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Top Russian Hypersonic Scientist Sentenced to 7 Years for Treason

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Scientist Alexander Kuranov in court in 2021. **Press Service of the Lefortovo Court of Moscow**

A top Russian scientist developing hypersonic technologies has been sentenced to seven years in prison on charges of state treason, a spokeswoman for St. Petersburg's judiciary said Thursday.

Alexander Kuranov, the head of a St. Petersburg state research institute who oversaw the Soviet-era Ayaks hypersonic aircraft program, was arrested in 2021 at age 73.

Investigators reportedly accused Kuranov of working with and passing secrets on scientific advances to foreign nationals.

St. Petersburg's City Court found Kuranov, 76, guilty of state treason and sentenced him to seven years in a high-security prison, said Daria Lebedeva, who heads the city's judicial press service. He was also fined 100,000 rubles ($1,000), she added.

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Lebedeva noted that it took two trials to reach the verdict. She did not specify which mitigating circumstances contributed to the sentence, which was lower than the 12-year maximum under Russian law.

"The case was heard behind closed doors due to the presence of a 'Top Secret' stamp," Lebedeva wrote on the messaging app Telegram.

Russia has stepped up treason convictions since ties with the West deteriorated following its annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Supreme Court data analyzed by independent media this week showed record numbers of convictions for state treason, espionage and disclosure of state secrets in 2023.

Critics have slammed the arrests of scientists, journalists and regular civilians on charges of sharing sensitive information with foreigners as examples of the state's paranoia.

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