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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

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Law enforcement officers detain participants in an unsanctioned protest in Zaryadye Park. **Vyacheslav Prokofyev / TASS**

Anti-war arrests

Russian police detained 215 people in 18 cities Saturday at protests against Moscow's military operation in Ukraine, OVD-Info, an NGO which monitors arrests during protests, said.

A national sit-in Saturday against what Moscow calls its "military operation" in Ukraine was announced on social media by activists in around 30 Russian cities.

The organizers said in a statement they wanted to protest "the collapse of [Russia's] economy," against Russian President Vladimir Putin and to demand freedom for jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

Bucha 'provocation'

Russia's Defense Ministry said Sunday its forces did not kill civilians in Bucha, a town outside

Ukraine's capital Kyiv that was recently retaken by Ukrainian soldiers after being held by Russian troops.

Photo and video of corpses strewn across the streets of Bucha were "another production of the Kyiv regime for the Western media," it added.

The ministry said that all Russian units withdrew from Bucha on March 30, a day after Russia's military announced it would be significantly reducing activity in northern Ukraine.

Ukraine accuses retreating Russian forces of massacring civilians in Bucha, where scenes of dead bodies scattered along the streets and of mass graves have ignited global outrage.

Ukrainian prosecutor general Iryna Venediktova said 410 civilian bodies had been recovered so far.

Gas independence

The head of Latvia's natural gas storage operator said Saturday the Baltic states were no longer importing Russian natural gas.

"Since April 1 Russian natural gas is no longer flowing to Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania," said Uldis Bariss, CEO of Conexus Baltic Grid.

He added that the Baltic market was currently being served by gas reserves stored underground in Latvia.

Spring call-up

As Russia launched its spring draft on Friday, targeting 18-year-old teenagers, some said they were ready to fight in Ukraine if needed, while others planned to evade call-up.

The Russian military holds two annual draft sessions, in spring and autumn, when it recruits eligible men aged 18 to 27 to serve for a year.

This time, Putin has set a recruitment goal of 134,500 men, slightly lower than the previous drive.

Rare rift

Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov issued a rare criticism of Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov for hailing a popular late-night talk show host — who has reportedly returned to Russia after fleeing during the invasion of Ukraine — as a patriot.

"Peskov's scale of priorities is somewhat underdeveloped. Something must be done about that," Kadyrov wrote on his Telegram messaging app channel Sunday.

Throes of winter

A heavy snowstorm descended on Moscow over the weekend, toppling trees, damaging cars and hospitalizing an 11-year-old girl.

Forecasters said the Moscow region was hit by half the normal amount of snowfall during April in the past two days.

AFP contributed reporting.

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