

# The new tsar cracks the whip

**T**HE RUSSIAN President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, has launched a battle for control of the private electronic media — the last perceived threat to his plan to rebuild a strong state and an effective Government as a precondition for reviving the country. Earlier, Mr. Putin pushed to remove two other potential sources of opposition — a defiant legislature and free-wheeling regions.

So far the Russian leader has been successful in a breath-taking drive to tighten his grip on power. He has steamrollered legislation to remove powerful regional governors from the upper house of Parliament and turn it into an obedient instrument of his policy and has pushed to rein in Russia's free-wheeling regions by taking away from them control over courts and law-enforcement agencies.

Now has come the turn of television that is by far the most influential source of information in a country that spans 11 time zones. Mr. Putin is trying to wrest control of two of Russia's three national television networks from the hands of notorious "oligarchs," business tycoons who got rich during the crime and corruption-ridden privatisation of national assets. Currently the Kremlin has one TV channel, RTR, under its full control. Another channel, ORT, is 51-per cent state-owned, but is virtually run by Mr. Boris Berezovsky, who controls 49 per cent of the shares and has helped arrange the channel's funding when Budget allocations fizzled out. Mr. Berezovsky, who was the main cashier of the former Russian President, Mr. Boris Yeltsin's family, went into opposition when the new President declared a policy of distancing the oligarchs from power. The third national channel, NTV, is the only fully private network owned by Mr. Vladimir Gusinsky, a media mogul with close links to Jewish capital in Israel and the United States. The two non-state TV channels have been vocally critical of Mr. Putin's policies, such as the war in Chechnya and the media crackdown.

Earlier this month, Mr. Berezovsky announced that the Kremlin was pressing him to relinquish his stake in the ORT television channel, threatening to put him in prison. Last week, Mr. Gusinsky said he had been forced to sign a deal to sell his media empire, which apart from NTV television includes a radio station and a number of periodicals, in exchange for freedom. The tycoon was briefly jailed in June on fraud charges



The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin (right), greets a former Premier, Mr. Yevgeny Primakov, during a recent meeting with parliamentarians... consolidating power.

*The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, has launched a battle for control of the private electronic media, the last perceived threat to his plan to rebuild a strong state, says*  
VLADIMIR RADYUHIN.

but was allowed to leave the country after agreeing to sell his holding company, Media-MOST.

So far the two media magnates have refused to cede control over their television networks. Mr. Berezovsky said he would transfer his ORT shares to a trust consisting of journalists and intellectuals in an attempt to keep the shares out of Government hands. For his part, Mr. Gusinsky called the deal to sell his assets invalid on the grounds that he signed it "at gunpoint." He produced a secret protocol signed by the Press Minister, Mr. Mikhail Lessin, which said explicitly that Mr. Gusinsky was swapping his stocks for his freedom.

The scandal has provoked a public outcry. The former Soviet President, Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev, who heads a media watchdog group organised by Media-MOST, denounced the Kremlin's offensive against NTV as "crude state blackmail" and asked Mr. Putin for a meeting to express his concerns. However, Mr. Putin is unlikely to backpedal even though his actions may spoil Moscow's relations with the West. The stakes are too high. Corruption and degradation of the Government machinery has gone too far during the previous ten years of Mr. Yeltsin's drunken rule and the new Kremlin team is convinced the country needs strong medicine to recover. Mr. Putin's prescription for Russia is "guided" or "manipulative democracy." Mr. Putin calls it a "strong state" that alone can bring to fruition pro-market reforms which have been fatally discredited in Russian eyes by Mr. Yeltsin's catastrophic economic experiments.

"Mass media and television networks are to play a key role in the Kremlin's plans by helping the Government to get the right results at the polls, says Dr. Sergei Markov of the Institute of Political Studies. The Kremlin is well aware of Russian electronic

media's ability to manipulate public opinion. Earlier this month, the Russian President signed a new "information security doctrine" that emphasises the state's need to "defend national interests in the information sector" and calls for "strengthening state-owned mass media and expanding their possibilities for bringing reliable information to Russian and foreign citizens."

In his battle for control of television, Mr. Putin can count on broad public support. After the chaos and anarchy of Mr. Yeltsin's rule, Russians want a strong hand in the Kremlin and have little regard for a "free" media which applauded the plundering of the country by the oligarchs. After 20 weeks in power, Mr. Putin's approval rating stays well above 60 per cent.

Analysts say Mr. Putin's manipulative democracy is the price Russia has to pay for the Yeltsin era and is the lesser of two evils facing the country. "A realistic alternative to manipulative democracy is not liberal democracy of the Western type (that Russia has failed to build over the past 10 years), but a police state and international isolation," says Dr. Markov of the Institute of Political Studies.

26 SEP 2000

# He has put in much for a strong State

By C. Raja Mohan

**MOSCOW, SEPT. 25.** The only sensible thing the former President, Mr. Boris Yeltsin, did for Russia, a perceptive observer here says, was to designate Mr. Vladimir Putin as his successor. Mr. Putin was the only alternative Russia would accept for he was the complete antithesis of President Yeltsin.

If Mr. Yeltsin was erratic and unpredictable, Mr. Putin is extremely focussed. If the former unleashed chaos in Russia over the last decade and presided over its diminution of global role, the new Russian President wants to bring order and stability, revive the economy and regain some of the positions in world affairs that had been lost.

If the post-Soviet elite was in search of a leader to end the anarchy of the 1990s and revive the hapless Russian nation, it has found one in Mr. Putin. The new President is enjoying considerable popularity and will wield significant power bestowed on the Russian presidency by the 1993 Constitution that Mr. Yeltsin was mentally and physically incapable of.

Every revolution, or counter-revolution if you will, will face a moment when the State begins to reassert its authority and puts an end to the lawlessness generated by political upheaval. In the French revolution, this was called the Thermidor.

The Russian people expect and President Putin hopes to curb the free for all nature of the post-Soviet politics, discipline the new capitalist brigands who have accumulated unacceptable levels of power and wealth, and impose what he calls a dictatorship of laws on Russia.

No, President Putin has no desire to take Russia back to the old communist ways and the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the charter he issued for Russia on the eve of the new millennium, he said it would be a mistake not to understand the historic futility of communism, which was a blind alley, far away from the mainstream of civilisation.

Mr. Putin insists that the nation's future depends on combining the universal principles of market economy and democracy with Russian realities. At the heart of Mr. Putin's vision for the new Russia is the recreation of a strong State. For Russians, a strong State is not an anomaly to be rid of. Quite the contrary, it

is a source of order and the main driving force of any change. Mr. Putin's efforts to impose the rule of law in Russia are already raising concerns in the West about his commitment to democracy. They point to the tensions between the imperatives of restoring order and sustaining democratic governance. But, Mr. Putin may have understood the desire of the Russian people to see the new robber barons controlled and the powerful mafia brought to book. After all, it has been the Russian tradition to look up to a czar or a strong central leader who can protect the weak from the strong.

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There is no question that Mr. Putin confronts daunting challenges in his drive to renew Russia. But there is good news on at least one front — the economic.

After years of continuous decline, the Russian GDP grew by 3.2 per cent in 1999. The

## RUSSIA TODAY — I

GDP is expected to grow by nearly 5 per cent this year and at an average of 3-4 per cent in the next five years.

For the Russian economy, which halved over the last decade, there is a long way to go. According to Mr. Putin, it will take Russia approximately 15 years and 10 per cent annual growth rate to reach the present per capita GDP levels in France and Britain.

The last decade has been economically devastating for Russia. According to some estimates, there are 50 million Russians below the poverty line, 20 million fully or partially unemployed, and 10 million refugees and homeless.

But there is a growing mood of optimism here that things may be turning around.

A recent report by the Western consulting firm, McKinsey, has suggested that Russia has the real and human capital for a growth rate of 8 per cent.

Analysts here also say that the recovery of the Russian economy is not because of the now rising prices of oil and that the structural changes of the last few years might have begun to yield results.

Mr. Putin now has the opportunity to ride the wave of economic revival and push for the

next generation of reforms — economic, political and social.

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As part of his desire to create a strong State, Mr. Putin is attempting to regain the badly-eroded central authority over the regions in the name of democratic federalism.

Although elected, the Presidents and Governors of various provinces have increasingly become feudal lords, controlling everything from legislatures to the media in their local fiefdoms. Since these leaders are also ex-officio members of the Federation Council, the Upper House of the Russian Parliament, they are at once regional chief executives and federal senators.

Even as he pushes for legislative reforms that will constrict the power of the regional bosses, Mr. Putin has begun a headlong confrontation with the robber barons who are called the oligarchs here. Since May, Mr. Putin has been putting relentless pressure on Mr. Vladimir Gusinsky, a leading media magnate and tycoon. Mr. Gusinsky is presenting the issue as an attack on the freedom of press and has sought to mobilise support in the United States. Mr. Gusinsky's television channel has been a sharp critic of the Kremlin. While he wants to be seen as a crusading journalist, many in Russia see him as an unsavoury oligarch who has used his media power to smear his political opponents and business rivals.

There are many skeptics who question whether Mr. Putin will be able to take his campaign against the oligarchs to the logical conclusion. There could be problems in the very coalition that Mr. Putin has put together. Others wonder whether the means being adopted to constrain the oligarchs will lead to a broader restriction of freedoms in Russia.

There are many Russians who compare Mr. Putin to Gen. Augusto Pinochet. Others see him as a Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore who gave modern capitalism to the city-State but imposed strict discipline. The friends of Mr. Putin view him as Charles De Gaulle, the democratically elected French General with an autocratic style. Whatever role-model the 48 year-old Mr. Putin may have in mind, the Russian people are looking up to him for deliverance. And the world is watching the rise of one of a young leader who could make a big difference to Russia and the world.

THE HINDU

26 SEP 2000

# The Russian economy — I

By Prem Shankar Jha

ONLY TWO years ago, the Russian economy was in tatters. Its banks were closed; it had defaulted on its foreign loans, and inflation had risen from 5.5 per cent in the first half of the year (1998) to 84 per cent in December. Moscow's control over its 89 regions was slipping. But since then Russia has experienced a remarkable rebirth. On October 2, its President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, will come to India as the head of a state that, having passed through the fires of hell, is on the verge of an East Asian style economic miracle.

The change began during what was Russia's darkest hour. On August 17, 1998, after weeks of trying desperately to shore up the rouble's exchange value by borrowing money abroad at higher and higher rates of interest, the Russian Central Bank suspended dealings in foreign exchange. Shortly afterwards, the Government announced that it could not repay short term debt and forced a rescheduling upon its creditors. The rouble immediately crashed, from just over 6 (6000 old rubles) to the dollar just before the crisis to 19 to the dollar at the end of the year. That was when the miracle occurred. Ignoring the IMF's admonitions and warnings, the new Prime Minister, Mr. Yevgeny Primakov, did not curb money supply but went about increasing it. Contrary to the IMF's dire prediction, the Russian economy did not spiral into hyperinflation. Instead, once the impact of the devaluation on prices began to wear off, the rate of inflation fell rapidly. Best of all, instead of going into a coma as it had done after the crash devaluation of 1992, Russian industry began to grow rapidly.

How does one account for the change? Liberal economists are at a loss for an answer. It is obvious that the steep devaluation of the rouble priced imports out of the market, and forced even the Russian middle class to look urgently for local substitutes. This gave Russian consumer goods industries their chance. But they are at a loss to explain why these industries were unable to seize exactly the same chance six years earlier. In fact, between 1992 and 1996, the consumer goods industries had experienced the most severe declines in output.

Orthodox Russian economists have the

other half of the explanation. Mr. Primakov's decision to ignore the warnings of the IMF and make paying the workers his first priority, and not to close but refinance all but the most profligate of the private banks, had the possibly unforeseen but vitally important effect of remonetising the Russian economy. The change that made the miracle possible was the emergence of a market economy. By a curious irony, this transformation was actually slowed down, instead of being speeded up, by Russia's

*Two years ago, the Russian economy was in tatters...*

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strict adherence, after 1994, to the IMF's prescription for controlling inflation by preventing the growth of money supply. In theory, this was expected to reduce demand and therefore inflation, and choke off imports, and thereby stabilise the exchange rate. In practice, it demonetised the entire Russian economy and pushed it back hundreds of years into a barter subsistence economy.

By July 1998, under Mr. Yegor Gaidar and Mr. Anatoly Chubais as Prime Ministers, Russia had succeeded in doing both. But the social and economic cost was frightful. In a country where nearly every one was a wage earner on the Government's payroll, attempts to curb the growth of money supply meant that wages and pensions remained unadjusted for inflation and unpaid, sometimes for years. As a result, real incomes shrank till in 1996 two-fifths of the population did not earn enough to meet the bare needs for food and a minimum of clothing. Had the socialist era not left them with a roof over their heads and free heat, they would have died in their millions.

The Government also did not pay its own bills. As a result, even profitable state enterprises such as the energy giant Gazprom refused to pay taxes. The Government refused to give advances to keep loss-making enterprises afloat. The result was that the entire economy was inexorably

shrunk rapidly and the tax base widened in step with this. The ratio of revenue to GDP rose to 11 per cent in the beginning of 1999 and dramatically to 18 per cent in the beginning of 2000. Some of this growth undoubtedly reflects the high international price of oil, basic metals and chemicals, on whose exports the Government levies a heavy tax. But after netting this out, the revenue to GDP ratio is still 14.6 per cent this year and is expected rise to almost 16 per cent next year.

Best of all, a decision taken by Mr. Primakov in October 1998 to compel exporters to sell 75 per cent of their export earnings to the Russian Central Bank has reduced the flight of capital and caused reserves to swell from \$ 7.1 billion in October 1998, to \$ 23.6 billion in July this year. Thanks to the oil price bonanza they are expected to exceed \$ 39 billion by the end of the year.

When the Russian Government defaulted on its payments on August 18, 1998, the infant Russian banking system collapsed. Unable to meet the run on them by depositors, they downed shutters. Inflation soared to 84.5 per cent, and living standards plummeted. The percentage of people living in poverty soared from 22.5 per cent before the crisis to a peak of 38 per cent in January to March 1999. The decline of population which had begun 1992, accelerated sharply. Death rates rose while birth rates fell.

To more and more Russians, however, the years 1992 to 1999 are already beginning to feel like a nightmare from which they have at last woken up. Today, most wage arrears have been paid off. Real incomes, though still far from adequate, are rising and so, less rapidly, are pensions. According to one survey, the index of consumer confidence had risen from a nadir of 40 in October 1998 to 85 in April 2000. There has been a similar improvement in the investment outlook, with two-fifths of all companies reporting plans to expand investment in the coming year. More than half of the decline in real wages caused by the 1998 devaluation has been made up. Russians have ceased to brood over their economic and political decline and are beginning to look, and plan, ahead.

Industry started to revive almost immediately. From 0.6 per cent in April 1999, the year-on-year growth of industrial production rose to a steady 10 to 11 per cent in the

# The Russian idea: Lenin to Peter the Great

HD-19

27/9

By C. Raja Mohan

ST. PETERSBURG, SEPT. 26. There is indeed a bit of Lenin left over in St. Petersburg, which was known under the Soviet dispensation as Leningrad. A flowing statue of Lenin, founder of Russian Communism, with one hand stretched out greets you in front of the imposing offices of the Governor of this region, Mr. Vladimir Yakovlev.

It was only natural that the visiting Indian journalists would ask Mr. Yakovlev why Lenin stands out there when the city in a referendum after the collapse of the Soviet Union opted to restore the old name. An unfazed Mr. Yakovlev said the demolition of statues is a sign of weakness and insisted that all monuments erected will stand.

It is not that the new generation of Russian leaders like Governor Yakovlev remain enamoured with Leninism. But they represent a new political maturity in Russia about owing up to the past and coming to terms with it.

Like Mr. Yakovlev, his former colleague in St. Petersburg and now the President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, argues that as Russia looks to a new post-Communist future, it would be a mistake not to recognise the unquestionable achievements of those times. At the same time, Mr. Putin says, Communism vividly demonstrated its inability to foster sound self-development dooming our country to lag behind other advanced countries.

Mr. Putin and his generation don't want to go back to Communism. But they also want to end the disastrous economic experimentation of the last decade. Demanding that Russia search its own path to renewal, Mr. Putin says abstract models and schemes taken from foreign textbooks cannot assure Russian prosperity.

While embracing free market and democracy, the new Russian leaders now focus on the idea of Russia. The emphasis is on patriotism, national self-renewal and the building of a strong state that will restore a semblance of stability and morality. While there is a renew-

ed emphasis on the greatness of Russia, the Putins and Yakovlevs demand that Russian mentality should be expanded by new ideas.

Elaborating on the idea in the charter he presented to the nation, Mr. Putin argues that in the modern age, a country's power is manifested more in its ability to develop and use advanced technologies and ensuring a high level of well-being than in its military strength. Lenin will continue to stand in front of Mr. Yakovlev's cavernous mansion; but the only portrait inside his office is that of Peter the Great, who laid the foundation for modern Russia. The idea of Russia that is slowly gripping the nation is about looking deep inside itself and chart the course for a future that will be very different from the recent past

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The political tension between St. Petersburg and Moscow has always been a Russian reality. A young Russian journalist told us here that St. Petersburg may not be the first city of

## RUSSIA TODAY — II

Russia; but he pressed on to say that it is not the second either. St. Petersburg was the capital of Russia before it was shifted to Moscow, and the city now sees itself as the cultural capital of Russia and also the cultured capital. For most of those who see themselves as Petersburgs, Moscow is too low-brow. But the capital cities everywhere have a way of cornering resources. Today Moscow looks more painted and brighter than St. Petersburg. But the city on the Western edges of Russia, and which saw itself as Russia's window to the West and modernity, the home to Russian culture and literature, is gearing itself up to celebrate the 300th anniversary of its founding in 2003.

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The citizens of St. Petersburg are mightily pleased that one of their own is today the President. Like all the previous Russian leaders,

Mr. Putin has taken a whole lot of his associates from St. Petersburg to run the show in Moscow. Unlike in India, where the Prime Minister has to constantly keep an eye on the regional balances in distributing the fishes and loaves of office, the Russian leaders take their trusted allies to Moscow to run the government.

President Boris Yeltsin, who hailed from Yekaterinburg in the Urals took people from the city to Moscow. Now under Mr. Putin, a powerful St. Petersburg network controls the levers of power in Moscow. But Mr. Putin has a problem with Governor Yakovlev.

In the early 1990s, they were part of the same reformist team that was built by Mr. Anatoly Sobchak. Mr. Yakovlev fell out with the gang and got himself elected Governor a second time last May. At that time, Mr. Putin had called Mr. Yakovlev Judas for the betrayal. As the top-gun of Russia, Mr. Putin needs to show he is in control of home territory. Until now, Mr. Yakovlev reportedly has not bitten the various offers from Mr. Putin to be kicked upstairs. Mr. Putin will obviously will keep on trying.

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India has a huge stake in St. Petersburg. Its Consulate-General here has a room named after Mr. Putin. When he was one of the vice-mayors, he visited the Indian mission for a function. But the real Indian stake is in the economic and trade relations with St. Petersburg, which runs today at nearly \$250m.

If one includes the defence purchases it immediately goes up to nearly a \$1 billions. The Admiralty shipyard here is manufacturing both frigates and submarines for the Indian Navy. When the Soviet Union broke up, the economy of St. Petersburg was almost 80 per cent dependent upon defence contracts. The dependence has now come down to about 20 per cent. But the contracts with India are very valuable and have considerable impact on local employment. Given these stakes, Governor Yakovlev hopes to visit India early next year.

THE HINDU

27 SEP 2003

# Putin intervenes, sacks 6 top generals

By PETER GRAFF

Moscow, Aug. 1: Russian President Vladimir Putin sacked six senior generals on Monday, apparently weighing in against his defence minister in a high profile quarrel that has split the top military brass.

The six generals were all seen as allies of veteran defence minister Igor Sergeev, who has clashed with the younger Chief of the General Staff, Mr Anatoly Kvashnin, in an increasingly embarrassing public row.

Mr Kvashnin has proposed eliminating the nuclear missile forces as a separate branch of the military to free up resources for conventional arms. Mr

Sergeev, who served his entire career in the missile forces, has called the plans "insane".

President Putin ordered the two men jointly to submit a reorganisation plan, which they did last week. But Russian military analysts have said the row is likely to end in

the ouster of one or the other of Russia's two top commanders.

Monday's dismissals are certain to fuel speculation that Mr Sergeev may be next.

The daily *Izvestia*, reporting the sackings in an early edition of its Tuesday edition said: "The commander-in-chief

has chosen Anatoly Kvashnin. Now the defence minister must either demand from the Kremlin an explanation of the mass dismissals of his subordinates, or accept the challenge hurled at him and prepare for a quick resignation." The newspaper said. "The next few days will show whether

Mr Vladimir Putin will hand over the defence ministry to his favourite."

The six generals sacked on Monday include: head of radioactive, biological and chemical defence Stanislav Petrov, head of anti-aircraft forces Boris Dukhov, procurement chief Anatoly Sitnov, artillery and rockets chief Nikolai

Karaulov, head of funding and trade Alexander Zlobin and press service head Anatoly Shatalov. All served under Mr Sergeev in the defence ministry bureaucracy, rather than under Mr Kvashnin in the general staff. Meanwhile Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed on Monday to visit Libya and was quoted as urging the United Nations to finally lift sanctions against Tripoli. The foreign ministers of both countries proclaimed a new era of improved ties.

Mr Putin's acceptance of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's invitation follows his visit to North Korea and talks in Moscow with the deputy prime minister of Iraq, two other Soviet-era allies mistrusted by the West. (Reuters)

## RUSSIA MILITARY ROW

THE ASIAN AGE

2 AUG 200

# Russia plans ban on fundamentalist group

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, AUG 5. Russian authorities are pressing for a ban on a fundamentalist Islamic sect in an attempt to halt the onslaught of religious fanaticism in mainly-Muslim regions of the country. The advisory Security Council has called for outlawing Wahhabism, a conservative brand of Sunni Islam that has recently gained a foothold in the former Soviet Central Asia and is spreading rapidly across Russia.

According to the Interior Minister, Gen. Vladimir Rushailo, up to 80 Wahhabi organisations are currently active in Russia. They first cropped up in North Caucasus, where the Russian army has been fighting Islamic separatists in Chechnya, and spread north, not only to Muslim regions, such as Tatarstan, but to non-Muslim territories — Astrakhan, Volgograd, Kuban and Mordovia.

Moscow maintains that Wahhabi mercenaries of Arab origin and their local followers are spearheading the rebel resistance in Chechnya. On Thursday, a military spokesman in Moscow said Wahhabis from neighbouring Dagestan were responsible for ambushing an elite unit of Russian paratroopers in Chechnya in March, killing more than 30 soldiers. The Russian leadership views the onslaught of Islamic fundamentalism as part of a great-power game for recarving the geopolitical map of the world. The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, is on record as saying that the anti-Russian rebellion in Chechnya was "only a fragment" of a greater "general struggle for re-making of the world" on the part of "extremist forces," particularly in Central Asia and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union.

In April, Russia and four former Soviet republics in Central Asia set up an anti-terrorist

centre to prevent radical Islamic groups from expanding their influence across the region. Russia's Security Council, which discussed the problem of Islamic extremism last week behind closed doors, is reported to have recommended that national legislation on the freedom of conscience and religious organisations be amended to outlaw Wahhabism.

The issue has split Russian Muslims. Three months ago Sheikh Talgat Tadjudin, head of the Spiritual Board of Russian Muslims, called on Russian authorities to ban Wahhabism. In a letter to the Russian President, he said his organisation needed government support to stem the tide of aggressive Wahhabism, which is generously financed from abroad and skillfully exploits Russia's economic problems and religious illiteracy of Russian Muslims.

The leader of a rival Muslim organisation, Russia's Council of Mufti, Sheikh Ravil Gainutdinov, has opposed a formal ban on Wahhabism. While admitting that extremist Islamic sects were gaining a foothold in Russia, he argued that such a ban would inevitably lead to abuses that would hit mainstream Muslims. "Few people know what Wahhabism is, and before there is complete clarity on the question such a law must not be adopted," Sheikh Gainutdin said. "Wahhabism is an ideology and can be only fought against by ideological methods."

However, the Kremlin is determined to press ahead with a legislative ban on Wahhabism. With Moscow's tacit approval, Dagestan last year approved a law outlawing "Wahhabi and other extremist activities" on its territory. The new pro-Russian administrator of Chechnya, Mufti Akhmad Kadyrov, has also banned the Wahhabi movement.

THE HINDU

6 AUG 2000

RUSSIA / DEFENCE FEUD RESOLVED

# Putin calls for military reforms

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, AUG. 12. The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, drew a line under an embarrassing public feud in the defence establishment, calling for a balanced military reform that would meet both potential threats and financial limitations.

Speaking at a key meeting of the policy-making Security Council in the Kremlin on Friday, he lambasted the bungled attempts at military reform under his predecessor, Mr. Boris Yeltsin. "The current structure of the armed forces is hardly optimal", Mr. Putin said, opening the meeting attended by the military top brass. "We spend huge funds on security needs, yet combat training is not conducted in many units, pilots rarely fly and sailors rarely go to sea."

Demonstrating his trademark pragmatic style, Mr. Putin said the military structure must be adapted precisely to the kind of threats Russia may face now and in the near future, but all changes had to be economically substantiated. Otherwise, they will be carried out just as the military reforms have been in the past 10 years, he said.

The former President, Mr. Yeltsin, several times announced the start of a radical military reform but it has never taken off the ground because of a lack of concept and funding.

Friday's meeting put an end to a very unusual public dispute in the military over ways of reforming Russia's armed forces. The Chief of the General Staff, General Anatoly Kvashnin, has called for drastically slashing land-based ballistic missiles and for diverting funds to ground forces. However, the Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeyev, a former missile commander, denounced the plan as mad ravings, arguing that the rocket forces was the most combat-ready arm of the decaying armed forces and the only remaining symbol of Russia's great-power status.

Details of the four-hour Security Council meeting were sketchy, but the Security Council Secretary, Mr. Sergei Ivanov, suggested a compromise formula had been worked out. "We managed to reach the key goal — to make



The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin (centre), at a meeting with officials in the Kremlin in Moscow on Saturday. (From left) The Foreign Minister, Mr. Igor Ivanov, the Defence Minister, Mr. Igor Sergeyev, the Prime Minister, Mr. Mikhail Kasyanov, the Security Council Secretary, Mr. Sergei Ivanov, the Interior Minister, Mr. Vladimir Rushailo and the Federal Security Service Director, Mr. Nikolai Patrushev. — AP

a balanced decision, that would do no harm to any branch of the military," he said after the meeting.

Marshal Sergeyev made it clear there would be no drastic cuts in the strategic missile forces. "No missile launcher would be demolished until the end of its regular and extended lifespan," he said.

Defence Ministry sources said the military reform plan for a period until 2015 approved at the meeting calls for gradual reduction of both missile and ground forces. Beginning 2006, land-based missile forces will be cut from their current 3,500 nuclear warheads to 1,500, rather than to 1,400 by 2003 as proposed by the General Staff. Ground forces are to be trimmed down from today's 1.2 million men to 900,000 and their rearmament will be stepped up. Funding of the armed forces will

improve at the expense of other security forces, above all the overblown military units of the Interior Ministry. Russia currently allocates around \$ 5 billions for defence needs, contrasted with \$300 billions by the U.S.

In the first follow-up to Friday's meeting, the Air Force Chief, General Anatoly Kornukov, announced on Saturday that Russia's ageing anti-ballistic missile rockets would be taken off duty and their job taken over by the Air Force.

The Defence Minister and the General Staff Chief appear to have both retained their posts for the moment, but analysts predict Mr. Putin may replace both in a few months and possibly appoint a civilian to head the Defence Ministry as part of an effort to demarcate more clearly the functions of the Ministry and the general staff.

THE HINDU

13 AUG 2000

# Over 100 trapped as N-sub stuck on seabed

■ Russian navy blames technical faults, says reactor shut down

REUTERS  
MOSCOW, AUG 14

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**M**ORE than 100 Russian sailors were trapped in a nuclear-powered submarine on the sea bed off northern Russia on Monday after technical faults forced them to shut down the nuclear reactor, the navy said.

Russia's independent NTV television station said the cause of the accident was flooding of the torpedo tubes and front section of the submarine Kursk, and said a power shutdown might lead to problems with oxygen supplies.

But the head of the navy's press office, Igor Dygalo, said that unspecified technical faults had forced the Kursk to settle on the sea bed after training exercises in the Barents Sea, most of which lies in the Arctic circle north of European Russia.

He gave no details of the depth or location of the Kursk, classed as Antyei in Russia and Oscar-2 by NATO, but said no nuclear

weapons were on board.

He said the submarine's nuclear reactor had been shut down and there were no radiation leaks, and that rescue vessels had rushed to the scene.

A reporter for NTV speaking from the Northern Fleet's base of Severomorsk said the crew of the Kursk had had to ground the vessel on the sea bed after its torpedo tubes and front section flooded.

The reporter gave no source for his information. He also said a power shutdown on the vessel might lead to problems with supplies of oxygen on board.

It was not clear whether the crew were trying to fix the problem themselves. The Norwegian environmental group Bellona said on its website ([www.bellona.no](http://www.bellona.no)) that rescue efforts could be hampered by the power shutdown.

It quoted former Russian naval officer Alexander Nikitin, who works for Bellona and was recently cleared by a Russian court of spying, as saying that if the submarine

*9/8-1*  
was at a depth of more than 100 metres it would be difficult to use the Kursk's ballast tanks to refloat it. Nikitin was quoted as saying that Oscar-2 class submarines did not have rescue capsules to take the crew to the surface and that deep-going rescue submarines would have to be used.

Interfax news agency said the Kursk came into service in 1995 and had 107 people on board, including 52 officers. Itar-Tass said its class of submarine could carry up to 130 men.

The defence ministry of Norway, which has territorial waters in the Barents, said it had no information about the incident.

One of the most serious recent submarine disasters was off Norway's North coast in 1989, when a Soviet Mike class nuclear submarine, the Komsomolets, sank after fires on board. A total of 42 crew died in the accident. Norway says the sunken submarine's nuclear reactor and torpedoes are still slowly leaking plutonium into the water.

INDIAN EXPRESS

15 AUG 2000



# The Red Army turns pale

27/8 110-12  
**T**HE KURSK submarine tragedy has highlighted the shocking extent of the Russian armed forces degradation. While the causes of powerful explosions that sent the sophisticated nuclear submarine to the bottom of the Barents Sea in the Arctic are yet to be established, it is obvious that poor training and rundown equipment combined to turn accident into disaster. Russia can still build some of the world's most powerful submarines — Kursk, dubbed "killer submarine" for its deadly Granit anti-ship missiles, was commissioned as recently as five years ago — but has no deep-diving equipment to rescue the crew of a sunken submarine.

In 1985 Russian divers made it to the Guinness Book of records for going down 300 metres under water for the first time in diving history, but 15 years later they had no equipment to descend 100 metres to the aid of the stricken Kursk. Naval rescue units have been downsized and their funding cut. The abyss of the armed forces' decline has shaken even the Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin. "I knew the navy was in a dire state, but I had no idea things were that bad," he told the families of the perished crew.

The Russian armed forces have been crippled by ten years of Mr. Boris Yeltsin's bungled economic reforms, which decimated the country's GNP to a quarter of what it was in Soviet times. Mr. Yeltsin entrusted the challenging job of reforming the huge army Russia inherited from the Soviet Union to the military top brass who understandably were above all concerned with keeping their jobs. Troop numbers have been slashed from 3.5 million to 1.2 million, but the number of generals and admirals has even increased compared to what the Soviet Union had. They resisted further cuts and preserved the bloated command structure to justify their usefulness. As a result, Russia today has an armed force comparable on paper to that of the United States and a vast military infrastructure that survives on a budget that constitutes 2 per cent of the American defence spending at the current exchange rate.

Military training all but stopped, morale plummeted, soldiers were ill-fed, officers did not receive wages for months and survived by giving blood and working as night guards and taxi drivers. In 1994 when Mr. Yeltsin sent the army to fight separatists in Chechnya, the military could not put up

## *The Kursk submarine tragedy has highlighted the shocking extent of the Russian armed forces' degradation, writes* **VLADIMIR RADYUHN.**

even two combat-ready divisions and lost the first campaign against a ragtag army of Islamic rebels. The army has claimed more success in its current year-long campaign in Chechnya, but it still loses scores of men in the region every week.

Mr. Putin came to power in spring on the slogan of strengthening the state and its armed forces. Last month the policy-making Security Council under his chairmanship called for optimising the defence structure and spending and for continuing balanced reductions in the armed forces.

The catastrophe of the Kursk may dictate the need for more radical changes. "We must draw, without any doubts, certain conclusions" from the Kursk sinking, Mr. Putin said last week.

The Russian military has insisted the Kursk must have collided with a foreign, presumably NATO,

submarine. However, it is yet to produce evidence to support the claim, while military commentators said it was more likely the submarine had been rammed by a Russian warship. The Russian navy has not held major war games for years for lack of funding. Only a tiny percentage of the navy is at sea at any one time. Experienced officers have been leaving the navy because they do not get decent pay and those who stay have little incentive to work hard apart from a sense of duty.

In these conditions, sophisticated weapons become a threat not so much to the enemy as to those who use them. A devastating explosion of about two tonnes of TNT that ripped the Kursk must have been caused by torpedoes stocked aboard. The Defence Ministry's *Krasnaya Zvezda* newspaper reported that during an overhaul in 1998 the Kursk's torpedoes were replaced by cheaper models powered by more dangerous hydrogen-mix engines. Fortunately, the Kursk carried no nuclear weapons, but it had two nuclear reactors and no one knows if they were damaged in the blast.

Russia has ten more Oscar-class guided-missile submarines, to which the Kursk belonged, about 18 ballistic-missile submarines and close to 30 attack nuclear-powered submarines. The Kursk disaster has raised the question of

whether Russia needs so many nuclear submarines, especially since few of them can be deployed for lack of funds and proper maintenance.

"We must stretch our feet according to our means," Mr. Putin told the relatives of the Kursk crew last week. "We do not have to keep 30 submarines, maybe 10, but their crews must be taken good care of and be well provided." At the same time Mr. Putin has called for increasing defence spending next year above the budget target of 206.3 billion roubles (just under \$7 billion).

If the drastic cuts proposed by Mr. Putin are more than a populist gesture to placate the grieving families of the Kursk's dead crew, they are likely to run into opposition from the military.

And the Russian leader, who has no power base of his own, can ill-afford to antagonise the defence establishment, which has strongly supported his tough stand on Chechnya.

An internal analysis by the Russian General Staff prepared more than a year ago said the country could not finance an armed forces strength of more than 600,000 personnel. Yet the guidelines approved at the recent Security Council meeting call for a 50 per cent bigger force of 900,000. Otherwise, three-fourths of the Generals will lose their jobs.

THE HINDU

27 AUG 2000

## WRONG REFLEXES

*Russia* *Kursk* torpedoes hit Putin presidency

THE torpedoes that sunk the *Kursk* appear also to have hit Putin's presidency — his ratings have already slipped 10 per cent since the disaster. He may have been inclined by Soviet era reflexes and KGB training to initially treat the crisis as a military emergency, but it has rapidly assumed the proportions of a human disaster hogging media attention. In what must be the Russian version of the Indian "foreign hand" thesis, the defence minister initially claimed that the giant submarine reinforced with a double hull sank because it had been rammed by a foreign submarine. Although he withdrew it later, it provides a revealing glimpse of the official mindset. Within Russia not many are buying the official version — of doing everything possible to rescue the sailors. Relatives of the dead sailors have refused to participate in official ceremonies of mourning and television viewers had a dramatic glimpse of dissent as well as its heavy-handed suppression, when a middle aged woman screamed at Ilya Klebanov, the Deputy Prime Minister and was forcibly injected with a heavy dose of sedative causing her to collapse.

Putin has claimed that Norwegian divers took a full six days to reach the submarine's hatch after being authorised to proceed, but both Norwegian and British teams now contradict this, saying they had both been obstructed from proceeding and misinformed about conditions around the submarine by the Russians. Initial reports suggested that the rear escape hatch of the submarine was severely damaged and the currents too strong for a rescue attempt, yet Norwegian divers found visibility good and experienced no difficulties. More such revelations in the days ahead could seriously damage Putin's reputation as well as that of the Russian armed forces. Russia has a huge and obsolescent military, in keeping with its pretensions of being a superpower and may need to move towards a smaller but more flexible and manageable fighting force. What would be the lessons for India in the episode? India relies heavily on a culture of secrecy as well as Russian military equipment. India needs to take a long hard look both at military procurements from Russia as well as the cloak of secrecy that surrounds its own official procedures.

THE STRAITS

28 AUG 2000

## Putin wants tougher action against rebels

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, JULY 6. The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, has called for a stepped-up military crackdown on rebels in the wake of a recent series of deadly bomb attacks in the breakaway region.

Paying a surprise visit to North Caucasus on his way back from Central Asia, Mr. Putin ordered Russian military commanders to improve their performance in Chechnya to avoid a repetition of suicide truck bombings which killed or wounded over 100 Russian troops last Sunday.

At a late-night meeting on Wednesday with military commanders and regional leaders at a military base in Mozdok, capital of North Ossetia, which borders Chechnya, the Russian leader berated the Interior Minister, General Vladimir Ruzhailo, for lax discipline of his troops which had led to large casualties in Sunday's attacks, and reaffirming his commitment to continued military operation in Chechnya.

"We should steadily step up our efforts to normalise the situation in the region," he said. "We are completely convinced that if we do not stop this seat of terrorism and extremism in Chechnya, then we will be faced with it again elsewhere in the country."

Mr. Putin also sought to end the ongoing rivalry between the Defence and Interior Ministry forces

in Chechnya which hampered the military's operations against rebels. The President pointedly reminded to the Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeyev, that he was still in charge of the overall operation in Chechnya and told all other officials to "strictly and rigorously carry out orders issued by the Minister of Defence."

Analysts said the rebels' new tactics of resorting to terrorist attacks left Russians defenceless. "If Chechen suicide bombers are capable of inflicting heavy losses on Russian forces in Chechnya, which is packed with Federal troops, they can strike even more effectively in other parts of the country," said Mr. Pavel Felgenhauer, a Moscow-based defence analyst. Russia's top military commander in Chechnya, General Gennady Troshev, told the NTV television that rebels seemed resolved to continue armed resistance. He estimated the number of militants confronting the 90,000-strong Russian force in Chechnya at 2,000. But despite their overwhelming superiority both in numbers and weapons, Russian troops continue to suffer daily losses.

During the past week, rebels killed 61 and wounded 153 Russian soldiers in Chechnya, a military spokesman announced in Moscow on Thursday. This is the highest weekly casualty rate in many weeks. //

THE HINDU

7 JULY 2001

# Putin's tactics ring alarm bells in the West

SIX months after he came to power promising to bring leadership and reform to Russia, President Vladimir Putin is becoming known for his autocratic rule: above all, for his attacks on press freedom.

In the latest example of the authorities' crackdown on their critics, Andrei Babitsky, the reporter detained in a camp in Chechnya in January, was on Thursday banned from travelling to Bucharest to receive a prize for his reporting. Instead of the award, he faces charges of carrying false documents and fines of £700. Many believe his crime was simply his critical coverage of the war.

The move against him coincided this week with the fourth interrogation of Vladimir Gusinsky, chairman of Media-Most, Russia's only independent media empire. Gusinsky was arrested and briefly imprisoned in mid-June on charges of defrauding the government of

How the West deals with Russia in the future may well depend on who is elected the next American President, says ALICE LAGNADO



Vladimir Putin: disquiet about his repressive tendencies

£7 million. The charges against both men have been ridiculed by journalists, politicians and commentators, who have called the Gusinsky case the most substantial attack on the media by Mr Putin since he became Prime Minister last year. They also argue that the attacks are simply the latest in a series of authoritarian measures about which the West has been too forgiving.

Russian liberals have warned the West that its softly-softly approach to Mr Putin's intimidation of journalists is even counter-productive because it is interpreted by the Kremlin as a blank cheque to harass its critics. Igor Malashenko, a senior executive in Gusinsky's holding company who was himself detained last month, said that the West's lack of forceful criticism of Mr Putin had sent the wrong message to the Kremlin.

"Appeasement does not work," he said. "Mr Blair's meeting with Putin created the misconception for Putin that he will be admitted into the exclusive club of Western leaders. Western leaders should be much more direct in dealing with Mr Putin." Tougher criticism would not isolate Russia but rather it would have an important influence on the new Russian regime. Instead, there was an over-confident mood among the President's men, he said. "People in the Kremlin think they can do anything they want about Chechnya or anything else," he said.

Sergei Kovalyov, Russia's veteran human rights campaigner, said it was simply easier for Western governments to pre-

tend things were fine in Russia. "They don't want to examine things properly. That is exactly what the Putin team is counting on," he said.

Mr Kovalyov said that the Russian government could go on harassing the press in myriad ways without having to resort to the psychiatric hospitals or labour camps employed by the Soviet regime. "No gulag is needed because inside every Soviet person there is a prison guard, and that is much more effective than an actual prison."

Even Sergei Dorenko, a prominent journalist widely perceived as a Kremlin supporter, has condemned the President's clampdown. He said: "It's hard for foreign and Russian investors to understand what is happening here. On the one hand, we seem to be in favour of investment, but on the other, democracy is being replaced by what even cautious critics are calling elements of a police state."

Critics of the West's handling of Mr Putin point to a lengthening list of decisions indicating that his instincts for control, honed during his KGB years, have come to the fore. The Security Council, an unelected body dominated by figures from the intelligence services, will run the country if a state of emergency is declared, according to a new law soon to be passed by parliament. In addition, Gazprom, the natural gas giant which is the country's biggest company, is now de facto under Mr Putin's control.

Mr Putin has also just pushed through a law enabling him to dismiss elected regional gover-

nors, further tightening central control of the country. Further, he has not introduced the promised legislation to implement wide reforms in Russia: for instance of the judicial system, which largely acts in the interests of the rich and powerful.

Until now, Mr Putin has enjoyed the comfort of economic stability because of high oil prices and the rouble devaluation in 1998. But he said this week that inflation would rise sharply, to 2.5 per cent, this month and the effects of devaluation are wearing off. Now the oil price is falling. Observers are worried about how he will act if the economy takes a nosedive.

Disquiet about his repressive tendencies has reopened the debate in the West about how best to deal with his leadership. Although Prime Minister Blair and President Clinton have sought to establish good working relations with the new Kremlin, on the assumption that he will be running Russia for the next decade, there are lingering doubts in other Western capitals about him and his failure to get to grips with the priorities facing his country.

One British source, who has watched the Putin Kremlin closely, said: "There were great expectations when he came to office and the shine has worn off. Threats against press freedoms are disturbing. Equally, where is the programme for reform we heard so much about earlier?" There is a palpable sense of drift, with Russians not clear sometimes if the government or the Security Council is actually running the country.

In the West, there are some signs of a reassessment. Shadow foreign secretary Francis Maude called on the British government on Wednesday to readjust its policy towards Moscow.

"Mr Blair's hasty embrace of Vladimir Putin owed everything to competitive opportunism and nothing to balanced judgment," he said. "We need close relations with powerful but unstable states such as Russia and China, but we don't need to check in our values at the check-out desk when we visit them. They won't respect us if we do."

How the West deals with Russia in the future may well depend on who is elected the next American President. A victory by Texas governor and Republican candidate George W. Bush would usher in a far more hawkish administration.

— The Times, London.

THE STATESMAN

RUSSIA / 'NATION FACING CATASTROPHIC SITUATION'

HD-12  
9/7

## Putin calls for a strong state

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, JULY 8.** In his first major address to the nation after being elected Russia's President in March, Mr. Vladimir Putin, painted a grim picture of the country's situation and said only a strong state could save the nation from extinction.

Much of Mr. Putin's 50-minute state of the nation address was devoted to a hard-hitting analysis of a catastrophic situation in Russian society and economy after 10 years of mishandled reforms.

"For several years now, Russia's population has been declining at an annual rate of 750,000," the President said addressing both Houses of Parliament gathered in the Kremlin on Saturday. "According to forecast, we could lose 22 million people, or one-seventh of its present population, within 15 years. If the trend persists, the very survival of the nation will be jeopardised."

Russia's economy was ineffective, the business climate remained bad, investment risks were high, and bureaucracy was stifling, Mr. Putin said. The country was losing the race to developed countries and could end up in the Third World.

He blamed a weak state for the country's deep and protracted economic crisis. "Indecisive state and weak Government has stalled the economic and other reforms."

Mr. Putin called for the state to stop interfering in business activity and concentrate on lowering the tax burden, enforcing the law and protecting property rights.

"The main barriers to economic reform are high taxes, the arbitrariness of bureaucrats and rash of criminals."

Mr. Putin vowed to end "crony capitalism" that emerged and gained political clout during Mr. Boris Yeltsin's rule. "The vacuum of power has resulted in private corporations and clans



The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin (right), listens to Mr. Yegor Stroyev, Chairman of the Federation Council, the Upper House, prior to presenting his first annual state of the union address at the Kremlin, Moscow on Saturday. Members of Parliament, Cabinet members and the judges of Russia's top courts gathered in an ornate Kremlin hall to hear the speech. — AP

seizing some Government functions."

He defended his reforms to cut the powers of the regions, reiterating the need for rebuilding a vertical of Central authority in the country which was disrupted when regions grabbed power from the Centre with Mr. Yeltsin's encouragement.

"No economic programme will succeed if there is no single economic and legal space throughout the country," Mr. Putin said, condemning local restrictions on the flow of cap-

ital and goods as "outrageous and shameful."

Without openly saying so, the President made it clear that he would push for painful reforms in the economy, bankrupting unprofitable state-owned companies, cutting back on "excessive" social benefits and withdrawing state support to losing industries.

Mr. Putin hailed Russia's military operation in Chechnya, saying it was the only way to "prevent the collapse of the Russian Federation."

THE END

# Training guns on each other

**A**FTER JUST three months in office, the Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, is facing his first crisis in the defence establishment, with a bitter rivalry among the top brass threatening to split the military and undermine the country's defence potential.

For the first time in modern Russia's history, two top defence officials have publicly clashed over the national defence strategy. Last week the Chief of the General Staff, General Anatoly Kvashnin, called for slashing Russia's arsenal of land-based inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and depriving the Strategic Nuclear Rocket Force, which is responsible for the missiles, of its status as an independent branch of the armed forces. Gen. Kvashnin proposed using the money saved to beef up Russia's conventional forces. The Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeyev, responded by blasting the plan as a "crime against Russia" and "sheer madness" and threatened to resign if it was accepted.

Mr. Putin intervened and ordered the rivals to stop making public statements and instructed the advisory Security Council to carry out an "objective assessment and clarification" of the issue and present its conclusions later this month. The scandal reflected an ongoing debate in Russia over ways of ensuring its national security in the post-cold war era. Gen. Kvashnin speaks for a section of the military which believes that the emphasis in defence strategy should be shifted from nuclear weapons to conventional forces. It argues that in the absence of East-West confrontation, nuclear conflict has become all but impossible and it is enough for Russia to maintain only a small nuclear force to deter a potential aggressor with a second-strike capability. On the other hand, Russia needs strong conventional forces to deal with internal instability and secessionist tendencies as in Chechnya and to defend its borders. General Staff experts have arrived at the conclusion that given potential threats Russia must be prepared to fight two limited regional conflicts at a time. Meanwhile, the present state of the Russian army is so poor that it cannot handle even one conflict, as the war in Chechnya has shown.

Since becoming Defence Minister in 1997, Marshal Sergeyev, former commander of the Strategic Nuclear Rocket forces, has channelled over 80 per cent of the Ministry's meagre arms procurement budget to buy new ICBMs. As a result, the army began its campaign in Chechnya last fall



The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, is flanked by his warring advisors, the Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeyev (to his left), and the Chief of the General Staff, Gen. Anatoly Kvashnin... cracks in the armour.

## A bitter rivalry among the top brass is threatening to split Russia's military and undermine its defence. VLADIMIR RADYUHIN reports.

without attack helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft capable of operating at night or in fog, without modern communication equipment and many other things that could have reduced its losses. Gen. Kvashnin has called for relocating expenditure from nuclear to conventional arms and drastically reducing land-based ICBM launchers to between 100 and 150, as against 450 envisaged by the START-II treaty with the United States.

Opponents of the plan say it would not only critically undermine the Russian defence potential but would also affect the country's geopolitical position. It would weaken Russia's positions at current talks with the U.S. on a START-III treaty and the fate of the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, which Washington would like to modify to build a National Missile Defence (NMD). Critics say that land-based ICBMs, which have traditionally been Russia's most

formidable nuclear component, have gained even greater importance today in view of the progressing degradation of the navy and the air force.

"The Kvashnin plan is a strategic signal for the U.S.: Russia is giving up the model of mutual nuclear containment, on which strategic stability has been based for several decades," says Dr. Sergei Rogov, head of the Institute of U.S. and Canada Studies. "It will take two U.S. submarines patrolling off the Russian coast to destroy our 100 ICBMs and a dozen or so bases of submarines and heavy bombers in one salvo." The precious few missiles that could survive the attack would be easily intercepted by an NMD the U.S. wants to deploy. Thus, Gen. Kvashnin's plan adds fuel power to champions of NMD in the U.S.

Nuclear war scenarios are of course purely theoretical, as no one in his senses is going to unleash a nuclear conflict, but by losing nuclear deterrence capability Russia, which is still largely an economic cripple, will become vulnerable to all kinds of political, economic and strategic pressures and lose all hope of becoming one of the centres of a multi-polar world it has been advocating.

The main driving motive behind Gen. Kvashnin's plan seems to be his bitter personal conflict with the Defence Minister. The two are barely on speaking terms.

The Chief of the General Staff is one of the main candidates to replace Marshal Sergeyev, who is past retirement age and is widely expected to go next spring or even earlier.

Dr. Rogov says the ambitious general has learned his tactics from the former Russian President, Mr. Boris Yeltsin. "In order to get rid of (the then Soviet President, Mr. Mikhail) Gorbachev he hated so much, Boris Yeltsin went as far as to dismantle the Soviet Union nine years ago," the expert said. "Today Gen. Kvashnin is ready to liquidate the last remaining vestige of the destroyed superpower — Russia's strategic nuclear forces — in order to get rid of the Defence Minister he hates and take up his office."

Another possible reason for Gen. Kvashnin's attack is his desire to avoid being made the scapegoat for the military's failure to contain Chechen rebels, who continue to inflict heavy losses on Russian forces.

Mr. Putin, who prefers pragmatic solutions, is likely to steer a middle course in the dispute. He is aware of the need to improve the funding of the army, but he also realises the importance of the country's nuclear arsenal. However, the fact that the long-brewing feud has broken into the open shows that Mr. Putin is yet to consolidate his hold on power.

THE HINDU  
23 JUL 2000

# President Putin's plan to curb Governors' powers assailed

Fred Weir  
Moscow, June 1

**T**YCOON BORIS Berezovsky, often called the king-maker of Russian politics, has made a public break with President Vladimir Putin over state policy. Some analysts say the squabble signals a major power struggle within the Kremlin. "Putin is demolishing some Russian democratic institutions in ways that will radically change the structure of the state," Mr Berezovsky warned in an open letter published in the Russian Press on Wednesday.

He was referring to Mr Putin's plan to curtail the powers of regional Governors by creating seven huge territorial zones in Russia, each ruled by a Kremlin representative. In other initiatives, Mr Putin is seeking the power to fire disobedient regional leaders and has moved to strip them of their right to sit in the upper chamber of Parliament.

The Governors of Russia's 89 regions and ethnic republics are all elected, but many of them have turned their provinces into semi-independent fiefdoms, which they rule as virtual dictators.

Mr Putin has insisted that it is necessary

to curb the power of local leaders and restore strong central rule before there can be any sustained economic growth or uniform rule of law in the country.

But Mr Berezovsky said the new President is taking the road to disaster.

"In a democratic state such as Russia, such measures are unthinkable without public debate and a referendum," Mr Berezovsky wrote. "You cannot make such

hasty decisions in a large country like Russia, a country which is seriously ill," he said in the letter, which was addressed to Mr Putin. The attack from one of Mr Putin's strongest supporters among

Russia's powerful business clans came as a surprise to most Moscow observers. Just weeks ago, Mr Berezovsky bragged to the Press that he had used his money and connections to help Mr Putin come to power in the first place. Mr Berezovsky, a former mathematician, became one of Russia's richest men by acquiring lucrative auto dealerships, banks, oil companies and media properties during the 1990s, when former Soviet state property was privatised in often-dubious ways.

In 1996, he and several other leading business tycoons banded together to help the then President Boris Yeltsin win re-

election in the face of a strong Communist challenger. After Mr Yeltsin re-gained the Kremlin he rewarded many of his sponsors, including Mr Berezovsky, with high government jobs.

Dubbed "the oligarchs", because of their combination of political and economic clout, this group of a dozen or so super-rich men remain a powerful factor in Russian life. Analysts say Mr Putin might be in for a hard fight if he intends to cut the oligarchs down to size. "Berezovsky is very influential and has allies at the highest echelons of the state," says analyst Nikolai Zyubov.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

2 JUN 2000

# Putin in key visit to North Korea

**Moscow, June 9** (Reuters). Russian President Vladimir Putin will make an unprecedented visit to North Korea next month to try to draw the reclusive Stalinist state out of its shell and coax it toward reconciliation with South Korea.

US officials, who see North Korea as a "rogue" state and a key reason for Washington's plans for a National Missile Defence, said they hoped Putin would persuade North Korea to halt its long-range weapons programme.

"The President of Russia has received an invitation from the leadership of North Korea to visit the country and the visit will take place shortly," foreign minister Igor Ivanov told a press conference. No Soviet, let alone Russian, leader has visited Pyongyang.

Putin was invited by North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, who holds a summit with South Korea's Kim Dae-jung next week as part of a gradual opening to the outside after decades of isolationism.

"It will be much better if North Korea feels secure and can balance its approach to the outside world," said one diplomatic source. "Putin may well help to draw North Korea out of its shell."

Diplomatic sources said the visit would probably take place on July 19 or 20, sandwiched between

Putin's trips to Beijing and the Japan summit of the Group of Eight top industrialised nations. A visit to Seoul is likely later this year.

"Naturally, the talks will touch above all on bilateral relations," said Ivanov. "They have slackened over the last years. We think that this period has to be overcome."

Ivanov visited Pyongyang in February to sign a post-Soviet friendship deal which he said "lifted ties to a modern level".

He said many economic projects could be implemented. Russia shares a border with North Korea in the far east. "It is in our interests the Korean peninsula be a region of stability, security, for it not to emanate any threat," he said, alluding to US fears about the North's missile plans.

Asked whether Putin would try to persuade Kim to halt missile work, Ivanov said: "(He) is paying a visit to a friendly country and has no intention to talk anyone into anything."

Diplomatic sources said the Kremlin had not intended to announce the visit so soon. But a senior Russian diplomat, Georgy Toloraya, let the cat out of the bag in an interview with the daily newspaper *Vremya Novosti*.

THE TELEGRAPH

10 JUN 2000



## Chechnya under direct Kremlin rule

Fred Weir  
Moscow, June 9

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin has decreed direct Kremlin rule in the rebellious province of Chechnya, pending local elections that may take place in two years.

"The President has taken upon himself full powers over Chechnya," Sergei Ivanov, secretary of the Kremlin's powerful Security Council, said in an interview with the daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. He said the decree, under

which the Kremlin will assume direct control over the war-torn region, is entirely Constitutional. A law will shortly be submitted to the Duma, which will mandate elections in two years."

Analysts say the measure will ensure close central control over the ongoing counter-insurgency campaign and efforts to restore "constitutional order" and normal life in the devastated republic.

But they warn that no swift solutions are likely. "The population of Chechnya is essentially hostile to

Russia after ten years of war and destruction there," says Pavel Felgenhauer, an independent defence expert. "The reason the President is taking Chechnya under his personal direction is that no other solutions are available. It is impossible to form a government made up of pro-Russian Chechens, and elections are a pipe dream."

More than 2,200 Russian troops have been killed and 6,500 wounded in almost 9 months of heavy fighting since the latest campaign in Chechnya's decade-old war.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 JUN 2000

# Russia to impose direct rule in Chechnya

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, MAY 5. Moscow will shortly impose direct rule in Chechnya as a temporary measure to provide a transition period to limited

self-government, a top Kremlin security official said on Friday.

"A presidential decree and a draft law on direct federal rule in Chechnya is being prepared," Mr. Sergei Ivanov, secretary of Russia's influential Security Council, said in remarks broadcast by Russian television channels.

Chechnya has been under Moscow's direct military rule since the Kremlin sent troops to crush rebels in the breakaway republic last October, but the legislative basis for this rule has been flimsy.

Russia's Constitution envisages the possibility of direct rule over a territory in the form of a state of emergency, but Parliament is yet to approve a relevant constitutional law.

Mr. Ivanov said the legislation would be in place "before the end of this month." He ruled out elections for local government bodies in Chechnya for the next two to three years.

"We have been saying for a long time that election of a leader in Chechnya, whether it is a President or a local government leader, is not on the agenda at the moment," the security official said. "We need a certain transition period... It is still too early to discuss the form of government

Chechnya will eventually have."

Russia's Deputy Prime Minister for Chechnya, Mr. Nikolai Koshman, clarified today that direct federal rule would involve the formation of territorial administrations in Chechnya headed by representatives of federal ministries. They will recruit local staff who will take over after the federal rule has been lifted after two-three years.

Meanwhile, a top Russian military commander in the region predicted a flareup of rebel activity in Chechnya in the second half of May and June. Gen. Vladimir Shamanov said with the appearance of spring greenery federal forces were finding it hard to control roads, especially in the mountainous part of Chechnya. In the past few weeks, rebels have am-

bushed several Russian army convoys in Chechnya, killing and wounding dozens of soldiers. Russian forces in Chechnya have been put on high alert after reports that rebels are planning large-scale attacks timed for the 55th anniversary of the Soviet Army's defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II, which is marked on May 9.

According to latest official figures, Moscow has lost 1,933 troops killed and 5,508 wounded in its more than seven-month campaign against Chechen separatists, including 32 soldiers killed in the past week. The army's casualty rate in Chechnya is several times higher than it was during Russia's 10-year war in Afghanistan.

THE HINDU

7 6 MAY 2000

# Putin vows to tighten grip on power

Summa  
11.9.12

7/5

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, MAY 6.** A day before he will be formally sworn in as Russia's second President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, indicated that his top priority after inauguration would be to consolidate his hold on power.

Mr. Putin said his first steps after taking office would be to "build up a more rigid vertical of power, improve the work of the law-enforcement agencies and streamline the presidential administration." The President-elect was speaking at a modest ceremony at the Central Election Commission where he was presented with a document certifying his election as President in the March 26 poll. The official swearing-in will be held on Sunday in the Kremlin.

Mr. Putin has inherited immense powers vested in the presidency by the 1993 constitution, which was tailor-made to meet the insatiable appetite for power of his predecessor, Mr. Boris Yeltsin. The President names the Prime Minister, who must then be confirmed by the Lower House of Parliament, has a decisive say in appointing all other Ministers and is empowered to dismiss the Prime Minister and the Government. He is entitled to issuing decrees which do not contradict the constitution and can veto laws approved by the Parliament. The President can dissolve the Lower House if it refuses three times to back his candidate for Prime Minister or if it votes no-confidence in the Government. Parliament has little means of exerting real influence on the President.

However, Mr. Yeltsin has failed to build an effective mechanism to wield his vast powers, a major flaw his successor is now determined to rectify.

Mr. Putin is expected to turn his Kremlin administration and the advisory Security Council into his

main strategy-mapping and decision-making bodies, relying on trusted cadres from Russian security and intelligence agencies. An ex-KGB officer himself, Mr. Putin has already appointed several security officials to key posts in the Kremlin and is likely to induct more of his former colleagues.

An internal Kremlin memo leaked to the press last week called for boosting the powers of Mr. Putin's Kremlin administration and increase the role of the secret services in controlling "the political and social processes in the Russian Federation."

"Russia is to become an even more presidential republic," the document said. "The Government will be restricted to a modest role: carrying out economic tasks and not straying from the political line."

The top candidate for the post of Prime Minister is Mr. Mikhail Kasyanov, who has been de facto Cabinet chief after Mr. Putin, who currently holds the post, took over as Acting President following the snap resignation of Mr. Yeltsin on December 31, 1999. Mr. Kasyanov, a typical bureaucrat with no political ambitions of his own, perfectly fits into a power-sharing arrangement suggested by Kremlin strategists.

Mr. Putin's promise to strengthen "the vertical of power" means curbing the free-wheeling regional barons to heel and restore the authority of a strong central government watered down under Mr. Yeltsin. The President-elect has already moved to amend the law to ensure that the chief local prosecutor and the heads of the police, tax and custom departments are appointed by the federal government only and be subordinate exclusively to the centre. The Kremlin is also drafting constitutional amendments to allow the President to dismiss regional governors if they violate the law.

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THE HUND

3.7 MAY 2000

NEW RUSSIAN PRESIDENT SWORN IN / MIKHAIL KASYANOV IS PM

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# Putin vows to unite the nation

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, MAY 7. Mr. Vladimir Putin, who was sworn in as Russia's second post-Communist President on Sunday, vowed to unite the nation, uphold democracy and build a free, rich and strong Russia.

Within hours of taking office, Mr. Putin stepped down from his other post of Prime Minister, accepted the resignation of his Cabinet and appointed the First Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Mikhail Kasyanov, as acting Premier. Mr. Putin is also expected to ask the Parliament to approve Mr. Ka-

syanov as Russia's next Prime Minister. A brief solemn inauguration ceremony was held in an ornate throne hall of the Russian Czars in the Grand Kremlin Palace, where Mr. Putin took a presidential oath on a copy of the 1993 Russian Constitution as his predecessor, Mr. Boris Yeltsin, stood by his side symbolising continuing of power in Russia.

In a short inauguration speech, Mr. Putin stressed that power was changing hands in Russia for the first time in a democratic, legitimate and peaceful process through elections.

"We have proved that Russia is

becoming a truly democratic modern state," he said drawing a line as it was under the epoch of Mr. Yeltsin, who had swept to power in a coup by dismantling the Soviet Union and staged another coup two years later, sending tanks to shoot down a hostile legislature.

In another departure from the Russian political tradition of re-writing history, Mr. Putin called for respecting the past.

"We must know our history, know it as it really is, draw lessons from it and always remember those who created the Russian state, championed its dignity and

made it a great, powerful and mighty state," he said. Mr. Putin himself led the way for showing respect for the country's past leaders, by inviting to his inauguration ceremony the former Soviet President, Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev, who was persona non grata at official functions during Mr. Yeltsin's rule.

The late dictator, Joseph Stalin, appears to be another Soviet leader to be brought back from oblivion.

For the first time, Stalin, whose name was all but taboo after his death, appeared on a just minted Russian coin along with the former U.S. President, Mr. Harry Truman, and the former British Prime Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, to commemorate the 55th anniversary of the Allied victory in World War II.

Stalin's name will also be on a commemorative plaque to be installed at the Kremlin wall this week to honour Soviet military commanders in World War II.

In a further sign of distancing himself from Mr. Yeltsin's era, Mr. Putin indicated he would stay clear of the Kremlin-connected oligarchs who used to wield great political power in recent years.

"I can assure you that in my work I will be guided only by the interests of the state," Mr. Putin stressed, vowing to heal deep divisions in Russian society brought about by Mr. Yeltsin's botched economic reforms.

"I consider it my sacred duty to unite the people of Russia behind the clearly-defined tasks and aims and to remember, every minute of every day, that we are one nation and we are one people," Russia's new President said.

2000

5 8 MAY 2000

# Putin sworn in, vows to unite nation

REUTERS

MOSCOW, May 7. — Mr Vladimir Putin was sworn in as Russian President today in a brief, solemn Kremlin ceremony in which he vowed to unite the nation, repay people's trust and learn from Russia's history.

Senior Kremlin officials said Mr Putin was likely to move swiftly to nominate outgoing first Deputy Prime Minister and finance minister Mr Mikhail Kasyanov as Prime Minister soon after the ceremony.

"I can assure you that in my actions I will be guided only by state interests," Mr Putin said in a 10-minute speech after he swore his oath of office just eight months after emerging from the obscurity of leading Russia's FSB domestic security agency.

"Maybe I will not avoid mistakes but what I promise, what I can really promise, is that I will work openly and honestly. I consider it my holy duty to consolidate

"Russian society, and every day and every hour to remember that we have one nation, one state, one common future together."

He did not give details of his economic or other plans.

More than 1,000 guests and Mr Putin's predecessor Mr Boris Yeltsin looked on as the

47-year-old former spy boss placed his right hand on a leather-bound copy of the constitution and swore his oath of office.

Mr Putin arrived at the Kremlin in a presidential limousine flanked by motorcycle outriders.

He then walked, alone and with his trademark swaggering gait, up a long stairway and through red-carpeted, gilded halls crowded with applauding guests.

It was in sharp contrast to Mr Yeltsin's 1996 inauguration when the ageing leader barely made it through the ceremony.

Mr Yeltsin, in his brief speech, spoke of his pride at handing over power peacefully for the first time in Russian history. His speech was punctuated by long pauses.

He said Mr Putin's main task was to justify the hopes placed in him by the Russian people.

The President will sign a letter naming Mr Kasyanov and send it to the state Duma.

The lower House must vote on the President's candidate for the premiership within seven days.

Mr Kasyanov, a technocrat well known in western financial circles, has been the acting Prime Minister since Mr Putin took over from Mr Yeltsin as acting President on New Year's eve.

THE STATESMAN

MAY 2000

# Robust economy vital to peace: Putin

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, MAY 9.** Russia marked the 55th anniversary of victory in World War II with a military parade in Moscow's Red Square that was remarkably devoid of Soviet-era sabre-rattling.

For the first time, the parade opened with a march-past by 5,000 war veterans, all in their 70's and 80's, proudly bearing their war decorations. In contrast to military parades in Soviet days, there were no tanks or missiles on display, and the President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, stressed the role of a robust civilian economy in safeguarding peace.

"Peace means, above all, a strong economy and peoples' well-being," he said. "They are the basis of the inner and outward strength of Russia, its defence capability and security."

Mr. Putin, who was sworn in just two days ago, watched the parade from a podium, flanked by his predecessor, Mr. Boris Yeltsin, and the Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeyev. The former President, Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev, stood with other guests away from the main rostrum.

In his speech, Mr. Putin made no reference to the current war in Chechnya, which helped propel him into the Kremlin, but his mention of terrorism was clearly

aimed at Chechen rebels. "As years go by, memories of the Great Patriotic War will serve as a warning to those who accept terrorism and violence as their main weapons," he said.

Earlier in the morning, Mr. Putin unveiled a plaque with the names of all those who had received the prestigious war time Order of Victory. It became the first memorabilia in decades to feature the name of the Soviet dictator, Josef Stalin. The move is seen as part of Mr. Putin's effort to reunite the nation split over Mr. Yeltsin's pro-market reforms.

Russian Communists, who have written the name of Stalin on their opposition banners, today again carried his portraits as they marched through the streets of Moscow in an alternative demonstration. The Communist leader, Mr. Gennady Zyuganov, refrained from openly criticising Mr. Putin, but warned that Russian liberal economists were preparing "a third Barbarossa plan" for the new Russian President, a reference to the Nazi leader, Adolf Hitler's plan for a blitzkrieg war on the Soviet Union. Mr. Zyuganov said Hitler's plan had been wrecked by the Red Army, but another "Barbarossa plan" succeeded in 1991, when Mr. Yeltsin dismantled the Soviet Union and ruined its economy.

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10 MAY 2000

## **Russia divided into administrative units**

**MOSCOW, MAY 14.** In what is seen as an attempt to consolidate his position, the Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, has signed a decree dividing the country into seven Federal Districts, barely a week after he was sworn in.

The districts will be headed by Presidential Representatives, who will help the President in exercising his constitutional powers and in monitoring the implementation of his domestic and foreign policies and Federal laws by the regional authorities, according to the decree signed yesterday.

The decree would facilitate the Government in firmly administering, the at times unruly Federation of 89 ethnic regions, many of which like Chechnya, have been ignoring Federal laws and Constitution. The new Decree comes two days after Mr. Putin suspended policies passed by the Ingush, Bashkirian and Amur regional authorities, saying they contradicted Federal laws.

But, according to figures cited by the privately-owned NTV, more than half of Russia's regions have local laws that contradict the Federal structure. — PTI

15 MAY 2000

# Putin-local governors showdown imminent

Russia to be split into 7 Kremlin-run regions

Fred Weir  
Moscow, May 15

H-19 165

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR Putin has issued a sweeping policy directive to divide Russia into seven Kremlin-run administrative regions, which analysts say could be a declaration of war against local governors and elites.

"If Putin is serious about this reform, it will require sweeping amendments to the Constitution and major changes to the power structure in Russia," says Sergei Tarasenko, an analyst with the Fund for Realism in Politics, an independent thinktank. "This puts him on a collision course with all local powers."

Russia is currently divided into 89 regions and republics, each with its own elected legislature and governor. In the 21 ethnic republics, the governor often styles himself "president" and in some cases has moved to curb the powers of the local assemblies. Mr Putin's decree will not touch the existing structures - at least for now - but will overlay seven super-regions, each run by a Kremlin appointee.

Analysts say the plan will inevitably place Mr Putin into conflict with local leaders, who are not expected to give up their power

and prestige easily.

"This is a very risky strategy," says Mr Tarasenko. "Russia's bureaucracy can swallow up any half-hearted change and make it meaningless. Unless Putin really takes on local governors, and wrests power from them, this reform will come to nothing very quickly."

In Soviet times, the huge and diverse territory of Russia was strictly ruled from the Kremlin, using the security services and the 20-million member Communist Party to enforce Moscow's diktat.

But in the past decade a power vacuum at the centre has given local elites the opportunity to take full control of their own regions. In many regions, the governor rules as a virtual satrap, making laws, directing the economy and even feeding -- and thus controlling -- the local military garrison.

Only one republic, the Caucasus province of Chechnya, has attempted to secede from Russia. But several others, including the large Moslem republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortistan, have declared their "sovereignty."

The Kremlin estimates that 30 Russian regions have enacted legislation that fundamentally contradicts the Constitution of the Russian Federation.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 MAY 2000



## PUTIN IN CHARGE

*Russia* An agenda for Russia *59-6*

Vladimir Putin should be easily able to get his nominee for Prime Minister, Mikhail Kasyanov, approved by a largely sympathetic Duma. Putin is in a much stronger position than Yeltsin to carry out his political projects. Yeltsin's sickness prevented the battle against the Communists from being won earlier. The contrast presented by Putin is striking: a memory that works and the ability to talk tough. He has an image that appeals to Russians suffering from Yeltsin-fatigue, especially since it goes with a sense of pragmatism. With a less hostile Duma, Putin will also be less torn in his choices between what Western creditors require of him and what his PM can extract from the Duma. Putin also plans to strengthen Moscow's central authority with greater fiscal and administrative power. Putin understands that after the recent anarchy, Russia needs to know that someone is in command.

Putin is also anxious to assert Russian might again. The new defence doctrine does away with no first-use and proposes to use nuclear weapons in case of a massive conventional attack. This is probably meant to assuage the sentiments of the Russian top brass who felt that Russia was denied its legitimate role in the Balkans. Putin is calibrating his response to the West by collaborating with it in areas like the test ban treaty and strategic arms control. There is self-interest here too, since Moscow's stockpile is outdated and expensive to maintain. The real confrontation with the US is over the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty which the latter wishes to modify so that it can deploy a strategic missile defence system which Russia says would give the US a global strategic advantage. Putin says he will go back on Start II if this happens, though he knows that the US can bleed Russia in a nuclear arms race. He may be right in reckoning that this will disturb global security configurations enough to make the US think twice. There is talk of multipolarity too which, in Russia's case, is about preserving zones of influence in eastern Europe.

THE STATESMAN

17 MAY 2000

## DECISIVE MOVES

Putin getting his act together? *leung*

**M**OVING swiftly after being sworn in as President, Vladimir Putin has signed a decree dividing the country into seven federal districts for administrative convenience, with a special presidential envoy in charge of each. Putin's decree suggests that considerable powers vested in the presidency will be used to the limit; with his KGB background, this is not surprising. A basic problem of the Russian state, however, is its inability to mobilise enough taxes to ensure a modicum of governance and social welfare; taxes are either not paid or get swallowed up along the way. The division of the Russian federation into 89 ethnic republics and regions is obviously unwieldy, and regional governors and politicians take full advantage of the opportunities offered during Yeltsin's *laissez-faire* times, some of them even encouraging breakaway efforts. Such a situation produced a yearning for a firm hand at the centre, and Putin's strong handling of Chechnya has endeared him to Russians.

His subsequent moves, such as edicts nullifying regional laws which contradict federal law, or the establishment of new federal districts, appear to be those of a man determined to streamline governance and reestablish control over a state machinery grown ineffectual. There may be several lessons here for Indian politicians. The USSR's adoption of economic planning prompted India to follow suit; the breakdown of Soviet Communism led to the acceptance of liberalisation by the Indian elite. The tendency in India over the past decade has been to rake up divisive issues, whether over Mandal, the Babari Masjid, or pulling down governments at the drop of a hat over demands by regional *satraps*. As a result, governance has taken a rap, corruption has skyrocketed, and separatist movements flourished. India needs firm governance, within democratic norms, like Russia; it is time to stop the drift.

THE STATESMAN

23 MAY 2000

# Putin & Russian nationalism

By Dmitry Shlapentokh

WHILE OBSERVING the rise of Mr. Vladimir Putin, some observers expressed the fear that the ex-KGB man would instal a harsh nationalistic regime in Russia, making the country a dangerous rival for the West. Nationalistic and anti-Semitic statements made by the elite and the brutal war in Chechnya seemed to provide an additional rationale for seeing Russia on the threshold of such a transformation. Yet the ideologies circulating in Russia could be quite deceptive in a way; they inform not much about coming changes but about the preservation of the status quo.

When elections were approaching, some journalists expressed the feeling that Mr. Putin was worried. Not over getting elected. The reason was different: he wanted to be elected in the first round of polling and not get into a runoff with the other contenders. Interestingly enough, he did not regard the Communist leader, Mr. Gennady Zyuganov, as his major rival, but Mr. Yavlinsky, leader of the liberal and Western-oriented "Yabloko" party. The television station through which the poll campaign was launched was controlled by the tycoon, Mr. Boris Berezovsky. The nature of the campaign was instructive in the sense that it seemed to provide good information about the ideology of the new regime. Mr. Yavlinsky and those who supported him were not just accused of lacking patriotism (Mr. Yavlinsky was only one of the country's leading politicians who opposed the new war in Chechnya) but also of catering to foreign Jews.

In many ways this last campaign had anti-Semitic implications. The nature of the campaign was interesting, for it indicated strong nationalist impulses which ran across the whole of Russian society including the emerging middle classes. The peculiar aspect of the anti-Semitic campaign was that Mr. Berezovsky himself was Jewish. This showed the tactics of the nouveau-riche in the last years of Mr. Boris Yeltsin's regime.

The new elite had sensed deep changes in the psychological climate. The image of Western liberal capitalism had been tarnished. This displeasure with capitalism was translated in the minds of Russians not as a new love affair with socialism but as nationalism. Even those Russians who

professed their dedication to socialism had 'nationalised' it.

It was proclaimed that socialism fitted the national tradition. The strategy of the new emerging elite in post-Soviet Russia was simple: to preserve "privatised" property and preserve power. As a matter of fact, both of these elements were deeply interconnected in post-Soviet society. The strategy was an ideological mimicry where members of the Yeltsin elite started to absorb the slogans of the political opposition (i.e. those who were called the representa-

Semites, if this was needed to protect their property.

It seems that the post-Soviet elite did not just verbalise their discomfort with the West and Russia's weakness vis-a-vis the West, but were willing and able to act. The second Chechen war was launched with brutal decisiveness and the Russian army occupied most of Chechnya. It seems that Mr. Putin's Russia was to be a harsh nationalistic state bound for a confrontation with the West. But all the nationalistic slogans were nothing but mere words. The

*It seems that Mr. Putin's Russia was to be a harsh nationalistic state bound for a confrontation with the West. Yet all the nationalistic slogans were nothing but mere words.*

tives of the "red to brown" movement). It was a loose coalition of Communists and nationalists.

The enemies of these groups of people had asserted that this coalition was nothing but the Russian variant of the German Nazi (i.e. National Socialists). This description of the "red to brown" had its valid point for German Nazis had combined rabid nationalism with socialism (i.e. the desire for enlarging "living space" for the Aryans with the doctrine of a controlled economy and state protection of the Germans from the vagaries of the market). The tactic of the Yeltsin elite was to divorce "nationalism" from "socialism". They implied that the country's greatness in confrontations with the West could be achieved without any changes in property rights.

As time progressed, and as recent trends indicate, the present-day elite would "borrow" not just from comparatively moderate Russian nationalists but from rabid nationalists and fascistic types of politicians such as Mr. Makashov and Mr. Barkashov. This appeal to anti-Semitic feelings certainly testified to the remarkable ideological agility of Russian tycoons (quite a few of whom are of Jewish background) in general and Mr. Berezovsky in particular. Not only are they ready to be great Russian nationalists but even anti-

Yeltsin elite succeeded in their combination of the nationalistic rhetoric "borrowed" from their opponents with no drastic changes and a continued complacency in foreign policy.

Despite all his harsh rhetoric, Mr. Putin caved in to the U.S. demands to push Duma (Parliament) to approve SALT-II. In the case of Chechnya, he also demonstrated a willingness to compromise. Moscow's signal that it is ready to start negotiations with some Chechen leaders was not only the result of European pressure but also because of the position of ordinary Russian citizens. It is true that quite a few of them not only supported the war but even entertained notions of extending Russia's influence among other nations of the former USSR. Recent surveys revealed even more interesting numbers. Quite a few of the young thought that Russia's borders would be the same as the former USSR or even Czarist Russia prior to the 1917 Revolution. Yet these grand nationalistic designs do not corroborate with Russian actions. The prestige of the armed forces continues to be low and it was reported that draft dodging is on the rise. The difference between the slogans and actions could be seen in domestic policy as well.

While Mr. Putin was poised for the top position in the state he implied that his rule would end the lawlessness which

characterised the post-Soviet era. His brutal decisiveness in dealing with Chechnya was broadly interpreted as an indicator of his ability to discipline society and impose order in the most holistic sense of the word. "Oligarchies", the financial tycoons, were to be one of the first victims of his wrath, demonstrating clearly that no one, even those on top, was beyond the law. But no action has been taken against any of the tycoons.

Mr. Putin understood well that Russia cannot be a viable and strong military power without a rise in economic performance. Yet, instead of mobilising the internal resources of the state (activities which would antagonise most of the elite) he proposed that Western investors bring money to Russia. He stated that the reason for this would be the fact that the situation in his country had stabilised, with everything having been repaired. This combination of verbal aggressiveness and a reluctance to act had in many ways reflected the attitude of a majority of Russians. All of them wanted to have a rich and prosperous country. All of them dreamed of Russia becoming powerful and being respected by the West. Yet none of them wanted to contribute in the building of this new, mighty and possibly dangerous Russia.

The elite preferred Western funding of the Russian economy. The youth preferred someone else to be in the army, especially if the army engaged in a brutal guerilla war with no end in sight. All of this implied that the anti-Western, nationalistic sentiment, especially anti-Americanism (which is quite popular in Russia) is nothing but bare talk. It is quite likely that this signals not the rise of a nationalistic and possibly fascistic Russia, but rather the preservation of the status quo. This is shown in the recent Chechen war, which was designed not to rise the country's military standing, but to insure Mr. Putin's election.

The very fact that a really strong nationalistic regime is rather unlikely in Russia explains why Mr. Berezovsky and other Jewish tycoons played with nationalistic and even anti-Semitic slogans. They understood that the real fascism which could endanger their survival is miles away from Russia.

(The writer is Associate Professor of History, Indiana University, South Bend, U.S.)

# MAN FOR ORDER

## Putin Focus For Russian Self-Respect

By HARI VASUDEVAN

Vladimir Putin's victory in the Russian presidential elections has been thorough and resounding. He has won outright with 52 per cent of the vote, in an election with 68 per cent turn out, where his closest rival, the Communist Gennadii Zyuganov received 28 per cent of the poll. Assumptions of the past three months have been proved right. There has been no serious competition against Mr Putin, although he became a serious political figure only after his nomination as Prime Minister last August by Boris Yeltsin.

The President-elect's past has been seriously scrutinised by journalists and intelligence men alike following his recent eminence. Now 47, Putin is a St Petersburg lawyer and a law graduate who joined the KGB in 1975. During 1984-90, he lived in Dresden, and is said to have been associated with intelligence work on computer technology in the West. He developed a fine appreciation of Germany and German virtues at the time — becoming tight-lipped, precise, abstemious and hard-working. After 1990, he threw in his lot with Anatolii Sobchak (the former Democrat Mayor of St Petersburg), emerging as a prominent privatiser and vigorous administrator (he became first deputy mayor in 1994).

### EASY ACCESSION

After Sobchak's defeat in local elections in 1996, Putin was moved to Moscow by the head of President Yeltsin's office properties, Pavel Borodin, on the advice of Anatolii Chubais, the brain behind Russian privatisation and a St Petersburg resident.

In the Yeltsin administration, he ran the central department, and dealt with the Kremlin's relations with Russia's Governors and republics. Thereafter, in July 1998, he became head of the Federal Security Services (the latter day internal KGB), and (in 1999 March), President Yeltsin's security advisor.

A close insider of the Yeltsin "family", Putin's success in the presidential polls has been the result of his subtle manipulation of such connections as well as the links he has evolved over a varied career. He has consolidated his position during his brief tenure as Prime Minister, and acting President, adroitly distancing himself from his erstwhile friends, whose current unpopularity is well known. Within a month of his nomination as acting President by Boris Yeltsin on New Year's eve, he removed Yeltsin's daughter, Tatiana D'iachenko, from her major positions in the Kremlin.

He also indicated his determination to deal with corruption among the networks which had been the foundations of Yeltsin's presidency. Equally, however, Putin proved himself worthy of the trust of the Yeltsin coterie by his decree that Yeltsin himself would not be subject to any judicial actions for measures he had undertaken during his regime. As acting President, he also followed a "hands off" policy on Yeltsin protégés.

Significant for Putin's victory has been his appropriation of the position of "boss" in public life that Yeltsin created for himself. Retiring in demeanour, the acting President pressed the war in Chechnya,

irrespective of international opprobrium and Russia's near-expulsion from institutions of the European community. He took a strong line against provincial autonomy, and made determined attempts to establish the instruments to control Russia's powerful Governors. Consequently, he has come to stand for "order" and the establishment in a confused land where neither the law nor the Communist party are present to hold a vast country together, and his accession to the Presidency has been easy because of this.

Early indications of his future success were available during

men and the US secretary of state concerning how democratic the elections have been and what Putin symbolises. Although there has been skulduggery in Russian elections before, it does not overwhelmingly exceed the standard set in the US, where money has always spoken volumes in the course of electoral campaigns. By and large, since 1990, democratic practice has been healthy — with serious public interest and a good deal of transparency. In the current campaign, it has always been clear that a Communist resurgence, which Washington has dreaded, was a non-starter. And it is self-evident that Mr Putin symbolises continuity

with the Yeltsin regime (well-trusted in Washington) on many levels.

Clearly, though, an obsessive feeling remains among Euro-American commentators that Russia is an abnormal country which is only on the verge of "normalcy" and "civilisation". Such a sentiment coupled with trepidation concerning the federation's economic instability and her military power are sources of concern and demand a close observation of Russian political processes.

The concern has become infectious in a string of countries from Latvia to the Balkans, whose experience of Russia has been chequered in the past.

### ENRAGED CALL

Here, in the media, Russia's reputation for barbarism looms large. Putin, like Yeltsin before him, is portrayed as an autocrat and a Tsar who wields the whip over an obsequious people. Consequently, east-central European leaders look to the European Community and Nato for leadership. Nations with no record better than Russia's for democracy and "Communist tyranny" parade themselves as spotless enclaves of European civilisation and queue up for entry into Europe — as with the Ukraine and Azerbaijan. A few pariahs (Belarus, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria) keep Moscow's company.

In Russia itself, such rhetoric has led to doubt and self-criticism, circumspection and uncertainty. Within "the oligarchy" of business barons, "red" managers, oil tycoons and perestroika's intelligentsia, the mood lays the country open for negotiation and advice from Euro-American leaders — a further opportunity to reshape the federation as they wish.

The election of "strong men" such as Yeltsin or Putin is often, for the man in the street, an enraged call for his self-respect in such adverse circumstances — through the elevation of a figure who can show national and international muscle. Normally, however, such demonstrations have merely led to the ascendancy of "heroes of our time", who can seldom clear the debris that surrounds them and that makes them. Putin's ability to avoid such a fate is obviously suspect. The election results, however, indicate that the expectations of him are considerable — a phenomenon that has made him suspect in Western circles. Painfully aware that "democracy" and "liberalism" can have many forms, and that "globalisation" has been an unhappy experience for many, both Brussels and Washington clearly fear the emergence of Moscow as a pivot in world affairs. Vladimir Putin — aloof, uncommunicative, sober and nationalist — is a logical focus for their fears.



the parliamentary elections of December. The pro-PM "Unity Party" of emergencies minister Shoigu made a strong showing, winning over 25 per cent Duma seats, making a substantial anti-Communist bloc with the Right Forces' group (8 per cent) and the Liberals (6 per cent). This outweighed the OVR (Primakov) combine (8 per cent), the Communists (25 per cent) and the Zhirinovskii fraction (7 per cent). Former PM Primakov withdrew from the presidential race thereafter (affirming support for Putin): a development which sealed Putin's control over neo-Soviet managers and politicians (supporters of former PM Chernomyrdin) as well as the pro-Yeltsin privatisation lobby (the Right Forces' group led by Kireenko, Chubais and Gaidar). The rest of Putin's victory has been shaped by media moghuls Gusinskii and Berezovskii.

### TRANSPARENCY

He has been able to acquire a larger than life image in the press and TV as a result of such clout, and since the stagnant economy has had no serious mishaps recently, there has been little tarnish on that image.

Crucial to Putin's standing has been the sad state of the Left, which was evident well before the vote. The Communist candidate Gennadii Zyuganov won a greater percentage of the vote than expected (28 per cent against a predicted 24 per cent). But he represents the KPRF (Communist Party of the Russian Federation) which is seldom trusted in the industrial belt, and which has come to depend increasingly on the unemployed and the farm collectives. Often labour dreads a Zyuganovite victory for the economic emergencies it might portend while health facilities are poor, state housing is dilapidated and wages are low and irregular. The party itself has been riven by quarrels that have forced Zyuganov to disciplinary action. "Innovative" Left leaders such as the Social Democrat Boris Kagerlitskii have campaigned for voters to declare "against everyone" on their ballots.

In the circumstances, the obsessive coverage of the Russian elections in the West may be surprising: as is the serious discussions of Congress-

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NEWS AGAIN

PROPERTY ATTACHED, DIRECTED TO PAY FINE, COMPENSATION

# Life term for Sharif, others freed

By Amit Baruah  
KARACHI, APRIL 6. The ousted Pakistani Prime Minister, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, was convicted and sentenced to a 25-year-long life sentence on charges of hijacking and terrorism by a special anti-terrorist court judge, Mr. Rehmat Hussain Jaffri, today.

In what came as a surprise, the six other accused, including Mr. Sharif's brother, Mr. Shahbaz Sharif, were acquitted by Mr. Jaffri in the case which related to the hijacking of PIA flight PK-805 carrying the then Army Chief, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, from Colombo to Karachi on October 12, 1999.

## 'No Justice in Pak.'

Amid tight security arrangements, Mr. Sharif stood at the rear of a makeshift courtroom and heard the verdict calmly. "It has been proved that there is no justice in Pakistan. I will leave it to God," he told relatives soon after the operative part of the judgment was read out in open court.

Sobbing softly in the courtroom as they waited for the judge to arrive, the former Prime Minister's daughters — Maryam and

Asma — wept uncontrollably as Mr. Jaffri announced the sentence. His wife, Begum Kulsoom Nawaz, was composed through the sitting. Slogans of "Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif" were also raised in the courtroom.

Relying on the evidence of the approver, Mr. Aminullah Chaudhury, former civil aviation chief, the judge held that Mr. Sharif conspired with Mr. Chaudhury to "hijack" the aircraft as defined in the Pakistan Penal Code. The judge, however, did not find that the other accused were part of the conspiracy to prevent Gen. Musharraf's plane from landing at Karachi airport.

The judge said that after Mr. Sharif issued "illegal orders" to divert the plane, "control" of the aircraft became "unlawful". To meet the requirement that "threats" had been used to match the description of "hijacking" as laid down in the penal code, Mr. Jaffri said the "threats" were in the form of parking fire tenders on the tarmac and switching off the runway lights. This, he held, would have caused the plane to crash had it landed.



Supporters of Mr. Nawaz Sharif, deposed Prime Minister of Pakistan, raise anti Government slogans outside the anti-terrorism court in Karachi on Thursday after the verdict was pronounced. — AP

## SHARIF TRIAL: A CHRONOLOGY

October 12, 1999: General Mushraf stages coup, topples and arrests Nawaz Sharif.

October 15: Emergency declared, Constitution suspended and Mushraf is Chief Executive.

November 10: Police complaint against Sharif of criminal conspiracy, hijacking, kidnapping and attempted murder.

November 13-14: Brought to Karachi for trial.

November 19: Produced before a special anti-terrorist court and remanded.

November 21-22: Sharif's brother Shahbaz, father Mohammad Sharif, son Hussain Nawaz and other family members arrested. But women members released on humanitarian grounds.

November 29-30: Ameenullah Chaudhary, former DG, Civil Aviation Authority, turns approver, released.

January 12, 2000: Charges are formally laid.

January 26: The trial begins.

March 10: Sharif's top lawyer Iqbal Hadh shot dead by masked gunmen.

March 11-12: Police register treason case against Sharif's wife Kulsoom Nawaz.

April 6: Sharif sentenced to life, others freed.

The former Prime Minister was found guilty on charges of hijacking (Section 402-B) and Section 7 of the Anti-Terrorism Act (enacted by Mr. Sharif himself) and sentenced to life imprisonment for 25 years each on both charges. The sentences, however, will run concurrently. All property owned by Mr. Sharif has also been attached by the court which has also fined him Rs. 10 lakhs for both charges. He has also been directed to pay Rs. 20 lakhs as compensation to the 198 passengers on board flight PK 805.

## Engineered verdict, says Kulsoom

Responding to the judgment, Begum Kulsoom Nawaz told reporters that the verdict was "engineered". The judge, in her view, could not take the "pressure" and "take the risk of setting my husband free".

"My husband is innocent. We will fight till the end. There is nothing to worry about. We know how to fight this battle...we are not scared of the military regime. We are scared only of Allah," she said.

Mr. Sharif's daughter, Maryam, alleged that the judge could just

## 'He acted in the heat of passion'

ISLAMABAD, APRIL 6. Pakistan's deposed Premier, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, was sentenced only to life imprisonment for plane hijacking and terrorism because he had acted "in the heat of passion" and the attempt had failed, the judge, Mr. Rehmat Hussain Jaffri, said.

Explaining why Mr. Sharif was not given the death sentence, he said, "the offence was committed at the spur of the moment and in the heat of passion when the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, who was also the Defence Minister, came to know that his authority was eroded by some army soldiers." — DPA

about read the verdict. "It was written and presented to him...he kept getting stuck," she said, adding that there was no demand for compensation from any of the passengers on board the PIA flight.

India keeps its counsel: Page 13  
More reactions: Page 14

THE HINDU

7 APR 2000

7 APR 2000

## Taliban may allow Chechen rebels to set up <sup>human</sup> govt.-in-exile

MOSCOW: Taliban, which has recognised the break away Chechen republic of the Russian federation, may allow the militant leaders to set up a government-in-exile on the territory controlled by them, said senior member of general staff of the Russian armed forces General Leonid Ivashov on Wednesday.

"Russia feels the threat emanating from the Taliban," said Gen Ivashov at a media briefing here. "The defence ministers of Russia and its allies are searching for ways and means to counteract and localise the threat from Afghanistan."

He spoke of a real possibility of the land-locked Afghan state being turned into a "state organisation providing shelter to the international terrorist forces" and a bridge head of terrorist expansion in Russia and other regions like China's Xinjiang province and Central Asian republics.

Laying special emphasis on the southern parts of the Commonwealth of Independent States

(CIS), he said "these are the least protected zones of CIS."

He spoke of Russia's readiness to cooperate with the Central Asian regions in adopting measures to prevent the threat to their territorial integrity. Stating that Uzbekistan is the most powerful state in the Central Asian region, he urged them to rejoin the security alliance of Russia and former Soviet republics, from which it pulled out earlier. He also offered training facilities for its servicemen in Russian military academies.

Gen Ivashov expressed Russia's keen desire to see Uzbekistan join hands with the 'Shanghai-5' group consisting of Russia, China, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. He said that during the recently-held joint-military exercises, "southern shield Commonwealth-2000," by Russia and some Central Asian states, a joint action plan was worked out that might be put to practice if any of the Central Asian state was attacked by Afghanistan. (UNI)

# Moscow edges towards talks on Chechnya

HA-16 By Vladimir Radyuhin 14/4

**MOSCOW, APRIL 13.** After six months of a bloody military campaign against Chechen militants, Moscow appears to be edging towards political talks with rebel leaders to avoid the prospect of a drawn-out guerilla conflict in the North Caucasus.

Russia's Foreign Minister, Mr. Igor Ivanov, told the visiting President of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Austrian Foreign Minister, Mrs. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, on Wednesday that Moscow was engaged in a "direct dialogue with different representatives of Chechen society" and was not shutting the door to political settlement in Chechnya.

In the past, the Kremlin's oft-repeated references to political talks related to contacts with pro-Moscow Chechens living outside Chechnya. However, in recent days Moscow has sent signals that it might be ready for talks with some rebel leaders.

Last week the Speaker of the Russian Parliament's Upper Chamber, Mr. Yegor Stroyev, told reporters it was time to make peace in Chechnya.

"Either we continue to fool our people [about winning a war in Chechnya], or we get down to the job of reaching agreement," he

said. Mr. Stroyev is an extremely cautious politician who would not risk launching a peace initiative against the will of the Kremlin.

A top Kremlin spokesperson said earlier this week that the government could conceivably open peace talks with the Chechen President, Mr. Aslan Maskhadov, who in turn distanced himself from other rebel warlords.

Mr. Sergei Yastrzhembsky, the Kremlin's main spokesman on Chechnya, said that "a certain political process" is now possible between Moscow and Mr. Maskhadov, who has been coordinating rebel resistance to Russian forces in Chechnya.

"It is absolutely obvious that the Russian government must maintain contacts with Maskhadov, and they have been maintained with certain of Maskhadov's representatives," Mr. Yastrzhembsky was quoted as saying by Russian news agencies. "We have repeatedly made Moscow's point of view known to Maskhadov, aiming to launch some kind of political process."

For his part Mr. Maskhadov, in interviews to foreign media this week, has repeatedly called on the Kremlin to open a dialogue "without conditions." He also blamed the war in the republic on warlord Shamil Basayev and his ally Movladi Udugov, who describes himself as Chechnya's Foreign Minister.

"The beginning of the war was financed by Russian financial oligarchs, mainly [Kremlin insider Boris] Berezovsky. On the Chechen side, it was [provoked by] Udugov and Basayev," Mr. Maskhadov told Deutsche Welle radio on Monday.

Russian politicians have called on the Kremlin to heed Mr. Maskhadov's offer. The influential Governor of Novgorod Region, Mr. Mikhail Prusak, who is chairman of the Upper House international affairs committee, said the government should "use any chance" to begin peace talks.

"Of course, it is difficult to evaluate Maskhadov's statements, but they should not be dismissed immediately," Mr. Prusak said.

With Russian troops in control of most of Chechnya, Moscow will try to conduct talks from positions of strength. Mr. Yastrzhembsky said Moscow's preconditions for negotiation would include the "complete disarmament" of all Chechen militants and "unconditional punishment for leaders like Khattab, Basayev and [Ruslan] Gelayev, responsible for murdering thousands upon thousands of people."

The Acting President, Mr. Putin, told the OSCE chief today that the OSCE could open its mission in Chechnya. The mission played a key role in mediating the first Chechen war in 1986.

THE HINDU

14 APR 2000

# Duma raps Russia's suspension

DADAN UPADHYAY  
MOSCOW, APRIL 13

96-7-14/4  
THE State Duma, lower House of Parliament, overwhelmingly passed a resolution after a stormy debate on Wednesday denouncing last week's vote by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to suspend Russia's membership over alleged human rights abuses in the breakaway republic of Chechnya.

The resolution called the Parliamentary Assembly's decision to suspend the Russian parliamentary delegation as "groundless and unjustified", terming it an "unacceptable unilateral diktat".

It urged the Parliamentary Assembly to rescind the decision. "The resumption of Russia's full cooperation will be possible only after the discriminatory decision was re-examined," the resolution emphasised.

The resolution came as a delegation of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was

due in Moscow to urge Russia to soften its stance over Chechnya.

The delegation will be led by Austrian Foreign Minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner, who will meet Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin on the issue.

Ferrero-Waldner is expected to persuade Putin to declare a ceasefire and open peace talks with Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov.

Ahead of Putin's visit to London next Sunday, the Kremlin hinted yesterday that Russia might start political talks with Maskhadov, as the Chechen President distanced himself from other warlords.

In a telephone interview with Deutsche Welle Radio on Monday, Maskhadov blamed the war in Chechnya on field commander Shamil Basayev and his ally Movladi Udugov.

Putin's special envoy on the Chechen military campaign, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, told mediapersons in Uzbekistan yesterday that "certain political process" was now possible between, Interfax news agency reported.

"It is absolutely obvious that (Russian Govt) must maintain contacts (with Maskhadov), and they have been maintained with certain of Maskhadov's representatives" through North Ossetian President Alexander Dzasokhov and Ingush President Ruslan Aushev, Itar-Tass quoted Yastrzhembsky as saying.

Earlier the Kremlin had charged Maskhadov with insurgency and the Prosecutor General's Office issued a warrant to arrest him.

Putin has so far not stated whether Russia plans possible peace talks with Maskhadov. Earlier, he had demanded that Maskhadov should unconditionally surrender before the law enforcement authorities.

Russian media reported that Putin had been offended by moves this week to censure Russia at the Geneva-based UNHRC, where the European Union and the US have increased pressure on Russia over Chechnya, calling on Moscow to conduct an inquiry into the alleged mass killings.

INDIAN EXPRESS

14 APR 2003



# Duma ratifies START-II treaty 288 votes to 131

BY MARTIN NESIRKY

Moscow, April 14: Russia's Parliament ratified the START-II nuclear arms reduction treaty on Friday — seven years after the deal was struck and just two days before President-elect Vladimir Putin makes his debut trip to the West.

The vote in the State Duma, lower House, was 288 in favour with 131 against and four abstentions. The voting was in open session but the debate in secret, with officials piping pop music into the lobby to stop journalists eavesdropping.

By ratifying the 1993 treaty as Mr Putin asked them, Duma deputies handed him a strategic and symbolic prize for his visit to London on Sunday, his first to the West since he took over from Boris Yeltsin on December 31. Mr Yeltsin tried and failed for six years to push the treaty through the old Communist-led Duma.

Mr Putin unexpectedly showed up in the Duma to attend the debate. Almost all the deputies in the 450-seat chamber were present. He strode into the building shadowed by a security detail that included plain-clothes and naval officers carrying communications equipment with his nuclear launch codes. In a speech which officials broadcast, Mr Putin urged deputies to back the treaty and said Russia would still have weapons enough to destroy any enemy "several times over and guaranteed." "We

don't need an arms race," he said.

Under START-II, the United States and Russia agree to cut the number of nuclear warheads from 6,000 to no more than 3,500 on each side by 2007. The US Senate ratified the treaty in 1996.

The President-elect will now be able to fly to Britain with proof he has stamped his authority on the new Duma, elected in December and now broadly pro-Putin.

The symbolism of this will not be lost on British and other firms contemplating a safe return to investment in Russia. It will also show the International Monetary Fund that Mr Putin can push through reforms, and so potentially secure new loans. It could also give a boost to strategic arms control talks.

"The most obvious and probably the biggest plus is that this offers the chance to start talks on even more radical cuts in Russian and US nuclear arsenals," said the military weekly newspaper *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*.

Briefing deputies on Thursday, defence minister Igor Sergeev said Russia had little room to manoeuvre because of economic problems and should focus limited funds on new arms such as Topol-M land-based missiles, a submarine-based version and a new cruise missile for strategic aviation. "Many deputies have been convinced we should not spend money from our meagre Budget on arms eaten away by rust," first deputy Speaker said. (Reuters)

15 APR 2000

THE ASIAN AGE

# A new President in the Kremlin

By Nirmala Joshi

HD-12 28/4  
**M**R. VLADIMIR PUTIN'S election as President of the Russian Federation was a foregone conclusion. Although there were eleven candidates in the fray, Mr. Putin was easily the best choice before the Russian people. Several factors worked in his favour. The most distinctive aspect about Mr. Putin, which went down very well with the Russian people, was that he represented the future. Whereas his chief opponent, Mr. Gennady Zyuganov of the Communist Party, represented the past. Another key factor was Mr. Putin's ability to convey successfully to the electorate an image of toughness.

It was his vigorous conduct of the military campaign in Chechnya as Russia's Prime Minister, despite international concerns and pressure, that helped in projecting an image of decisiveness. Besides, Mr. Putin's coherent articulation of views often convinced the people that he is a man of action and not unpredictable like his predecessor. In addition his young age and robust health is an asset. In fact, Mr. Putin presents a refreshing contrast to the sick and ailing Mr. Boris Yeltsin.

What kind of a future is expected from Mr. Putin? Indeed Mr. Putin's agenda is a formidable one, and the challenges are daunting. Nevertheless the topmost priority would have to be accorded to good governance, reassertion of the rule of law, to use Mr. Putin's phrase "dictatorship of law". In the political sphere, Mr. Putin's task would be to strengthen political freedom within the parameters of the laws of the land. This is absolutely essential for Mr. Putin; because of his long career in the secret service (KGB) and the common perception that he is a creature of the oligarchs a slide into authoritarianism is apprehended. Besides, the President of Russia is invested with awesome powers by the Constitution. His biggest challenge would be to prove to his detractors both within and outside that de-

mocracy under his dispensation is not an empty slogan. From the long term perspective it would be Mr. Putin's lasting contribution if he could lay the social basis for a liberal democracy to emerge in Russia. An equally challenging task would be to bring about uniformity in the existing laws. Most of the Constitutions and Charters of the regions are often at variance with the laws of the federal centre. A sound federal system is yet to emerge in Russia. This requires a well-conceived policy based on democracy and autonomy.

Mr. Putin's mettle, however, will be

Putin. Finally, given the present ferment in Russian society, it is essential to promote the "Russian idea", especially when the society is heterogeneous. Mr. Putin's popularity received a shot in the arm with the successful military campaign in Chechnya, which wiped out the national humiliation suffered in the earlier campaign. In short, in the domestic sphere the agenda of Mr. Putin is to weave together the economic, political and social base of the country into a single whole.

In the field of foreign policy, Mr. Putin has stated in his election campaign his

*The agenda before Mr. Vladimir Putin is extremely challenging... His determination and vision for the country raise new hopes for Russia.*

put to the test in his dealing with Chechnya. Bringing about a reconciliation of hearts, convincing the thousands of refugees to return back to their homes and finally to bring the alienated Chechens into the mainstream is indeed a very difficult task.

At the economic level, Mr. Putin's agenda is an equally formidable one. He has pledged his determination to continue the economic reform process. How the reform process proceeds would depend to a large extent on his ability to control the financial oligarchs. Many observers feel that this is difficult, because Mr. Putin is a creature of these oligarchs. A related task would be to create an appropriate climate for investment to flow into the country. This necessitates the strengthening of the legal framework especially the banking facilities so as to inspire investor confidence in Russia. Besides, in the social sphere, reducing unemployment, curbing the rising crime rate and lessening social strains in society by giving the people a better quality of life would be other priority tasks for Mr.

intent to restore Russia's past glory as a great power. This commitment it appears has provided comfort to the wounded Russian pride. Summit level meetings would be more frequent; Mr. Yeltsin because of his ill-health was unable to provide the necessary drive to foreign policy. A shift to active diplomacy would be part of Mr. Putin's agenda.

There is no doubt that Mr. Putin would continue Russia's orientation towards the G-8 developed countries. Russian interests lie in forging friendly and cooperative relations with these countries. Herein lies the challenge for Mr. Putin. His task would be to ensure friendly ties with the West and to convince it that its interests also lie with a friendly and cooperative Russia, instead of expanding NATO eastwards. He has to also resist attempts, by some forces, to marginalise Russia. In this endeavour he would have to stand up to the West where Russia's national interests are involved, and not allow the violation of human rights to be a ground for pressuring Russia. Mr. Putin has already given ample indication that

he will be able to balance the diverse forces vis-a-vis the West.

What seems certain, however, is that Russia policy in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) will be more active. The challenge here is to dispel the notion that Russia is the big brother. The CIS needs rejuvenation and streamlining of its working. Importantly, Mr. Putin should try and promote better understanding among the members. In all likelihood, the Asian component of Russia foreign policy will receive focussed attention. In this regard, relations with China have already been placed on a sound footing, and Russian-Chinese relations are likely to scale new heights in the future.

Similarly, Indo-Russian ties, which for some time were adrift, are likely to receive a powerful push. The Moscow Declaration of 1994 highlights the shared geo-political interests of the two countries and the challenges facing them. The space between Russia and India is an area of vital importance to both the countries, and developments there have a bearing on their security interests. A strategic partnership agreement is to be signed by the two countries. The quick congratulatory message sent by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, to Mr. Putin reflects the Indian desire to energise its relationship with Russia. Mr. Yeltsin was unable to visit India due to health problems. It is hoped that Mr. Putin will soon make a trip to India.

Indeed the agenda before Mr. Putin is extremely challenging, strewn with imponderables. Given his long years of service and training in the secret service, he will have imbibed qualities of discipline and decisiveness. These qualities were on display during the recent military campaign in Chechnya, but they will now have to be put to good use in dealing with other vital problems. His determination and vision for the country raise new hopes for Russia.

(The writer teaches at the School of International Studies, JNU, New Delhi).

Out in bank interest

THE HINDU

28 APR 2000

## Russian upper house ratifies START-II treaty

MOSCOW: Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin secured a major political victory on Wednesday as START-II, the long-delayed U.S.-Russian treaty that would halve the two countries' nuclear stockpiles and pave the way for further cuts, was ratified by the upper house with an overwhelming vote.

Russian upper house federation council ratified the treaty, signed in 1993, with 112 to 15 votes, with seven abstentions, rubber-stamping a similar decision last Friday by Russian state Duma, or the lower house.

The ratification bill will now go to President Putin for signing along with the federal law reserving Russia's right to walking off START-II (also passed at an "in camera" sitting of the federation council).

The ratification of the treaty by state Duma came after a delay of seven years. The Duma also passed a federal law about the "ratification of the treaty between the Russian federation and the United States on further cuts and limitations of

offensive arms." 11-16

START-II had been signed by former presidents George Bush and Boris Yeltsin in 1993 and envisages reducing nuclear arsenals of both countries by half to achieve a figure of 3,000-3,500 warheads each by 2007. A new treaty, START-III, now under discussion, seeks to further reduce the number of warheads to 1,500 to 2,500.

The Duma had blocked approval of the treaty for seven years, with the communist majority claiming it would weaken Russia and give the U.S. a huge strategic advantage. The communists lost their control of the chamber in parliamentary elections last December and the new Centrist majority made approval of START-II one of its top priorities.

Among the main issues taken up during a one-hour discussion before the treaty was passed included compensation and welfare benefits for nuclear workers who would lose their jobs because of the treaty coming into force. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 APR 2000

# Duma ratifies CTBT

■ Putin signs new military doctrine to 'first use' N-arms

DADAN UPADHYAY  
MOSCOW, APRIL 22

**K**EEPING up its recent offensive to upstage Washington ahead of arms talks next week, Russia took two key steps on Friday, radically influencing the strategic situation in today's world.

President-elect Vladimir Putin signed Russia's new military doctrine, after Russia's all-powerful Security Council approved it at its emergency meeting in the Kremlin, even as the State Duma, Lower House of Parliament, started a debate on the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

As the House met for the crucial decision on CTBT, the Communists led by Zyuganov demanded the ratification item to be removed from the agenda of the proceedings. But the House rejected it.

The House, which debated the issue in a closed-door session, passed the Ratification Bill with 298 in favour, 74 against and three abstentions.

Duma's ratification of the CTBT came as another feather in the cap of Putin in as many days after he persuaded the Lower House to ratify START II treaty last week, something former President Boris Yeltsin



Vladimir Putin

failed to clinch. It also provided additional handle to Putin as he was dispatching his Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov to Washington at the weekend, for talks on START III treaty.

Commenting on the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Ivanov said, "We consider it a very important step. First of all, for the interest of Russia's security, but also for the interest of world stability. Because the coming into force of this treaty, will be a serious barrier to the spread of nuclear weapons."

As well as the ratification of START II and CTBT, the new military doctrine could be a useful ammunition for Russia in negotiations over the controversial American plan for a new national missile defence system, which Moscow strongly opposes, Russian television stations said.

The new military doctrine reserves the right for Russia to a "first use" of nuclear weapons in any situation it deems critical to its national security.

The doctrine, which reflects Putin's vision of reviving Russia as a super power, has radically revised Russia's defence doctrine, accepted in 1997 under Yeltsin, "while it doesn't specifically name the United States or NATO as Russia's attempts at gaining global monopoly, of gaining a position in the world," said Alexey Arbatov, a famous strategic analyst and prominent member of the Russian Parliament.

In a video footage, Sergei Ivanov, secretary of the Security Council, dismissed the western criticism that the doctrine was "too confrontational", saying the new military doctrine was defensive in character and was aimed at deterring the possible aggression against Russia. "The text of the military doctrine meets the national interests of Russia," he said.

INDIAN EXPRESS

23 APR 2000

# On his mark, set... will he go?

10-16 2874

*Mr. Vladimir Putin is demonstrating a tough and pragmatic, but also cautious, approach to problems facing Russia, says*  
**VLADIMIR RADYUHIN.**

**F**OUR WEEKS after his election as Russia's new President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, is yet to spell out his programme of action for the coming four years in office, but his first steps inspire guarded optimism. The President-elect is demonstrating a tough and pragmatic, but also cautious approach to problems facing the country. A detailed economic plan is still being worked out by Mr. Putin's think-tank, Centre for Strategic Research, but it is already clear that without massive foreign investment and a restructuring of its multi-billion dollar debts to Western Governments Russia will not be able to revive its shattered economy quickly enough.

Without waiting for his formal taking of office on May 7, Mr. Putin launched a high-profile diplomatic offensive in the West. He played about the only trump card Russia still has in relations with Western nations — its nuclear weapons. With active prodding from the Kremlin, the Russian Parliament last week ratified the long-delayed START II nuclear arms reduction pact with the United States. The move served the triple purpose of showing Mr. Putin's commitment to disarmament and better relations with the West; demonstrating his ability to control Parliament and end Mr. Boris Yeltsin's era of confrontation; and freeing up funds for developing new weapons.

Ratification of START II has opened the way to U.S.-Russian talks on deeper cuts in nuclear arsenals under a START III accord and provided a good launching pad for Mr. Putin's first trip to the West last weekend. Seizing on the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair's ambition to emerge from the US shadow and play a more active role in Europe, Mr. Putin travelled to London to forge a new "strategic partnership" with Britain and secure Mr. Blair's promise to mediate in Russia's relations with the U.S., especially in resolving their dispute over the 1972 Soviet-American Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty. Washington threatens to back out of the treaty unless Moscow agrees



to amend it to allow the U.S. to deploy a space-based anti-missile defence, while Moscow warns the move would wreck the existing system of arms control.

Mr. Putin has shown he is going to be a tough negotiator: if the U.S. breaks the ABM pact, he said, Russia would tear up START II, walk out of START III talks, and scrap all conventional arms control agreements as well. At the same time his security chief, Mr. Sergei Ivanov, left the door open for compromise, telling U.S. Senators that Moscow and Washington could cooperate on developing a "non-strategic ABM defence," based on Russia's SS-300 missiles and the U.S. Patriot. The U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton's announced visit to Moscow in June may be an indication that the sides are moving to a deal on ABM and START III.

Pressing its diplomatic offensive Russia ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), upstaging the U.S., which is yet to endorse the pact, at a U.N. conference on non-proliferation later this week.

Mr. Putin's first foreign policy moves so far have been fully in line with his declared concept of making Russian diplomacy serve a very pragmatic goal of facilitat-

ing the economic revival at home. Economic issues dominated Mr. Putin's brief talks in Belarus and Ukraine, which were included in his first foreign trip. In a style very different from Mr. Yeltsin's ostentatious camaraderie, Mr. Putin told Belarus' President, Mr. Alexander Lukashenko, that a union treaty between the two nations signed last year by Mr. Yeltsin would very much remain on paper as long as Belarus shied away from reforming its Soviet-time statist economy. In Kiev Mr. Putin gave the Ukrainian leader, Mr. Leonid Kuchma, a month to hammer out with the Russian Government a plan to restructure Ukraine's \$2-billion debt for Russian gas deliveries and to stop siphoning off export gas from the Russian pipeline to Europe.

If in foreign policy Mr. Putin has made his debut, on the home front he largely remains an unknown quantity. How is he going to get out of the quagmire of the war in Chechnya, which helped propel him to presidency, but has now turned against him, draining the country's scarce resources and antagonising the West against Russia? What is he going to do in the economy? Mr. Putin has been so far sending mixed signals. He has vowed to pursue the

military operation in Chechnya till the destruction of all rebels, which could mean killing all Chechen males, as guerilla resistance shows no sign of weakening. On the other hand, the Kremlin claims to be engaged in dialogue with all forces in Chechnya to achieve a political settlement. It remains to be seen whether the Kremlin is really swerving towards peace talks or just attempting to pacify public opinion at home and in the West.

Economic signals are equally confusing. On the one hand, Mr. Putin has appointed an ultra-liberal, Mr. Andrei Illarionov, as his economic adviser, raising fears that Russia may be in for another round of radical reforms that have nearly ruined the country's economy. On the other hand, there are rumours that the President-elect is going to set up a new strategic planning body, Consultative Council for Political, Social and Economic Issues, with the outspoken opponent of radicalism, the former Prime Minister, Mr. Yevgeny Primakov, at the head.

Some answers to these queries can be expected after May 7, when Mr. Putin is formally sworn in as Russia's second President, and proceeds to form his Government.

THE HINDU

23 APR 2000

# 15 Russians killed in Chechen ambush

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

MOSCOW, April 24. — Moscow conceded today that Chechen fighters had staged another bloody ambush of Russian troops in Chechnya's mountains, but denied rebel claims that 80 soldiers had died, putting the death toll at 15.

Military headquarters said 50 fighters led by Arab mercenaries had swooped yesterday on a federal armoured column near the village of Serzhen-yurt, in the south of the breakaway republic.

Russian defence minister, Mr Igor Sergeyev, said 15 government soldiers were killed, updating the first official toll of five dead and nine wounded, cited by Interfax news agency.

The Chechens put the Russian losses much higher,

claiming that 80 defence ministry troops had died in the attack near the mouth of the strategic Vedeno Gorge, which snakes up from the plains to Chechnya's snowy mountain peaks.

The ambush marks the fifth major Chechen counter-attack in the past two months. The last assault, on 29 March, killed 43 Russian troops near Zhani-Vedeno, southeast Chechnya.

It also served as a warning to the Kremlin that rebels intend to fight a brutal guerrilla war similar to one waged in 1994-96 that left the republic with de facto independence.

The Chechen rebels' main spokesman, Mr Movladi Udugov, told AFP by telephone yesterday that a four-hour battle erupted after a Russian col-

umn of 23 tanks and armoured personnel carriers was ambushed at 3 p.m. yesterday.

Chechen fighter Abu-Valid, who forms part of a group headed by warlord Shamil Basayev, led the attack, said Mr Udugov. The Russian military said the operation was also commanded by Abu-Dzhafar, adding that both were Arabs.

The Chechens claimed to have destroyed 18 armoured vehicles. No prisoners were taken and there were no losses on the Chechen side, Mr Udugov said.

But the Russian military said the column had radioed for artillery and air support which helped beat back the ambush. Only six vehicles were destroyed, including a fuel truck, according to Mr Sergeyev.

"Fifty fighters took part in the attack, led by Arab mercenar-

ies," military officials said, cited by Interfax news agency. "In the course of the battle, eight bandits were killed, and two taken prisoners."

The Kremlin has frequently asserted that its troops are in the final phase of their task of bringing the separatist republic to heel, launched on 1 October last year.

But the army has suffered a series of bloody reverses in the treacherous highlands, where Moscow says some 2,000 rebels are hiding, and guerrillas are also active in the Russian-controlled lowlands, including the capital, Grozny.

Despite the setbacks on the battlefield, Russia continues to resist Western pressure for a political settlement to the conflict in the breakaway southern republic.

THE STATESMAN

25 APR 2000

# RUSSIAN POLLS

## Voters Wary Of Political Class

REPORTS on the parliamentary crisis seem to have ousted completely all the attempts to seriously analyse the lessons of the December elections. However, there are many, disparate lessons. There are some good ones: people voted more reasonably, they were guided rather by reason than by heart. The new Duma make-up represents 80 per cent of the electorate, who came to the polls, and not 50 odd per cent as the previous one. The level of monopolisation of the legislature has fallen — six blocs succeeded this time as compared with four blocs in 1995, and none of them has a stable majority. It's a good rather than bad sign, in spite of the crises in the Duma.

However, there are some alarming tendencies. The main thing that was demonstrated again during the December elections was the growing discontent of the population with our "political class". Some 6,000 candidates took part in the elections both on the parties' lists and in the majority districts. It wouldn't seem that few for the 450 deputy seats. However, a considerable part of the electorate wasn't satisfied with them. 3.6 per cent voted "against everybody" on the parties' lists, which is almost a 1 per cent increase on the 1995 figure.

### MAJORITY

Those who voted "against everybody" in single-mandate districts on average totalled 11.1 per cent, which is very serious. It means that among 3,000 single-mandate candidates there weren't that many unconditionally recognised leaders. Less than 50 deputies got more than 30 per cent of votes in the districts. The overwhelming majority won by having received 15-20 per cent of votes, so we can't call such victories convincing.

We shouldn't leave out the possibility that the percentage of those voting "against everybody" at the presidential elections will grow still more, while the percentage of those coming to the polls will, on the contrary, go down. In this case, the elite would find it quite difficult to pass the test in its ability to come to power. It doesn't relate to any candidate in particular — one of them will certainly win. And what is more, representatives of the elite are sure that "there is such a man. And everyone knows who he is." It is this confidence that represents a certain danger: as everyone is sure that this very candidate will win, a considerable part of even disciplined voters might not come to the polls.

By DMITRY OLSHANSKY

And can a president, elected by an obvious minority, be considered fully legitimate? If half of the electorate comes to the elections, even 51 per cent of their votes will represent only one-quarter of the total number of voters.

Much has been written about Putin's "popularity secret". In my opinion, the explanation is not that difficult. First of all, behind this secret lies quite a

*The author is Director, Centre for Strategic Analysis and Prognosis.*

competent job that was executed as far back as last autumn by PR experts, including some well-known sociologists with their "presidential ratings". While people have strong dislike for Yeltsin, now ex-president, Putin is considered subconsciously to be a liberator. He is younger, healthier, he speaks correctly and shows resolution. In reality it was Putin who did what inveterate oppositionists could do neither in 1993, nor later. Yeltsin outstayed them all. And then Putin appeared and Yeltsin resigned. That's why people's fondness for the "saviour" is Putin's support. Especially if he stirs it up a little by dismissing some of Yeltsin's former stooges, holding a couple of anti-corruption trials and returning at least some of the oligarchs' money to Russia.

Another very important factor is mystery, obscurity and the incomprehensibility of Putin's personality. So far it has remained the "tabula rasa" on which everyone sees what he is willing to see. According to the results of sociological polls, people's expectations for Putin's actions range drastically: from his support of the Right to his ideological alliance with Communists, from accelerating market reforms to tightening the state's grip over the economy, from further democratisation to establishing dictatorship in public life.

### POPULARITY

People don't expect something definite, concrete from Putin. It's not true that his popularity rests on the Chechen war and that he will lose it if something "goes wrong" in that war. This conflict has already been going wrong for a long time.

But it has not affected Putin's rating. The majority don't believe that with Putin being appointed acting president their own lives will change for the better. But again this very majority are going to vote for him. While Putin's figure remains obscure, everyone will like him. But most likely it won't last for ever: people quickly get tired of political vagueness. Everything has its limits.

Although the presidential election is a contest of individuals, Gennady Zyuganov has been, is and will always be a joint candidate, nominated by the epoch, nostalgia, a group of citizens or by the party. He receives votes not because people take a personal liking to him, but because he is the leader of the KPRF (the Communist Party of the Russian Federation). If he could add an informal human charisma to his official status, remarkable wit and considerable managerial abilities, he would leave all his competitors far behind. He would have become president long ago, but this is not his destiny. To achieve success at the forthcoming elections, Zyuganov, first of all, has to overcome himself and to believe that he is able to become first.

In the front line there are regular participants in any elections of the past years:

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Grigory Yavlinsky. These are professional politicians. Alexei Podberyozykin is also joining this group, his task, though, is more modest: it's not trying to consolidate his supporters, but to get some votes for the future.

The next group is that of politicians of the "lower echelon", who are willing to join the major league. Konstantin Titov, governor of the Samara region, is the most striking example among them. His present task is quite clear: to try and become

the Lebed of the year of 1996, which means to soar to the heights of fame, take third place, receive 10-15 per cent of votes and then give them to one of the candidates, who made it to the second round, all this in return for the post of Premier at the least. At the maximum his claims would depend on the situation.

### PRESTIGE

We can refer the governor of the Kemerovo region Aman Tuleyev to the same group. His task is to enhance the prestige of his region and try and get something for it under pretense of rendering the Kremlin some services.

The third group consists of creative personalities, who aspire after self-expression. What kind of elections would be those without a director participating in them? At the dawn of democracy Mark Zakharov played this part. Then it went to Nikita Mikhailov. Now we have Stanislav Govorukhin maintaining this tradition. His participation is promising that at least this election campaign won't be very dull and dreary. It's of no importance either to Govorukhin or to us how many votes he'll finally get. It's more important for him to speak of the things that have been troubling him and for us to hear it. Govorukhin won't win, but he'll attempt to become a sort of spiritual leader and national conscience.

Bearing in mind the constantly growing list of "initiative groups" that are being registered and the developed techniques for collecting signatures, we can, quite naturally, ask ourselves: is our elite capable of taking into account the results of the Duma elections? Is it capable of realising its responsibility for the forthcoming elections? We don't expect it to ensure "fair and clean" elections — it should be ensured by law. We think it's the elite's responsibility that the elections be held in earnest. For this purpose we should give our people an opportunity to have a real choice.

# 'Russia on the way to modernised Stalinism'

Fred Weir  
Moscow, March 4

ACTING PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin is leading Russia into a new "modernised" form of Stalinism, say a group of Soviet-era dissidents.

"The great paradox of recent Russian history is that, while the West has applauded the democratic and market reforms of the various Governments of former President Boris Yeltsin, under the cover of and as a result of these reforms a modernized form of Stalinism has been re-established in Russia," several human rights activists charged last week in an open letter to the Russian public.

The letter warns that freedom of the press is waning, elections are becoming a farce, and the war in Chechnya is corrupting Russian society.

Among the statement's authors is Yelena Bonner, widow of Soviet dissident physicist Andrei Sakharov.

"Putin is moving toward dictatorship, and this can be seen in many ways," says Andrei Piontkovsky, a leading Russian political commentator and one of the letter's signatories.

"The oligarchic capitalism introduced by Yeltsin is reaching its logical political outcome, and that is totalitarianism," he says.

"First the oligarchs robbed Russia, and now they require polit-

ical power that will legitimise the robbery".

The critics say that Mr Putin is bringing in an authoritarian regime under slogans about "consolidating society" and "building a strong state". They point to episodes such as the six-week disappearance of Radio Liberty journalist Andrei Babitsky, after being detained by Russian security police, to back the charge that press freedoms are being curtailed.

"Almost all the newspapers and television companies are under the control of oligarchs with ties to the state authorities," says the letter. "This ensures a censor like guidance of the mass media in the interests of those authorities".

Mr. Putin is the leading candidate in presidential elections slated for March 26. His only realistic challenger, analysts say, is Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov, who trails far behind in opinion polls.

Society is becoming increasingly militarised, partly under the impact of the Chechnya war, and the security services are being granted powers and prerogatives they haven't seen since the USSR collapsed, the letter says.

"The military budget is increasing, special divisions of the FSB (former KGB) are being re-established in military units, military education is being re-imposed in schools, reserve officers are being called up," says the letter.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 5 MAR 2000



# Russians suffer heavy losses after Chechen rebels infiltrate village

ALKHAZUROVO (Russia): Rebel fighters broke through Russian military lines and seized a village in southern Chechnya in which dozens of federal soldiers were killed and wounded, officials said on Monday.

Russian Maj Gen Yuri Naumov said several dozen rebels managed to enter the village of Komsomolskye Sunday night and occupied it. Russian artillery pounded the village incessantly on Monday, trying to oust the fighters.

An unidentified Russian officer manning a checkpoint near Komsomolskoye said up to 50 Russian troops had been killed and others wounded since Sunday in rebel attacks. The Russian military has lost scores of troops during the past week despite Moscow's claim that the rebels were defeated.

Russian casualties from the weekend fighting were not mentioned in official reports, which only said that according to a federal command about 40 wounded rebel fighters had been captured and another 30 surrendered their weapons around Chechnya over the weekend.

By mid-day on Monday, almost all the homes on the southern edge of Komsomolskoye had been destroyed and all the residents had fled. Village residents pleaded with the Russian military to stop the shelling, while residents of a nearby town set up patrols to dissuade rebels from entering their settlements.

After a half-year of bombing and shelling Chechnya, Russia claims to have occupied most of the separatist republic, including former rebel strongholds around the Argun Gorge.

Russian Lt Gen Vladimir Bulgakov said that the rebels still controlled two small pockets of land in the mountains but would be destroyed "in a matter of days." The federals also claimed to have taken a hilltop in the Shatoi region, some 60 km north of Chechnya's border with the Republic of Georgia.

Federal aviation kept up their bombing raids, flying 60 attack sorties on Sunday, the military command said. Federal casualties have mounted sharply in the last few days, with Russian commanders saying that 31 paratroopers were killed in an attack on Friday.

Meanwhile, a delegation from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe postponed a trip to Chechnya until Saturday, a spokesman with the body's Moscow office said. The spokesman said dangers inside Chechnya had increased in recent days, making the fact-finding trip originally set for Monday impossible.

Acting President Vladimir Putin said he would not hold peace talks with the rebels. He said in an interview with the BBC aired on Sunday, that Russian victory is within reach. "It seems to me that organised opposition is practically impossible from this moment on," he said. (AP)

RUSSIA / BLAIR DUBS MEET A 'GOOD OMEN'

# Putin gets West's stamp of approval

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, MARCH 12. A one-day unofficial visit by Britain's Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, to Russia on Saturday gave a final stamp of the West's endorsement of Mr. Vladimir Putin as Russia's next President, despite the continuing brutal war in Chechnya.

Mr. Blair was the first Western leader to have met Russia's Acting President, Mr. Putin, who is tipped to win the March 26 presidential elections in Russia. Mr. Blair and his wife came to St. Petersburg at a private invitation of the Putins for a weekend cultural programme that included a tour of Russia's historical sights and a night at the opera, but the Russian and British leaders also squeezed in two rounds of intensive talks that covered Chechnya, Balkans and bilateral ties.

Afterwards, Mr. Blair described the meeting as "a very good omen for the future," while Mr. Putin said the discussions helped him better understand Western concerns over Chechnya "in order to correct our own policy" in the region.

Mr. Blair praised Mr. Putin as a "highly intelligent" leader "with a focussed view of what he wants to achieve in Russia" and stressed the need for the West to maintain working relations with Russia. For his part, Mr. Putin, 47, played up the things he said he had in common with Mr. Blair, 46, saying they were "both law graduates and of the same generation."

Predictably, the two sides disagreed on Chechnya, with Mr. Blair urging Russia to use "proportionate" force against rebels and investigate allegations of human rights violations in the region, and Mr. Putin refusing to bow to Western pressure to halt the five-month-long military operation against "international terrorism."

The British leader acknowledged that Russia was dealing with a "terrorist insurrection" in



The Acting Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin (left), and the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, on a tour of the Hermitage in St. Petersburg on Saturday. — AP

Chechnya, while Mr. Putin voiced willingness to cooperate on humanitarian issues in Chechnya with international bodies, including the Red Cross, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations.

Mr. Blair made it clear the West would not let the war in Chechnya stand in the way of its relations with Moscow. "There is a great desire to see Russia engaged with the rest of the world," he told a news conference and called for "an open and clear dialogue" with Moscow.

Mr. Putin used the occasion to urge all nations to pool their efforts in combatting international terrorism and said Russia could learn from the relevant British ex-

perience in Northern Ireland. He also made an intriguing claim that American missiles, fired at a suspected hideout of the Saudi militant Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, "would have hit more of the right places" if the U.S. had consulted Russia on the issue.

Coming two weeks before Russia's presidential elections, Mr. Blair's visit is bound to boost Mr. Putin's chances for an outright win in the first round of voting. A Russian daily said Mr. Putin also gave the West "a pertinent reminder of Russia's past imperial grandeur" by taking the British leader on a tour of the Russian Tsars' palaces and a premiere of Sergei Prokofiev's opera *War and Peace* based upon Leo Tolstoy's epic.

THE HINDU  
13 MAR 2000

# Chechen warlord captured

**Urus-Martan (Russia), March 13 (AP):** Acting Russian President Vladimir Putin said today that a top Chechen warlord had been captured in a special operation and was being held in a Moscow prison.

Putin said that Salman Raduyev, a well-known Chechen field commander, had been arrested by Russian troops yesterday and brought to the capital.

"This is one of the most odious bandit leaders," Putin said at a meeting of top ministers. "Now he's in prison, and that's where he belongs."

The arrest of Raduyev is the first time Russian forces have captured a top rebel leader since Moscow began its campaign in September to retake control of Chechnya, which has had de-facto independence since 1996.

The chief of Russia's federal security service, Nikolai Patrushev, said Raduyev had been taken in the Chechen town of Novogrozniyskiy, where he was hiding. Raduyev led a raid on the Russian town of Kizlyar in 1996, during the last Chechen war, taking hundreds of hostages who were later released. He played a

prominent role leading rebel fighters against Russian troops in the current conflict.

Putin said investigators would check Raduyev's claims that he was responsible for an assassination attempt on Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze in early 1998.

Russia came under new criticism for its handling of the war when a delegation from the Council of Europe today called for an immediate ceasefire. The delegation said Russian forces showed little concern for civilians in the campaign, which has relied heavily on air and artillery raids.

The delegation, which visited refugee camps and the capital Grozny, was "deeply disturbed by the distress and trauma suffered by civilians as a result of indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by the Russian military," said delegation leader Lord Judd, according to the Interfax news agency.

Western nations have expressed concern over alleged human rights abuses by Russian troops. The delegation is studying the possible suspension of Russia's membership in the Council of Europe, the continent's leading human rights body.

Vladimir Kalamonov, Russia's human rights envoy for Chechnya, promised to investigate allegations of human rights abuses but reiterated his stance that Russia's campaign was aimed at criminal bands that had stripped civilians of their rights. Chechnya has been plagued by crime and violence for years.

Russian forces today continued their battle against rebel fighters in the southern Chechen town of Komsomolskoye, which the rebels captured a week ago. Jets and helicopters flew 26 sorties yesterday, attacking Komsomolskoye and other targets.



**DEAD END:** Salman Raduyev. (AFP)

# Russia wants to seal off southern Chechnya

SR-12  
19/3  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

URUS-MARTAN, March 18. — Russian forces plan to seal off Chechnya's southern mountains and fight rebels there, while trying to restore peaceful life in the Russian-controlled north, acting President, Mr Vladimir Putin, said today.

Mr Putin's comments came as federal warplanes and artillerybombed suspected rebel positions in the mountains, where the main rebel forces are now concentrated.

Moscow is eager to demonstrate that it is in control of the situation in Chechnya's northern flatlands, and is able to block rebels from coming down into the plains to attack federal positions.

"We will cut off Chechnya's mountainous part," Mr Putin told the Mayak radio station today. "We will carry out military and special operations there, and will be finishing off (the rebels)."

However, Russian attempts in the past to seal off smaller parts of Chechnya have been unsuccessful, and during the

weeks-long blockade of Grozny this winter, rebels continued to sneak past Russian lines in and out of the city.

Russian airborne troops commander, Col-Gen Georgy Shpak, was not optimistic that rebels could be stopped from reaching the northern plains, where hit-and-run attacks on Russian troops have been on the rise.

"These clashes will continue for a long time and we are getting ready for them," he said, according to an Interfax news agency report today. "Groups of 15 to 20 rebels infiltrate villages in the plains from Chechnya's mountainous areas. They easily blend in with the peaceful residents, making it difficult to identify them. They are civilians by day, and armed bandits by night."

The comments came a day after rebels staged two attacks deep in the Russian-controlled territory in Chechnya's north, the shelling of a bridge across the Terek River and a grenade attack on a Russian checkpoint in the village of Naurskaya.

Both areas had appeared to be fully under Russian control since federal troops swept across the northern flatlands at the start of their military offensive last autumn.

Mr Putin claimed today that the main rebel forces have been destroyed, but that many "animals ... still run around and are capable of gathering into packs".

The Russian military claimed today to have killed a group of rebels in the strategic Argun Gorge, the Itar-Tass news agency reported.

Russian artillery continued to shell suspected rebel positions near the town of Urus-Martan, north of the mountains, and the villages of Serzhen-Yurt, Agishty, Dzhugury and Komsomolskoye, Itar-Tass reported.

The Russian military claimed to have Komsomolskoye under control on Wednesday after more than a week of intense fighting. However today, federal troops were still trying to carry out a sweep of the village for remaining rebels, and were meeting fierce resistance.

THE STATESMAN  
19 MAR 2000

# Putin way in front

*Handwritten: Putin, H.D. 16, 19/13*

**Mr. Vladimir Putin's superiority is so overwhelming that he decided not to use the free air time allotted for his campaign for the Russian Presidency and declined to take part in TV debates with his 11 opponents. The only problem for the Kremlin is ensuring that enough voters turn up, says**  
**VLADIMIR RADYUHIN.**



Russia's Acting President, Mr. Vladimir Putin... exuding confidence ahead of the polls.

**W**ITH A week to go before Russia's snap presidential elections, the Acting President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, appears set to sweep the vote contested by 12 candidates. Opinion surveys show that more than 70 per cent of Russians expect him to be their next leader, and up to 60 per cent say they will vote for him on March 26, compared to just over 20 per cent for the nearest challenger. Mr. Putin's remarkable achievement is even more astounding considering the precious little he has said or done to justify his meteoric rise after Mr. Boris Yeltsin anointed the obscure head of the Federal Security Service as his chosen successor seven months ago.

The would-be president owes his stunning popularity almost entirely to a Kremlin-crafted flawless PR campaign that kicked off with a military campaign against Chechen rebels six months ago and climaxed with the dramatic ahead-of-term resignation of Mr. Yeltsin on December 31, a move that brought forward presidential elections by several months and cut the ground from under the feet of other contenders. The war in Chechnya, the second in five years, turned Mr. Putin virtually overnight into Russia's most popular politician.

The State-controlled media portrayed him as the man who stood up to crush terrorism and banditry, protect national dignity and territorial integrity and redeem the humiliation of Russia's defeat in the first Chechen war. Young, energetic and clean, Mr. Putin emerged as a welcome change from the inept and rotten regime of Mr. Yeltsin. He is seen as a man of action, compared to whom his chief rival, the Communist leader, Mr. Gennady Zyuganov, is a man of words, who moreover belongs to the Yeltsin era. By contrast, Mr. Putin has managed not only to distance himself from Mr. Yeltsin but to promote himself as his opposite.

Mr. Putin's image has caught on despite the lack of detail concerning his economic programme, political views, or his previous career in the KGB. When faced with a straightforward question about his policies after the presidential elections, Mr. Putin in a recent interview said bluntly: "I will not

tell you." It has been Mr. Putin's campaign tactics to say little and speak vaguely in order to appear all things to all audiences.

"The right wing expects him to turn to the right, the left wing wants him to return to the era of social equality," says Mr. Yuri Levada, one of Russia's leading opinion pollsters. "Patriots expect him to counter 'Western tricks', and liberals want him to strengthen Russia's relations with the West." But above all, people tend to see Mr. Putin as a strong leader who will restore order at home, and lost pride on the world stage. Mr. Putin's main campaign slogans about "consolidating society", "building a strong state", and imposing "a dictatorship of the law" appeal to Russian voters, exhausted and demoralised after years of chaos and decline.

Critics say that Mr. Putin is bringing in an authoritarian regime — "a modernised form of Stalinism". But analysts said a vast majority of Russians did not mind the state getting a little tough. Mr. Putin's image of an authoritarian leader, reinforced by his KGB background, should help him attract the votes of many Communist supporters. "Putin wants to address the communist electorate and he really can hope to take the votes of at least 10-15 per cent of Zyuganov's supporters in the coming election," says Mrs. Liliya Shevtsova of the Carnegie Endowment.

At the same time, she estimates that around 70 per cent of the Russian liberal-oriented audience is going to vote for Mr. Putin, expecting him to pursue a pro-market policy. Many pollsters see Mr. Putin heading for an outright win on March 26. But should he fail to win the necessary 50 per cent of the votes in the first round, he

will face — and defeat — in the runoff Mr. Zyuganov, who is likely to capture up to 30 per cent of the votes on March 26.

The liberal economist, Mr. Grigory Yavlinsky, is expected to come in third, with 5 to 9 per cent of the votes. Mr. Putin's superiority is so overwhelming that he decided not to use the free air time allotted to his campaign and declined to take part in television debates with his 11 opponents. Analysts said Mr. Putin's decision was a wise move that put him above the fray.

The only problem for the Kremlin is to ensure that enough voters — at least 50 per cent — come to the polls to make the elections valid.

The all-too-predictable outcome of the presidential race has raised serious fears that many voters may choose to stay away. If the turnout is low, the voting results will be annulled and new elections will be called within four months. To whet public appetite for the elections, the Kremlin even staged an elaborate show centred on Russia's maverick politician, Mr. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who had run in all previous presidential races but never polled more than a few percentage points.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) barred Mr. Zhirinovskiy from the current race for failing to provide full details of his family property. However, the Supreme Court overruled the ban, ordering the CEC to register Mr. Zhirinovskiy, but the CEC appealed against the ruling and the final decision is not expected until a few days before the polling date. The latest prediction for the turnout on March 26 is around 60 per cent.

# Public opinion backs Putin for Russian President

Moscow, March 23

**A**CTING RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin stands firm favourite to win the March 26 Presidential elections, according to public opinion surveys conducted during the last few days.

Summing up the findings, Novosti says that even if Mr Putin fails to muster up the required 50 per cent votes forcing a second round of voting on April 16, he is poised to clinch a resounding 60 to 65 per cent votes in such a case.

The runner-up in the contest, according to the surveys, is again Communist Party Chairman Gennadi Zyuganov, who was the main contender against Boris Yeltsin in 1996 and had secured the second place by obtaining below 30 per cent votes.

Mr Putin is being backed by the Unity Party that was formed by many provincial governors and local authorities to contest the Duma elections in last December to strengthen the hand of the Acting President.

President Putin, who shot into limelight from the shadows of life-long service in the KGB and its successor the Federal Security Service, was appointed Premier in last autumn and was unexpectedly handed over the reins of the Kremlin on December 31 last year.

He became a favourite with the masses not only because of his aggressive approach towards the Islamic militants in Chechnya, but also because of his promise to turn Russia into a "dictatorship of law", thereby making clear that he was going to consolidate Russia as a

stable state and a power to be reckoned with. This, admit his friends and admirers, had revived the sagging morale of the Russian people.

In his campaigning, Mr Putin used neither the electronic media, the print media or public meetings for bolstering his image. "My actions and policy pronouncements are my election mani festo," he says.

It is said of Putin that he does not utter a single word out of context and meticulously avoids showmanship. But he can take any risk, even putting at stake his life, the evidence of which was provided on Monday.

Putin had occupied the co-pilot's seat in a two-seater supersonic Sukhoi-27 fighter jet and landed at an airport near the Chechen capital, Grozny. Regional news services said the former KGB spy had flown the plane himself for some of the trip.

In such an adventure, the Russians saw a man who could undertake any risk to salvage his country from the morass, observers said.

According to West Germany's Institute for Eastern and International Studies, "Vladimir Putin has set himself the task to bring Russia within a relatively short time closer to the Western industrialised countries and give an impulse for a very high rate of economic growth in the country".

The institute's directorate felt that Russia led by Putin was on the right track and consistently implementing economic reforms, a *Novosti* report, quoting the German institute's report, said.

(UNI)

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24 MAR 2000

## POST YELTSIN, WHO?

SV Vladimir Putin, that's who

**A**CTING Russian President Vladimir Putin shines by contrast. Anybody with a reasonably lucid head, unslurred speech and the will to act forcefully would look good after Boris Yeltsin. Most Russian commentators are not sure whether Putin is doing great things for Russia, although the Chechnya campaign did produce an outburst of enthusiasm. What is perhaps important in a demoralised country is the impression of toughness that Putin conveys, more than the actual substance of his achievements. The enthusiasm over Chechnya may have waned, but the Russians saw a man defending their pride in front of the world, especially the West. Putin, in fact, has been trying to raise his country's international profile. Domestically, he talks about cracking down on crime, corruption and terrorism, about a "dictatorship of the law". This may make sense in a country where institutions of state were in alarming regression during Yeltsin's last years, but sceptics say he may not be able to do much against fat cats with powerful connections in Kremlin.

The other reason why Putin has a crushing lead over other presidential contenders, such as the communist Zyuganov and the nationalist Zhirinovskiy, is that there isn't much of a choice. Few Russians trust Zhirinovskiy and few want to see the communists back in the Kremlin. Putin is the only mainstream contender left in the race, Primakov and Luzhkov having withdrawn from the race in favour of Putin. Nothing much is known about what Putin plans to do with the economy, except that he mentions the right to property. The West seems to think that he can put Russia back on its feet. Clinton called him "strong and effective" and said the US "could do business with him". Tony Blair gave him good marks too. Finally, Putin is liked because nothing much is known about him, except that he is a former KGB operative and proud of it. His entire political thinking seems to be derived from the internal security perspective he has inherited from his former agency, in which some former Soviet dissidents, such as Sakharov's wife, see a danger of authoritarianism. His lack of political credentials gives him an advantage when people are tired of the political class and not too sure whether ideology is what will pull Russia out of the mess. Maybe they just want someone who can keep things going without causing too much disruption.

**THE STATESMAN**  
25 MAR 2000

## Putin declared 28.3 winner (11) By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, MARCH 27.** Russia's acting President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, swept to victory in Sunday's Presidential elections, capturing over a half of all votes cast, enough to avoid going into a second round.

With over 95 per cent of the votes counted by Monday afternoon, Mr. Putin was declared winner with 52.6 per cent. His main rival, the Communist leader, Mr. Gennady Zyuganov, came second with 29.3 per cent, and the liberal leader, Mr. Grigory Yavlinsky, was third with 5.8 per cent. Eight other candidates, including the maverick nationalist leader, Mr. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, trailed far behind.



Mr. Zyuganov was quick to claim that the vote had been falsified. "We, in reality, have some 40 per cent of the votes and any attempt to make it 50 and more (for Putin) will mean falsification," he said, as votes were still being counted.

## PM calls Putin

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 27.** The Prime Minister Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today warmly felicitated Mr. Vladimir Putin who has won the elections for the presidency.

In the brief telephone conversation this evening, sources in the Government said, Mr. Vajpayee and the Russian President-elect were bullish about the future of Indo-Russian relations.

There is strong hope here that Mr. Putin, who has often expressed positive sentiments about India, will help consolidate the relations that went through many ups and downs in the last ten years. During the conversation, Mr. Putin reaffirmed the importance Russia attached to its relations with India and promised to finalise early the dates of his planned visit to India.

**THE HINDU**  
**28 MAR 2000**



# Putin is Russia's President



DEUTSCHE PRESSE AGENTUR

MOSCOW, March 27. — The Acting Russian President, Mr Vladimir Putin, was elected President on his own today in a narrow victory, succeeding Mr Boris Yeltsin, election officials said.

Mr Putin, 47, the acting Russian chief since Mr Yeltsin stepped down on New Year's eve, won 52.3 per cent of the vote with 91.1 per cent of the ballots counted, the Central Election Commission said. To win a four-year term in the first round and avoid a run-off, Mr Putin had to win more than 50 per cent of the vote among the 11 candidates which he did.

The Communist, Mr Gennady Zyuganov, finished second, winning just under 30 per cent of the votes, while the liberal Mr Grigory Yavlinsky of the Yabloko party won 5.8 per cent to finish third.

**Vajpayee congratulations:** The Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, today spoke to Mr Putin over the hotline and conveyed his warm felicitations and greetings over the Russian leader's impressive victory in the just-concluded elections, adds PTI.

**THE STATESMAN**  
28 MAR 2000

## THE VICTORIOUS MR. PUTIN

AFTER A DECADE under the stewardship of the mercurial but impulsive Mr. Boris Yeltsin, post-Soviet Russia gets a President who, from the little that is known of him, could not be more different from the man he is succeeding. Four years ago, the basic choice before the Russian electorate was described as one between the apostate and the acolyte, between Mr. Yeltsin who had given up communism after holding high office during the Soviet period and Mr. Gennady Zyuganov, the steadfast communist who has remained with the party undeterred by the collapse of the empire and the presumed defeat of the communist ideology. In Sunday's election, this clear line was perhaps somewhat blurred, with the persistent Mr. Zyuganov pitted against a relatively unknown candidate, a former secret service operative anointed as his political heir by Mr. Yeltsin before his bombshell resignation on new year's eve. The Presidential election, third since the introduction of democracy in Russia, thus turned out in the main to be between an avowed communist and a former apparatchik. The consequence of this strange battle will be that the victory of Mr. Vladimir Putin, the diminutive, self-effacing former colonel of the dreaded spy agency of Soviet vintage, the KGB, is bound to herald a break with the last few years of drift under Mr. Yeltsin.

When Mr. Putin appeared on the world stage six months ago, first in the dummy post of Prime Minister and then as Acting President, little was known about him. There were as many unanswered questions about Mr. Putin's past as about the course he would follow if entrusted with power. In the three months he has acted as President there was one acid test of the quality of his leadership, provided by the renewed war in the breakaway republic of Chechnya, and he scored high marks. The unqualified

success of that military campaign was one of the key factors for his victory, with the population ready to reward him for his commitment and determination once he set himself the goal. "If we don't stop the extremists, we will have a second Yugoslavia, the Islamisation of Russia," he declared at the start of the military campaign and went on to erase the national humiliation suffered by the Russian army in two earlier wars against the separatists in the region. The victory in Chechnya has propelled him to the top at the Kremlin.

The vote is an appeal in desperation from the Russian people for a halt to the all-round slide that the former superpower has seen since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is a measure of Russia's falling global influence that a national election for President has provoked little notice outside the country and even less interest. A lacklustre campaign in a country in the midst of one of its worst socio-economic crises and a veritable non-contest combined to dampen interest. It was nevertheless a crucial election since the verdict will set the course that Russia takes in the next decade and more. The successive defeats of Mr. Zyuganov will come as a blow to the communists, the former ruling class. But questions remain about the road that Mr. Putin will take and the future political landscape of Russia. The last few months have witnessed efforts by the U.S. and a Putin-led Russia to reshape their relationship. Under Mr. Yeltsin, Moscow's foreign policy remained Washington-centred, surrendering to the U.S. and accentuating the imbalances of the unipolar world. Only in later years did Mr. Yeltsin see the benefit of sustaining Russia's relations with other countries. Neighbours like India with a stake in the evolution of a multipolar world will watch for signals from the Putin Presidency.

THE HINDU  
28 MAR 2000

## Putin Palace

Vladimir Putin is Russia's legitimate new ruler. He derives his legitimacy partly from the Russian people. The other part will perhaps interest a few people more; Mr Putin himself has contributed to the fact that he comes as "The Great Saviour" of a nation which has lived its life, partly real and otherwise surreal, surrounded by unkind cuts and melodramatic twists. His rise to the top should therefore be equally credited to the myths and romances that abide about a redoubtable past; even if it is in a state called Russia, which presently finds itself in a situation of such acute disrepair as the contemporary reality announces. The mythology which has sustained the Great Russian Dream through history still seems to hold the people spellbound, and there should hardly be any surprise over that. Russia wants to return to its old superpower days; it wants to be acknowledged as an international player in its own right. And Mr Putin faces the insurmountable task of making the ordinary Russian forget the setbacks of his recent past. As the new boss at the Kremlin, and perhaps of the Kremlin too, Mr Putin has a few significant pluses on his side; one, he is not as old and medically unstable as his immediate predecessor-turned-mentor Boris Yeltsin is. Two, Mr Putin being relatively younger and with a more definite feel of how governments work, will perhaps infuse the somnolent "system" he presides over with a new sense of mission and approach. Mr Putin's own agenda seems somewhat grandiose, though. He is talking in terms of rehabilitating the Russian state, but the manner in which he proposes to go about it indicates a confused mindset veering dangerously close to the horrors of over-centralisation. Too much centralisation is its own worst enemy; from the last of the Czars to their present day reflection that is him, a trifle exaggerated notion of self-importance has proved to be the nemesis of most of Russia's rulers over the last century. The Bolsheviks promised collectivisation above all; in actual fact, all that the people got were leaders and rulers who just wanted state power. Nothing more, nothing less. Critics of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin have post-facto accused Leninism of laying too much store by capturing state power which in time degenerated into rigid, fossilised, bureaucratic controls. It is a moot point whether Mr Putin agrees with this view. If he does not, he may have to repent for his own mistakes of understanding, and the Russian people will have another messiah who was not to rue about. Be that as it may, Mr Putin could perhaps become less ambitious and more realistic about the tasks that face him. There is the national mood which has to be nursed back to normal without it becoming dangerously romantic and fondly revivalist about the Russian past. The Russian economy needs Mr Putin's immediate attention, and he has to perhaps prune his defence expenditure to an extent to put the society back on its rails. Although centrist notions have seldom survived the vicissitudes of history, Russia's long ordeal-by-transition perhaps suggests that straightforward middle-of-the-road stuff to be his only sensible ideological and policy option for the moment. If Mr Putin can seize that moment as it presents itself, he will have gone a long way indeed in helping Russia to redefine its role in a world that has changed so radically, perhaps irreversibly; from good old Cold War times. Mr Putin can become an intelligent child of destiny. He has got the opportunity to become one, and such chances come but once in any given lifetime. He has a choice: Whether to go down as an obscure spy chief-turned political boss or as someone who had the necessary vision when it mattered most.

**THE ASIAN AGE**  
28 MAR 2000

# Putin moots shift in foreign policy

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, MARCH 28.** Russia's newly-elected President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, intends to modify his country's foreign policy, a senior Cabinet member has suggested.

The Russian Foreign Minister, Mr. Igor Ivanov, said "correctives" would be made in Russia's foreign policy in the wake of Sunday's presidential elections. "These correctives will take account of the new foreign policy concept discussed at a recent meeting of the Security Council," Mr. Ivanov said after a Cabinet meeting. He did not elaborate.

Russia's advisory Security Council last week approved a new foreign policy concept that calls on diplomats to do more to help promote Russian industry and commerce. "The role of the Foreign Ministry must be raised. We need actively to use the Foreign Ministry's opportunities to promote the economic interests of our state overseas," the Itar-Tass news agency quoted Mr. Putin as saying.

In the first indication of coming foreign policy changes, Mr. Putin on Monday appointed a new Deputy Foreign Minister in charge of Asia. Mr. Alexander Losyukov, 56, has replaced Mr. Grigory Karasin, who is going to Britain as Russia's ambassador.

Mr. Losyukov, who until his new appointment served as General Secretary of the Foreign Ministry, is a career diplomat who worked in many Asian countries, including Australia, the Philippines, Afghanistan and New Zealand.

Speaking at an international conference on Asia in Vladivostok last year, he said Russia needed to take a closer look at its neighbours in Asia following NATO's push into Eastern Europe. India's Ambassador to Russia, Mr. S. K. Lambah, was the first foreign envoy to have met and congratulated Mr. Losyukov on his appointment on Monday.



The former Russian President, Mr. Boris Yeltsin, congratulates the newly-elected President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, during their meeting outside Moscow on Monday. — AP

Meanwhile, Mr. Putin told Cabinet members today that it would take him more than a month to form the new Government and the present Cabinet should keep working until then. Under the Russian Constitution, the Cabinet will resign after the inauguration of the newly-elected President, which will tentatively take place on May 5. Mr. Putin has so far given no indication as to who he would like to see as Russia's new Prime Minister. But he has

already decided to keep the Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeev, who is 62.

The Interfax news agency quoted Mr. Putin's Press Secretary as saying that the President had "some time ago" given instructions to extend Marshal Sergeev's stay in office for another year. According to Russian law, senior officers who reach the age of 60 can continue in active duty till 65 but need to be reappointed by the President on a yearly basis.

## Hope floats in Russia

SO THERE was to be no new red dawn over Moscow when acting President Vladimir Putin expectedly won a commanding victory over his communist challenger, Gennady Zyuganov. Over 108 million voters scattered across 11 time zones of the world's biggest country has once again proved that elections in Russia revolve around personalities rather than the programmes of political parties. Thus, most Russians obviously backed Mr Putin at the hustings, thanks to his image as a tough leader who would be the best bet for draining out Russia's cup of woes, although he had campaigned with an almost non-existent political manifesto.

Very little is known about his philosophical, political, and economic orientation, save for the fact that he prefers a state-run economy based on traditional Russian values. Not for him, it would seem, Western style liberalism, nor Soviet Socialism. If his credentials as a former Soviet spy and the ruthless manner in which he conducted the military campaign against Chechen rebels has endeared him to Russian nationalists, his enthusiasm for post-Soviet market reforms has gone down well with the liberals. Little wonder then that the electorate substituted him as the country's *nadezhda na zavtra* ("hope for tomorrow") in place of Mr Zyuganov. This, of course, doesn't detract attention from the latter's impressive electoral scorecard which has recorded a remarkable gain in percentage points over his poll performance against former President Boris Yeltsin in 1996. Winning the elections must have been the least of Mr Putin's worries as the politically untested KGB colonel consolidates his position and tries to replace frowns with smiles on Russian faces, which is easier said than done, considering the dismal political and economic situation Russia finds itself in.

Most Russian citizens live in the proletarian provinces which are divided into economic castes — ranging from the millions of struggling workers and the emerging entrepreneurs, to the big business tycoons who hold sway in the rich towns. After the somnambulism induced by 70 years of strong-arm Soviet rule, Russians have been shaken awake to a form of market economy which has created a handful of super-wealthy while leaving the majority behind to struggle in abject poverty. So it is hardly surprising that no one in the remote Russian regions — be it Karelia woodcutters on the Finnish border or Vladivostok traders on the Pacific coast — have enjoyed the benefits promised by the new found democracy and market economy. None of these socio-economic problems is susceptible to bumper sticker solutions and the sooner Mr Putin acknowledges this, the better it will be for a country that has been adrift for so long.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 MAR 2000

## CHECHNYA WAR

5/10 Casualties mount on both sides 7/2

Russians were making heavy weather of their advance into Grozny and fudging casualty figures in order not to frighten mothers and widows back home and keep Putin's presidential constituency satisfied. One-third of Grozny is said to be under Russian control and they appear to be advancing on the remaining two-thirds, if only as a rubblestack. The Chechen rebels are using underground sewer pipes to isolate Russian units and have killed at least one General, besides inflicting heavy casualties. But it doesn't seem, given the steady exodus of the civilian population and the siege they are placed under, that they can remain in Grozny for long. The Chechens have taken heavy casualties too, as several prominent commanders have been reported to have been killed or badly wounded when fleeing rebels walked into a minefield. Many have already made their way into the mountains from where, very likely, guerrilla warfare will be launched. Putin seems to have some kind of a deadline for this operation, March probably, when presidential elections are due. This means that the assault will be intensified to guarantee the result.

A group of European parliamentarians are prowling around in the locality to see if the Russians are behaving themselves. The media has reported widespread venality, commanders taking the heat off in exchange for money and goods, troops indulging in loot, but, apart from the usual distress caused by bombardment, no systematic outrages seem to have occurred. So, the Council for Europe has decided not to impose sanctions on Russia but asks itself seriously whether to act and will want to know in three months time whether "any progress has been made towards ending the conflict", which all sounds nice and vague. Nobody wants to put too much pressure on Russia over this, especially now that the Taliban has gone and recognised the rebel regime and there is evidence that the rebels are being funded and supplied by the likes of bin Laden, but there is still the business of separating the fighting from the humanitarian morass into which the Chechen population has sunk. The right thing to do is to send envoys and make concerned noises. Grozny may be taken, but that will not bring the war to an end. The Russians will have to next ask themselves how to rehabilitate and protect the refugees in Ingushetia, rebuild the capital, while trying to contain the rebels in their mountain strongholds in the south from where they can continue to harass Grozny.

THE STATESMAN

- 3 FEB 2000

# Russians raise flag over Grozny

BY DMITRI SOUTSEV

**Grozny, Feb. 7:** Russians raised their flag over Grozny on Sunday as acting President Vladimir Putin declared that the operation to liberate the destroyed Chechen capital was over.

Depleted Chechen forces were meanwhile struggling under fierce bombing to maintain control of a corridor leading from the west of the city to mountain strongholds.

"The liberation operation (in Grozny) is finished," Mr Putin said on television. "The last pocket of resistance in Grozny, the Zavodskoyi district, has been cleared. The Russian flag has been raised on one of the administrative buildings." Russian bombing of Grozny from the air, which began on September 23, ended on Sun-

day, RTR television reported.

Russian shelling was targeting the region around the villages of Akhan-Kala, Zakan-Yurt, Shaami-Yurt, Katry-Yurt and Achkoi-Martan, between 20 and 30 km southwest of the capital of the breakaway republic, an AFP correspondent reported.

Chechen rebels were driven out of the capital last week after several months of aerial bombardment and a massive ground attack on the capital that began mid-January.

Rebel sources said on Sunday that more than 3,000 of their fighters had evacuated Grozny in a pull-back to refuges in the southern mountains, adding that the Russian strikes had killed 80 Chechen fighters. Russian sources claim that 1,500 Chechens were killed in the Grozny

region in recent days.

More than 2,000 Chechens broke through Russian lines near Katy-Yurt, southeast of Grozny, on Saturday, according to a Chechen commander who identified himself as Aslambek.

Russian military commanders proclaimed victory in the capital on Thursday, while defence minister Igor Sergeev reported that a "brilliant" Russian ploy of trapping and killing rebels fleeing the city had cost the lives of 1,500 Chechen rebels. He said the rebels left on a road that appeared to lead to freedom, but which in fact ended in a minefield where they also came under artillery and machine-gun fire. Fighting has since concentrated on the region around the villages south-west of Grozny. (AFP)

## Gudermes is named as new first city

**Moscow, Feb. 7:** The Russian authorities have named the town of Gudermes in eastern Chechnya as the rebel province's new first city, pending the rebuilding of the capital Grozny which was ruined in the recent fighting, a Moscow official was quoted Monday as saying.

"First we have to examine the extent of the damage (in Grozny), after which we will be able to talk about the future of the Chechen capital," the Itar-Tass news agency quoted Moscow representative in Chechnya Nikolai Kochman as saying.

"There is no great problem if the main town is temporarily Gudermes," he said.

Gudermes, Chechnya's second largest town, is 30 km east of Grozny.

Mr Kochman said that Moscow had not yet released the funds necessary to restore Grozny.

Last month he said that \$420 million would be need to restore the "liberated" areas of Chechnya, excluding Grozny. Russia's acting President Vladimir Putin, on Sunday announced the official end of the operation to "liberate" Grozny. Russian forces began to bombard Grozny on September 25.

Meanwhile, Chechen leader Aslan Maskhadov vowed to retake Grozny from Russian forces, in an interview published on Monday in the Barcelona daily *La Vanguardia*. "For the time being, we have given up the city. We will take it back at a later date," Gen. Maskhadov said, adding that guerrilla warfare was the next step. (AFP)



TAKING A CLOSE LOOK: Russian officers look at a map during cleaning-up operations in Grozny on Saturday. Senior Russian military officers declared Grozny "totally liberated." (AFP)

## 'Radio Free Europe reporter is alive'

**Moscow, Feb. 7:** A Radio Free Europe correspondent handed over to Chechen rebels in exchange for two Russian soldiers is alive, but his whereabouts are unknown, the head of Russia's secret services said on Monday.

"Andrei Babitsky is alive, but I do not know where he is. You should ask someone else about that," Nikolai Patrushev, the head of Russia's Federal Security Service, was quoted as saying by Interfax.

Babitsky, first arrested by Russian forces in Grozny for failing to carry proper identification, was reportedly handed to Chechen rebels in exchange for two government officers.

RFE, a US-based agency, and Washington officials bitterly protested the move. RFE's management in Moscow has expressed fears that Babitsky has been killed.

The reporter has failed to contact his agency in Moscow since his arrest.

Meanwhile, the White House has lodged a protest with Russia over its treatment of journalist Andrei Babitsky, a senior aide to President Bill Clinton said, adding Moscow's actions were "wrong."

Mr Podesta, the White House chief of staff, said the Clinton administration was unable to shed any light on the matter.

"We have no information to substantiate his whereabouts and his condition at this point," noted the White House chief of staff. "Obviously, we think that journalists should be able to operate freely and be able to cover their actions over there (in Chechnya)," said Mr Podesta. "We have made our views known to the Russian government. We've pressed them on this issue," he added. (AFP)

THE ASIAN AGE

- 8 FEB 2000

# Russia says it starts final phase in Chechen campaign

KHANKALA (Russia): Russian military officials on Wednesday said they had started the last phase of their battle to control the break-away region of Chechnya and one general confirmed two regiments would soon be withdrawn.

Russian troops have turned their attention to fighting rebels in Chechnya's southern mountains where thousands fled after Moscow seized the rebel region's razed capital Grozny. Russia launched its campaign in Chechnya four months ago.

Itar-Tass news agency quoted the military at Russia's headquarters in the region as saying they had "started the concluding phase in the operation to defeat the bandit groups in the mountainous parts of Chechnya". "We know where the bandit groups are congregating. First and foremost they will be destroyed there," Tass quoted General Viktor Kazantsev, one of Russia's top commanders in the region, as saying in Khankala, just outside Grozny.

"The fate of the bandits has already been decided," he said, adding Russian forces controlled territory in the south from Shatili, a village across the border in Georgia, to Itum Kale.

But the rebel internet web site Kavkaz.Org said fighting continued close to Itum Kale after Russian paratroops were dropped onto a commanding height there.

Fighters were preparing for a storming by Russian troops at the mouth of the Argun Gorge, one of

two main routes into the mountains, it said.

It said the battles, which had raged for three days, died down while Russian planes bombed villages surrounding the gorge, which is littered with the hulks of tanks destroyed during Russia's defeat in the 1994-96 Chechen war.

General Gennady Troshev, a top commander, said late on Tuesday that some troops would be withdrawn from Chechnya.

"In the coming days two regiments... will be taken out of Chechnya," he told NTV commercial television. It was not clear how many men would be involved.

Russian troops continued an operation to kill or capture those rebels who remained in Grozny, which was seized over the weekend and has been reduced to rubble after weeks of fighting.

The official Russian death toll stands at more than 1,100 but conscripts' families say Russian losses are three times higher. Some Russian newspapers published an official list naming 279 servicemen killed in fighting last year in Dagestan, a region neighbouring Chechnya.

In Grozny, civilians have started to leave the cellars they sheltered in to be greeted by the sight of devastated buildings and Russian troops on the streets.

The rebels have vowed to retake Grozny as they did twice in lightning raids against the Russians during the 1994-96 Chechen war. (Reuters)



## 15 file papers for Russian presidential election

MOSCOW: Fifteen candidates have filed their applications for the presidential election in Russia, before the deadline for nominations expired.

15/2/00 11-15  
"Sunday being the last day for registration of candidates, 15 presidential hopefuls have filed their papers," chief election commissioner Alexander Yeshnyokov said on Sunday night.

The main fight will be between acting President Vladimir Putin and Communist Party chief Gennadi Zyuganov, whom various popularity polls have put ahead of the pack which includes well-known economist and leader of moderate Yabloko Party Grigory Yavlinsky, Liberal Democratic Party's leader and hardliner Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

Mr Putin's election campaign committee is already in place but he has so far refrained from publishing his programme saying, "I would not like it to become a target of attack too early."

Putin aides say that the acting president, who is leading all the popularity polls, is keen to protect his image of a man with impeccable public record and defender of law and order and constitutional norms.

Gennadi Zyuganov has already

released his seven-point agenda. He has promised, among other things, 50 per cent reduction in taxes levied on producers, increase in wages and pensions and democratic democratisation of the society.

"By democratic democratisation I mean introduction of some sort of collective government that would prevent any form of authoritarian rule," he told perplexed journalists.

Mr Zyuganov invited his main rival Mr Putin for a live TV debate. Mr Putin, however, evaded direct reply of Mr Zyuganov's offer and merely said, "I respect his views."

Former premier Yevgeni Primakov, who was leading the opinion polls before the flare-up in Chechnya has pulled out of the race saying that society has not reached civilised level.

He was hurt by some uncharitable remarks against him in a section of the Russian media, Primakov supporters said.

His All-Russia Front had lost the battle to the pro-Putin block in the Duma elections held in December last year.

However, at the same time, Mr Primakov, in his talks with various political leaders had paid tributes to the effective leadership of Mr Putin. (UPI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 FEB 2000

# Putin qualifies for presidential race

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MOSCOW, Feb. 15.— Russia's Central Election Commission today officially registered acting President Vladimir Putin for the 26 March presidential polls, in which he is widely considered the clear favourite.

Mr Putin became the third of 15 candidates to qualify for the race, after Communist Party chief Gennady Zyuganov and Alexei Podberyozykin of the small, Leftist Spiritual Heritage group.

Mr Putin leads his rivals by a wide margin, with opinion polls giving him the support of nearly 60 per cent of respondents. His closest competitor, Mr Zyuganov, has been polling less than 20 per cent.

His popularity has been fuelled by his tough handling of the war in Chechnya, and his energetic, can-do image -- a contrast with former President Boris Yeltsin, who was frequently ailing and absent from public view for weeks at a time during his second term.

Mr Putin was made acting President when Mr Yeltsin unexpectedly resigned on 31 December. But Mr Putin sought to play down his advantages today, saying voters could vote for the seasoned politicians among his competitors.

THE STATESMAN  
16 FEB 2000

HD-15

# Zhirinovskyy banned from poll

19/2

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, FEB. 18.** Russia's maverick politician, Mr. Vladimir Zhirinovskyy, has been barred from running in next month's presidential elections, in a move that could affect the outcome of the vote.

The Central Election Commission in Russia on Thursday refused to register Mr. Zhirinovskyy as a presidential candidate for the March 26 poll because he had failed to declare an apartment belonging to his son.

Russian legislation requires all candidates to provide a full list of their property and income, as well as those of their family members.

Mr. Zhirinovskyy, who leads the Liberal Democratic Party, stood in both previous presidential elections in post-Communist Russia, finishing third in 1991 and fifth in 1996. He said he would appeal Thursday's decision to the Supreme Court.

The exclusion of Mr. Zhirinovskyy will not affect the lineup of forces in the presidential race, because, according to opinion polls, he can count on a mere 3 per cent of the votes.

In the parliamentary elections in December, his party won six per cent.

The Acting President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, is a hot favourite to win presidency, with about 60 per cent of Russians prepared to support him, as against 19 per cent for his main rival, the Communist leader, Mr. Gennady Zyuganov.

However, the absence of Mr. Zhirinovskyy's on the list of contenders may have a crucial impact on voter turnout.

As of last week, pollsters predicted a low 53 per cent turnout, as many Russians are likely to ignore the election in which one contender



Mr. Zhirinovskyy

is practically assured of victory. If Mr. Zhirinovskyy's supporters choose to stay away, the turnout may fall below the 50-per cent minimum necessary for the election to be pronounced valid.

This would kill Mr. Putin's chances to become Russia's next President, as under the law he would be banned from taking part in the next poll.

Some Communist leaders are said to be seriously considering a scenario, under which Mr. Zyuganov, who has no chances of winning the March election, will withdraw his

candidacy and call on his supporters to boycott the vote.

This would open the way to presidency for Mr. Yevgeny Primakov, the only popular politician who has not joined the current race and therefore would be able to register for the vote that must be held four months later.

Communists can get some portfolios in Mr. Primakov's left-leaning Cabinet, something they cannot count on under Mr. Putin.

The Kremlin therefore is expected to bring pressure on the Supreme Court to repeal the verdict of the Central Election Commission and allow Mr. Zhirinovskyy to run.

Some analysts even suggested that the scandal had been masterminded by Kremlin strategists to draw public attention to Mr. Zhirinovskyy and ensure that all his supporters come to the polling stations and help guarantee the required turnout.

A similar trick was successfully used in the December parliamentary election, when Mr. Zhirinovskyy's party was barred from running only to be reinstated later by the Supreme Court.

The well-publicised troubles are believed to have helped Mr. Zhirinovskyy's party to scratch past the 5-per cent threshold to win seats on the Lower House, the State Duma, despite pre-election polls predicting it would get no more than 3 per cent.

The Kremlin was interested in having Mr. Zhirinovskyy in Parliament because his party usually backs the Government in all critical votes.

So far five candidates have been registered for the presidential elections and the Central Election Commission is yet to consider applications from another nine hopefuls.

# A bloody spring in Chechnya?



Russian troops on patrol in Grozny... a land devastated.

**F**OLLOWING THE capture of the Chechen capital, Grozny, the Russian military is confidently predicting an early end to the five-month-long campaign to reassert Moscow's control over the breakaway region.

The Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeev, said last week that the military stage of Moscow's operation in Chechnya would end "within a month", to be followed by a police operation to hunt down small groups of rebels.

Such optimistic predictions appear to be prompted more by presidential elections in Russia scheduled for March 26, than the military situation in Chechnya. The Acting President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, is admittedly a hot favourite to win the polls, but his rivals will use the continuing hostilities in Chechnya as their main weapon when the election campaign officially gets under way later this week.

The Communist leader, Mr. Gennady Zyuganov, who is likely to be Mr. Putin's main rival in the presidential race, last week blasted the Government for using a butcher's cleaver instead of a surgeon's scalpel to carry out what Moscow calls an "anti-terrorist operation" in Chechnya. Another strong presidential contender, Mr. Grigory Yavlinsky, condemned the Chechen campaign as a crime and a war against an ethnic group.

The five-month-long operation has turned out to be as bloody as the 1994-1996 war in Chechnya, despite the military's promise to

avoid the mistakes of the first war, in which thousands died. Moscow has already admitted losing close to 6,000 troops killed and wounded in Chechnya, while human rights organisations say the official casualty figure should be multiplied by two or three.

The military also claims to have killed some 10,000 rebels and Chechens say thousands of civilians have died. The first war ended in Russia's defeat, with the army withdrawing from Chechnya, leaving a devastated and *de facto* independent territory behind.

Chechnya, the then President, Mr. Boris Yeltsin, announced that organised rebel resistance had been broken, with federal forces occupying nearly all of Chechnya, and that the military part of the operation was over. But before long, the Russians found out that occupying a territory was not enough to win control over it.

Peaceful civilians turned into daring guerillas at night, mounting murderous raids on Russia garrisons in towns and villages. The Russian army never found a way to deal with these attacks, and when rebels seized

*In Chechnya, history may repeat itself, says VLADIMIR RADYUHIN. As soon as spring comes and trees again provide good cover for the rebels, the scenario of the first war will be replayed.*

This time around, the military says it is just a few weeks away from crushing the remaining hotbeds of rebel resistance in the mountains. The new Chechen war has made Mr. Putin Russia's most popular politician, but the growing human cost of the campaign makes it necessary for him to declare it over before next month's elections.

However, as soon as spring comes and leaf-clad trees again provide good cover for rebels, the scenario of the first war will be replayed in Chechnya.

In May 1995, five months after Russian troops marched into

Grozny in August, 1996, Russia finally gave up.

History may repeat itself. After the Russian forces overran lowland Chechnya, captured Grozny and pushed into the mountains, Chechen militants vowed to return to their favourite tactic of lightning raids on Russian-held towns. The rebel President, Mr. Aslan Maskhadov, said a week ago his forces were starting an all-out guerrilla war against Russian troops throughout Chechnya — "in the mountains, the lowlands, in every village, wherever we can". Shortly afterwards, the rebels ambushed

two military trains in a Russian-controlled region of Chechnya, destroying the locomotives and blowing up the rails.

The Russian military plans to counter this tactic in exactly the same way the Russian empire did way back in the 19th century, when it was conquering the Caucasus — by building fortresses, where troops will be safe from rebel attacks. The Deputy Defence Minister, General Alexander Kosovan, said such fortresses would be set up at strategic points in the mountainous parts of Chechnya.

One does not need to be a military expert to see what will follow — an exhausting, decades-long war of the kind so vividly described by Mikhail Lermontov and Leo Tolstoy.

The army is already looking for exit strategies. As soon as the news broke that Grozny had been taken, the First Deputy Head of the General Staff, General Valery Manilov, announced that preparations had already begun for troop withdrawal from Chechnya.

The Defence Ministry would like to shift all responsibility for maintaining "constitutional order" in Chechnya to the police and Interior Ministry troops. An army general, Vyacheslav Tikhomirov, appointed commander-in-chief of the Interior Ministry troops earlier this month, predicts a drawn-out conflict in Chechnya.

"The end of the military phase of the operation will not bring peace to Chechnya," he said last week. "Partisan attacks and acts of sabotage will continue for one, two, three, or even ten years, unless the Federal Government wins over the local population."

That will be an uphill task after what the federal forces did in Chechnya in the first war and are doing again now. Grozny, which was home to 1.5 million before the war, has been razed to the ground, and Moscow is talking about shifting the Chechen capital elsewhere, because it is impossible to rebuild the city, where not a single building has survived intact. An estimated 30,000 people were killed in the first war and about 400,000 became refugees.

The former Interior Minister, General Anatoly Kulikov, who was commander-in-chief of Russian forces in Chechnya in the first half of 1995, says Russia faces years of terrorist warfare in the region. "This is our Ulster," he said recently. "It will last for years to come."

THE HINDU

20 FEB 2000

Opinion polls show Putin winning support of up to 55 per cent voters

# Putin launches campaign with a poodle

DADAN UPADHYAY  
MOSCOW, FEB 21

FIVE weeks to go before the presidential elections, acting President Vladimir Putin has launched his campaign by opening in bits the human side of his stern-looking, spymaster's face.

With the help of a fluffy white poodle Toshiya and a casual new wardrobe, Putin and his campaign staff is ready to rebuff any attempts to declare an information war on the acting President, who has already emerged an unbeatable front-runner, in the March 26 elections.

On the eve of formally launching the campaign, chief of Putin's campaign staff Dmitry Medvedev said that, "Wars, including information wars, are not the best way of settling relations. Quite honestly, Vladimir Putin cares more for the mood of the voter than for attacks by his opponents."

In the run-up to the elections, Putin's opponents have called him "a black box", "a piece of white paper," and "Russia's modern day Andropov," accusing him of trying to keep everyone guessing on his policies, managing to be all things to all men.

Even some politicians have alleged that Putin might impose dictatorship, if he is elected President.

His arch-rival Communist Gennady Zyuganov has officially challenged him for a debate on national policy.

After the approval of his nomination by the Central Election Commission on Tuesday, Putin promised that he will soon announce his manifesto.

"The main aspects of the programme have already been announced by Putin himself, including the dictatorship of law through the establishment of proper legal order all over Russia, the defence of citizen from crime and terrorism, civil liberties, the priority of rights of the individual, stability and the inviolability of the right of ownership", Medvedev said, referring to Putin's manifesto.

Yet it is the toy poodle Toshiya that millions of Russians will remember the longest, as they got their first glimpse of Putin during a recent television interview. The poodle is a favourite of the Putins, almost a family member.

Toshiya scampered across Putin's lap, staring in a carefully staged scene aimed at

putting a human face on a man known hitherto as a career KGB spy, an unsmiling technocrat and author of Russian campaign against Chechen terrorists.

Toshiya replaces the Putins' former canine pal, a Caucasus sheepdog who was run over by a car when the family was living in St Petersburg.

Putins' daughters, Masha, 15, and Katya, 14, who usually assume the family dog-walking duties, persuaded their parents to get another dog after the accident.

The show removed any doubts that Putin cares a lot about how he is perceived by voters in Russia and the world community, even though he is far ahead of his main rivals Zyuganov and liberal Yabloko candidate Grigory Yavlinsky. Various opinion polls show Putin winning support of up to 55 per cent voters, while Zyuganov has up to 20 per cent and Yavlinsky about 5 per cent.

Meanwhile Russian troops targeted Southern Chechnya mountains, according to Defence Minister Igor Sergeev. "Here we will not hurry. The main thing is minimal losses and the proper destruction of the bandits so that they cannot slip out anywhere," Ria news agency quoted Sergeev as saying.

## Official urges Islamic nations to recognise Chechnya

ISLAMABAD: A prominent Chechen official urged Islamic countries on Thursday to recognise the breakaway Russian region rather than mourn its present plight after Moscow's military assault.

"I appeal to all Muslim countries to recognise our independent status," Zalimkhan Yandarbiyev, who has briefly been acting Chechen president, said in a speech at a meeting to mark the anniversary of a Soviet-era mass deportation of Chechens.

"Anybody wanting to help the Chechen people must recognise our independence," he said a day after Pakistan said he had been asked to leave because his visa had expired. "Today Russia is again implementing the same deportation policy," Mr Yandarbiyev said after recalling the 1944 deportation that Soviet dictator Josef Stalin ordered to "root out" Chechen Muslims from their homeland.

"This is not merely a Russian plan but a conspiracy of infidelity against Islam," he said of the five-

month-old Russian onslaught, which Moscow says will end soon.

Mr Yandarbiyev, who described himself as the "fully authorised envoy of Chechnya to Muslim countries" said: "The enemy wants us to cry, but we should show them our courage to face them."

"Today we will not cry before anyone but consider ways to unite the Islamic ummah (nation)...On one platform. If we are not united, we will face more situations similar to those in Chechnya, and Palestine." Several hundred people assembled for the meeting at a hotel stood up and chanted "God is great" and "Islamic revolution" as he began his speech.

The meeting was organised by Pakistan's largest Islamic fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami party whose leader, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, said the Chechens had the right to fight against what he called Russia's "forcible occupation".

Foreign ministry secretary Inamul Haq told a news conference on Wednesday that Yandarbiyev,

whose presence in Pakistan has angered Russia, had been asked to "expedite his departure" from the country because his visa had expired. But the Chechen said he had not received such a message. "Nobody has told me about it," he told reporters.

But Mr Yandarbiyev said in his speech later that Thursday was his last appearance in Pakistan and he would go to other Muslim countries to seek recognition.

The Taliban movement became the first government to recognise Chechnya last month when Mr Yandarbiyev opened a Chechen embassy in Kabul. Russia criticised Pakistan earlier this month for allowing Mr Yandarbiyev to stay in the country, accusing him of spreading anti-Russian propaganda.

Mr Yandarbiyev was acting Chechen president between the death of separatist leader Dzhokhar Dudayev in April 1996 and an election in January 1997 won by the present president Aslan Maskhadov. (Reuters)

THE TIMES OF INDIA  
25 FEB 2000

# Boris drops bow-out bombshell

AGENCIES

MOSCOW, Dec. 31. — Mr Boris Yeltsin today stunned his own people and the world, choosing the century's last day to resign prematurely after eight years as Russian President.

Mr Yeltsin left the Kremlin at 4.30 p.m. IST, naming Prime Minister Vladimir Putin as acting President and handing over to him Russia's "nuclear briefcase", which contains the codes controlling the country's vast nuclear arsenal.

Mr Yeltsin (68), whose term would have ended next June, said presidential elections would now be held on 26 March.

He spoke slowly and calmly as he dropped the bombshell on state-owned ORT television, saying Russia needed to go into the new century with new political leaders.

"I am going. I am going earlier than my established time," he said. "Today, on the last day of the old century, I am resigning."

Washington, in its first reaction, said the resignation was a "dramatic step", but not a complete surprise given recent speculation in Russia's press that ill health would force Mr Yeltsin to quit office.



Mr Boris Yeltsin

But to most people, the announcement was as dramatic as the day in August 1991 when Mr Yeltsin climbed atop a Soviet tank in Moscow to foil a Communist coup against Mr Mikhail Gorbachov. That daring action had unleashed a chain of events that led to the collapse of Communism and

made Mr Yeltsin the first democratically elected President in Russia's 1,000-year history.

But in recent years, a poor economy and corruption charges against his family, friends and toadies had left him isolated, with a two per cent popularity rating. Illness had whittled away his authority, often making him seem disoriented and confused.

Today, as Russian shares surged following his announcement, he said he had done all he could for his people and asked forgiveness for his mistakes.

Mr Putin, meanwhile, signed a decree granting Mr Yeltsin immunity from any criminal prosecution. He cannot be arrested, searched or questioned by prosecutors under any condition.

This immunity could have been a condition for the resignation that robs Mr Yeltsin of presidential immunity, some suggested. A Kremlin official, however, said Mr Yeltsin's shock decision was intended to improve Mr Putin's chances of succeeding him.

Mr Putin is likely to appoint emergency situation minister Sergei Shoigo as the new Prime Minister.

THE STATESMAN

1 JAN 2000

## Yeltsin resigns, Putin takes over

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, DEC. 31. In a bombshell decision, Russia's President, Mr. Boris Yeltsin, resigned today, six months ahead of his Constitutional term, appointing the Prime Minister, Mr. Vladimir Putin, as Acting President and urging Russians to vote for him in early presidential elections.

"Today, on the last day of outgoing century, I am resigning,"



Mr. Yeltsin said in a televised address to the nation. The Kremlin press service said Mr. Yeltsin had signed the resignation decree, effective 12-00 Moscow time on Dec. 31, in the presence of the Russian Patriarch, who blessed Mr. Putin to take over the reigns of power.

Mr. Putin also assumed Mr. Yeltsin's duties as Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and received the so-called "nuclear briefcase, with codes controlling the country's nuclear arsenal.

The Russian Constitution requires snap elections to be held within 90 days of the President's resignation, and news agencies said Mr. Yeltsin set the elections for March 26, the last Sunday before the deadline.

Looking pale and tired, Mr. Yeltsin said the decision to resign came to him after "long and painful thoughts."

"I realised that I must do it, Russia must enter the new millennium with new politicians, new faces, new wise, strong, vigorous leaders," Mr. Yeltsin said.

(Details on Page 22)

THE HINDU  
- 1 JAN 2000



## 410-92 The spy who became President

**MOSCOW, DEC. 31.** Mr. Vladimir Putin became Prime Minister in August as another faceless man in the Kremlin. He now enters the Russian Presidency with a dramatically higher profile, buoyed by the popularity of military action against Chechen rebels, and as the real winner of recent Parliamentary elections, even though he was not a candidate. )))

Prior to his appointment by Mr. Boris Yeltsin as Prime Minister, what people knew about him was that he had been a veteran Soviet spy and security chief, heading the federal security service and secretary of the powerful national security council. He also repeatedly demonstrated his loyalty to Mr. Yeltsin. This became especially clear during the clash with the State Prosecutor, Mr. Yuri Skuratov, who has threatened to expose cases of corruption in the Kremlin and among Yeltsin supporters. In turn, Mr. Skuratov has been the subject of a probe by the secret service, and Mr. Yeltsin clearly believes he will be able to place his full confidence in Mr. Putin, who had taken over from the sacked Prime Minister, Mr. Sergei Stepashin.

Mr. Putin, 47, began his career in Soviet overseas

espionage in 1975, immediately after finishing his legal studies. Fluent in German, his reputation grew during his years as a spy in Germany, where he is believed to have been based in Dresden. Mr. Putin's political career was launched with the end of the Soviet Union. In 1990 he became an aide to Mr. Anatoly Sobchak, the liberal Mayor of his native St. Petersburg. As Deputy Mayor he later became responsible for overseas contacts. He was called to Moscow in 1996 by the then reformist Prime Minister, Mr. Anatoly Chubais, the architect of Russia's privatisation programme. Once there, he rose rapidly to the position of Kremlin Deputy Chief of Staff. He grasped the nettle in a number of intractable areas, taking responsibility for preventing the flight of capital, for example, and for Moscow's relations with the regions.

Mr. Yeltsin appointed him as head of the federal security service in July 1998. He was able to boost his position still further in March this year when he was put in charge of the advisory security council, a move that once again demonstrated Mr. Yeltsin's willingness to reward his loyalty. — DPA

THE HINDU

- 1 JAN 2000

# A calculated move to help Putin

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, DEC. 31. The news of Mr. Boris Yeltsin's resignation as Russian President came as a surprise as he had repeatedly said he would serve out his full term. There was also speculation that he could try to prolong his stay in power but Mr. Yeltsin dismissed the suggestions as "lies." He also said his decision had nothing to do with his health.

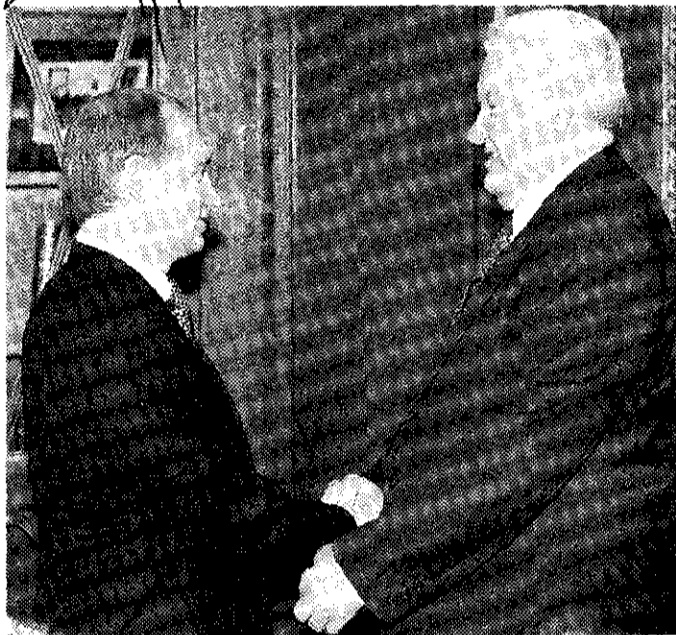
"I must not stand in the way of the natural course of history," the outgoing President said. "To cling to power for another six months when the country has a strong person worthy of becoming President — why should I stand in his way? Why should I wait? It's not in my character," Mr. Yeltsin said.

Kremlin sources told the Interfax news agency that Mr. Yeltsin had taken the final decision to resign only on Thursday, after he had already recorded his usual New Year TV address. But analysts said Mr. Yeltsin's decision was a well-calculated move to help his favoured successor, Mr. Putin, win the Presidency. Mr. Putin said he would retain his post of Prime Minister in the run up to elections. Control of the Government gives Mr. Putin a huge advantage in the race to succeed Mr. Yeltsin.

Mr. Putin, a 46-year-old former KGB officer appointed Prime Minister only in August, is today Russia's most popular politician, largely thanks to his resolute handling of the war in Chechnya. Mr. Putin is expected to benefit greatly from early elections, as his popularity today is at its peak.

He is also expected to capitalise on the success of the pro-government parties in parliamentary elections earlier this month and the poor showing of the alliance led by his main rival, the former Prime Minister, Mr. Yevgeny Primakov.

The Itar-Tass news agency said Mr. Yeltsin still planned to visit the Holy Land in Palestine next week to mark the first Orthodox Christmas of the new millennium despite stepping



The outgoing President of Russia, Mr. Boris Yeltsin (right) and the new incumbent, Mr. Vladimir Putin, smile as they shake hands during their meeting in Kremlin on Friday. — AP

down as Russia's President.

In his address to the nation Mr. Yeltsin begged Russians to forgive him for his mistakes, but also asserted that he had done the main job of his life. "Russia will never return to the past; Russia will now always be moving forward," Mr. Yeltsin said.

Reuters reports: After announcing his resignation today, Mr. Boris Yeltsin must hand over to his acting successor one of the most important symbols of power in Russia: the briefcase with codes to launch nuclear missiles.

Mr. Yeltsin received the briefcase from the Soviet leader, Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev, who resigned on Christmas Day in 1991. Mr. Yeltsin

parted from it only once during his term in office — in 1996, when he underwent heart surgery and turned over his powers briefly to the then Prime Minister, Mr. Viktor Chernomyrdin. "The nuclear button is an effective mechanism to control Russian nuclear forces and also a symbol of the presidency," the former Yeltsin Press Secretary, Mr. Sergei Yastrzhembsky said when asked to describe the device.

The briefcase is carried behind Mr. Yeltsin by an officer dressed in a distinctive black navy uniform which makes it easy for the President to single him out in a crowd. But all information about it has been classified until lately. A senior Parliament member, Mr. Alexei Arbatov, has described the nu-

clear button as the first link in a chain of commands ending in onboard cruise computers of nuclear missiles. "The nuclear button...transmits Presidential sanction for the use of nuclear weapons to command centres where general staff officers are on duty around the clock," said Mr. Arbatov, an expert on national security with close ties to the Kremlin.

"On receiving a coded signal, officers...using appropriate codes, determine that it was the President who sent it, rather than someone else." When the authenticity of the Presidential message is confirmed, duty officers open safes containing their own codes and send them to missile launch pads and nuclear submarines.

# Jets, artillery unleash attacks on Grozny

ASSOCIATED PRESS

GROZNY, Jan. 1. — Plumes of black smoke hung over Grozny today after Russian forces hit the shattered city with one of the biggest attacks yet, with waves of low-flying jets unleashing scores of bombs.

A major Russian drive to take Grozny entered its second week today with federal forces apparently still far from capturing the city centre. Rebel fighters in heavily-fortified positions have inflicted steady losses on the Russian forces, although no reliable figures are available.

Several large buildings are still burning and smoke from the fires covered parts of the Chechen capital after the overnight bombardment. Russian artillery on surrounding hills fired hundreds of shells in between the jet attacks. Mortar and artillery strikes too continued.

The stepped-up effort to take the city came as acting President, Mr Vladimir Putin, visited Russian forces in Chechnya to praise them for the campaign to crush separatist rebels. The visit coming on Mr Putin's first full day in office underlined his determination to win the war in Chechnya.

"This is not simply about restoring honor and dignity to the country, no," Mr Putin told the servicemen in Gudermes, a city east of the capital that Russian troops took several weeks ago.

"This is about more serious things. This is about how to bring about the end of the breakup of Russia, that is your fundamental goal." Civilian residents in Grozny were stunned by the overnight attack on the city. Chechen officials had no details on possible casualties.

"The planes were like snakes, streaming past, over and over," said Lyubov Grigoryeva, 62, a pensioner. "This is how we spent the New Year."

Up to 40,000 mostly elderly and infirm civilians are trapped in Grozny. Residents have been huddled for weeks in basements, too afraid to go outside or risk the journey through the Russian bombardment to escape Grozny.

"There was no place to sit, to rest. They bombed all night," said another elderly woman, who gave only her first name,

## PUTIN'S NEW YEAR GIFT TO SOLDIERS

MOSCOW, Jan. 1. — Mr Putin flew unexpectedly to a Russian-held town in Chechnya early on New Year's Day to award hunting knives to troops and tell them their main aim was to keep the Russian federation intact.

"I want you to know that Boris highly appreciates what you are doing," Mr Putin said in remarks to officers and soldiers broadcast live on television today from Gudermes, east of Grozny.

"This is not just about restoring the honour and dignity of Russia," he said, his wife at his side.

"It is rather more important than that. It is about putting an end to the break-up of the Russian federation. That is the main task. Russia is grateful to you."

Moscow says Chechnya is one of the 89 regions in the Russian federation. Chechnya says it is independent.

Itar-tass news agency said Mr Putin handed servicemen hunting knives inscribed with the words "from the chairman of the government of the Russian Federation", indicating the visit was planned before Mr Boris Yeltsin resigned yesterday and handed power to his Prime Minister.

Asked whether the trip was the start of his election campaign, Mr Putin said the visit had been planned a month ago.

The presidential election is expected to be held on 26 March. Mr Putin is by far Russia's most popular politician, largely on the strength of his military campaign against rebels in Chechnya, a province in the turbulent North Caucasus.

The campaign began three months ago and 100,000 Russian troops now control much of the territory, but not the whole of Grozny or the southern mountains where rebels have strongholds.

"I wish you a happy new year," said Mr Putin, flanked by troops and dressed in a check parka coat. "I wish you happiness, all the very best." — Reuters

Anonina. Russian military commanders again claimed that their forces were moving closer to the centre, but there was no sign that federal troops were making significant progress on the ground.

The military claimed yesterday to have broken through the rebels' first line of defence and to have taken control of the Staropromyslovsky neighborhood, about 3 km from Grozny's centre.

A Chechen commander said his fighters were standing firm. "Federal troops have not advanced by a single meter," said Khamzat Gilayev, commander of the units defending Grozny. The Russian military command also said helicopters and ground troops targeted rebel bases in southern and eastern Chechnya yesterday, causing heavy losses among the militants.

The Pentagon said yesterday that Russia fired three Scud missiles into Chechnya. The missiles were monitored as part of the US-Russia joint surveillance of any activity that might be related to the year 2000 computer glitch, but US Undersecretary of State, Mr Thomas Pickering said the

attacks were not Y2K-related.

There had been no previous reports of Russia using such heavy weaponry in Chechnya. A duty officer at Russia's Defense Ministry said yesterday that he had no information about the report and no one answered at Russia's Strategic Missile Forces or Russian Air Defense

offices. After months of bombing and shelling the capital, the Russians launched an operation on 25 December to capture Grozny, the last major Chechen city under rebel control and the war's key political prize. But Russian forces have been held up on heavily-mined roads and by tough rebel resistance.

Grozny is the only major town in Chechnya still held by the rebels after a three-month Russian ground offensive backed by intense air and artillery strikes.

The surprise resignation of President Boris Yeltsin on yesterday and the appointment of Mr Putin as acting President left Russia's strategy in Chechnya unchanged. Mr Putin has championed the war and vigorously defended Russia against Western criticism of the offensive.

THE STATESMAN  
- 2 JAN 2000

# Battle for the ballot

410-16

**T**HE SURPRISE resignation of the Russian President, Mr. Boris Yeltsin, on the last day of the 20th Century sent an ominous signal to rebels fighting Russian troops in breakaway Chechnya. Their days are numbered, as Russia's new Acting President and the Kremlin's choice for Mr. Yeltsin's successor on the Russian throne, Mr. Vladimir Putin, needs a quick and convincing victory in Chechnya to win snap presidential elections, likely on March 26.

The so far successful military campaign in Chechnya has played a key role in making Mr. Putin, an obscure security official at the time of his appointment as Prime Minister five months ago, Russia's most popular politician and presidential frontrunner today. Mr. Putin's resolute handling of the Chechen operation made it the first popular war Russia has waged since World War Two. After years of suffering humiliation at witnessing Russia lose its superpower status, Russians rallied behind a leader who seemed capable of reasserting what Mr. Putin described as "national pride" by wiping out Chechen separatists.

Patriotic fervour has overshadowed the hidden agenda of the Chechen war: to install in the Kremlin a man who would protect political and financial interests of the "family," a group of Kremlin insiders and business tycoons with close links to the Yeltsin family. They saw the war as their last chance to stay in power after Mr. Yeltsin stepped down upon completing his final term.

War-fed nationalist fervour brought its first dividends to the Kremlin last month, when parties supportive of Mr. Putin made big gains in parliamentary elections, while the alliance led by his main rival in the presidential race, Mr. Yevgeny Primakov, suffered a bad setback. All that Mr. Putin needs to do to climb onto the Kremlin throne is to declare the Chechen war won in time for the early presidential elections that under the Constitution must take place within three months after the President's resignation. Generals have already said they will wind up the military campaign by March at the latest.

Given its overwhelming superiority in strength and firepower the Russian army may well meet the deadline. Russia has fielded 100,000 troops against an estimated 6,000 to 10,000 Chechen militants. This is three times the strength of the Russian force that fought in Chechnya during the 1994-1996 war, and Russian generals have also learned their lessons from the disastrous defeat in that war. They are careful to avoid head-on frontal assaults that were beaten back with terrible losses during the first war and rely heavily on air and artillery bombardment to flush out rebels from their strongholds. Since October 1, when they entered Chechnya,

## *Patriotic fervour has overshadowed the hidden agenda of the Chechen war, says VLADIMIR RADYUHIN.*

federal forces have occupied the larger lowland part of the breakaway republic without meeting much resistance, as Chechen militants withdrew into the capital Grozny and the mountains where they can better defend their positions. But fighting grew much fiercer when Russian forces mounted an assault on Grozny a week ago, which is the last rebel stronghold in the plains, and pushed for the mountains. Progress has been slow in both directions, with Chechens skillfully using the advantages offered by concrete buildings in Grozny and tree-grown rugged mountains in the south to put up stiff resistance.

General Ruslan Aushev, President of the neighbouring Russian Republic of Ingushetiya, predicted that the battle for Grozny would last a long time because the Chechens "are excellently armed and will resist fiercely". Now that presidential elections have been moved forward by two months, the Russian army will be asked to step up the drive against the rebels. This can only be done at the cost of higher losses, because despite a visible improvement in combat tactics, the Russian army still lacks mobile units trained in urban and mountain warfare. As they pushed through lowland Chechnya Russians routinely resorted to "firewall" tactics, which however is far less effective in Grozny and in the mountains.

Reports say Russian forces have started using deadly fuel air bombs to weaken rebel resistance. In the mountains they drop powerful bombs of 250 and 500 kg, which release a large cloud of inflammable aerosol that upon ignition kills people in shelters. In Grozny, where a wrongly dropped aerosol air bomb could wipe out friendly forces, Russians reportedly use multi-barrel launchers that fire unguided missiles with aerosol warheads. Inevitably, fuel air bombs will kill not only militants but thousands of civilians who are still trapped in Grozny or have fled to the mountains. A high human cost of the war, though, should not really affect Mr. Putin's popularity. Russians have largely remained indifferent to the plight of half a million Chechens, half of whom has taken refuge in neighbouring regions. As for Russian casualties, the military have well mastered the art of playing them down. They would not report a daily count of losses and refuse to publish

the names of killed and wounded soldiers. The Union of Soldiers' Mothers estimates that the official casualty figure of nearly 400 killed during the first three months of the campaign should be multiplied at least by three. There is no way to find out the truth, as Russian authorities have clapped tight controls on the media coverage of the war.

What can reduce Mr. Putin's chances of winning presidency is a drawnout guerilla war and the prohibitive cost of rebuilding Chechnya after the war. Some military experts predict that even after Grozny has been captured and main rebel strongholds in the mountains overrun, Chechen militants will be able to wage a guerilla war. "There was a similar

situation in January 1996 when the militants were driven out of towns, but embarked on a hit-and-run war, which the army was unable to stop," said Mr. Alexander Golts, military commentator for *Itogi* magazine.

Post-war rebuilding of Chechnya is another problem that Russia failed to solve after the first war and can ill afford to tackle today. According to government experts, reconstruction work in Chechnya (not counting Grozny, which has been razed to the ground) will require 20 billion roubles (about \$700 million) in 2000 alone, whereas the federal budget has earmarked only 585 million (about \$20 million) for the purpose.

Mr. Putin's opponents in the coming presidential elections will certainly try to turn the issue of the Chechen war against the Kremlin's candidate. The liberal Yabloko party, which until recently was the only Russian party to have denounced the Chechen campaign as a "war of revenge", last week was joined by Mr. Primakov's Fatherland-All Russia alliance, whose spokesman said that what began as an "anti-terrorist operation" had escalated into a full-scale war, which the bloc could not support.

However, in the time left before snap presidential elections Mr. Putin can still ride the wave of popular support as Russian forces gain new ground in Chechnya. By the time the fallout of the Chechen war grows big enough to unravel Russia's victory, he will have been declared victor in the Chechen campaign and elected Russia's new President. And this has been the main motive behind Mr. Yeltsin's decision to resign early.

**THE HINDU**  
- 2 JAN 2000

MONDAY, JANUARY 3, 2000

## MR. YELTSIN'S SURPRISE DECISION

EVEN JUDGING BY his own rather unconventional ways and unorthodox methods, Mr. Boris Yeltsin's surprise action in announcing his resignation as Russia's President should be difficult to read. Not particularly known for timing his often controversial actions, he has lived up to his well-earned reputation as an unpredictable leader. His latest action is even more incomprehensible since he was least expected to leave the Presidency when the political milieu had become distinctly friendlier to him, whatever the state of his health. For the first time since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the President has a legislature that is not openly hostile to him. Mr. Yeltsin's supporters and sympathisers had scored a spectacular and unexpected victory in parliamentary elections in mid-December, presenting him with the prospect of a harmonious relationship between the legislature and the executive. For nearly a decade he had been forced to contend with a communist-dominated Duma, the Lower House of Parliament which blocked every legislative move of his administration. Cohabiting with the Duma had become a highly frustrating experience and Mr. Yeltsin was more than once forced to threaten to dissolve the House if it did not approve his action. Till he picked the last one, Mr. Yeltsin even found it difficult to get parliamentary confirmation for his Prime Ministerial candidate. After the latest elections to the Duma, the communists will continue to be the largest single party but they are short of the stalling power they wielded for the past six years.

What then prompted the 68-year-old Mr. Yeltsin to take such a momentous decision? Certainly not failing health since he has ignored earlier alarms and shown remarkable ability to bounce back to centre stage even after more serious ailments. Only a fortnight ago, immedi-

ately after a renewed bout of pneumonia forced him into hospital, he insisted on keeping his scheduled visit to Beijing and seemed none the worse for the journey. From the Chinese capital, he rattled his nuclear arsenal, only to be reminded politely by his American counterpart that he owed his position in Moscow not a little to the support given by the Western nations at a critical time of transition for his country. The most plausible explanation for his resignation is that after being satisfied that he has found a suitable heavyweight successor in the current Prime Minister, Mr. Vladimir Putin, he feels he can quit especially when the going is good. The Presidential election, due in six months, has now been advanced by three months and Mr. Yeltsin has anointed Mr. Putin, a Soviet secret service top brass, as his nominee.

Mr. Yeltsin, himself a top Soviet communist party official, came into prominence when, in a classic act of defiance, he led the resistance against coup plotters who tried to overthrow the last Soviet President, Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev. His rise to the Presidency, showdown with the Duma when he ordered tanks to open fire on the Parliament building to flush out Opposition members holed up inside, the manner in which he sacked his whole Cabinet overnight without offering any explanation (his opponents call it a brain bypass), other bizarre actions, some of them certainly impulsive and inexplicable, and the strong, even desperate measures he has undertaken to defeat armed militancy in Chechnya will ensure that he leaves a mixed legacy. But as the December 19 parliamentary election testified, he has safeguarded, however imperfectly, the historic transition to democracy from the authoritarian eight-decade-long Soviet era. This is no mean achievement.

THE HINDU  
- 3 JAN 2000

## SHORT GOODBYE <sup>W</sup>

5/8 <sup>Yeltsin</sup> Yeltsin survives his resignation <sup>1</sup> A ||

**B**ORIS Yeltsin's surprise resignation is a good tactical move. He is ailing and clearly incapable of staying on top of the volatile situation in Russia. At the same time he needs protection for himself and his "family" — the collection of rogue businessmen who cluster around his daughter, Tatyana Diachenko, and rob Russian coffers with impunity. Given the terrible publicity that has been generated, had Yeltsin continued any longer it would have handicapped his chosen successor. It could possibly have helped an opposition candidate to win through. That would have seriously jeopardised Yeltsin's retired existence and directly threatened Tatiana Diachenko. Now, however, with Vladimir Putin in place as acting President there is a serious possibility that Yeltsin will have a protege in office to protect him from retrospective prosecution for corruption. Putin has already signed a warrant that confers immunity on the former President, reminiscent of Nixon's pardon by his successor. Although Diachenko and the "family" interests will be protected, the daughter has been removed from her vantage position inside the Kremlin. For Yeltsin, this will serve to stem some of the extremely bad publicity that he has generated on several counts — drunkenness, mismanagement, corruption. All of which have led to the collapse of Russian public life as well as the already fragile economy. In an ironical comment on the Russian situation, the country's stock exchange surged on news of Yeltsin's retirement.

Yeltsin's resignation is a godsend for Putin, whose chances of becoming President will now greatly improve. Come next March, several factors will favour Putin. First, there will be the feelgood factor generated by Yeltsin's action. More important, Putin will be bolstered by the, as of now, successful military campaign in Chechnya. Putin will be untrammelled by Yeltsin's disastrous campaign in Chechnya between 1994 and 1996. On the contrary, he will receive most of the credit for successfully subduing Islamic militants in Dagestan and Chechnya. Putin's other strong point is his low profile. If he does not have much charisma, unlike his predecessor who had it in abundance, he compensates with a serious image which inspires more confidence in Russian voters, after Yeltsin's extravagant idiom.

The Russian public will now wish that Putin will bring the Chechen offensive to some kind of a solution so that he can spare his energies to deal with the huge economic problems Russia faces. Also, international concern about the humanitarian dimension of the war is considerable but Putin knows that within reason, he can ignore it if it all ends well and above all, quickly. All that is in the future, for now we would do well to remember that in the midst of considerable opprobrium, Yeltsin's has been successful in keeping a fragile democracy alive — even if he has injected some degree of authoritarianism and arbitrariness into its functioning. The image of a lone figure atop a Russian tank hurling defiance will endure.

**THE STATESMAN**

- 4 JAN 2000

# Russian jets bomb Chechen village

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ASSOCIATED PRESS

AL KHAN-KALA, (Russia), Jan. 3. — Russian jets and artillery, today, bombarded Kharachai in Chechnya's southern mountains, in an attempt to the path of retreating rebel forces, federal officials said.

Some 50 rebels were killed and two rebel bunkers destroyed in airstrikes on the small village, said Maj Alexander Diardiev, spokesman for the Russian military. The death toll could not be confirmed.

Kharachai is located just south of Vedden, a key rebel stronghold which Russian forces are trying to capture. Both settlements lie along routes used by rebel forces returning to the mountains.

Elsewhere, along a road in Dagestan, a bomb exploded, today, as a convoy of six military trucks passed by. No one was, however, wounded, the Russian military said.

After yesterday's fierce fighting, the military was able to place artillery on heights around Vedeno and shelled the town today.

Rebel forces are unable to regroup and are leaving the village, Maj Diardiev, said.

Russian forces continued to bomb Grozny and ground troops are edging in from three sides, hoping to funnel the rebels south towards waiting federal guns, the NTV television station said today.

There was, however, no sign of rebels preparing to leave their defences in the city whose capture would give Russia a major psychological victory.

Military doctor, Dr Oleg Zayev said on ORT television yesterday, that he sees dozens of wounded troops daily from in and around Grozny. The military insists its losses have been minimal despite evidence to the contrary.

Russian advances to the south are trapping civilians in cellars and sending others flee-

## ATTACK ON EMBASSY

BEIRUT, Jan. 3. — One gunman was killed today in a two-hour shootout with Lebanese police after a rocket-propelled grenade narrowly missed the Russian Embassy complex in Beirut, security sources said.

The grenade was one of at least three fired by unidentified gunmen from a building near the embassy. Security sources said that two grenades hit a police station. One policeman was killed and another wounded. — DPA

ing across snowy mountains and forests littered with corpses.

The constant air and artillery attacks that precede the advance of Russian troops have left civilians trapped in southern mountain villages, afraid to venture under the bombs and shells raining on the roads

that lead out, Chechen officials and civilians say.

"People cannot go out of their homes because of round-the-clock shelling," said Mr Ramzan Bisiyev, head of the village administration in Rodina. "In despair, people go through the forests, along mountain passes, and come under artillery fire. A lot of dead bodies lie around those forests," said Mr Bisiyev, who visited southern Chechnya last week. No figures were available on the number of civilians trapped in the south, but Mr Bisiyev said, only about 10 per cent of residents have managed to leave the area.

THE STATESMAN

- 4 JAN 2000

# YELTSIN'S RECORD

## 51-6 History Should Be Kind To Him

**B**ORIS Yeltsin, who stepped down as Russian President on 31 December will be represented by commentators and historians as one of the 20th century's monumental failures. And he will probably go down as one of the greatest losers of all time, rivalling Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachov. Unlike Gorbachov, there will be no tragic afterglow to follow him — no respect for a person who meant well and could not quite achieve what he set out to do. There will be opprobrium for the drunkard, and vituperation for the man associated with the collapse of a state, the collapse of Communism and the inability to make Russian democracy. The sagacity of his exit — leaving his protégé, Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, and thereby ensuring his future security — will evoke derision, rather than respect.

This will mean nothing to the ailing old man who will retire to some comfortable mansion in central Moscow, and take little trips out to an equally comfortable dacha in the Moscow suburbs. He will be protected by guarantees of immunity for the rest of his life, and his only major fear will be how to avoid a bullet or a bomb aimed at him by Russian nationalists or sometime Communists. He may also comfort himself that he will always be remembered — as one of the major actors of Russia's break with Soviet customs, traditions and economic practices. But when overall judgements are made, he will be put down as a "loser".

### GREAT IRONY

There is great irony in this. For Boris Yeltsin has "won" almost all the battles he has ever fought. As an *apparatchik* of the CPSU he "won" his way to the Politburo. He "won" against the old Soviet establishment, emerging as Russian President after the elections of 1990 and 1991. He "won" against the "hardline" conspirators of the "putsch" of August 1991. In 1993, he "won" against the constitutional remnant of the old Soviet system — a bicameral house which was dominated by his critics. Since then, in 1996, he "won" his second term as President, despite illness and unpopularity. He also ensured that he had Prime Ministers of his choice, despite his lack of control over the Russian political system. Through manoeuvres and persuasion, he avoided the appointment of Cabinet members associated with Russian Communists through a succession

By HARI VASUDEVAN

of President's men as PMs: Gaidar, Chernomyrdin, Primakov, and his own poodles, Stepashin and Putin. In Russian politics, although repeatedly written off as drunk, incompetent and inept, he rose again and again to establish his authority on the country.

But all this — the remarkable record of Yeltsin's political success and shrewdness as a political actor — is seldom read as a record of success. The perspective that is brought to bear on

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that record is always established in terms of the greater game: the building of a new country and finding a place for it within world politics and a new regional system. Here Yeltsin is, and almost always will be, judged as a rank failure. True, the record will acknowledge that at home, in politics, he allowed the "openness" and political "restructuring" of Gorbachov's time to find new dimensions — in the growth of associative politics, frank TV exchanges, and a lively press. But this figures along with his jealous regard for his authority and his actions which made that authority wholly inaccessible to the public. It is reluctantly admitted that the President was surrounded by men of some foresight who sought to help him foster presidential institutions on a stable basis, and make them the pivot of a new politics. Greater stress falls on his surrender to a kitchen entourage: initially his Praetorian Guard, led by Korzhakov, and, latterly, those who have found favour with his daughter, Tatiana Diachenko.

Here, commentators stress, "Presidential institutions" under Yeltsin's administration existed in name only. This was a disaster since they dominated the actions of the Russian Parliament, and alternative avenues to deal with public problems — fraud, bankruptcy, and everyday law and order — could not be found in the legal system. Russia's judicial framework was hopelessly inadequate to cope with the tangle of legislation made up of Soviet laws and large-scale Russian amendments.

### NO EXCUSE

Since Soviet times, moreover, the legal system had no moral standing in civil life, beyond the most mundane. The uncharitable conclusion is inevitable. Under Boris Yeltsin, Russian public life degenerated into endless intrigues, beneath a fig-leaf of institutional regularity, where Presidential functionaries could intervene at any time as

arbitrators, and where otherwise there were no clear systems for the solution of everyday problems.

Few would deny that the economic reforms which were associated with Yeltsin's regime, reshaped Russia — providing her with stock exchanges, free-floating financial institutions and a new class which supplanted the authority of the *nomenklatura*. But the record of looting and the denial of public involvement in privatisation is always the centre point of any analysis of the recent history of the Russian economy: as is the incompetent management of state finances which culminated in the crash of August 1998. The enormous fortunes that have been accumulated by friends of Yeltsin's "family" — the Berezovskis, Abramovichs and Chubais — are a constant source of amusement and deprecation. Poor employment levels, low per capita income and appalling production figures which tell a sorry story of stagnation are the inescapable stuffing of any argument. And to cap it all, the scandals of money laundering at crucial times, and the diversion of funds to European accounts, strip Yeltsin's time of any legitimacy it might have received in the excuse of good intentions gone bad.

Internationally, the newly born Russian federation is regarded as having handled its foreign policy incompetently. Euro-Americans castigate Russia's President for insufficient cooperation with the reduction of arms stockpiles, while Russians point to the failure of the CIS and the sacrifice of Russia's interests in the Baltic, East Central Europe and Central Asia, in the name of a national interest which has rarely been served. Yeltsin bears the cross for reducing Russia to the status of a second rank power — a beggar among great nations, or the incompetent drunken barbarian who was unable to make of Russia a "responsible" Western nation.

### RECOGNITION

In popular perceptions, President Putin cannot be worse. Rather, young, patriotic and a victor of the Chechen war, he must be an improvement. As a former member of the KGB and the Federal Security Services, he is a public man who is untarred by associations with Russia's corrupt financial world. The long links with Yeltsin's democratic administration and his family are forgotten — as is the close connection with privatisation chief Anatolii Chubais. As the recent election results indicate, many Russians are upbeat about the acting President — hence the large vote for his supporters (the Unity Party of Emergencies' Minister Shoigu and the Union of Right Forces, led by former PM Kireenko). After Boris Yeltsin, it appears, anyone else will be better.

Few here will raise the question: what were the alternatives before Yeltsin? Responding to the public disenchantment with Soviet Communism, and the economic disaster of latter-day perestroika, surely, the crooked path which led Yeltsin through IMF patronage and self-contradictory foreign policies has been his unenviable lot, however willingly he took it. Within this perhaps he has steered a course as straight as anyone in such a "transition" can take. Like all "heroes of their time", for Boris Yeltsin there could be no great achievements, merely little successes. There can be no cheers for such an individual. But there must be some recognition of what made him a phenomenon.

THE STATESMAN  
- 5 JAN 2000



# Russia to suspend attack on parts of Grozny

REUTERS

MOSCOW, Jan. 7. — A Russian general said today that forces were suspending attacks on parts of the Chechen capital Grozny because toxic chemicals can harm the civilians. Itar-Tass News Agency said that attacks would continue on other parts of the city, where civilians were not in danger.

**AP adds from Grozny:** Earlier in the day, Russian artillery rained shells on the southern Chechen town of Vedeno, trying to break the rebels' grip on their main stronghold in the mountains. The army's eastern group had brought practically all its artillery to bear on Vedeno.

DPA reports that sources in Mozdok's military command have said that Russia wants to change its Chechnya strategy to give momentum to a war which is showing signs of becoming bogged down.

The plan is to apply the main thrust to the mountainous areas of the south.

The rebels have their



Russian officers search men suspected to be Chechen militants in Shali district on Friday. — AP/PTI

strongest bases and defenses in the mountainous south. Russian sources believe that

the 6,000 to 8,000 fighters in the region are serving under Chechnya's best field commander.

Bombing, however, was interrupted at Serzhen-Yurt after news came in that civil-

ians remained in the village with militants, a military press spokesman said. "We'll enter Serzhen-Yurt when we consider it necessary," he said.

Russian efforts to take the capital Grozny appeared to be stalled today by bad weather and tough rebel resistance. Heavy fog over the last few days had limited airstrikes and helped rebels stage hit-and-run attacks on Russian troops trying to gain control of the shatter city.

An AP reporter saw two groups of rebels trying to break out of a northeast Grozny neighbourhood overnight, but they were repelled by special police units. Police also turned down a request by rebel commanders to evacuate 28 seriously-injured fighters.

"They kill us, and we should be giving them medical treatment!" scoffed Major Andrei Vlasov, head of a reconnaissance unit on the northeast edge of Grozny.

"(Instead) I'll kill each of them with a control shot to the head," he said.

# Zyuganov, Putin head for top post shootout



Mr Vladimir Putin

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

MOSCOW, Jan. 8. — Russian Communist Party chairman, Mr Gennady Zyuganov, seems to be the only serious rival that acting President, Mr Vladimir Putin, will have to contend with in the 26 March presidential polls.

The race narrowed down to these two names after former Premier, Mr Yevgeny Primakov, said yesterday he was unwilling to run.

The Fatherland-All Russia Bloc's coordinating chairman, Mr Oleg Morozov, told newsmen that the party had decided at its presidium meeting yesterday to support Mr Putin's candidature.

Saying no one in the Bloc could command the necessary votes to win the presidential election, Mr Morozov hinted at the possibility of forming a Putin-Primakov block, whereby Mr Primakov could occupy the

key post of Duma Speaker

Leading Russian political scientist, Ms Lilia Shevtsova, while appreciating former President, Mr Boris Yeltsin's desire "not to live like a sponge" in the Kremlin, says he has left behind him chronic crises and numerous mistakes.

If Mr Putin's rating is high, it is because people are tired of being ruled by old people, and feel he is Mr Yeltsin's antipode, she told the daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda*.

In the event of Mr Putin's victory, he must take along senior statesmen like Mr Luzhkov, former Premiers, Mr Sergei Stepashin and Mr Primakov, and Mr Zyuganov and work towards amending the constitution and abolish constitutional monarchy, or make the President, Parliament and government accountable to each other, she said.

The Russian political scientist has said that if Mr Putin failed to deliver soon, society will shy away from him and the very idea of a young, dynamic and tough leader will be discredited. Society might once again yearn for a Russian variant of Deng Xiaoping, she added.

But Mr Putin still has a chance if he announces that the rules will be the same for every one, and if he manages to distance himself from "corporations of power," she says, hinting at the tycoons who operated under the shadow of Mr Yeltsin and the first family.

Another respected columnist, Andranik Migranyan, has pointed out the public impression of Mr Putin: "Yeltsin's hostage."

## Generals pulled out on technical grounds: Russia

GROZNY, Jan. 8. — Acting Russian Prime Minister, Mr Vladimir Putin, insisted today that his two top combat generals in Chechnya were not replaced because the government was unhappy with their handling of the war.

With Russian efforts to capture Grozny stalled, Lt Gen. Gennady Troshev and Maj Gen. Vladimir Shamanov were returned Friday to the posts they occupied before the war, the defence ministry said.

Removing combat commanders at the height of the military campaign in Chechnya suggested government displeasure with their failure to take the capital Grozny or deal a decisive blow against the rebels.

Mr Putin, emerging from an Orthodox Christmas mass today, first denied that any shuffle had been made at all, and then said the issue was a technical one.

"Russia doesn't throw away such generals as Troshev and Shamanov. There has been no replacement and no replacement has been planned. It is a technical question," he said.

Lt Gen. Troshev was replaced as commander of the eastern front by his deputy, Maj. Gen. Sergei Makarov. On the western front, Maj. Gen. Shamanov was sidelined in favour of Maj. Gen. Alexei Verbitzky.

— AP

CHECHNYA / SIGNS OF ASSAULT GOING AWRY

# Moscow sacks top Generals

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, Jan. 8.** Moscow has replaced top military commanders in Chechnya and halted the assault on the capital Grozny in the clearest indication yet that the operation was going awry.

Two deputy chief commanders of the Russian forces in Chechnya, Generals Vladimir Shamanov and Gennady Troshkev, who were in charge of the western and eastern fronts, were replaced on Friday by their deputies in what the Defence Ministry described as "routine staff rotation."

However, the changes in the Russian command could be prompted by Moscow's impatience at the slow pace of the Chechen campaign. Russian troops have made little progress in their assault on Grozny, the rebels' last stronghold in lowland Chechnya and have been bogged down in the mountains in the south of the breakaway republic. The Kremlin is anxious to wind up the Chechen operation before the March 26 presidential elections, which the Acting President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, is tipped to win, following Mr. Boris Yeltsin's pre-term resignation on Dec. 31. The only setback in the Chechen war, which has made him Russia's most popular politician.

Mr. Putin denied the Generals had been demoted and vowed to press on with the offensive in Chechnya. "Russia does not throw out such Generals as Shamanov and Troshkev," Mr. Putin said, describing their replacement as a "technical" move. "Our aims (in Chechnya) remain unchanged and they will be achieved."

The two replaced Generals were awarded the top "Hero of Russia" medals on the eve of the New Year. Both have retained their other posts — General Troshkev is Commander of the North Caucasus military district and General Shamanov is Commander of the 58th Army stationed in the region.

Mr. Putin said the storming of Grozny had been suspended on account of Orthodox Christmas on Jan. 6 and Eid al-Fitr, the Feast



Russian soldiers wearing white winter camouflage uniforms stand near an APC at a frontline in the Chechen capital Grozny. — AP

in Chechnya may be the result of a long-brewing conflict between Russia's Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeev, who favoured cautious tactics to minimise human losses, and the Chief of the General Staff, General Anatoly Kvashnin, advocate of a faster advance. News agencies said General Kvashnin paid a lightning visit to North Caucasus on Thursday to preside over a meeting of top commanders to review operation progress.

The two removed Generals had fought in Chechnya during the first war in the region in 1994-1996, when Russian forces suffered heavy losses because of ill-prepared attacks undertaken under pressure from Moscow to achieve quick results.

Friday's changes in the military command marking the end of the fasting month of Ramadan on Jan. 7.

"We will respect the feelings of believers," Mr. Putin told mediapersons at an Orthodox Christmas service in Moscow. Russians say there are still an estimated 20,000 civilians trapped in Grozny.

General Troshkev on Friday said the assault on Grozny was being suspended to let civilians escape from what he described as "an ecological danger zone" created in the city after the rebels had blown up containers of toxic chemicals. The explanation rang hollow as reports of chemical explosions have been coming for weeks.

Friday's changes in the military command

## CAMPAIGN FALTERS

Putin forced to rethink Chechnya?

RECENT developments in Chechnya suggest that Russia may not be as well placed as it was. Even a week or so ago it had seemed that they had decisive military advantage. Apparently not any more. First Russia decided that it was going to suspend operations in Grozny because toxic chemicals can harm civilians. If we assume that Russia is not deploying chemical or biological weapons — a reasonable assumption — then we would have to conclude that they mean that shelling causes toxicity, which can be harmful. Shelling is indeed extremely injurious to health. So there is some doublespeak being put out — presumably to hide circumstances that are not all that flattering to the Russia. Russian soldiers also claim, that Russia is doctoring casualty figures and seriously underreporting. There is a third factor that suggests that something is wrong — that is the recent sacking of two generals in charge of the campaign, though Putin has unconvincingly claimed that this is a routine change of command. What all this adds up to is that the Russian campaign is not absolutely on track — and that suspension of attacks on Grozny was dictated by logistical factors not humanitarian ones. Especially since Russia has not shown great humanitarian concern.

The rebels attacked a town north-east of Grozny, which they claim they are on the verge of overrunning. Whether their claim is authentic cannot be ascertained. But what seems to be pretty clear is that this Chechen campaign, like the inglorious one last time around, will be much more protracted than facile Russian optimism would have us believe. Putin will probably aim to build his election campaign for the presidential elections around the campaign in Chechnya. If the latter campaign becomes protracted, and word that casualty statistics are going up to unacceptable levels gets around, Putin's chances can be badly hurt. At the moment Putin's youth and air of dynamism gives him high popularity ratings, but he can hardly take this for granted. The race has narrowed to two candidates — Putin himself and the Communist Leader Gennady Zyuganov, whose general popularity cannot be underestimated. This means that Putin cannot rely on division of the anti-Yeltsin votes. All this, especially in the context of international humanitarian concern and the US's interest in the oil-rich Caucasus, means that Putin may have to rethink Chechnya and focus on a political solution. It will not come easily to a former KGB apparatchik.

THE STATESMAN

11 JAN 2000

CHECHNYA / REBELS LAUNCH COUNTER-ATTACKS

## Russia suffers setbacks

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, JAN. 10. Russian forces have come under massive rebel attacks in several Chechen towns that had been under Russian control for weeks, news agencies reported.

Hundreds of Chechen militants launched simultaneous surprise strikes on Sunday on Russian troops in Shali, Argun and Gudermes, seizing parts of these lowland towns in the biggest counterattacks yet, described by the NTV television as a "catastrophic aggravation of the situation" in Chechnya.

Military sources told news agencies that up to 1,500 rebels had captured the main administrative building and two schools in Shali, 22 km south-east of the Chechen capital Grozny. In Gudermes, Chechnya's second biggest town 25 km east of Grozny, rebels also seized several buildings, including a school with hostages, the sources said. In Argun, 12 km east of Grozny, rebels blockaded Russian troops at the railway station and the military headquarters. The three towns were taken without a fight by Russian forces more than a month ago as rebels retreated toward the mountains.

The Russian military said 26 servicemen were killed and 30 wounded in the past 24 hours of fighting in Chechnya, the heaviest casualties reported so far in one day of fighting in the rebel republic. However, NTV said the losses had been sustained in the town of Shali alone, whereas no figures were available for the other two towns -- Argun and Gudermes. Meanwhile, the AVN military news agency said Russian forces suffered the reported losses in Dzhalka, northeast of Grozny, which quoted sources in the Russian military headquarters in Chechnya as rebels ambushed a convoy of Interior Ministry troops taking supplies to troops.

Russia's Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeev, said the Chechens' "backhand" attacks had made Russian forces to cancel an Ortho-



A Chechen man holds up his sole remaining possession, a tea-kettle, amidst the twisted ruins of his home after Russian troops burned it down on Sunday in Goragorsk, 55 km north-west of Grozny. — AP

dox Christmas lull in Grozny and to resume a full-scale offensive.

The top Russian commander in Chechnya, General Viktor Kazantsev said his forces had regained control over all the towns attacked by Chechens over the weekend.

In another surprise development, General Kazantsev denied reports that Generals Genady Iroshev and Vladimir Shamanov had been replaced as his deputies in charge of the

eastern and western fronts. The two Generals themselves announced their replacement on Friday.

"They are still in command; they have just been given additional responsibilities," General Kazantsev said.

The Russian commander said despite the Chechen counter-attacks the operation in Chechnya would be finished within two months, as previously planned.

# Russia gives more teeth to N-policy

REUTERS

59-11 157  
MOSCOW, Jan. 14. — Russia published its radically reshaped national security concept today and the document made clear it had reduced the threshold for using nuclear weapons, to counter what it sees as a growing military threat. It envisages the potential use of its vast nuclear arsenal "to repel armed aggression."

Under the previous national security doctrine published in 1997 Russia reserved the right to use nuclear weapons only if its very existence was threatened.

Russia's acting President, Mr Vladimir Putin, signed a decree on 6 January covering the new concept setting out Russia's views on its strategic interests and establishing priorities for protecting them.

Few details were made available at the time, but officials said it was a sweeping rewrite of the 1997 security strategy to focus more on fighting terrorism and organised crime. The 21-page document was published today in the weekly military newspaper *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*.

The document, which is divided into four sections and fills two broadsheet pages, says Russia remained important but "a number of states" were trying to weaken and marginalise it.

"The level and scale of threats in the military sphere is growing," the concept says. It says

Moscow's main security task is to deter any attacks, nuclear or conventional, against Russia and its allies. "The Russian federation considers it possible to use military force to guarantee its national security according to the following principles: the use of all forces and equipment at its disposal, including nuclear weapons, if it has to repel armed aggression if all other means of resolving the crisis have been exhausted or proved ineffective," the concept says.

This contrasted with the previous concept published in 1997 which said Russia reserved the right to use nuclear weapons only if its very existence was threatened.

The other principle stated under the new concept was the use of force to quell internal unrest. The document also said Russia could guarantee its national interests only if its economy was in good shape. "For that reason, Russia's national interests in this sphere are crucial," it said. The Russian economy has been in deep trouble since a financial crisis in August 1998. The document said Russia would pay more attention to fighting terrorism, the drugs trade and organised crime.

It said there were two main, opposing trends in world affairs. Moscow's favoured option was for a "multi-polar" world with a range of regional powers. The document said the other trend was for a "unipolar" world dominated by USA.

THE STATESMAN  
15 JAN 2000

## Jingoism in Russia

THE ENUNCIATION of a new security doctrine by the Vladimir Putin regime in Russia is in line with the acting President's growing appeal to aggressive nationalism. Ever since he has been at the helm of affairs, his popularity has soared thanks to his war against Islamic separatists in Dagestan and Chechnya as also because of his pledge to control the corrupt Russian bureaucracy. No wonder the new security doctrine emphasises the need to fight crime, corruption and terrorism. While it is not easy to take on the former apparatchiks who have a firm hold on the economy, Mr Putin seems to be close to winning the war in Chechnya. The Caucasus region is vital for Russia as it is a major source of oil and gas. It is also on the way to the Caspian Sea. No government worth its salt can afford to allow this region to fall into enemy hands. Mr Putin has also let the world know that Moscow has its own claim to world power status. Besides, he has made his preferences clear as to who are his potential allies and who pose a challenge to Moscow's regional and global ambitions.

Although Russia has now reduced the threshold for using nuclear weapons to counter a military threat, it is not clear who poses such a threat to Moscow. Surely, it is not contemplating using nuclear weapons against the Chechen rebels. Perhaps it is just a display of jingoism which is a politically correct move at the time of elections. Few will dispute, however, the need to quell internal subversion. The Taliban's recognition of Chechnya has further exposed the designs of international forces inimical to Russia, which is wrestling with a mercenary war in Chechnya similar to what India is facing in Kashmir. Multi-ethnic societies have become special targets for Islamic fundamentalism. