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Related Categories: Democracy and Governance; Economic Sanctions; Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues; International Economics and Trade; Corruption; SPACE; NASA; Russia

A REPLACEMENT FOR KHABOROVSK'S IMPRISONED GOVERNOR

Demonstrations over the arrest of Khabarovsk Governor Sergei Furgal on decade-old murder charges have entered their second week and swelled to include tens of thousands of protesters in the Russian Far East. While Furgal awaits trial in Moscow, President Putin handed the reins of Khabarovsk Krai to Mikhail Degtyaryov, an obscure parliamentarian with no experience in the Far East who previously represented Saratov in Moscow. Degtyaryov was chosen for his party affiliation; both he and Furgal are members of Russia's Liberal Democratic Party, whose leader, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, was allegedly promised the position would be filled by an alternate member of the party as compensation for the loss of Furgal. Experts speculate that Furgal was targeted for arrest after he defeated a member of the ruling United Russia party during his gubernatorial victory in 2018. (London *Guardian*, July 19, 2020; *NPR*, July 24, 2020)

RUSSIA REJECTS NASA'S OVERTURES

Russia, a senior partner alongside the United States in the International Space Station, has rejected joining NASA's "Artemis" program, the ongoing mission to land another person on the moon by 2024. Russian space chief Dmitry Rogozin described the U.S. mission to get back to the moon as a "political project," and one that resembles NATO. Russia, given its involvement in the ISS, is believed by American officials to be a natural partner for "Artemis" as well. However, Rogozin has made clear that Russia has other plans, and would prefer to join with China as a space partner. (*The Hill*, July 19, 2020)

STATE SANCTIONS KADYROV

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has announced new sanctions against Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov. The measures, which supplement existing sanctions against the controversial regional head, bar Kadyrov and some of his family members from traveling to the U.S. Pompeo cited "extensive credible information that Kadyrov is responsible for numerous gross violations of human rights dating back more than a decade, including torture and extrajudicial killings." The secretary also called upon "like-minded nations" to follow suit with sanctions of their own.

Kadyrov is known for his brutal crackdowns against domestic dissent as well as his cozy relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin. In February, a 44-year-old Chechen blogger critical of both Putin and Kadyrov was found inside a French hotel room covered with dozens of stab wounds. Authorities say the death was a "politically motivated" slaying likely tied to Kadyrov. After Monday's sanctions, Kadyrov remained defiant and, on his blog, posted a photo of himself grinning while brandishing two machine guns. "Pompeo, we accept the fight. It's going to be even more fun down the road," he wrote. (*Washington Examiner*, July 20, 2020)

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE IN GULAG HISTORIAN CASE

In mid-July, renowned Gulag historian Yuri Dmitriyev was convicted by a Russian court of sexual assault against his adopted daughter. The charges are broadly understood to be politically motivated; Dmitriyev has spent over 20 years shedding light on crimes committed by the USSR under Josef Stalin in Russia's northwestern Karelia region. As part of his work for Memorial, a civil society organization founded during the *Glasnost* period, Dmitriyev helped locate and identify a mass grave in the Sandarmokh Forest, which had been the site of thousands of executions during the "Great Purge" of 1937-1938.

Critics view the legal action against the historian as the Kremlin's way of slandering and silencing him. It is an approach authorities have attempted before; back in 2016, Dmitriyev was also arrested on child pornography charges. He was acquitted following a protracted two-year court battle. (*The Moscow Times*, July 22, 2020)