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Alexei Navalny Refuses to Obey House Arrest, Cuts Off Electronic Bracelet

By Allison Quinn

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lexei Navalny (right), Russian opposition leader and anti-corruption blogger, gestures with his wife Yulia before a court hearing in Moscow, Dec. 30, 2014.

Opposition leader Alexei Navalny, who was found guilty of embezzlement last week while already under house arrest, on Monday cut off his electronic monitoring bracelet to protest what he called his "illegal detention."

Photographs on the anti-corruption campaigner's website show photos of the bracelet cut in half with a kitchen knife in an apparent jibe at the Russian authorities, who he says used illegal maneuvers in the recent embezzlement case against him.

Last week, Navalny and his younger brother Oleg were found guilty of embezzling 30 million rubles (about $500,000) from two companies, one an affiliate of French cosmetics company Yves Rocher. Both men have denied the claims and maintained that the case against them was politically motivated.

Oleg was sentenced to three and a half years in prison and led away from the court in handcuffs, while Navalny got off with a suspended sentence of the same length.

On Monday, Navalny railed against what he described as rampant foul play in the court's behavior.

The Navalny brothers' verdict hearing was last week abruptly moved forward from Jan. 15 to Dec. 30, a move critics viewed as an attempt to forestall political protests planned for the original date.

"That means that Judge [Yelena] Korobchenko closely read 139 tomes of the criminal case and the testimony of dozens of witnesses in six days," Navalny wrote on Monday.

Now the court has failed to provide the full text of the verdict, which is needed in order to file an appeal, he said.

"Everyone is asking me: 'Have you already filed an appeal? When is the appeal hearing?' But there is no appeal and there can't be one — there's no text of the verdict and so nothing to appeal. That's a kind of genius move by Putin's 'justice system,'" Navalny wrote.

Navalny's refusal to wear his electronic monitoring bracelet appears to be more a protest of the way his trial was handled than a genuine attempt to break free.

Citing Article 11 of Russia's Criminal Procedural Code, the activist said the recent guilty verdict against him had effectively nullified his current house arrest.

Yulia Petrova, a spokeswoman for Moscow's Zamoskvoretsky Court, said last week that Navalny's house arrest was no longer valid after the verdict, news agency Interfax reported.

Petrova's statement came in response to a complaint from the Federal Prison Service that Navalny had broken his house arrest to attend a political demonstration protesting the verdict.

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