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Kremlin Accuses Navalny Aides of Removing Potential Evidence

By AFP

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Navalny's team collected the bottle and other items from his room after hearing he had fallen ill.
Alexander Shcherbak / TASS

The Kremlin on Friday said Russia's ability to probe opposition politician Alexei Navalny's suspected poisoning was "limited" and accused his aides of taking potential evidence out of the country.

Members of Navalny's team said Thursday that German experts found Novichok, a Soviet-designed nerve agent, on a water bottle taken from the Siberian hotel room where the Kremlin foe stayed before falling ill last month.

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The bottle appears to have been key evidence for Germany's conclusion that the 44-year-old

outspoken critic of President Vladimir Putin was poisoned with the banned chemical weapon.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Friday reiterated complaints that Moscow's hands were tied because Germany has not yet shared its findings with Russia and accused Navalny's aides of removing potential evidence.

"Unfortunately, our abilities to genuinely conduct an investigation are rather limited," Peskov told reporters.

"The bottle — if it existed — has been taken somewhere, to Germany or some other place," he said. "What could have become a piece of evidence proving poisoning has unfortunately been taken out.

Another question is why."

But he also cast doubt on Germany's findings, saying it would not be possible to take a bottle with traces of a nerve agent out of the country because that person would simply "have no time" to do that due to the toxicity of the substance.

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Navalny's team Aug. the bottle and other items from his room straight after hearing he had been taken ill on August 20.

The team said it was obvious that the Russian leadership would not be interested in conducting a proper probe.

Russia has dismissed "unsubstantiated claims" over the incident and said its doctors found no trace of toxins.

Navalny is being treated in a hospital in Berlin and on Tuesday said he was breathing for the first time without medical support.

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