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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

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Alexei Pavlishak / TASS

Naval standoff

Russia seized three Ukrainian naval ships off the coast of Russia-annexed Crimea on Sunday after opening fire on them and wounding several sailors, a move that risks igniting a dangerous new crisis between the two countries.

Russia had earlier in the day stopped three Ukrainian navy vessels from entering the Sea of Azov via the Kerch Strait by placing a huge cargo ship beneath a Russian-controlled bridge.

Syrian escalation

The Russian Defense Ministry said on Sunday that its warplanes had carried out airstrikes against militants in Syria who had fired shells filled with chlorine gas at the city of Aleppo.

The ministry said that 46 civilians had been injured in the chemical attack that was launched

from an area in the Idlib de-escalation zone controlled by Nusra Front militants. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said it was the first time that Russian warplanes had struck rebel territory in northwest Syria since Moscow and Ankara agreed to create a buffer zone there in September.

Falling ratings

The percentage of people who say they would be willing to cast their ballots for President Vladimir Putin has dropped by nearly 20 points in the past six months, according to a new survey published by the state-funded FOM pollster.

In the latest poll, 45 percent of respondents said they would vote for Putin in the nearest elections, while 64 percent said the same in May, marking a fall in Putin's electoral ratings to pre-Crimean annexation levels.

No entry

Andrei Ishchenko, a Communist candidate who says he won the gubernatorial race in Russia's Far East region of Primorye in September, has been barred from running in a rerun of the vote scheduled for Dec. 16.

Regional election officials have registered the signatures of five candidates for the post, including that of acting governor Oleg Kozhemyako, who was appointed by President Vladimir Putin after the results of the previous runoff election in September were annulled.

Banned music

Russian authorities reportedly attempted to disrupt two concerts by electronic duo IC3PEAK in Nizhny Novgorod and Kazan over the weekend, days after the popular young rapper Husky was detained in Krasnodar.

A parent group in Tver has appealed to the authorities to cancel an upcoming gig by popular artist Yegor Krid, whose show in Muslim-majority Dagestan was canceled earlier this year following an outcry over his lyrics from local residents.

Moon landing

The outspoken head of Russia's space agency, Dmitry Rogozin, has suggested that a new Russian lunar program will investigate whether the U.S. moon landing was real.

The space agency, Roscosmos, later said Rogozin's remarks were a joke.

Wasted effort

An unfortunate culprit shattered an ATM in the city of Samara in broad daylight and took off with what turned out to be a tray of counterfeit bills.

CCTV footage published by the Interior Ministry captured a man tearing open the automatic teller machine, ripping out a part of it and walking away with a tray.

Includes reporting from Reuters.

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