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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

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Lyudmila Alexeyeva (Bernd von Jutrczenka / DPA / TASS)

Rights Champion Dies

Lyudmila Alexeyeva, a human rights veteran and dissident who challenged the Soviet and Russian regimes for decades, died on Saturday in a Moscow hospital at the age of 91.

Alexeyeva was one of the founders of the Moscow Helsinki Group human rights organization in 1976 and was a stalwart advocate for the release of political prisoners and the establishment of democratic rights in Russia.

Sentence reduced

A Russian court reduced the sentence of Lev Ponomaryov, a prominent human rights defender and critic of President Vladimir Putin, from 25 days to 16 days in jail on Friday night.

He was detained last week for allegedly organizing a protest earlier this year against the arrest

of a group of teenagers accused of extremism. The activist reportedly asked the court on Sunday to allow him to attend the funeral of Lyudmila Alexeyeva.

Ruling party

The ruling United Russia party held a large congress on Sunday in Moscow that was attended by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, who leads the party, as well as President Vladimir Putin.

At the congress, Medvedev said he was "proud that the party had made a contribution" to Vladimir Putin's victory in the 2018 presidential election.

Friendly call

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu briefed Russian President Vladimir Putin on Israel's crackdown last week along its border with Lebanon on tunnels it said were dug by Hezbollah, the Kremlin said on Saturday.

During their phone call, initiated by Netanyahu, "The President of Russia stressed the importance of ensuring stability in the region," the Kremlin statement said.

Gucci priest

A Russian Orthodox priest is being investigated by the church's ethic committee over a series of pictures posted on Instagram in which he is seen wearing luxury clothing brands, including Gucci shoes and Louis Vuitton slippers.

A church spokesman was cited as saying that the pictures were an example of bad taste and would be investigated. The Instagram account that sparked the controversy has since been taken offline.

More bribes

Russia's Prosecutor General's Office recorded a 10 percent increase in bribes in 2018 compared to the previous year, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported, citing the government's portal for crime statistics.

The largest increase was reported in Moscow and the Moscow and Krasnodar regions.

French connection

Dozens of social media accounts linked to Russia have been active in promoting recent street protests in France, according to analysis by the New Knowledge cybersecurity company cited by The Times daily newspaper.

The Times' report says that about 200 Russian-linked accounts have spread disinformation by using photographs of injured protesters from other events to bolster a narrative of police brutality.

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