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Russia Arrests Hypersonic Aircraft Chief on Treason Suspicion

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TASS

The head of Russia's long-running hypersonic aircraft program has been detained on charges of high treason, state media reported Thursday, citing unnamed sources.

Alexander Kuranov, 73, is the latest in a string of Russian scientists, academics and more to be suspected of passing state secrets to foreign countries in recent years.

Kuranov is the general director and chief designer of St. Petersburg's State Hypersonic Systems Research Institute, which is run by the Leninets holding company. As part of that role, he leads the Soviet-era Ayaks hypersonic craft program that has been under on-and-off development since the 1970s.

The state-run TASS news agency reported that Kuranov was detained in Moscow and that the Federal Security Service (FSB) asked the court to place him in pre-trial detention for two months.

The state-run RIA Novosti news agency later reported that the court ordered Kuranov to be placed under arrest on charges of state treason.

Kuranov is suspected of passing information on scientific advances containing state secrets to a foreign citizen, Interfax reported, citing one of its sources. Another source reportedly said that Kuranov held meetings and worked with foreign nationals.

“Representatives of the United States and China showed particular interest” in the Ayaks technology, they were quoted as saying.

HSRI’s website states that the research institute holds annual international workshops on “thermochemical processes in plasma aerodynamics” in St. Petersburg. The government daily Rossiiskaya Gazeta noted that Kuranov “maintains close ties with American colleagues” and “conducts work on orders from many countries around the world.”

Russia has stepped up its treason convictions since ties with the West deteriorated following its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

Critics have accused authorities of paranoia with the arrests of scientists, journalists and regular civilians on charges of sharing sensitive information with foreigners.

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