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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

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Pussy Riot's Nadezhda Tolokonnikova has been labeled a foreign agent. **Zuma / TASS**

Putin address

President Vladimir Putin said in a New Year's Eve address Friday that Russia had "firmly" defended its interests in 2021 as tensions with the West reached new highs over Ukraine.

Putin delivered his annual holiday greetings hours after speaking with U.S. President Joe Biden, who warned the Russian leader of a "decisive" response to any invasion of Ukraine. The Kremlin chief meanwhile cautioned Biden that sanctions would be a "colossal mistake" and lead to a collapse in Russian-U.S. relations.

Pandemic toll

Russia recorded more than 115,000 excess deaths during November 2021 according to official statistics published Thursday — a new record high since the start of the pandemic.

The number takes Russia's overall excess death count since the start of the pandemic to

929,000, according to The Moscow Times' analysis. Calculations based on official statistics for January-November and preliminary data for December say Russia's Covid-19 death toll is the second-highest in the world behind the United States.

Foreign agents

Russia on Thursday added members of the Pussy Riot protest group Nadezhda Tolokonnikova and Nika Nikulshina, prominent satirist Viktor Shenderovich, independent journalist Taisiya Bekbulatova and former Kremlin advisor Marat Gelman to its registry of "foreign agents."

The Justice Ministry's registry now includes more than 100 entities and individuals, most of which were added in 2021

Tsirkon test

The Russian Navy's Northern Fleet said on Friday that it had carried out a 10th overall test of the Tsirkon hypersonic cruise missile from a frigate.

The Russian military also test-fired the Tsirkon from a submarine twice during the testing phase, the Northern Fleet added.

Fatal crash

Five people died and 21 were injured in a bus accident near the village of Voslebovo in the Ryazan region south of Moscow on Sunday, Russian authorities said.

The Federal Road Traffic Inspection agency published photographs of the badly damaged coach, which hit a pillar under a railway bridge. The front of the bus appeared to be entirely crushed. A website belonging to the Russian Interior Ministry said the driver could have fallen asleep behind the wheel.

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