

Ruling Deferred in Abramovich Libel Case Over Putin Book

By [AFP](#)

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The case was brought by several wealthy Russians, including Roman Abramovich. **Sergei Savostyanov / TASS**

A British judge on Thursday said she expected to rule later this year on a libel case brought against a journalist over claims made in her book about Vladimir Putin's inner circle.

Judge Amanda Tipples told the High Court in London after two days of preliminary legal arguments that she planned to issue a judgment in October.

The case against Catherine Belton, and the publishers of her best-selling book "Putin's People", was brought by several wealthy Russians, including Roman Abramovich.

Lawyers for the Chelsea football club owner on Wednesday submitted it contained "lazy inaccuracies" about his links to the Kremlin, and wrongly implicated him in wrong-doing.

They portrayed the book as alleging he had been a "cashier" to the family of former president

Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s, then a "custodian of slush funds" to Putin.

The Russian state-owned energy giant Rosneft, led by Putin's close associate Igor Sechin, is also suing Belton and the U.K. arm of publishers HarperCollins.

Rosneft's lawyers said the book's allegations would prompt a reader to think its business dealings were "illegal, improper or inefficient."

The defendants deny the claims, arguing the book is balanced, well-sourced and based on years of investigative reporting and interviews, reflecting the political and business climate of the Putin era.

The case has prompted criticism about wealthy non-resident Russians using a British court and law firms for claims personally targeting a journalist.

Belton, a former Financial Times correspondent who now works for Reuters, declined to comment after the hearing.

On Wednesday, two other Russian billionaires named in the book, Pyotr Aven and Mikhail Fridman, settled with HarperCollins, agreeing to a small number of changes in subsequent editions and apologies from the publisher.

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