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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

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Foreign fans on the Moscow subway/ Aleksandr Avilov/ Moskva News Agency

Fans and taxes

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a series of bills into law, including legislation granting visa-free travel for World Cup Fan ID holders until the end of 2018 and raising the Value-Added Tax (VAT) from 18 percent to 20 percent in 2019.

Midair collision

Fifteen oil workers heading to their shift at an oil-pumping station in eastern Siberia, along with three flight crew, died when their helicopter crashed into the cargo of an adjacent helicopter.

The Mi-8 helicopter knocked into the load as both aircraft were completing take-off from the Vankor Field area in the Krasnoyarsk region. The oil field is operated by Russian oil giant

Rosneft.

Defiant pride

Twenty-five LGBT activists have been detained in St. Petersburg's Palace Square for holding an unsanctioned rally.

Campaigners were seen being detained by police and dragged into a police bus after unfurling rainbow flags or holding placards.

Higher wages

The State Statistics Service, Rosstat, reported an 11.2 percent wage growth in the first half of 2018.

The average Russian earned 42,550 rubles ($670) from January to June of this year, compared to 38,049 rubles ($600) from January to June 2017, Rosstat said.

Over the top

Russia's media watchdog Roskomnadzor has exceeded its authority in blacklisting millions of IP addresses this spring as part of an effort to ban the Telegram messaging app, the Prosecutor General's Office reportedly said in a lawsuit brought by a firm whose address was blacklisted.

The Prosecutor General's Office said that an earlier ruling only gave Roskomnadzor permission to ban seven Telegram accounts and four bypassing tools.

Related article: Russian Deputies Prioritize Visa-Free Entry Law for World Cup Fans

Korean sanctions

The United States imposed sanctions on Moscow-based Agrosoyuz Commercial Bank for a transaction related to North Korea. In response, the deputy Russian foreign minister said that U.S. attempts to pressure Moscow would not be effective.

The U.S. Treasury Department said Agrosoyuz conducted "a significant transaction" for North Korea's primary foreign exchange bank suspected of helping to finance the nuclear weapons program.

Earlier in the week, Russia denied a Wall Street Journal report that it was granting work permits to thousands of North Korean laborers that U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley said breached UN sanctions.

Foreign liaison

Hollywood actor and Russian passport-holder Steven Seagal was named a humanitarian envoy by the Foreign Ministry, which likened his role in deepening Russian-American

cultural ties to that of a UN goodwill ambassador.

“I have worked tirelessly in this direction for many years unofficially and I am now very grateful for the opportunity to do the same thing officially,” Seagal was cited by Kremlin-backed broadcaster RT as saying. Seagal’s movies are popular with Russian audiences.

Holy bloggers

The Russian Orthodox Church put out instructions for video blogger priests, urging them to “speak the target audience’s language,” including through memes, but bans the use of “hype, clickbait and trolling.”

“Video blogging can be viewed as a direct continuation of the priest’s pastoral activities, considering that the boundaries of the parish community are significantly expanding in this case,” the Church said.

“Unlike the sermon, video blogging allows the expression of emotions, self-irony, good-hearted jokes, moderate gesturing and other nonverbal modes of communication,” the guidance noted.

Synchronized winners

Synchronized Russian swimmers Svetlana Kolesnichenko, 24, and Varvara Subbotina, 17, were crowned as the champions at the inaugural multi-sports European Championships in Glasgow. Their compatriots Alexander Maltsev, 23, and Mayya Gurbanberdieva, 19, then underlined their country's familiar dominance in synchronized swimming events by taking the duet technical mixed title.

Russia’s strong showing continued into the next day when it won the country’s third successive title in two days of competition.

Broken records

Also at the championship, Russian swimmer Kliment Kolesnikov broke the 50-meter backstroke world record at 24.00 seconds, while Yulia Yefimova broke her own championship record in the 100-meter breaststroke final to claim gold.

Altogether, Russia launched into the upper echelons of the European Championships by winning 10 gold, six silver and five bronze medals.

Includes reporting from Reuters.

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