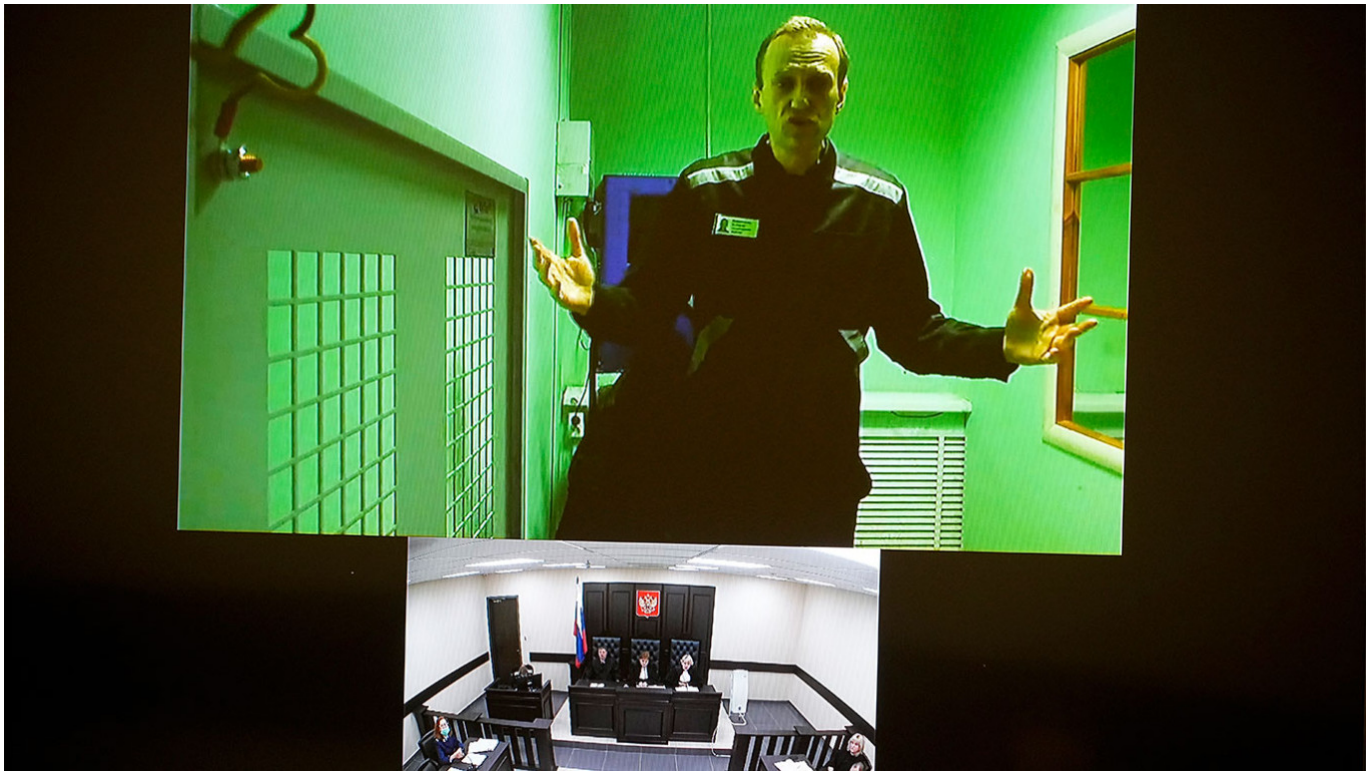
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Opens New Criminal Case Against Navalny After Prison 'Provocation'

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Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny is seen on a TV screen during a court hearing. **Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP / TASS**

The Russian authorities have opened a fresh criminal case against Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny after staging a "provocation" against the politician at a penal colony where he is serving his nine-year prison sentence, his press spokesperson said Tuesday.

The prison authorities, according to spokesperson Kira Yarmysh, placed a convict "with personal hygiene problems" in Navalny's cell in what she said was a likely attempt to provoke a fight.

After a scuffle between Navalny and the convict, the prison authorities announced that the politician was being charged with violating the rules of conduct in prisons, an offense punishable by up to a 5-year jail sentence.

Since Navalny's imprisonment in 2021, the Russian authorities have opened as many as 10 additional criminal cases against him, meaning the prominent Kremlin critic faces a total jail sentence of up to 35 years.

In the incident with the fellow inmate, Yarmysh said Navalny was also assaulted by prison guards.

The Kremlin "wants Alexei to sit in prison forever and demands that new criminal cases be fabricated against him using completely inhumane methods," said Yarmysh.

Allies have raised concerns about Navalny's health in recent weeks, with some suggesting that he could be slowly poisoned by the prison authorities.

Before his imprisonment, Navalny was poisoned with a nerve agent in an attack that he blamed on the Kremlin.

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