

Russia's New Law: Observing U.S. Sanctions a Crime



Russia's President Vladimir Putin talks to U.S. President Donald Trump during their bilateral meeting at the G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany July 7, 2017.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- Russian lawmakers unanimously approved in its first reading on Tuesday a bill that makes it a criminal offence to observe sanctions imposed by the United States or other countries, as part of counter-sanctions measures against Washington.

The United States last month imposed sanctions on some of Russia's biggest

companies and businessmen, striking at allies of President Vladimir Putin to punish Moscow for its alleged meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and other "malign activities".

The draft bill, which will have its second reading on Thursday, would make refusing to supply services or do business with a Russian citizen, citing U.S. or other sanctions, a crime

punishable by up to four years in jail.

Any person or representatives of legal entities in Russia found guilty of such an offence could also face other limits on their freedom or fines of up to 600,000 rubles (\$9,696).

The bill would also make it a criminal offence for Russian citizens to help foreign governments sanction Russia by providing advice or information.

That offence would be punishable by up to three years in jail or other restrictions on an individual's freedom, or by a fine of up to 500,000 rubles.

Initially lawmakers vowed to impose restrictions on a wide range of goods and services from the United States, including medicine and agricultural products.

But they have since diluted the proposed counter-sanctions measures, removing language that targeted specific goods and sectors because of fears about the potential impact on Russian consumers and industries.

The draft law, which has caused concern and uncertainty among investors in Russian assets, is likely to be changed in subsequent readings before it is signed by Putin.

Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev last month voiced support for the initiative and pledged that the government would help companies targeted by U.S. sanctions.

Putin Drives Truck to Open Crimean Bridge



Russian President Vladimir Putin drives a truck to officially open the much-anticipated bridge linking Russia and the Crimean peninsula, during the opening ceremony near in Kerch, Crimea, May 15, 2018.

THE KERCH STRAIT (Dispatches) -- Russian President Vladimir Putin, driving a truck, unveiled the auto section of a new road-and-rail bridge linking Russia to the Crimean peninsula on Tuesday.

Putin, at the wheel of a heavy KAMAZ truck, drove the full 19 km across the bridge from the Kerch Strait, which some Russians call "Putin's bridge" and which is

designed to link Crimea into Russia's transport network.

At a ceremony broadcast live on state TV, Putin, dressed in blue jeans, was met by cheering workers on the Crimean side after driving the orange-colored truck across the bridge in a small convoy of vehicles.

"At last, thanks to your talent this project, this miracle has happened," Putin told the crowd of workers.

In Kiev, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said: "The illegal construction of the Kerch bridge is the latest evidence of the Kremlin's disregard for international law.

"It is particularly cynical that its opening is happening on the eve of the latest anniversary of the deportation of the Crimean-Tatar people by the Stalin regime."

Russia annexed Crimea from neighboring Ukraine in 2014, drawing sanctions and prompting a sharp deterioration in ties with the West. But many in Russia saw the move as restoring Moscow's rule over a historically Russian region.

Built at a cost of 223 billion rubles (\$3.60 billion), the bridge is set to be the longest dual-purpose span in Europe.

The Kremlin said the bridge would be opened to cars on Wednesday. The rail section was due to be completed at the end of 2019.

"Putin initiated this project himself. Many didn't believe these plans were possible," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on a conference call on Tuesday ahead of the ceremony.

"This is an extremely important day from this point of view and in a practical sense and in symbolic terms."

Chinese Volunteers Emerge From Virtual Moon Base

BEIJING (AFP) -- A group of Chinese volunteers has emerged from 110 days of isolation in a virtual "lunar lab", state media reported Tuesday, as the country pursues its ambition to put people on the moon.

The official Xinhua news service streamed images on its website of the would-be astronauts emerging from their temporary home, a self-contained environment simulating conditions which future explorers will face on the

moon's surface.

In the video, students wearing masks and blue tennis shirts emerge from the pod carrying baskets of fruit and vegetables, including carrots and strawberries, grown inside the module.

It was the group's second stay in the 160-square-meter "Yuegong-1" - Lunar Palace - on the campus of Beihang University, following a 60-day sojourn earlier.

In between, a second group of four

students spent 200 consecutive days in the facility.

The volunteers lived in the sealed lab to simulate a long-term space mission with no input from the outside world.

The facility treats human waste with a bio-fermentation process, and volunteers grew experimental crops and vegetables with the help of food and waste byproducts.

