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Trial Begins in Russia for Former Navalny Lawyers

By AFP

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Igor Sergunin, Alexei Liptser and Vadim Kobzev. **Alexander Nemenov / AFP**

A Russian court on Thursday put three lawyers who used to represent the late opposition activist Alexei Navalny on trial over "extremism" charges.

Navalny died in unclear circumstances at an Arctic prison colony in February, where he was serving a 19-year sentence for leading an "extremist" organization.

Since his death, authorities in Russia have arrested journalists who covered his court hearings and added his wife Yulia Navalnaya to the country's list of "terrorists and extremists."

The trial of three of his former lawyers — Vadim Kobzev, Alexei Liptser and Igor Sergunin — opened Thursday in a court in the Vladimir region east of Moscow, AFP journalists in the courtroom reported.

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Arrested in October 2023, the trio are accused of participating in an "extremist" organization, charges which carry a maximum of six years.

Investigators say the men passed messages between Navalny and his associates during his imprisonment, thus helping the activist continue his political activity from behind bars.

At the time, Navalny's team alleged the arrest of the lawyers was an attempt to isolate him even further, as he spent most of his time in solitary confinement.

At a pre-trial hearing, Sergunin pleaded guilty, according to independent media reports, while Kobzev and Liptser rejected the charges. The judge overseeing the trial later ruled to close the hearing to the public and journalists were escorted from the courtroom.

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