

Moscow Court Extends House Arrest of Kremlin Critic Alexei Navalny

December 19, 2014



Russian opposition leader and anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny (R) talks to his brother and co-defendant Oleg before a court hearing in Moscow on Dec. 19, 2014.

A Moscow court on Friday extended a term of house arrest for Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on trial for stealing more than 30 million rubles (\$497,851), charges he dismisses as part of a campaign by President Vladimir Putin to stifle dissent.

Judge Elena Korobchenko endorsed the state prosecutors' motion to extend Navalny's house arrest for another month when the current term expires on Jan. 15. Navalny smiled ironically when the decision was announced.

Navalny and his brother, who is also on trial, are accused of stealing from two firms, including an affiliate of the French cosmetics company Yves Rocher. They deny any wrongdoing.

Navalny, a Western-educated anti-corruption blogger, and his allies ridicule the case as the Kremlin's attempt to mount pressure on critics after he led mass street protests against Putin in 2011 and 2012.

Navalny was sentenced to five years in jail last year for embezzling 16 million rubles in another case Kremlin critics dismiss as trumped-up. His sentence was later suspended.

Original url:

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