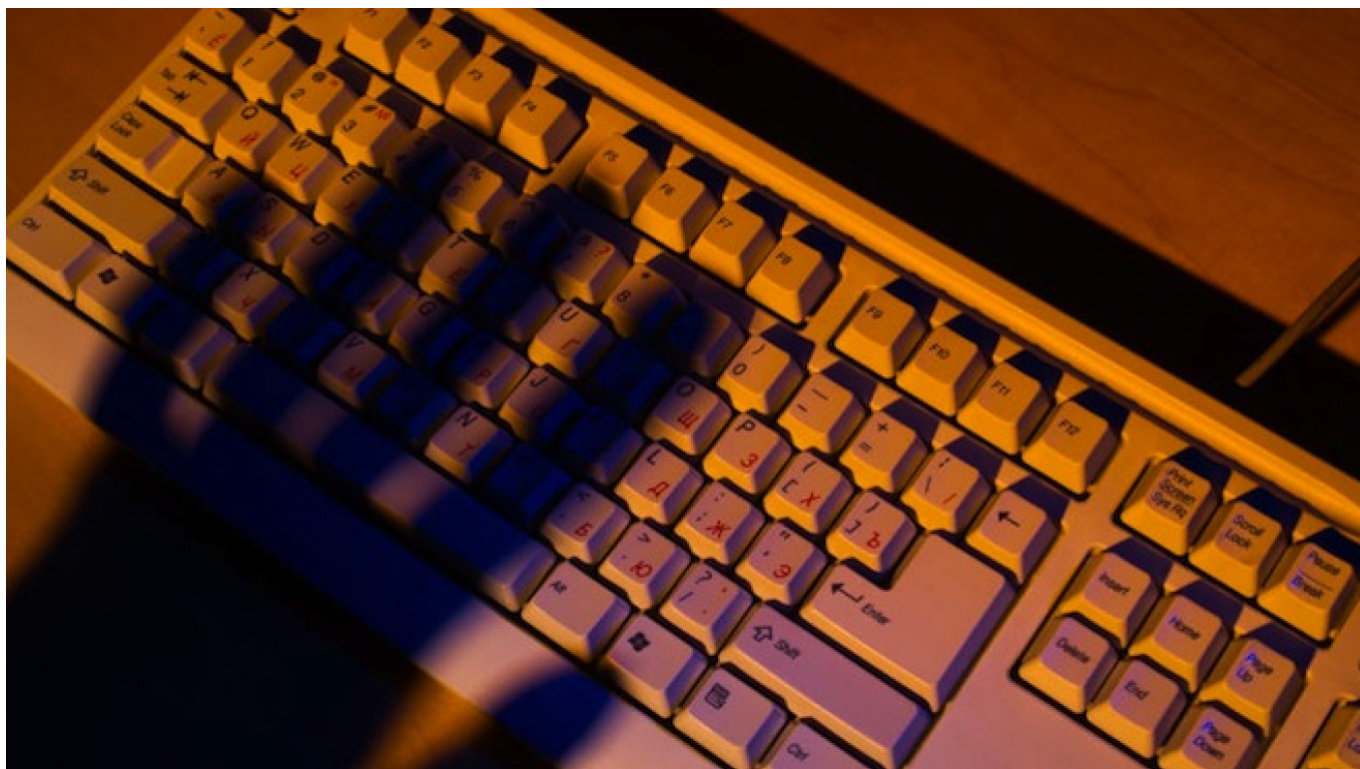


Russian Court Jails Blogger for Five Years for 'Extremist' Posts

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A Russian court on Wednesday sentenced a blogger to five years in jail for what it said was his extremist activity on the Internet after he urged people to attend a protest against high transport fares and criticised Russian intervention in Ukraine.

Vadim Tyumenstev, 35, from the Siberian region of Tomsk, was also banned from using the Internet for three years in a case which Russian human rights activists said violated his rights to a proper defence.

Tyumentsev irked local authorities in Tomsk with a series of blogs in which he accused them of corruption and incompetence. He had also sharply criticised pro-Kremlin separatists in eastern Ukraine, saying he did not see why ordinary Russians should go and fight with them.

A statement from Tomsk's regional court said Tyumentsev had urged people to overthrow the authorities, a reference to an appeal he made for people to attend an unsanctioned meeting to protest against a hike in local bus fares.

He had also urged people to take hostile action against Ukrainian refugees, the court said, referring to a video in which he complained about their presence in Tomsk and said they should be deported.

Footage of the sentencing showed Tyumentsev, clad in a thick grey sweater, standing in a courtroom cage making notes as he listened to the verdict. He said he would appeal.

The Memorial human rights group said the jail sentence was "outrageous" and called for the verdict to be overturned.

Pavel Pryanikov, a prominent Russian blogger, said the verdict recalled the excesses of the Stalin era and such behaviour should not be a criminal offence. "We have quietly returned to Stalinist sentencing for 'thought crimes'," he wrote.

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