The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

January 01, 2018



Presidential New Year

In his yearly televised speech before midnight on Dec. 31, President Vladimir Putin thanked Russians for their work and achievements.

“Let everyone be healthy, have children who bring you joy,” he told viewers in a speech which lasted some four minutes. “I wish you success and wellbeing. Peace and prosperity for our loved and unique great Russia. Be happy.”

Bomb threats

Anonymous callers phoned in bomb threats to four shopping centers in Moscow on New Year's Eve. False threats were also made to five airports — in Moscow, Kemerovo, Magadan, Volgograd and Kazan.

Harsher Punishment

Putin signed a law Dec. 31 increasing the maximum punishment for "telephone terrorism" from five to ten years in prison.

Fines have also been increased to 700,000 rubles ($12,000) for threats to public buildings and to one million rubles or six to eight years of imprisonment for "destabilizing government bodies."

Bomber Arrested

The Federal Security Service (FSB) has arrested a suspect in the Dec. 27 bombing of the Perekryostok store in St. Petersburg in which 18 people were injured.

Dmitry Lukyanenko, 35, has been described by police as a drug user and a member of a nationalist movement called New Age, the news agency Interfax reports.

Police said Lukyanenko confessed to being motivated by "hate towards the organizers and followers of psychological trainings which he had previously attended."

Putin has called the supermarket bombing an act of terrorism.

Red Square Shootout

Two people have been injured in a shooting near Red Square on Sunday.

The shooter was allegedly motivated by jealousy when he fired shots at a 29-year-old man and a 26-year-old woman on Moscow's Nikolskaya Ulitsa, the state-run RIA Novosti agency reports, adding the suspect has been detained.

Navalny Rejected

Russia's Supreme Court has rejected an appeal from opposition leader Alexei Navalny against a decision to bar him from taking part in presidential elections in March, his lawyer has tweeted.

The judge found no grounds for satisfying the appeal, citing a rule prohibiting those with a criminal conviction from running for office.

Following the Supreme Court decision, Navalny called for a boycott of the elections.

Fuel Supply

Russian tankers have supplied fuel to North Korea at least three times in recent months by unloading cargoes at sea, Reuters reports, citing two western European security sources.

"There is no evidence that this is backed by the Russian state but these Russian vessels are giving a lifeline to the North Koreans," one of the sources was cited as saying.

Troll Move

The Internet Research Agency has moved premises to the Lakhta-2 business center in St. Petersburg.

The so-called Kremlin troll factory has been accused of attempting to influence the U.S. 2016 elections through numerous social media accounts and fake news reports.

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