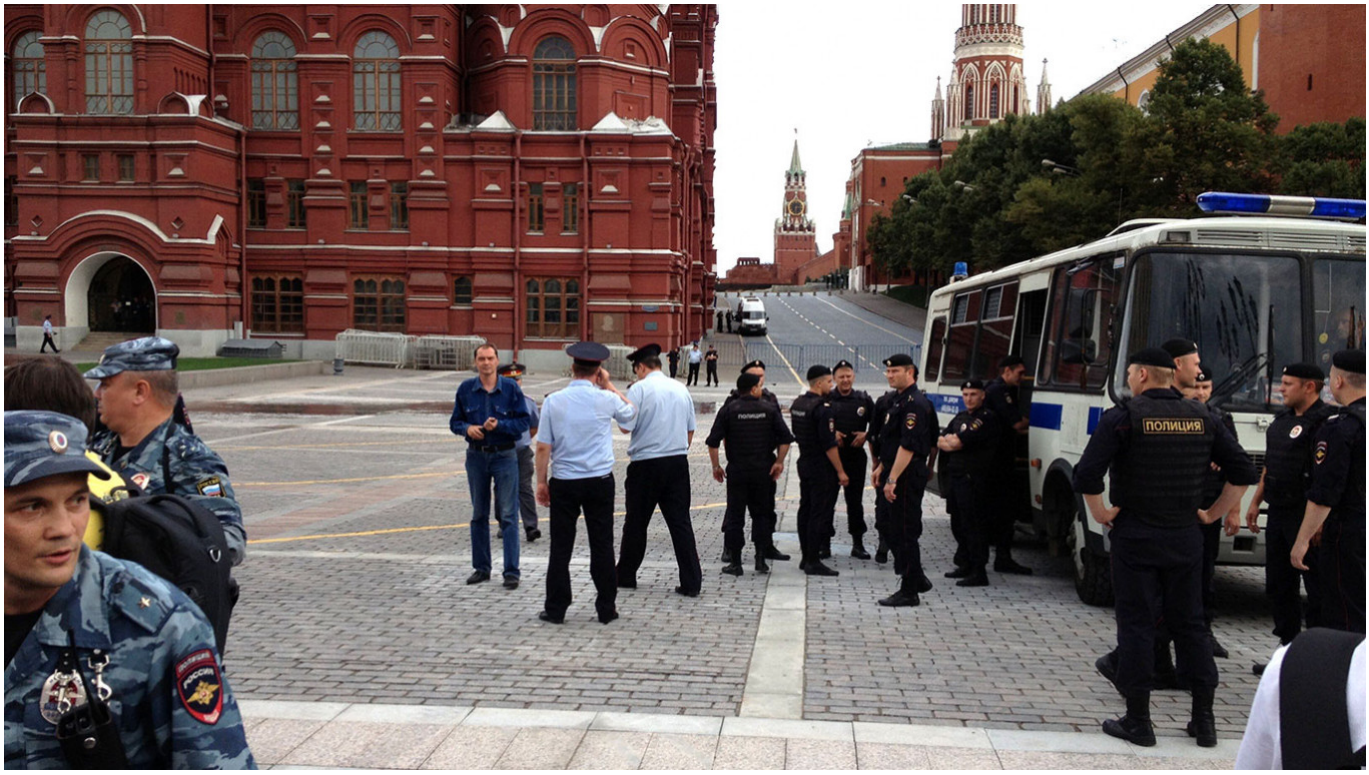
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Putin Gives Cash to Police, Soldiers Ahead of Polls

By AFP

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Moskva News Agency

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday ordered law enforcement officers and army staff receive $200, as he seeks support for his unpopular United Russia party ahead of parliamentary elections next month.

The cash handouts follow earlier one-time payments for pensioners of $135 ahead of lower house State Duma polls in September, with United Russia's ratings hit by rising prices coupled with falling wages.

Russia's legal information portal showed Putin had signed decrees ordering one-time cash payments of 15,000 rubles ($200) for members of the military and law enforcement bodies to be handed out in September for their "social protection."

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The payments come as Russian authorities have struggled to curb soaring inflation, with Putin ordering his government several times since late 2020 to take measures to bring prices under control.

Annual inflation has reached 6.5%, according to the Central Bank, which in June hiked its key interest rate to the same figure — its biggest increase since a currency crisis in 2014.

United Russia has seen its ratings fall in recent years after the government passed a controversial pension plan in 2018 and as the country's economy has stagnated.

The ruling party is polling around 30%, according to state-run pollster VTsIOM — a 10-point drop from the last lower house elections in 2016.

It currently controls 75% of seats in the State Duma, with the rest held by parties widely seen as doing the Kremlin's bidding.

Ahead of the September vote, Russian authorities have pursued a crackdown on the opposition and independent media.

Jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny has seen his organizations declared "extremist" and banned in the country, while all of his top allies have fled.

Meanwhile, leading independent media outlets including the Meduza news website and the Dozhd TV channel have been designated "foreign agents," while investigative outlet Proekt was declared an "undesirable organization."

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