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Ryazan News Editor Accused of Extortion Released on House Arrest

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Alexei Frolov in court. **@vid_sboku**

A court in central Russia's Ryazan region placed a former local news editor under house arrest months after he pleaded guilty to extorting a business executive, local media reported Wednesday.

Alexei Frolov, who headed the Ryazan bureau of the independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta until his arrest in January, was detained alongside Konstantin Smirnov, editor-in-chief of the local outlet Ryazan Vid Sboku, and former TV reporter Natalia Smolyaninova.

The three were accused of extorting between 300,000 and 1.2 million rubles ($3,800 to $15,000) from Alexei Rogotovsky, acting head of the Ryazan region's housing repair fund, in exchange for suppressing negative coverage.

Frolov pleaded guilty to large-scale extortion in March. He faces seven to 15 years in prison if convicted.

Smolyaninova was placed under house arrest shortly after her detention.

On Wednesday, Ryazan's Sovetsky District Court released Frolov under house arrest as investigators sought to extend his pretrial detention, Ryazan Vid Sboku reported. Hearings on Smirnov's detention were scheduled to continue later in the day.

Last week, at least 22 local journalists signed an appeal urging authorities to place both Frolov and Smirnov under house arrest.

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