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Rogue Russian Monk Sentenced to 3.5 Years in Prison

By AFP

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Basmanny district court press service / Moskva News Agency

A Covid-denying rogue Russian monk who barricaded himself in a monastery last year with dozens of followers was sentenced to 3.5 years in prison on Tuesday.

A Moscow court found Father Sergiy — whose secular name is Nikolai Romanov — guilty of inciting suicide, offending religious beliefs and vigilantism, Russian news agencies reported.

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He was arrested in late December when Russian riot police and secret services stormed the convent he held in the Ural mountains.

Some of his followers resisted being removed from the convent in the dramatic night-time

raids, as the rebel cleric himself was flown to Moscow.

Sergiy sports a long grey beard and wears a black robe and hat with Orthodox crosses and other symbols on them.

A former policeman in the Soviet Union, he rose to fame in Russia last year after publicly denying the existence of Covid when it reached the country, calling on Russians to resist virus restrictions.

Sergiy had reportedly called on some of his followers to "die for Russia," and prosecutors accused him of trying to encourage several nuns to commit suicide.

The monk had been ex-communicated by the Russian Orthodox Church last year.

He held the female convent outside the Ural city of Yekaterinburg for several months, despite church authorities ordering him to leave.

Local state authorities had initially stayed out of the church dispute, but eventually sent in riot police, the National Guard and the FSB security service to the convent — reportedly on Moscow's orders.

The Russian Orthodox Church believes Sergiy to be divisive and says his sermons are blasphemous.

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