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Putin's 'Chef' Sues Navalny and His Ally for Defamation

By AFP

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Yevgeny Prigozhin is nicknamed "Putin's chef" because his company Concord has catered for the Kremlin. **Michael Metzel / TASS**

Kremlin-linked businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin has sued Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny and a close ally for defamation, a Moscow court said Tuesday.

The lawsuit appeared Tuesday on the website of a Moscow court, which later told the Russian news agency TASS that the claim sought 5 million rubles ($66,000) each from Navalny and his ally Vladimir Milov for defamatory statements.

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Prigozhin, 59, is nicknamed "Putin's chef" because his company Concord has catered for the

Kremlin.

Last week Concord posted a copy of a lawsuit on the social media network Vkontakte that it said it had submitted to the Moscow court.

The lawsuit cited an Oct. 27 video stream by former deputy energy minister Milov on Navalny's YouTube channel Navalny Live.

In the video Milov accuses Prigozhin of "involving minors in prostitution" in his past and describes him as a "bandit who serves Putin for all sorts of bad deeds," which the lawsuit said caused the businessman to suffer "moral injury."

Navalny, 44, did not appear in the video stream.

In August the Kremlin critic fell violently ill on a flight from Siberia to Moscow and was hospitalized in the Russian city of Omsk before being transferred by medical aircraft to Berlin.

Experts from several Western countries determined that he was poisoned by the Soviet-era nerve agent Novichok — a claim Moscow has repeatedly denied.

While Navalny was in a coma, Concord's press service quoted Prigozhin as saying he intended to enforce a court decision last year that Navalny and his associates must pay him nearly 88 million rubles in damages over a video report.

"I intend to strip this group of unscrupulous people of their clothes and shoes," Prigozhin was quoted as saying.

Days after Navalny was released from a Berlin hospital in September his spokeswoman Kira Yarmysh said officials had seized the Kremlin critic's apartment as part of the damages.

In October Prigozhin was sanctioned by the European Union on charges of undermining peace in Libya by supporting the Wagner Group private military company.

He has also been sanctioned by the United States for allegedly meddling in its 2016 presidential vote and for his links to Wagner, which has been accused of sending mercenaries to conflicts throughout Africa and the Middle East.

Navalny has said he will return to Russia once he has made a full recovery in Germany.

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