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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

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Russia marked muted Victory Day celebrations with only military plane flyovers and a fireworks display as authorities urged Russians to stay home. **Anton Novoderezhkin / TASS**

Victory Day

Russia marked muted Victory Day celebrations with only military plane flyovers and a fireworks display as authorities urged Russians to stay home amid the coronavirus lockdown. President Vladimir Putin, in his first public appearance since April 1, told Russians they are "invincible" when they stand together as he presided over the slimmed-down ceremony.

In neighboring Belarus, 4,000 troops marched before crowds of spectators despite the coronavirus pandemic and planes and helicopters flew overhead in Minsk to mark 75 years since the defeat of Nazi Germany. Central Asia's Turkmenistan was the only other ex-Soviet country to say it would mark Victory Day this year with a parade; it has not officially reported any coronavirus cases.

Excess mortality

Moscow recorded roughly 20% more fatalities in April 2020 (11,846) compared to its average April mortality total over the past decade (9,866), according to newly published preliminary data from Moscow's civil registry office.

The data comes as Russia sees the fastest growth in coronavirus infections in Europe, while its mortality rate of 0.9% remains much lower than in many countries. The numbers suggest that the city's statistics of coronavirus deaths, standing at 1,915 as of Sunday, may be higher in reality than official numbers indicate.

Covid hospital fire

One person died after a fire broke out in a hospital treating nearly 700 coronavirus patients in northern Moscow, forcing an evacuation, emergencies officials said Saturday.

The emergencies services in Moscow said in a statement that one person died and 200 had to be escorted from the Spasokukotsky hospital No. 50. It was not clear what started the fire or whether it impacted the wing housing coronavirus patients.

Space debris

Russia's space agency confirmed that its Fregat-SB rocket used in past launches and floating in space has broken down, leaving debris in orbit.

A U.S Air Force unit tracking space debris reported the Fregat's disintegration on Twitter, saying it broke up into 65 pieces and did not appear to be caused by a collision.

What abuse?

Russia's Interior Ministry said it has recorded around 25% fewer domestic abuse cases in April 2020, a month when most of the country was under coronavirus lockdown, than in April 2019. The figures contradict the top human rights official's estimate, based on calls to domestic abuse hotlines, that domestic violence cases have more than doubled.

The ministry also declined to impose stricter administrative punishments for battery and justified the 2017 decriminalization of first-time domestic abuse offenses, saying "it helped reveal a significant number of latent acts."

Includes reporting from AFP.

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