

Jail Attack on Yukos' Ex-CEO Was 'Forced'

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Mikhail Khodorkovsky's former cellmate said Monday that prison authorities forced him through beatings and torture to attack the jailed tycoon and falsify a sexual harassment suit, Gazeta.ru reported.

Alexander Kuchma — who served part of his seven-year sentence for armed robbery in a Chita jail with Khodorkovsky — cut the sleeping tycoon's face with a sharp object in April 2006. Khodorkovsky was hospitalized and required stitches.

Kuchma told Gazeta.ru that Chita prison authorities brutally forced him to attack Khodorkovsky.

"I'm talking honestly — I cut Khodorkovsky against my will," Kuchma said. Prison guards "beat me up, tortured me. Broke my arm. Forced me to sign all sorts of papers."

Khodorkovsky's lawyers have accused the Kremlin of trying to break their client's will by incarcerating him in the isolated Chita prison.

Once Russia's richest man, Khodorkovsky was arrested in 2003 and sentenced to eight years in jail for fraud and tax evasion. Last December, he had his prison term extended until 2017 for stealing almost \$30 billion worth of oil produced by his Yukos company and laundering the proceeds.

Both trials were widely seen as part of a Kremlin campaign to punish him for challenging then-President Vladimir Putin.

Kuchma said his sexual harassment suit against the tycoon was falsified. "I'm assuming that they just wanted to pour dirt on him," he said.

Khodorkovsky's lead lawyer said Kuchma's claims were true. "Kuchma said nothing that was news to us," Vadim Klugant told Interfax. "What Kuchma said contains information about a whole string of crimes, and this information should be checked by legal means."

Kuchma also said that in 2008 prison authorities forced him to give an interview to the Kremlin-controlled NTV television and say Khodorkovsky did not deserve a release on parole.

Khodorkovsky has been repeatedly put in solitary confinement for violations of prison rules in what his lawyers say is an attempt to prevent him from obtaining parole by blackening his prison record.

Kuchma, 29, said he was released in February and now needs an expensive operation on the arm broken by the guards. He said he had been frightened to tell the truth about the attack and the suit because prison authorities had threatened him with another beating.

"They broke [my arm] and said they'd break the other one if I made a move," he said.

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