The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Moscow Court Delays Navalny War Veteran Libel Trial

By Maxime Popov for AFP

January 20, 2021



The opposition figure is currently in virus quarantine after returning from Germany on Sunday and being immediately put behind bars **Alexander Nemenov / AFP**

A Moscow court on Wednesday postponed the start of the trial of detained Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on charges of defaming a World War II veteran, his lawyers said.

Olga Mikhailova, a lawyer for Navalny, told journalists the court pushed back the trial until Feb. 5 because the opposition figure is currently in virus quarantine after returning from Germany on Sunday and being immediately put behind bars.

The court ruled that the "hearing has to take place with his participation," Mikhailova said, adding that Navalny's allies supported the decision.

Navalny was detained in a Moscow airport after returning for the first time since he was flown to Berlin in August following a poisoning attack.

The 44-year-old anti-graft campaigner is accused of violating probationary terms of his 2014 suspended sentence on fraud charges by not appearing at Russia's prison service for checks twice a month.

On Monday, a makeshift court at a police station ordered Navalny placed in custody until Feb. 15. He was then moved to Moscow's Matrosskaya Tishina detention centre, where he is spending his first 14 days in quarantine.

The libel charges due to be heard Wednesday are part of a separate case launched in June by the Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes.

The Committee charged Navalny with "discrediting the honour and dignity" of the veteran after describing him and others who appeared in a pro-Kremlin video as "the shame of the country" and "traitors" in a June tweet.

The video was in favour of constitutional amendments that passed last summer allowing President Vladimir Putin to remain in office until 2036.

Related article: Could Navalny's Detention Derail His Movement?

The Investigative Committee had suspended the probe while the Kremlin critic was hospitalised following the near-fatal poisoning attack with a nerve agent.

Navalny accuses Putin of ordering the attack, a claim the Kremlin has repeatedly denied.

On Feb. 2, a court will consider whether Navalny's 2014 suspended sentence of three years and six months on fraud charges should be converted to jail time.

Last month investigators also opened a criminal probe into Navalny for large-scale fraud, alleging he used more than 356 million rubles ($4.8 million) of donations to his organisations for personal purposes including holidays abroad.

The charge is punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

Navalny and his supporters believe all three cases are politically motivated.

The Kremlin critic hit back Tuesday with a report into a lavish Black Sea property he claimed is owned by Putin alongside a call for donations to his Anti-Corruption Foundation to produce more investigations.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Wednesday said the main purpose of the report — which was published alongside a YouTube video that has 20 million views — was to syphon off money.

"We caution all citizens — particularly given the large number of views: Think before transferring money to people who are actually crooks," Peskov said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/01/20/navalny-due-in-court-wednesday-on-charges-of-defaming-war-veteran-a72656