The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Navalny's Posh Car Bill Makes It to Duma With Communists' Support

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September 15, 2011



The Communists beat the other political parties on Thursday to a proposal by whistleblower Alexei Navalny, who called to prevent officials from buying cars worth more than 2 million rubles ($65,500).

State agencies and regional governments often open tenders for posh cars that are later used by high-ranking officials, both on- and off-duty.

Navalny posted a draft bill to limit such purchases on his LiveJournal last week, asking any of the four State Duma parties to introduce it in the fall session, the last before the Duma vote in December.

The Communists are the only ones to react so far. "Let's limit that thievery at least a little," party member Sergei Obukhov, a Duma deputy, said in an interview with Business FM radio on Thursday.

The bill does not ban the purchase of costly cars outright, but each such tender would need to be authorized by the federal government.

No date for a hearing was set.

Navalny is not a member of the Communist Party, but shares many leftist views and is known for his critical stance on the ruling United Russia party.

The new bill is well-timed, as two state tenders for expensive vehicles are mulled by the media this week alone.

On Tuesday, President Dmitry Medvedev chided the Moscow-based Russian Customs Academy for its plans to purchase two Mercedes cars priced at about 3 million rubles ($98,330) apiece. An unidentified customs official said later that the vehicles were needed to impress official delegations from the World Trade Organization, which Russia has been trying to join since 1993.

On Wednesday, the traffic police placed a tender for 13 Mercedes cars — about 2.5 million rubles each — to escort high-ranking state officials, Gazeta.ru reported.

An apparent record holder for this year is Dagestani Finance Minister Abdusamad Gamidov, who announced a tender in March for an Audi sedan worth 8.5 million rubles ($290,000). The tender was withdrawn after Navalny criticized it.

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