

News From Russia: What You Missed Over the Weekend

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Konstantin Shiring. FSB / TASS

Virus surge

Russia [lifted](#) self-isolation orders Sunday for those who had contact with those infected with coronavirus despite continuing to report record numbers of new coronavirus infections.

New daily cases jumped to 180,071 on Sunday from 177,282 on Saturday and a tenfold spike from January. Russia also reported 1,375 deaths over the weekend.

'Madness and scaremongering'

First U.S. troops landed in Poland on Sunday as Washington assessed that Russia was stepping up moves toward a potential full-scale invasion of Ukraine with 70% of the forces it would need for an attack.

The U.S. officials estimated such an attack would leave 25,000 to 50,000 civilians dead, along with 5,000 to 25,000 Ukrainian soldiers and 3,000 to 10,000 Russian ones. It could also

trigger a refugee flood of one to five million people, mainly into Poland, they added.

Russia's deputy ambassador to the United Nations, Dmitry Polyansky, called the warnings “madness and scaremongering.”

Ukraine's presidency on Sunday insisted the chance of resolving soaring tensions with Russia through diplomacy remained greater than that of an attack.

Minsk and Moscow

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko told Russian state media that Minsk will come to Moscow's support if Ukraine “starts a war” against Ukraine's pro-Russian separatists, estimating that the clashes would last less than a week.

Lukashenko also voiced support for Russian President Vladimir Putin's legally binding security demands that the United States and NATO ban Ukraine from joining the Western alliance and pull back its forces from the Russian border.

'Nazi accomplices'

Russian investigators launched a criminal probe into rehabilitation of Nazism by the Memorial civil rights group, which authorities dismantled in December, the RBC news website [reported](#) Saturday.

Russia's veterans group had asked authorities to punish Memorial for “denying, concealing and falsifying the [crimes of Nazi accomplices](#) by memorializing them as victims of political repression,” according to a January statement on Memorial's website. Yan Rachinsky, head of Memorial, told RBC that he was summoned to appear for questioning.

Wild meddling

Authorities in Russia's third-biggest city of Novosibirsk were accused of meddling in an [online vote](#) for the town mascot from among local zoo animals.

With Batu the orangutan enjoying strong public support in the month-long campaign, users over the weekend [noticed](#) that Shilka the polar bear took an unexpected lead before polls close Monday.

AFP contributed reporting.

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