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Navalny Hit With New Theft Charges

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Navalny during an interview in August **M. Stulov**

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny said Tuesday that he had been served with new theft and money laundering charges, describing them as a part of an attempt to "terrorize" those who displease the Russian authorities.

Under the charges filed by the Investigative Committee, Alexei Navalny and his brother Oleg face up to ten years in prison. In a separate case, a Russian court handed Navalny, 37, a suspended five-year sentence for theft last month.

"I understand the logic of the authorities. They try to show everyone that if you do something not quite as they want, then they will terrorize you," he told Ekho Moskvy radio.

"It is absolute nonsense when the commercial activity that my brother led for more than three years without any complaints against him are suddenly announced to be fraud."

Investigators accused the Navalny brothers of defrauding a Russian branch of French cosmetics firm Yves Rocher out of 26 million rubles ($814,600) and a cargo delivery firm, the Glavnoye Podpisnoye Agentstvo, out of 4 million rubles. The Russian arm of Yves Rocher

was not immediately available for comment. Russia is a major market for the French company.

Anti-Kremlin protest leader Navalny was convicted July 18 of organizing the theft of 16 million rubles from a timber firm in the Kirov region in 2009, after a trial that he described as President Vladimir Putin's revenge for challenging the Kremlin.

But he was unexpectedly freed while waiting for an appeal hearing, allowing him to run in the Moscow mayoral election, in which he posted a strong second place against Putin ally Sergei Sobyanin.

On Tuesday, the Investigative Committee also accused the brothers of laundering some 21 million rubles in funds, charges that carry a two-year maximum sentence. Under Russian law, sentences for crimes cannot be added up.

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