

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

December 24, 2018



Emergency Response Centre / TASS

Mine tragedy

Rescuers have found nine dead construction workers following a mine fire in the Urals region of Perm.

The workers were trapped more than 360 meters underground by smoke after a fire broke out in the Solikamsk mine, operated by potash maker Uralkali, 1,500 kilometers northeast of Moscow. The Investigative Committee opened a criminal case over the possible violation of safety rules.

End of an era

A Soviet-built nuclear reactor has been [taken](#) out of operation after 45 years of service at the Leningrad nuclear power plant in St. Petersburg. A reactor of the same type exploded in Chernobyl in 1986 in the world's worst nuclear accident.

The St. Petersburg reactor, which will fully unload its uranium fuel by 2023, was the first unit of the RBMK-1000 type [built](#) in the Soviet Union and was launched in 1973.

Nuclear boost

Four upgraded Tu-95MS Bears and one Tu-160 Blackjack missile-carrying bombers have [reportedly](#) reinforced the air component of Russia's nuclear triad.

The Defense Ministry's announcement follows President Vladimir Putin's [promise](#) this spring that the aircraft will carry Kh-102 nuclear missiles.

Formal extension

The European Union has formally agreed to prolong its economic sanctions against Russia by six months until July 2019, the European Council said.

The measures are focused on financial, energy and defense sectors, as well as dual-use goods, and were originally imposed in July 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Jets in Crimea

More than a dozen Su-27 and Su-30 fighter jets have arrived in Crimea's Belbek air base as Russia deploys assets to boost its air force amid heightened tensions with Ukraine.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has alleged Ukraine was preparing "a provocation" near Crimea before the end of the year after Russia seized three Ukrainian navy ships and their crews on Nov. 25.

Doomed flight

At least three Russian pilots have died in a cargo plane crash in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Russian embassy in the Central African nation [told](#) Russian media.

The killed pilots were [reportedly](#) part of a crew charged with transporting election materials ahead of the DRC's scheduled presidential election on Dec. 30.

On the brink

Russia's Anti-Doping Agency (RUSADA) is once again on the verge of suspension after a World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) inspection team visiting a Moscow laboratory was denied access to raw data to complete its full reinstatement.

Russian authorities said that the inspection team's equipment was not certified under Russian law. Access to the lab and data was a condition of WADA's September decision to reinstate RUSADA, risking Russian athletes' possible ban from the Olympics in Tokyo in 2020.

No quitting

A Moscow court has [charged](#) Kremlin critic and U.S.-born hedge fund manager William Browder with creating an international criminal syndicate.

The Tverskoy district court seeks Browder's extradition to Russia and placement in pre-trial custody for two months.

Foolproof plan

Norway has [caught](#) an alleged Russian citizen for what has been [said](#) to be the first ever armed bank robbery in the barren Arctic island of Spitsbergen. The island is an international demilitarized and free economic zone considered a sovereign entity of Norway.

Russia's consulate said it had sent inquiries to local authorities in the town of Longyearbyen, population 2,000, to establish the perpetrator's identity.

See Santa run

A snowy Moscow park turned red on Sunday as 2,000 volunteers dressed as Santa Claus came together for a charity run to raise money for hospices.

Participants could choose between the distances of five and 10 kilometers inside the park of the VDNKh expo center. Each of them donated 1,500 rubles (\$22) in the charity fund called Vera.

Big brother's watching

A high school in St. Petersburg has launched a first facial-recognition entry/exit system accessible to staff and parents that will [monitor](#) students' attendance.

The system, which replaces ID cards and updates its database with the schoolchildren's new photos once a year, plans to expand further if the city administration greenlights the project.

Includes reporting from Reuters.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/12/24/news-from-russia-what-you-missed-over-the-weekend-63937-a63937>