

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

December 21, 2020



St. Petersburg hospitals had just 27 beds for coronavirus patients, or 0.5% of total capacity, available early Sunday as the city became Russia's most-infected locale. **Dmitry Rogulin / TASS**

'Under control'

U.S. President Donald Trump on Saturday downplayed a massive cyberattack on U.S. government agencies, declaring it "under control" and undercutting the assessment by his own administration that Russia was to blame.

Trump's response was in sharp contradiction to comments a day earlier from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who had said the breach was "pretty clearly" Russia's work. CNN said White House officials had made plans Friday to release a statement directly blaming Russia, before it was abruptly pulled back for unclear reasons.

Job well done

President Vladimir Putin on Sunday hailed the country's "courageous" spies amid the

controversy surrounding the work of the country's security services.

Putin praised Russian security agents after an investigative report claimed last week that members of the FSB intelligence were behind the poisoning of top opposition leader Alexei Navalny with Novichok, a Soviet-designed nerve agent. Putin's remarks came on a visit to the headquarters of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) to mark its 100th birthday.

'People's tribunal'

Thousands of protesters took to the streets of Belarus on Sunday as they sought to keep the pressure on President Alexander Lukashenko over his contested re-election.

The Viasna rights group said more than 100 people were detained in Minsk and other cities.

Mine death

A Russian mine clearance officer was [killed](#) on duty in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan on Thursday, the military announced around 48 hours after the incident.

The unnamed officer died en route to the hospital.

Out of beds

St. Petersburg hospitals had just 27 beds for coronavirus patients, or 0.5% of total capacity, [available](#) early Sunday as the city became Russia's most-infected locale during the second wave of the pandemic. Authorities have vowed to open a 474-bed hospital for Covid-19 patients later this week.

Russia's second-largest city overtook the northwestern Russian republic of Karelia last week with 19.1 cases per 1,000 recorded over the past month, a figure that sees no sign of slowing down.

Forced entry

Special police units pried open the doors of two crowded west-central Moscow bars after midnight Saturday for violating 11 p.m. curfew orders.

Bars *Kvartira* and *Nikuda Ne Yedem* face a fine of up to 1 million rubles (\$13,500) or up to 90 days of closure if visitors get infected with coronavirus.

Embed:

This is how Russian police are imposing the 2300 closing time for bars & restaurants during the Covid pandemic. Crowbar, hammer, raid - closure & fines.

This was last night in Moscow. pic.twitter.com/KscmzluOs5

— Sarah Rainsford (@sarahrainsford) [December 19, 2020](#)

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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