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Rosneft Boss Sechin Sues Leading Russian Business Paper Vedomosti

By Alexey Eremenko

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Igor Sechin, left, standing with Rostec chief Sergei Chemezov during talks with India's leadership last October.

Igor Sechin, the head of state-run gas giant Rosneft and a close ally of President Vladimir Putin, is suing Russia's leading business newspaper Vedomosti for "wrongful interference in government activity," Forbes Russia reported Friday.

Sechin took offense to an editorial that examined the possible reasons for and benefits of his transitioning from the government to his top Rosneft job in 2012. Vedomosti is part of Sanoma Independent Media, which owns The Moscow Times and more than 50 other publications and media projects in Russia.

The editorial implied that Sechin is able to unlawfully influence state officials while enjoying de-facto independence at Rosneft, where he allegedly answers to no one except Putin, the report said, citing the lawsuit.

The suit was filed just days after the article by Vedomosti deputy editor Kirill Kharatyan was published in mid-June, but the main hearing will only kick off next Wednesday.

Sechin wants three passages deleted from the article, Forbes said. It remains unclear whether he also wants to receive any financial compensation.

Last month, Sechin successfully sued Forbes Russia and daily newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda for calling him Russia's highest-grossing CEO and estimating his 2013 salary at $50 million, with the court ordering the newspapers retract the statements. Forbes has said that it is planning to appeal the decision.

Sechin, 53, has worked with Putin since the 1990s. He was deputy head of the presidential administration from 1999 until 2008, when he was appointed deputy prime minister.

The alleged leader of a conservative and isolationist faction in the Kremlin, Sechin has been nicknamed "Darth Vader" and Russia's "grey cardinal" in the Western press. He was the only Russian on Time magazine's 2013 list of the world's most influential people.

Rosneft, a target of recent U.S. and EU sanctions against Russia over its policy in Ukraine, asked the government this week for 1.5 trillion rubles ($41.7 billion) to help with the $54-billion debt it acquired by purchasing TNK-BP in 2013, Vedomosti reported, citing unidentified sources.

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