The "Lunar Palace" has two plant cultivation modules and an accommodation cabin: 42 square meters containing four sleeping cubicles, a common room, a bathroom, a waste-treatment room and a room for raising animals.

A successful 105-day trial was conducted in 2014.

China does not expect to land its first astronauts on the moon for at least another decade. But the project seeks to help it prepare explorers for longer stays on the surface.

China is pouring billions into its military-run space program, with hopes of having a crewed outpost by 2022.

Catalan Leader Wants Jailed Separatists in Cabinet



The new elected Catalan regional president Quim Torra (C) lavas the Catalan parliament following his election in Barcelona on May 14, 2018.

BARCELONA (AFP) -- Catalonia's new separatist leader Quim Torra said Tuesday he would ask regional ministers jailed or exiled after a failed secession bid if they want to return to their posts in his government.

Torra, a 55-year-old hardline separatist, was appointed Catalan president on Monday after scraping through a regional parliamentary vote, promising to keep fighting to break from Spain.

He travelled to Berlin Tuesday to meet deposed Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont, who is awaiting a court decision on his extradition to Spain and handpicked Torra as his successor.

"We will definitely propose it to them... and if they accept, they will be regional ministers," Torra said earlier Tuesday in an interview on Catalan radio.

Torra will now form a regional government after months of political limbo as other candidates proposed by the separatist camp after it won regional elections in December fell flat.

This in turn will automatically lift the state of emergency direct rule imposed on semi-autonomous Catalonia by Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, who deposed Puigdemont and his cabinet after a failed declaration of independence on Oct. 27.

But restoring sacked regional ministers, who are now mostly in jail in Spain or abroad awaiting possible extradition, could throw a spanner in the works in this region of 7.5 million inhabitants that is deeply divided on independence.

"If this option was put on the table, we would have to look into it and determine if it is in line with the law and justifies lifting" direct rule, Spain's central government representative in Catalonia, Enric Millo, warned on Catalan television.

Rajoy meanwhile met Tuesday with Pedro Sanchez, the opposition Socialist leader, to talk about Catalonia.

They both committed to giving a "proportional" response to any potential challenge "in defense of the constitutional law," they said in a joint statement.

Torra's appointment brings to an end months of uncertainty in Catalonia after separatist parties failed to get their preferred candidates through following the elections.

Puigdemont was their first choice, but he is in self-exile abroad, and two other presidential candidates they picked are in jail.

Torra does not have any judicial proceedings pending, but critics have accused him of being "xenophobic" after he wrote a series of tweets and articles that are offensive towards Spaniards. He has since apologized.

Australia Ups Security After Alleged Bomb Threat



Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, left, and Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton inspect a body scanner during an airport security announcement at Tullamarine airport in Melbourne on May 15, 2018.

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia's government said Tuesday that it will upgrade airport security around the country and increase police powers in response to an alleged attempt to smuggle an improvised explosive device aboard a flight out of Sydney last year.

The government will spend 294 million Australian dollars (\$222 million) on improving security equipment and staffing levels at all major city airports plus 13 regional airports, government ministers said.

It follows an attempt to check in a bag allegedly containing military-grade explosives into the luggage hold of an Etihad Airways Airbus A380 double-decker jet headed to the Middle East last July in a plot authorities say was directed by the Daesh group.

The airline rejected the bag at the check-in counter because it was overweight. The alleged plot wasn't discovered until weeks later, but two Sydney men were eventually charged with planning a terrorist act.

Under the upgrade, body scanners and advanced X-ray equipment will be rolled out across Australian airports. Inbound air cargo and international mail will be

subjected to stricter screening.

An additional 140 police trained to detect improvised explosive devices would be assigned to airports. They would be supported by police intelligence specialists.

Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton said police would be given new powers to check people's identities at airports and to remove from airports people suspected of "certain criminal activities." He did not elaborate on those activities.

Police can only demand to see people's identity documents at airports under certain conditions, a restriction that Dutton described as an absurdity.

"We're addressing an anomaly and a deficiency in the law at the moment," Dutton told reporters.

He said that had the July plot succeeded, the explosion would have had a multibillion-dollar impact on tourism and the number of foreign students studying at Australian universities, which is one of Australia's most lucrative industries.

"Had that been successful, hundreds of people would've of course lost their lives, but it would've had an enormous impact on the psyche of the Australian traveling public," he said.



