheduled for the next day. He was **sentenced** to 10 days in prison for «organising an unauthorised public event».

According to a RusNews report from 19 January, nine more people were arrested. They were sentenced between 8-15 days in jail by the Baymak district court.

The next day, the Kirov district court heard 27 more cases. All the defendants were found guilty.

«People are deeply hurt», said Ruslan, a citizen of Sibay. «Anyone who knows Bashkir or Tatar knows what Fail's words meant. He's being persecuted for a bad translation. We couldn't accept the Russian „justice“ and now we're being oppressed. People naively appealed to Putin, but got a slap in the face». According to Ruslan, the police «drive around quietly» and take people away.

«The trials are even held at night. Attorney's barely care, and their prices have gone up, despite them being unable to guarantee anything. That's Russia for you».

On 17 January, a mass criminal case was announced by the local investigative committee. Its goal was to charge people for «organisation of and participating in mass riots». The names of the first defendants were announced on 20 January. Among them was Ilias Baiguskarov, who was detained in Baymak on 17 January. Although he was later released, he was detained, again, in Ufa on the next day. The police believed he was involved in organising the protests. Before the hearing, he was kept in custody for four days — twice as long as the legal maximum.

«He was accused of „violating the rules of holding a rally“ and „participating in an unauthorised event“. The court dealt with both at the same time», explains Radmir Saniev, Baiguskarov's attorney. Radmir then explained that each offence should be dealt with separately, according to court regulations. The court didn't finish deliberating and Ilias'

detention period was supposed to expire soon. «I went to the police station to find Ilias and was told he'd been taken to court. I'd just arrived from the court and no-one was there! My client's detention period has expired and there's no information regarding his whereabouts, where is he?»

Saniev finally found Baiguskarov in court. The court protocol had been rewritten, but there were still problems.

«Protocol can't be changed during the hearing. This isn't supposed to be possible», commented Saniev.

Baiguskarov was sentenced to seven days in jail for «organising a public event without notification». According to the local police chief, 900 protestors arrived following Baiguskarov's posts on social media. He explained that he «made a post for people concerned about local politics, urging them to do something».



*Ilias Baiguskarov with his attorney Radmir Saniev in court. 22 January 2024
/ Photo: Vlada Makeychik, SOTAvision*

Baiguskarov was supposed to spend seven days in jail, but on 25 January 2024, he was taken into custody as part of the criminal case.

On 20 January, Vilyur Karachurin, the father of a large family was sent to the pre-trial detention centre in Ufa for two months for the «use of non-dangerous violence against a representative of the authorities» and «participating in mass riots». His background as a parent of several children was not taken into consideration by the police.

Azat Mirzin, a resident of Mullakaevo (a village north of Ufa) was placed in a pre-trial detention centre for two months. According to RusNews, Mirzin is being charged with «organising riots and violence against the police». On social media, his relatives explained that they tried to rent a flat in Ufa to be closer, but realtors refused to associate with them.

On 21 January, the court announced the name of the fourth defendant: Dim Davletkildin, a resident of Baymak. According to his wife, riot police visited their house while he was at work on 19 January. «They asked questions and left», she commented. The next day, he went to the police station to follow up and was detained. He was to be taken to a different city due to a lack of space at the Baymak police office. Later that day, the police searched his home.

During the search, the police interrogated the whole family, including the children. «They had Dim's phone in their hands. When I asked where they got it, they asked me tauntingly if I needed it». The police asked Davletkildin's wife to unlock the phone. When she refused, one of them unlocked it. Apparently, he already knew the password.

She immediately contacted the court-appointed attorney, who confirmed that Davletkildin had been arrested and was under investigation. The hearing was supposed to take place

on 21 January, but it never happened. Nevertheless, Dim was charged with a criminal offence.

Davletkildin was **taken** to Ufa. He was pre-sentenced with «participation in mass riots» and was **sent** to pre-trial detention until 17 March. He is being kept in SIZO-1 (a prison in Ufa that houses death row inmates). Visits with his lawyer are not allowed and the case materials are **unavailable**.

Garifulla Yaparov, Davletkildin's lawyer, visited SIZO-1. «A colonel stationed there told the staff to „prepare any documents for violations committed by the people from Baymak“, recounts Yaparov. «After that, a captain instructed the staff to search Yaparov and „send his phone to the general, only he can deal with it“, continues Yaparov.

Ravar Davletbaev and Dayan Valeev were also to be detained until March 17, **according** to the courts' notification service.

«On 17 January, my son left Sibay and went to Baymak. He came back the next day. Everything seemed normal. Then the police came the next day», — Aigul, Valeev's mother, told OVD-Info.

«First they questioned my husband, who's lost his phone. When I left for work, Dayan was home. I came back and haven't seen my son since».



Riot police during the Baymak protests on 17 January / Photo: OVD-Info

Aigul comments that a mysterious van had been outside their house for the past two days. She suspects it was the police waiting for Valeev.

«My son told me the police recognized him near the courthouse and threatened to come later», Aigul continued. «The van arrived on 19 January and the police came in again, without greeting us. They threatened to detain me too, claiming that I was there. I asked them what they were talking about — I have a seven-year-old daughter at home! They pushed me aside and went in, but didn't find anyone. They came again later and asked for Dayan's clothes, saying that he was in Beloretsk. I realised that he was still in Ufa only after I found a list of the arrested protestors».

Residents of the republic have been warning each other that police are searching for the protestors' clothes. They've visited multiple family homes to collect them.

Rayat's son told the aid group that his father was at a funeral when he was detained.

«I was at work. My mother told me that riot police in full gear burst into the house. They questioned her about my father's whereabouts and then left in a white van. My father was at a funeral when they came. While he was there, someone approached him, and they left together in a white car. That evening, everyone returned from the funeral except my dad. We started looking for him, but somebody told us he left with someone. I called the police hotline and they said „no such person“ had been detained.

«That evening came a knock at the door. The police arrived with orders to take my father's clothing. My brother discovered only a few days later that our father was in the detention centre in Ufa».

Marina-Maya Govzman

ЧТО Я МОГУ С ЭТИМ СДЕЛАТЬ?

Прочитать, рассказать, поддержать. Подпишитесь на регулярные пожертвования ОВД-Инфо, чтобы как можно больше людей узнали о политических репрессиях в России сегодня.

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