

# Putin Denies Embezzlement Case Is Attempt to Silence Serebrennikov

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Director Kirill Serebrennikov **Nikerichev Andrei / Moskva News Agency**

President Vladimir Putin on Monday denied that embezzlement charges against Kirill Serebrennikov were an attempt to silence the high-profile theater director.

If authorities wanted to suppress Serebrennikov's work, "they would simply not give him any state money," Putin said at the BRICS summit in China. "That's the end of it."

The artistic director of Russia's leading avant-garde theater, the Gogol Center, has been accused of embezzling 68 million rubles (\$1.1 million) from Culture Ministry funds in a case that is widely suspected to be politically motivated.

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Citing prior criminal cases against the cultural elite, including the deputy director of the Hermitage Museum Mikhail Novikov and former Deputy Culture Minister Grigory Pirumov,

Putin asked: "Does anyone working in the cultural sphere get a free pass?"

"The authorities require nothing from Serebrennikov, except for one thing: compliance with the law when using state funds," Putin said, adding the director's guilt could only be determined by the court.

Serebrennikov was sentenced to house arrest in August and could face up to 10 years in prison.

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