

Khodorkovsky Ready to Die in Jail

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Khodorkovsky arriving in the court Nov. 2 to deliver his closing speech. **Tatyana Makeyeva**

Jailed oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, delivering his final statement at his second trial Tuesday, spoke of hope, trials for the country and a willingness to give up his life in a speech that moved some spectators to tears in the packed courtroom.

Speaking calmly and confidently, Khodorkovsky resembled a politician addressing a crowd at a rally, not a prisoner facing years of imprisonment.

The verdict, to be delivered Dec. 15, may add up to seven years to the eight-year prison terms that he and his co-defendant, Platon Lebedev, are already serving. The two businessmen stand accused of stealing 218 million tons of oil worth \$27 billion from their company Yukos from 1998 to 2003.

Khodorkovsky, who dismissed all charges in a courtroom speech last week, said Tuesday that he did not expect to be acquitted but still hoped things would take a turn for the better in Russia.

“No one believes now that an acquittal is possible in a Yukos case,” he said. “Nevertheless, I would like to speak about hope. Hope is the main thing in life.”

Khodorkovsky called his trial a landmark event for the country and a test for President Dmitry Medvedev, who has pledged to modernize the country and fight “legal nihilism.”

“Two years have passed since a new president came to power, and many of my compatriots have regained hope — hope that Russia will become a civilized country with a developed civil society, free of lawlessness, corruption and injustice by officials,” Khodorkovsky said.

He maintains that the charges against him are politically motivated and are orchestrated by former President and current Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who is widely believed to harbor a personal grudge against Khodorkovsky.

Khodorkovsky did not name any names in Tuesday's speech. “There are people who want to keep us in jail. They want to show that they are above the law,” he said.

Turning to the judge, he said, “There's more than just two fates in your hands: The fate of every citizen of our country is at stake.”

Judge Viktor Danilkin sat quiet and motionless throughout the hour-long speech.

Khodorkovsky wished Danilkin courage in making the verdict, saying he “must be feeling scared” because of the responsibility he is facing.

“Everyone understands that your ruling in this case — regardless of what it will be — will become part of Russia's history,” Khodorkovsky said.

He said he believed that power in Russia would eventually be in the hands of the people, not corrupt officials distorting justice for their own ends. He said he was ready to die in prison for his convictions.

“My faith is worth my life,” said Khodorkovsky, 47.

Tears rolled down the cheeks of an elderly woman as she listened to the closing speech. As Khodorkovsky wound up his remarks, dozens of people started clapping and chanting, “Freedom!”

Lebedev refused to give his own closing speech. “I will give my last word at a different place,” he said, without elaborating.

Among those attending Tuesday's hearing were German lawmaker Marie-Louise Beck and opposition leader Mikhail Kasyanov.

“Khodorkovsky has kept his courage and keeps on fighting,” Kasyanov said outside the courtroom.

He said he was convinced of Khodorkovsky's innocence but believed there was “minimal hope” of an acquittal.

Kasyanov, who served as the first witness for the defense at the trial, reiterated Tuesday his

opinion that the case against Yukos was Putin's revenge on Khodorkovsky for sponsoring the political opposition without the Kremlin's permission.

Prosecutors declined to comment on Khodorkovsky's speech Tuesday. They have asked the judge to sentence both Khodorkovsky and Lebedev to six years in prison — a year less than the maximum sentence possible in the case.

The Investigative Committee said last week that its investigation into Yukos was ongoing and a third case was possible.

Khodorkovsky predicted in an interview with Novaya Gazeta published Monday that officials who violated the law and blocked national reforms would cause a nationwide crisis by 2015.

Tuesday's hearing was followed by news conference by the defendants' lawyers, who again criticized the 20-month second trial as "falsified."

Sandy Sanders, Khodorkovsky's lawyer in the United States who came to Moscow for the hearing, urged the authorities to release Khodorkovsky to show the world that Russia is governed by the rule of law.

The case "is known and being watched by other countries and will be remembered. And Russia can't escape it," Sanders said.

Still, Khodorkovsky's parents, who were present in the courtroom Tuesday and have attended most other hearings, voiced pessimism about the upcoming verdict.

"I don't think I'll ever see him again," Khodorkovsky's mother, Marina, 76, told reporters outside the courthouse.

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