

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

March 15, 2021



A giant wooden castle representing the coronavirus was burned at the open-air art park Nikola-Lenivets for Maslenitsa, the Russian festival marking the beginning of spring. **Stanislav Krasilnikov / TASS**

Mass arrests

Russian police on Saturday arrested around 200 opposition politicians and municipal deputies at a Moscow conference as authorities tighten the screws on Kremlin critics ahead of parliamentary elections.

While Russian police routinely break up opposition protests, the mass arrests of well-known opposition figures including Ilya Yashin, Vladimir Kara-Murza, Yulia Galyamina, Yevgeny Roizman and Andrei Pivovarov as well as journalists was unprecedented.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called for an end to "persecution of independent voices," noting the Kremlin had detained these people "on dubious grounds."

Katyusha-less

The Court of Arbitration for Sport has [rejected](#) Russia's proposal to use the patriotic World War II-era folk song "Katyusha" as a replacement anthem for the Tokyo Olympics.

Russia will compete this summer and in next year's Beijing Winter Olympics as "ROC" for Russian Olympic Committee, in accordance with its two-year ban on the team name, flag and national anthem.

Senator's death

Russian senator and deputy chairman of the Federation Council's economic policy committee Mikhail Ponomaryov has died of [cardiac arrest](#) at age 67.

Ponomaryov is at least the third person from the 100-member legislative body to have died in the past year.

Watching you

Russian scientists on Saturday launched one of the world's biggest underwater space telescopes to peer deep into the universe from the pristine waters of Lake Baikal.

Dubbed Baikal-GVD, the telescope submerged to a depth of 750-1,300 meters (2,500-4,300 feet) around four kilometers from the lake's shore, is designed to observe neutrinos. Neutrinos, the smallest particles currently known, are very hard to detect and water is an effective medium for doing so.

Free shots

St. Petersburg football fans were [treated](#) to free Sputnik V vaccine shots ahead of home team Zenit's match against Akhmat Grozny on Saturday. Reuters reported that the service was available for two hours before and after the game, which was attended by 22,500 people.

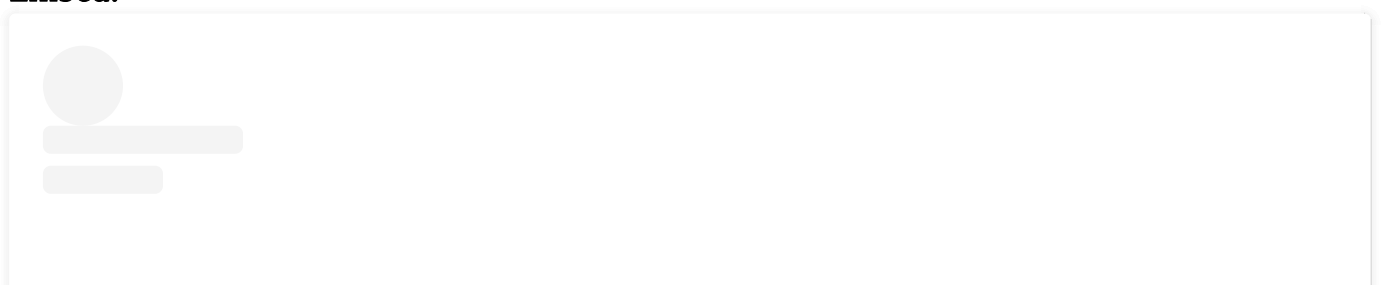
Russia's vaccination rollout has so far been slower than in other countries, with polls this month saying nearly two-thirds of Russians don't want to take Sputnik V.

Burning man

A giant wooden castle representing the coronavirus was burned at the open-air art park Nikola-Lenivets for Maslenitsa, Russia's weeklong Shrovetide that marks the start of spring.

The castle's creator Nikolai Polissky [compared](#) Covid-19 to "an evil wizard or cannibal," saying that the traditional burning would allow "to finally do away with him."

Embed:





[View this post on Instagram](#)



A post shared by Никола-Ленивец (арт-парк) (@nikolaleni vets)

Nude dash

A Russian performance artist was detained after he stripped down and sprinted naked across a snowy Red Square on Saturday.

Ilya Kachayev had written on social media that his performance referenced Fyodor Dostoevsky's story "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," explaining that "this is a story about a downtrodden, disillusioned person who finds himself on a planet of open and happy people. With me, it's the other way around."

Embed:

The independent OVD-Info police monitor and Dozhd broadcaster [reported](#) Sunday that Kachayev had been taken to a psychiatric clinic.

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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