

Tymoshenko husband attacks Ukraine leader from exile



Oleksandr Tymoshenko (AP/Olexander Prokopenko)

KIEV: The husband of Ukraine's jailed opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko said on Tuesday "enormous pressure" and persecution by President Viktor Yanukovich's government forced him to flee to the Czech Republic.

Oleksander Tymoshenko, 51, who was granted political asylum in the Czech Republic on Jan. 6, said in a statement that by fleeing abroad he had deprived Yanukovich of additional leverage over the opposition.

"The regime in Ukraine has not shied away from using dirty methods. They were not able to break Yulia Tymoshenko either through intimidation, the courts, imprisonment or torture. So they resorted to even uglier means. They began to persecute me and other members of her family," he said.

Yulia Tymoshenko, a charismatic politician, helped lead the 2004 Orange Revolution street protests which thwarted a first bid for the presidency by Yanukovich.

She went on to serve two terms as prime minister.

But, after Yanukovich made a comeback and beat her in an election for the presidency in Feb. 2010, criminal proceedings were brought against her and other members of the opposition culminating in her prosecution last year.

Exceeding powers

She was jailed for seven years in October on a charge of exceeding her powers by forcing through a 2009 gas deal with Russia as prime minister which the Yanukovich government says saddled Ukraine with an exorbitant price for gas.

The 51-year-old is now in prison in Kharkiv some 500 km (300 miles) away from the capital Kiev.

Her trial was condemned by the United States and the European Union as politically motivated and the affair has seriously strained Yanukovich's ties with the West.

Oleksander Tymoshenko, who kept a low profile during his wife's roller-coaster political career, is part owner of a business registered in the Czech Republic.

"I do not want to provide Yanukovich with any additional leverage against the opposition and for me political asylum is the only way to achieve this goal," he said in his statement.