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Founder of Siberia's Infamous 'Stalin Center' Arrested on Fraud Charges

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Sergei Matasov. **Video grab**

Authorities in Russia's Altai region arrested the founder of a Siberian cultural center dedicated to Soviet dictator Josef Stalin on suspicion of fraud, state media reported Friday.

Sergei Matasov, who leads the regional chapter of the Communists of Russia party in the Altai legislative assembly, is accused of falsely employing two relatives between 2021 and 2025 and pocketing their salaries. The Communists of Russia party is distinct from the larger Communist Party of the Russian Federation.

Authorities estimate the damages at 3.25 million rubles ($35,800). Matasov faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted of large-scale fraud.

Police footage published by the state-run TASS news agency showed plainclothes officers and masked security agents escorting Matasov from his office into a law enforcement building.

Related article: Siberian Communists Unveil New 'Stalin Center'

Matasov founded the Stalin Center, a self-described "cultural and historical" center dedicated to the Soviet leader, in the Altai regional capital of Barnaul in December 2023.

The center announced it would close for "brief reconstruction" starting Thursday, after Matasov was reportedly questioned by security services last month.

On Wednesday, the 72nd anniversary of Stalin's death, a group of anonymous activists plastered the Stalin Center with anti-Stalin signs.

Local media reported that one activist said the group staged the protest after the Stalin Center hosted a New Year's party in December where children were encouraged to chase away a pirate-like character called "Barmaley the Liberal."

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