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Imprisoned Russian Governor Belykh Starts Hunger Strike

By The Moscow Times

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Governor of Kirov region Nikita Belykh, who is accused by the Investigative Committee of taking a bribe, is escorted by Federal Security Service (FSB) officers during a hearing at the Basmanny district court in Moscow, Russia, June 25, 2016.

Nikita Belykh, the independent Kirov region governor imprisoned on corruption allegations, has began a hunger strike, the TASS news agency reported Wednesday.

Belykh is protesting against the charges, and because he has not yet been permitted to see his wife or brother, Belykh's lawyer Vadim Prokhorov told TASS.

He has already gone without food for six days and "his condition is unstable," Prokhorov said.

The governor was arrested on Friday on allegations that he accepted a 400,000 euro ($444,000) bribe. Belykh allegedly received the money to protect the interests of two companies based in the Kirov region: the Novovyatsky ski factory and the Forestry

Management Company. Police released images of Belykh alongside piles of money in a restaurant in central Moscow last week.

The politician pleaded not guilty in court and called his arrest a setup.

Belykh was leader of the Union of Right Forces opposition political party before being appointed as Kirov governor by former-president Dmitry Medvedev seven years ago.

He had close connections with Russian opposition activists, appointing activist Alexei Navalny as his advisor in 2009. Belykh defended Navalny in the KirovLes embezzlement case and first attracted the attention of Russian Federal Security Service while they were digging into Navalny's case, the Novaya Gazeta newspaper reported.

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