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Navalny Foundation Director Says Russia Trying to Imprison Father 'for Life'

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Ivan Zhdanov says his father Yuri's arrest is retaliation for his work as director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK). **Facebook / zhdanovivan**

An exiled top associate of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny has accused Russian authorities of trying to imprison his elderly father for the rest of his life on corruption charges he says are politically motivated.

Yuri Zhdanov, 67, was arrested in March on accusations of abusing his work obligations for personal gain by recommending social housing to a family that turned out to have previously received it. His son Ivan Zhdanov says his arrest is retaliation for his work as director of Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK).

A court on Wednesday toughened the charges against Yuri Zhdanov, extending his possible prison term from four years to 10.

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“They want to give an elderly person of 67 years of age a term comparable to life imprisonment,” the younger Zhdanov said in an Instagram post. “Villainy. If you want to fight me, fight me.”

Yuri Zhdanov is currently in pre-trial detention in the northern Russian region of Arkhangelsk.

The reclassification of his charges comes ahead of an anticipated Moscow court ruling to outlaw the FBK and Navalny’s nationwide network by designating them as “extremist” organizations. The ruling would put these groups’ members and supporters at risk of lengthy jail terms.

The younger Zhdanov has been living in exile to avoid being jailed in Russia.

Analysts say that Russian authorities are applying pressure on the exiled Navalny ally and Russia’s wider opposition by arresting family members on trumped-up charges in a return to Stalinist-style repressions.

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The FBK helped spark nationwide protests in Navalny's support in January after it released a viral investigation into President Vladimir Putin’s alleged $1.3 billion palace.

Navalny himself was jailed for two and a half years upon returning to Russia from Germany, where he spent months recovering from a near-fatal Novichok poisoning on Russian soil.

The months since the January protests have seen a widening crackdown on Navalny supporters, human rights groups and independent media as the Kremlin looks to solidify the pro-Putin ruling party’s majority in this fall's parliamentary elections.

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