

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

May 24, 2021



People wearing the Belarus flag as they disembark from a flight carrying an activist that was forced to divert Sunday. **Petras Malukas / AFP**

Crisis in Belarus

Belarus forced an Athens-to-Vilnius Ryanair flight carrying a wanted opposition activist to divert and land in Belarus on Sunday, provoking a furious outcry from world leaders who called the act “state terrorism.”

Belarusian state television reported that Roman Protasevich, a 26-year-old opposition blogger exiled in Poland, had been detained in Minsk after flight FR4978 was diverted from EU airspace — ostensibly over a security scare.

Last year, Protasevich and Nexta opposition social media channel founder Stepan Putilo, 22, were added to Belarus's list of “individuals involved in terrorist activity” based on earlier charges of causing mass unrest, an offense that can lead to up to 15 years of imprisonment.

They are also facing charges of inciting social hatred against government and law enforcement officials, and have been added to international wanted lists in Belarus and in Russia, an ally of Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko.

Opposition crackdown

Police on Saturday broke up a meeting of independent, elected Russian opposition figures, saying they had failed to observe coronavirus health restrictions, participants said.

Police had already intervened against a forum of elected local opposition representatives in Moscow in mid-March, arresting about 200 people.

Baza detention

Russia's Baza Telegram news channel reported that police in Moscow [detained](#) its chief editor Nikita Mogutin late Sunday.

Mogutin was released hours later without an explanation for the detention and ordered to appear for questioning later. Baza linked his detention to work during rallies in support of jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny.

Rappelling deaths

Two National Guard soldiers died in a rappelling accident during exercises in northern Russia's Murmansk region, authorities [confirmed](#) Friday.

Law enforcement authorities opened a criminal case into negligence after the two soldiers were reported to have fallen off a cable on the deck of a ship.

AFP contributed reporting to this article.

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