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Kremlin Critic Navalny and Allies Hit With $1.4M Lawsuit Payout

By Reuters

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Alexei Navalny **Sergei Bobylev / TASS**

A Russian court on Monday ordered opposition leader Alexei Navalny and his allies to pay $1.4 million in damages, a blow to the Kremlin critic's group, whose bank accounts have been frozen amid what he says is a broad government crackdown.

The Moscow Arbitration Court told Navalny, his Anti-Corruption Foundation and ally Lyubov Sobol each to pay 29 million rubles ($455,000) for libeling the Moscow Schoolchild catering company, Navalny's spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said.

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The court order is a setback for Navalny and his allies, who helped organize large protests in the capital this summer but now face an array of lawsuits filed by police and state-run firms

seeking damages and compensation over the rallies.

The Kremlin's critics have cast those lawsuits, as well as a series of mass police raids, as part of a coordinated campaign aimed at crippling their activities following a spate of big political demonstrations. Russian authorities deny those charges.

State investigators have opened a criminal investigation of the alleged laundering of 1 billion rubles ($15 million) by Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation. They also froze a number of bank accounts linked to it.

On Monday, the Moscow court said Navalny and his allies had caused the Moscow Schoolchild company moral damage and told his group to delete a video in which they had called into question the quality of its food, the state-run TASS news agency reported.

Navalny rejected the court ruling. "Cases of dysentery were proven using documents. But it's us that has to pay," he wrote on social media.

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