

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

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Mikhail Pochuyev / TASS

Pension protests

Scores of Russians [protested](#) around the country on Sunday against planned increases to the pension age in a series of rallies called by jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny as a challenge to authorities holding regional elections on the same day.

According to OVD-Info, a human rights organization that monitors detentions, 50 Navalny supporters were detained by police in the run-up to the protests. A further 1,018 people, mostly in St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, had been [detained](#) in 33 cities during protests on Sunday, said OVD-Info.

Syria attacks

Russian and Syrian warplanes pounded towns in Syria's opposition-held Idlib province on

Saturday, the day after a summit in which the leaders of Turkey, Iran and Russia failed to agree on a ceasefire that would forestall a Russian-backed offensive against rebels.

Witnesses said a dozen airstrikes [hit](#) a string of villages and towns in southern Idlib and a town in northern Hama, where rebels are still in control.

Intensive strikes [resumed](#) in Idlib and Hama on Sunday, according to residents and rescuers, who said Syrian army helicopters dropped barrel bombs — typically filled with high explosives and shrapnel — on hamlets and villages.

Chemical claims

Russia's military said that two U.S. F-15 fighter jets [dropped](#) phosphorus bombs over Syria's Deir al-Zor province on Saturday, the TASS and RIA news agencies reported. The air strikes targeted the village of Hadjin and resulted in fires, but there was no information about casualties, the Russian military said.

A Pentagon spokesman denied that U.S. planes dropped phosphorus bombs, which human rights groups have said have been used by the U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State over the course of the Syria conflict.

Islamic State is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

Related article: [Russia Accuses U.S. of Staging Another Chemical Attack in Syria](#)

Voting snag

President Vladimir Putin [encountered](#) technical problems casting his ballot for Sergei Sobyenin, Moscow's incumbent mayor and Putin's former chief of staff. Putin's ballot was rejected by the voting machine twice, before he managed to feed his paper in successfully.

Sobyenin [cruised](#) to victory in the election with 69.72 percent of the vote.

Spaced out

Engineers at Samara University have [developed](#) a nanosatellite engine prototype that runs on a mixture of vodka and water that they say could lower costs and optimize space satellites.

“The addition of alcohol [about 40 percent of the mixture] prevents the working body from freezing at low temperatures in near-Earth orbits,” the researchers said, noting the mixture was safe because it had no self-igniting components, was non-toxic and didn't cause environmental damage.

Costly weapons

Vietnam has [placed](#) orders for Russian weapons and military services worth more than \$1 billion, Russia's TASS news agency has reported. The announcement was made during a visit by the general secretary of Vietnam's Communist Party to Russia.

No details were given of the deals between Hanoi and Moscow, Vietnam's biggest weapons supplier.

Vietnam has been one of the world's most active arms importers in recent years amid China's increasingly aggressive territorial claims in the South China Sea, where the neighbors have long-standing rival claims.

Related article: [Voting Violations Don't Cast Doubts on Putin's Victory, Election Head Claims](#)

American predator

An American English teacher in St. Petersburg has been placed under [arrest](#) until Nov. 3 on suspicion of sexual assault against two 9-year-old boys. Bjorn Richard West, 47, is [alleged](#) to have resided in Russia without proper documentation since 2012.

Authorities in St. Petersburg said West had a [record](#) of committing crimes toward minors of a sexual nature in the United States.

Dessert bombs

Revelers were left wondering if they were being tricked or treated when a local pastry company [flung](#) 150 kilograms of a brownie-like dessert called kartoshkas (potato in Russian) into a crowd during a city festival in the town of Tomsk.

The Antonov Dvor company weighed its pastry for the local book of records before volunteers started throwing handfuls of the packaged sweets to the crowd at a food fair, Vtomske.ru reported. All the tarts were reportedly gone in 30 minutes.

Bridge troubles

A large floating cane propelled by high winds during a heavy storm [crashed](#) into a bridge in Crimea, leading to a partial closure of the road. The Kerch Bridge, which spans the Kerch Strait, was recently opened.

Includes reporting from Reuters.

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