



Ust-Djeguta

Russian President Vladimir Putin won a landslide re-election victory yesterday, extending his rule over the world's largest country for another six years at a time when his ties with the West are on a hostile trajectory.

Putin's thumping victory will extend his total time in office to nearly a quarter of a century, until 2024, by which time he will be 71. Only Soviet dictator Josef Stalin ruled for longer. Putin has promised to use his new term to beef up Russia's defences against the West and to raise living standards.

In a widely-expected result, an exit poll by pollster VTsIOM showed Putin, who has already dominated the political landscape for the last 18 years, had won 73.9

percent of the vote. Backed by state TV, the ruling party, and credited with an approval rating around 80 percent, his victory was never in doubt.

None of the seven candidates who ran against him posed a threat, and opposition leader Alexei Navalny was barred from running. Critics alleged that officials had compelled people to come to the polls to ensure that voter boredom at the one-sided contest did not lead to a low turnout.

Russia's Central Election Commission recognised that there were some irregularities, but were likely to dismiss wider criticism and declare the overall result legitimate.

Putin loyalists said the result was a vindication of his tough stance towards the

West.

"I think that in the United States and Britain they've understood they cannot influence our elections," Igor Morozov, a member of the upper house of parliament, said on state television. "Our citizens understand what sort of situation Russian finds itself in today."

The immediate question is if and when opponents like Navalny organise protests, citing widespread fraud, and how large and sustained those protests will be. A senior opposition politician has warned they could descend into street clashes if police crack down too hard on demonstrators.

The longer-term question is whether Putin will soften his anti-Western rhetoric now the election is won. (Reuters)

German spy agency: North rockets can reach Europe

Berlin

North Korean rockets can now be fitted with nuclear weapons and could reach Germany and central Europe, a top official with Germany's foreign intelligence agency told lawmakers this week,

according to a report in the Bild am Sonntag newspaper.

BND Deputy Director Ole Diehl told lawmakers during a closed-door meeting that the assessment was "certain," the newspaper reported, citing participants in the

briefing.

At the same time, Diehl said the agency viewed talks between North and South Korea as a positive sign.

No comment was immediately available from the BND. (Reuters)

#PollToday



Do you think Duterte has done the right thing by moving out of the International Criminal Court?

Yes No Cant Say



"From the very beginning, we use the principle of parity on the number of people included in sanction lists. So we will expand our 'black list' with another group of Americans,"

-Sergei Ryabkov,
Russian Deputy Foreign Minister

Rest in sight

Hotel fire kills at least three in Philippine capital



A fire at a hotel in the Philippine capital killed three people on Sunday and injured nearly two dozen, police and rescue officials said, with two people listed as missing.

Saudi crown prince to visit US on Tuesday

Donald Trump will host Saudi Arabia's crown prince in Washington Tuesday, giving the president a receptive audience to air his grievances towards Iran.

Erdogan says Afrin town centre 'under control'

Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan said the centre of Afrin was "entirely under control" and Turkish flags had been raised in the northern Syrian town.

Russia to expand 'black list' of Americans

Moscow will respond to a new set of U.S. sanctions by expanding its "black list" of Americans.

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Rebels in eastern Ghouta discussing ceasefire with UN

Beirut

The main rebel group in the southern pocket of Syria's opposition-held eastern Ghouta told Reuters on Sunday it was negotiating with a United Nations delegation about a ceasefire, aid and the evacuation of urgent medical cases.

"We are engaged in arranging serious negotiations to guarantee the safety and protection of civilians," said Wael Alwan, the Istanbul-based spokesman for Failaq al-Rahman, in a voice recording.

"The most important

points under negotiation are a ceasefire, ensuring aid for civilians and the exit of medical cases and injured people needing treatment outside Ghouta."

Alwan said the subject of "exit and evacuation" was "not on the table".

In a month-long assault, pro-Syrian government forces have marched into much of eastern Ghouta, the last major insurgent bastion around Damascus.

Troops have splintered Ghouta into three besieged zones in one of the bloodiest offensives of the seven-year war.

Philippines' Duterte calls for mass withdrawal from ICC



Manila

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte yesterday called for other signatories of the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court (ICC) to join his country in withdrawing from the treaty.

Duterte's comments during a speech to graduating cadets at the Philippine Military Academy in northern Philippines comes after ICC prosecutors last month opened a preliminary examination into the president's "war on drugs",

which has led to the death of thousands since it began in July 2016.

The Southeast Asian nation last week notified the United Nations secretary-general of its decision to withdraw from the ICC because of what the outspoken Philippine leader called "outrageous" attacks by U.N. officials and violations of due process.

"I will convince everybody now under the treaty to get out, get out," Duterte said. "It is not a document that was prepared by anybody, it's EU-sponsored."

Britain accuses Russia of stockpiling nerve agent

London

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said on Sunday that Russia has been stockpiling the deadly nerve agent used to poison a Russian former double agent in England and has been investigating how such weapons can be used in assassinations.

Britain has said Russia used the Soviet-era nerve agent called Novichok to attack Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the first known offensive use of such

a weapon on European soil since World War Two. Russia has denied any involvement.

"We actually have evidence within the last 10 years that Russia has not only been investigating the delivery of nerve agents for the purposes of assassination, but has also been creating and stockpiling Novichok," Johnson told the BBC.

Britain and Russia have each expelled 23 diplomats over the attack as relations between the two countries crash to a post-Cold War low.