

Transneft Fights Decision on Minutes

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State-run oil pipeline operator Transneft said it is planning to use legal means to resist handing over documents. **Igor Tabakov**

Pipeline monopoly Transneft said Friday that it would fight the court ruling mandating it to release minutes from its board meetings, accusing whistleblowing anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny of conspiring against Russia and using the minutes for commercial interests.

In February, Navalny won a lawsuit against Transneft to make board meeting minutes available to holders of the company's preferred shares.

According to Navalny, the minutes could contain information that would prove Transneft embezzled \$4 billion during the construction of the East Siberia-Pacific Ocean pipeline.

"We are not going to hand anything over to crooks," Transneft chief executive Nikolai Tokarev told the Izvestia newspaper.

"Why newspapers pay this gentleman [Navalny] so much attention — it's difficult to say,"

Transneft spokesman Igor Dyomin told The Moscow Times. "We haven't taken him to court, and we won't do it. We understand that it's his style of behavior."

"It's like being annoyed by a tick when it bites you — it's just his nature," Dyomin said.

Transneft executives say Navalny was trying to get hold of the minutes out of commercial interest and not because he is fighting for a cause.

In the interview with Izvestia, Tokarev also accused Navalny of being backed by John McCain, a U.S. Republican senator from Arizona who opposed President Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential elections.

"Let him harass somebody else. We will always be able to protect ourselves," Tokarev told Izvestia.

According to Tokarev, Navalny also had backing from former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

"This man is being licked by Madeleine Albright's National Democratic Institute," Tokarev was quoted as saying in an interview that ran on the front page of Izvestia.

Navalny jokingly shrugged off Tokarev's allegations on his blog later Friday. "What can I say? All of it is true. After I had been licked by Madeleine Albright, I spent 90 million [rubles] of SPS's [the Union of the Right Forces] money, gathered a bunch of skinheads and began shooting people from the gun that was given to me by McCain. ... But the court decision has taken force. They must provide the documents," Navalny wrote.

"Of course, we plan to comply with the court's decision. But within the boundaries of the law, we will try not to give the documents," Transneft vice president Mikhail Barkov told Izvestia.

Navalny is currently under investigation himself, facing up to five years in prison for allegedly forcing Kirovles, a state-owned timber company based in the Kirov region, into a disadvantageous contract in 2009, when he served as an unpaid adviser to Kirov region Governor Nikita Belykh.

The Investigative Committee said in mid-May that the blogger involved Kirovles in a contract that cost the company 1.3 million rubles (\$46,000) under false pretense.

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