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News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

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Igor Ivanko / Moskva News Agency

Crimean spring

Two hundred bikers unfurled a giant Russian flag, kicking off celebrations in Sevastopol marking the fifth anniversary of Moscow's annexation of the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine.

The Night Wolves motorcycle club, a favorite of President Vladimir Putin, drove in a motorcade through the city and spread a 1,423-square-meter white, blue and red banner on the highest hill in the outskirts.

Auspicious action

The United States, Canada and the European Union have imposed fresh sanctions to punish Russia for its 2018 attack on three Ukrainian ships as well as its annexation of Crimea and its activities in eastern Ukraine.

The U.S. Treasury said it targeted four members of Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) for their involvement in the naval clash in the Kerch Strait linking the Black and Azov seas near Crimea. In a coordinated announcement, Canada imposed sanctions on 114 people and 15 entities in response to Russia's military action against the Ukrainian ships, while the EU sanctioned eight more Russians over the standoff.

Sanctions strike back

Russia's Foreign Ministry said it will respond to new EU sanctions without specifying what action it would take.

"The excuse for placing our fellow countrymen on the European Union's illegitimate sanctions lists amazes with its hypocrisy and cynicism," it said, adding that the individuals targeted were simply doing their jobs.

Related article: Tycoon Deripaska Sues U.S. Over Sanctions

'Annoyance claim'

Russian tycoon Oleg Deripaska sued the United States, alleging that it had overstepped its legal bounds in imposing sanctions on him and made him the "latest victim" in the U.S. probe into Moscow's alleged election interference.

Deripaska, who secured a spot among Russia's elite group of oligarchs after prevailing in the "aluminum wars" of the 1990s, said the sanctions rendered him a pariah shunned by business partners and banks, and had erased four-fifths of his net worth.

Lifted ban

The International Paralympic Committee has lifted Russia's two-and-a-half-year suspension from competition, with extra drug testing and a ban on government officials from the Russian Paralympic Committee set as conditions.

The IPC put Russia on probation through 2022 after its president Andrew Parsons said the country had "disappointingly" not done enough to admit and atone for previous doping and cover-ups.

Related article: Record Audience Watched 'Best World Cup Ever' in Russia, FIFA Says

Football profits

FIFA named the 2018 World Cup that Russia hosted over the summer its most profitable championship in history with a revenue of $5.36 billion.

More than half of the world's population – 3.5 billion people – watched the World Cup, the sport's governing body said.

New course

Several hundred opposition activists gathered in Moscow to demand major changes in the government, parliament and the Central Bank; nationalization of national resources; and the establishment of a social welfare state.

The rally, called "For justice, for Russia, for the new course," united a number of left-wing and nationalist parties and movements.

Illegal proselytizing

A court in southern Russia has fined two American citizens volunteering for the Mormon Church for illegal missionary work and ordered their deportation.

Previous reports said Kole Brodowski and David Udo Gaag were found guilty of violating immigration laws and charged with teaching English without a license.

Baltic buildup

Russia has added a battalion of S-400 missile defense systems in Kaliningrad region, the country's westernmost enclave, the latest upgrade to Russia's presence in the Baltic Sea since 2016.

The Kremlin has previously justified the deployments as purely defensive, saying they were a response to a U.S. missile shield being developed in eastern Europe.

Time reversal

A team from the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology used a quantum system program to reverse the state of a quantum computer a fraction of a second into the past.

"This is one in a series of papers on the possibility of violating the second law of thermodynamics. That law is closely related to the notion of the arrow of time that posits the one-way direction of time from the past to the future," said the study's lead author Gordey Lesovik.

Spotted meteor

A glowing object resembling a meteor has been filmed falling in the Siberian region of Krasnoyarsk.

Local television cited a senior physics institute researcher as saying that the luminous body was likely 10 centimeters in diameter.

Going green

Russians celebrated Irish culture with a St. Patrick's Day parade in Moscow and a folk music festival in St. Petersburg.

NZ solidarity

The lights on Moscow's Ostankino Tower were turned off for one hour as a symbol of mourning for those who were killed in the mosque shootings in New Zealand.

Includes reporting from Reuters.

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