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Russian Railways Chief Threatens to Quit Over Demands to Publish Salary

By Peter Hobson

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Vladimir Yakunin, President of Russian Railways, attends the Gaidar Forum 2015 "Russia and the World: New Dimensions" in Moscow, Jan. 15.

The head of Russia's vast state railway company on Thursday said he might quit if the government persisted in its "unreasonable" demands that he publish his salary.

Vladimir Yakunin, a long-time friend and ally of President Vladimir Putin, has been accused of accumulating vast wealth for himself and his family during his decade at the helm of rail monopoly Russian Railways. A government order last month obliges him, along with other state managers, to publish his earnings on his company's website.

"This is unreasonable interference in my personal life," Yakunin said in an interview with television station Rossia-24. "There are two options: either I submit, or I say I won't have it, tender my resignation and go to work in the private sector."

Yakunin has previously said publishing his earnings would threaten his family's security.

The government has pushed in recent years for the kingpins of state companies to reveal their earnings, but has met with pushback. Igor Sechin, another long-time Putin associate who heads state-owned oil giant Rosneft, has also bristled at the attempts, refusing to publish his salary and successfully suing Forbes Russia for claiming he earned $50 million in 2012.

Yakunin has been accused by Alexei Navalny, an anti-corruption blogger turned opposition politician, of owning a sprawling mansion near Moscow complete with a 50-meter pool, a garage able to hold 15 cars and a special storage space for his wife's fur coats. Navalny has also alleged that Yakunin's family has accrued a vast business empire and a number of expensive properties in European countries. Yakunin dismisses the charges.

He said on Thursday, "I don't care if the government insists. I have nothing to hide. I don't set my salary, it is set by the board, and Russian Railways' budget is approved by the government. I can't stand when people stick their noses into other people's business."

Russian Railways, which employs nearly a million people, has applied for billions of dollars in aid from the government to help fund its investment programs.

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