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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

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Ambulance crew members put on protective gear in Moscow. **Sergei Karpukhin / TASS**

Steep toll

Russia recorded more than 460,000 excess deaths during the first 12 months of the coronavirus pandemic, according to analysis of official statistics published by the Rosstat federal statistics agency.

In its latest report published Friday, Rosstat data showed 38,000 more people died in March 2021 compared to the same month in 2020 — the last time the country reported numbers of deaths close to what would be expected.

Related article: Russia's Pandemic Excess Death Toll Passes 460K

Blacklist hitback

European Union chiefs on Friday slammed Russian sanctions that hit top Brussels officials

and warned the bloc could strike back at the Kremlin in the latest row with Moscow.

Moscow on Friday put eight European officials, including the president of the European Parliament David Sassoli and Commission vice-president Vera Jourova, on a blacklist in retaliation for EU sanctions against Russian officials over abuses including the jailing of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

Sweden summoned Russia's ambassador to Stockholm on Saturday, denouncing Moscow for sanctioning officials including a Swedish researcher.

Unwelcome allegations

Three Russian tycoons and the state-controlled Rosneft oil giant have filed libel and data protection lawsuits against the publisher of author Catherine Belton's acclaimed 2020 book "Putin's People," FT reported.

Billionaire Roman Abramovich previously filed a defamation lawsuit over the book, which centers on the rise of President Vladimir Putin and his relationship with wealthy oligarchs.

The billionaires — Mikhail Fridman, his longtime business partner Peter Aven and real estate tycoon Shalva Chigirinsky — and Rosneft filed the suits in March and April, around the one-year deadline for libel actions in British law, FT reported.

Central Asian tensions

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on Saturday claimed a breakthrough in their bid to end the worst clashes at their shared border in memory with working groups to enforce a ceasefire agreement.

Russia said it hoped the countries where Moscow maintains military bases would "strictly follow the commitments made" during bilateral talks, according to a Russian Foreign Ministry readout.

Football champ

Zenit St. Petersburg claimed a third successive Russian Premier League title on Sunday after a 6-1 rout of Lokomotiv Moscow.

Zenit have now won the Russian Premier League title seven times, three fewer than the record of 10 held by Spartak Moscow since the post-Soviet championship started in 1992.

Embed:

> Artem Dzyuba as #Deadpool collecting his #RPL league winners medal with his son! ◙◙ pic.twitter.com/GyciKE9NLw
>
> — FC Zenit in English◙ (@fczenit_en) May 2, 2021

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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