

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

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Andrei Ishchenko / Facebook

Election scandal

A Communist Party candidate in the Far East Primorye region has accused the authorities of election rigging after losing runoff gubernatorial elections to the ruling party candidate.

Citing official figures, Andrei Ishchenko said he had been up by 6 points in the race after 97 percent of all voting precincts had been counted, before a last-minute shift in the vote count put United Russia's Andrei Tarasenko in first place.

Ishchenko has [declared](#) a hunger strike and a crowd of supporters temporarily [occupied](#) the administration building in Vladivostok to protest what they argue is election fraud.

Pension protests

Around 500 people demonstrated in St. Petersburg against government plans to increase

Russia's pension age, a week after hundreds were detained for protesting against the reform that has hurt President Vladimir Putin's approval rating.

OVD-Info, a human rights organization that monitors detentions, said that three people had been detained during the rally.

Novichok redux

Two people fell ill while eating at a restaurant in Salisbury, the English city where former Russian agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were poisoned in March, police said. One of the two people taken ill at the restaurant is Russian, the Sky News broadcaster [said](#), citing sources.

In a statement, Wiltshire Police said there was nothing to suggest the incident at the Prezzo restaurant involved the Novichok nerve agent and that it was not clear whether a crime had been committed. Inquiries were continuing, police said.

Military links

The two Skripal poisoning suspects' alleged passport data was found to contain a "top-secret" designation typically reserved for top state or secret service operatives, according to the Bellingcat open-source investigative team and The Insider publication, as well as the [Proekt](#) news outlet.

Novaya Gazeta [linked](#) a phone number on Alexander Petrov's passport file to the Russian Defense Ministry, whose staffer reportedly [hung up](#) after [confirming](#) that callers had gotten through to the ministry.

Prying eyes

Switzerland has demanded that Russia cease any spying activities on its territory after two suspected espionage cases came to light in recent days.

Switzerland's intelligence agency said it had worked with British and Dutch counterparts to foil a Russian plot which, according to newspaper reports, was targeting a Swiss laboratory testing nerve agents such as Novichok.

The Swiss newspaper Sonntags-Zeitung said that according to a Swiss intelligence agency estimate, one in four Russian diplomats in Switzerland are or had worked as intelligence officers.

Free press

Police have reportedly [detained](#) three journalists and seized copies of the self-described "counterculture almanac" Moloko Plus at a presentation in Nizhny Novgorod over claims that they were distributing extremist literature.

The Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers [said](#) its co-chairman and Moloko Plus founder Pavel Nikulin faces up to 15 days behind bars for disobeying police orders. Journalists Mikhail Shubin and Sofiko Arifdzhanova were also being held with Nikulin, the union said.

Coming around

An anti-Kremlin activist lost his sight, hearing and ability to walk in a suspected poisoning last week but is [doing better](#) since he arrived in Berlin for treatment, according to a fellow member of the Pussy Riot band.

Pyotr Verzilov was flown to Berlin on a special medical transport plane late on Saturday, German newspaper Bild said, publishing a photograph of Verzilov on a stretcher at the airport.

Sporting behavior

The World Anti-Doping Agency said that its compliance review committee (CRC) had [recommended the reinstatement](#) of Russian anti-doping agency RUSADA, which has been suspended since 2015 over alleged state-backed doping.

It later emphasised that Russian officials will have to submit a copy of the former Moscow laboratory database and raw data if the country's anti-doping agency RUSADA is to be reinstated later this month.

Chinese sanctions

A number of Chinese banks have refused services to Russian banking customers in “an extended interpretation” of third-party sanctions levied on Russia, the head of the Russian Central Bank’s China branch has [said](#).

Chinese banks have tightened demands and “often cite EU and U.S. sanctions” as reasons for refusing services, he was cited as saying.

Baby baton

A first-grader who was dressed up as an OMON riot police officer in a children’s parade in Chelyabinsk has sparked [controversy](#) on social media following the forces’ violent detention of protesters last week.

The photo of the severe-looking boy being fitted with a helmet and bulletproof vest while holding a baton has gone viral and turned into a meme on the Russian internet.

Includes reporting from Reuters.

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