



RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR

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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Global Health; Russia

RUSSIA'S PREMIER CATCHES CORONAVIRUS

Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin has publicly announced that he had tested positive for coronavirus. Mishustin revealed his diagnosis during a late April videoconference of government officials that was televised to the nation. Included in the meeting was President Putin, who approved Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Belousov's ascendency to the post of Acting Prime Minister while Mishustin stepped down to recover. Despite the switch, the Prime Minister said he'd remain in remote contact with his colleagues in the Presidential administration while he quarantined. He is said to be spending his isolation in an undisclosed hospital, and those he had been in contact with have also been ordered to isolate. (Reuters, April 30, 2020)

AMBULANCE WORKERS ON THE CORONAVIRUS FRONTLINES

Ambulance workers in Russia's largest cities are reporting grim realities in the country's current health crisis. Paramedics are seeing their numbers depleted as more and more of them contract coronavirus in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, and throughout Moscow Oblast. Official promises that all workers would receive testing for the disease have not been fulfilled, while shortages of protective equipment are believed to be one of the causes of widespread infection - with reports that front-line workers have resorted to wearing construction worker suits that are bleached after every shift in order to protect themselves. Those still able to work endure 24-hour shifts and routinely have their patients turned away at crowded hospitals, forcing them to return the sick to their homes. Finally, promised bonuses are not being received, and the few that have been disbursed have turned out to be a mere fraction of the amount previously promised by the state. (*The Moscow Times*, May 2, 2020)

NEW SIGNS OF LIFE FOR NORD STREAM 2

The GAZPROM-owned vessel *Akademik Cherskiy* has docked at Russia's Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad. The arrival of the ship, which is used for laying pipelines, is being taken as an important indicator of Moscow's continued interest in completing the Nord Stream 2 pipeline - and the Kremlin's commitment to the energy project in spite of Western pressure. The pipeline, designed to bring Russian natural gas supplies to Germany, has been on hold since the United States sanctioned the project at the end of 2019, which led Swiss-Dutch company Allseas to cease work with only 100 miles of pipe left to be laid. (Reuters, May 3, 2020)

U.S. NAVY ENTERS THE RUSSIAN ARCTIC

For the first time since the 1980s, American naval ships will patrol the Barents Sea near the extreme north-west of Russia as a part of a group of NATO vessels dispatched to the region. The Barents Sea is considered international waters, but it borders Murmansk, the Kola Peninsula, and other Russian territories in addition to housing Russia's Northern Fleet. The five-vessel NATO force is comprised of American and British ships, and tasked with ensuring freedom of navigation through the waterway. Three of the American vessels, moreover, are outfitted with missile defense technology, creating another point of contention as the U.S. and Russia attempt to renew the New START Treaty before its scheduled expiration early next year. (*NBC News*, May 4, 2020)

THE DANGER FACING RUSSIA'S DOCTORS

Aleksandr Shulepov, a doctor on an ambulance team in the western Russian region of Voronezh, is in the hospital after falling from a second story window under suspicious circumstances. Shulepov, like many in his profession, had tested positive for coronavirus at the end of April but had been ordered back to work only days later. He later posted a video with another doctor in which he ranted against the orders. Not long after, he recanted his statement in a follow up video, in which he explained that he acted out of emotion. The fall put Shulepov back in the hospital with a fractured skull.

The incident, however, is part of a larger pattern - one that is both strange and alarming. Shulepov is the third Russian doctor with gripes against the Kremlin's handling of the coronavirus pandemic to recently experience a serious accident. In late April, Natalya Lebedeva, the head of an ambulance center in Zvyozdny, near Moscow, died of an undisclosed "accident." And on May 1st, Yelena Nepomnyashchaya, a hospital physician in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, died from injuries sustained from a five story fall from her office a week earlier. (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, May 4, 2020)