The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

'Alien' Cult Leader Held on Sex Charges

By Alexandra Taranova

October 05, 2010



A self-proclaimed alien from the star Sirius has been arrested in Novosibirsk on charges of organizing a nationwide totalitarian sect that brainwashed and sexually abused members, police said Tuesday.

A local court on Saturday approved the arrest of Konstantin Rudnev, 43, leader of the Ashram Shambala religious group, a Novosibirsk police spokeswoman said by phone.

Rudnev was detained in a cottage owned by the group in Novosibirsk on Sept. 30 along with 38 followers, all citizens of Russia and Ukraine. Among them were four teenage girls whose parents had reported them as missing, police said in a statement.

A package containing 4 grams of heroin was found in the pocket of Rudnev's shirt, the statement said.

Ashram Shambala, established more than 20 years ago, grew into a powerful cult with branches in many cities across Russia in the late 1990s, the local branch of the Investigative

Committee said in a statement posted on its web site Tuesday.

Rudnev, who claimed to be an alien sent to Earth to enlighten mankind, combined Oriental esoterica and the writings of Carlos Castaneda with elements of yoga and shamanism in his teaching, investigators said. The group also offered yoga courses and self-help camps that attracted thousands of people.

Most of the group's members were young people aged 17 to 30 who were forced to leave home, friends and families under psychological and emotional pressure, investigators said.

Members were forced to turn over their property to Rudnev, and young female members had to participate in regular sexual orgies with him and other senior members, investigators said.

Law enforcement officers have spent 11 years attempting to bring Rudnev to court, but the previous three cases opened against him — in 1999, 2004 and 2008 — were closed because Ashram Shambala members refused to testify.

If convicted on charges of rape, sexual abuse and human rights violations, Rudnev faces up to 15 years in prison. Police are still considering whether to add heroin charges to the list.

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