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Prosecutor Seeks Defamation Fine in Latest Navalny Case

By Marina Lapenkova for AFP

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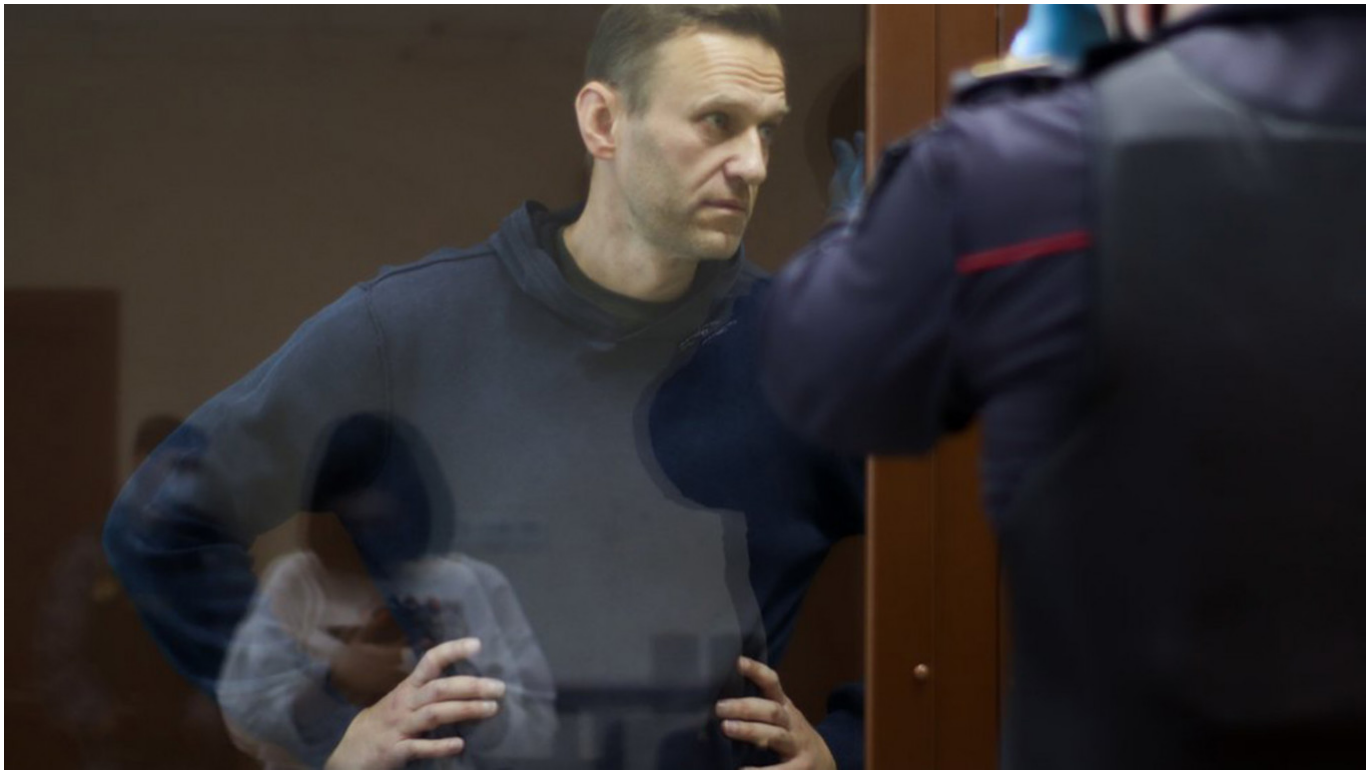

Navalny at the hearing in Moscow's Babushkinsky District Court. **Babushkinsky District Court Press Service**

A Russian prosecutor on Tuesday called for Alexei Navalny to face a $13,000 fine in a defamation case, one of a series of legal proceedings the jailed Kremlin critic says are aimed at silencing him.

President Vladimir Putin's most vocal opponent was taken into police custody immediately after returning to Moscow in January from Germany, where he was recovering from an August poisoning he blames on the Kremlin.

Related article: Russia to Pay Damages for 2012 Navalny Arrest

His arrest sparked two consecutive weekends of nationwide protests demanding his release,

in some of the biggest anti-government demonstrations in years.

A Moscow court earlier this month ruled to convert a three-and-a-half-year suspended sentence Navalny received on fraud charges in 2014 to jail time over alleged parole violations.

Navalny is now facing defamation charges for referring to a World War II veteran and others who appeared in a pro-Kremlin video as "traitors."

A Moscow district court on Tuesday heard the final arguments in the case, during which the prosecutor asked for a fine of 950,000 rubles ($13,000).

As the alleged defamation occurred during the suspended sentence, the prosecutor also requested that it be converted to real jail time, despite the other court having already ruled to do so.

Inside a glass cage for defendants and wearing a blue hoodie, the 44-year-old anti-graft campaigner frequently smiled and paced inside the glass cell, an AFP journalist reported.

In his closing arguments, Navalny said that "every moment of this case is obvious legal nonsense" and accused the prosecution of presenting fabricated evidence.

Recipe for pickles

Navalny has often used his court hearings to mock the proceedings and in his final remarks Tuesday he asked if the judge could recommend a recipe for pickles, since it is "pointless to talk about the law" with her.

Navalny's lawyer Olga Mikhailova insisted the charges were "contrived and arbitrary" and said the defence "strongly disagreed" with the prosecution’s arguments.

After the final arguments were delivered, the judge adjourned the hearing to Feb. 20, the same day Navalny is scheduled to appeal his jail term in a different court.

Asked about Navalny's case by reporters on Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that "in our country it is forbidden to insult veterans."

Navalny and his allies have faced a slew of legal challenges in recent years, most stemming from their investigations into the wealth of Russia's elites.

Another Moscow court on Tuesday rejected Navalny's appeal against a fine of 3.3 million rubles that he was ordered to pay a food company in another defamation lawsuit.

He is facing more defamation charges from Russian businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, nicknamed "Putin's chef" because his company Concord catered for the Kremlin.

The 59-year-old businessman, who is under U.S. and European sanctions, has two pending cases against Navalny that will be considered in March.

Navalny's arrest sparked large-scale rallies across the country that saw at least 10,000 people detained in a police crackdown.

On Sunday several hundred female activists formed a human chain in central Moscow in a show of support for Navalny's wife Yulia and other women caught up in the crackdown.

Activists across Russia also staged courtyard protests on Sunday evening, briefly lighting their phone flashlights and posting pictures of the gatherings on social media.

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