LONDON (FT) -- Woody Johnson, the U.S. ambassador to the UK, has urged British ministers to increase defense spending and push ahead with the F-35 program, echoing Donald Trump's warning that America's allies had to become more self-sufficient. UK defense officials are carrying out a wide-ranging review of the UK's military capabilities. The review is expected to be finished in July, in time for a NATO summit in Brussels that Trump will attend. Gavin Williamson, the UK defense minister, is pushing chancellor Philip Hammond to increase the amount of money the UK spends on defense from the current level of 2 per cent of GDP, or just over £37bn a year. Military chiefs have feared they could face further spending cuts to pay for a funding shortfall of up to £20bn over the next decade. The program to build the first 48 of a potential total of 138 F-35s is costing the UK over £9 billion. While the UK government says it remains committed to buying the full quota of 138 jets from U.S. defense company Lockheed Martin, there has been speculation that Britain could reduce the size of the final order to cut costs.

KUALA LUMPUR/TOKYO (Reuters) -- New Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said on Tuesday he will remain in office for one or two years and that Anwar Ibrahim, the jailed reformist he had vowed would replace him, will be released on Wednesday. Mahathir, 92, said he thought that "in a short while" the government could have a case against his predecessor, Najib Razak, who has been dogged by a multi-billion-dollar scandal at state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (IMDB). A four-party alliance driven by Mahathir and Anwar won the general election last week, ousting the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition for the first time in the history of the Southeast Asian nation. Mahathir was sworn in as prime minister on Thursday, making him the world's oldest democratically elected leader. In "an initial stage, maybe lasting one or two years, I will be the prime minister", Mahathir said, speaking by live video link from Kuala Lumpur to a Wall Street Journal CEO conference in Tokyo. "I will play a role in the background even when I step down." The pardons board in Malaysia's capital will meet on Wednesday to discuss Anwar's release and Mahathir said he would be released the same day.

GENEVA (AFP) -- North Korea plans to join international efforts to implement a total ban on nuclear weapons tests, an ambassador for the country told the United Nations disarmament body Tuesday. "DPRK will join international desires and efforts for a total ban on nuclear tests," North Korea's ambassador to the UN in Geneva Han Tae-song said in an address to the Conference on Disarmament, using North Korea's official acronym.

MADRID (AFP) -- A Spanish police union warned Monday young people in the poorer south were flocking to work for flush narco gangs as they rise in power in an area where security forces are now reluctant to be posted. The stark warning came days after some 40 people -- some of whom are thought to be linked to drug mafias -- attacked nine Guardia Civil police officers on their time off in Algeciras, part of the southern province of Cadiz, a drug trafficking hotspot. "Before the mafias avoided us, now this new generation of narcos is challenging security forces directly, they use guns, and they have professionals, we're now noting the presence of sicarios," Alberto Moya, head of the AUGC Guardia Civil union, told Spanish radio. Sicario is a term used to describe hired killers, especially of Latin American drug cartels. "These people employ legions of youth," he added, pointing to the high unemployment rate in this poorer area of southern Spain as one of the reasons. "These people can pay salaries that not even a multinational could pay its executives."

ATHENS (Reuters) -- Greece said Tuesday it was "far away" from resolving a decades-long dispute over Macedonia's name despite progress in talks between the two neighbors. The row erupted in 1991 when Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia as it disintegrated. Greece refuses to recognize it under the name Macedonia, saying this implies a territorial claim on a northern Greek region of the same name, and has blocked its efforts to join NATO and the European Union. "In our continuing talks with our neighbors, there has been significant progress but we are still far away from concluding negotiations and reaching an agreement," government spokesman Dimitris Tzanakopoulos told a press briefing. The prime ministers of Greece and Macedonia are expected to meet in neighboring Bulgaria on Thursday on the sidelines of an EU-Western Balkans summit. Tzanakopoulos said the meeting would be "very useful and important" but the two countries might need a new round of talks to resolve the dispute.

MOSCOW (Reuters) -- A Moscow court Tuesday sentenced Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny to 30 days in prison for his role in organizing a protest against President Vladimir Putin on May 5, a Reuters correspondent reported from the court.

Zafaranieh Residential Complex,

(Karadj) Soheilieh, 9 KM to Hashtgerd
A 2,000 m2 fruit orchard with an outdoor swimming pool, BBQ & a big storage room. The facilities include a janitor's quarters and a fully furnished 180 m2 villa - the furnishing includes furniture such as a Panasonic TV, a side refrigerator, dish washer, washing machine plus Internet access, satellite, 2 power branches, 3 separate water supplies (2 city splits + 1 well) & 2 land lines.
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