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Navalny Accuses Google, Apple of Becoming Putin's 'Accomplices'

By AFP

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Jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny accused Google and Apple Thursday of acting as the Kremlin's "accomplices" after the companies removed his voting app during the country's parliamentary election last week.

"If something surprised me in the latest elections, it was not how (President Vladimir) Putin forged the results, but how obediently the almighty Big Tech turned into his accomplices," Navalny said on Twitter.

Related article: Apple, Google Delete Navalny App on Day of Russian Parliamentary Vote

Apple and Google removed the opposition-run "Smart Voting" app advising supporters on how to vote out Kremlin allies as polled opened across Russia last Friday.

Navalny allies accused the tech giants of "censorship."

The jailed Kremlin critic said the tech giants were run by "cowardly and greedy" people.

"They tell us about 'making the world a better place', but on the inside they are liars and hypocrites," he said.

Navalny also said he was "terribly upset and disappointed" with Pavel Durov, the head of the Telegram messaging app. The Smart Voting bot also disappeared from the app during the election.

Russia-born Durov had said he was following Apple and Google, which "dictate the rules of the game to developers like us."

Sources familiar with Google and Apple's decision said the move was taken under pressure from Russian authorities, including threats to arrest local staff of the tech giant.

The Kremlin welcomed the move, saying the tech giants had conformed with "the letter and spirit" of Russian law.

The Russian opposition accused authorities of mass voter fraud after the three-day vote in which the ruling United Russia party won a sweeping majority.

The election came after a sweeping crackdown on Putin's opponents.

Navalny, who was detained in January and has seen his allies arrested or flee the country and his organizations banned, had nonetheless tried to dent the Kremlin's grip on parliament from behind bars.

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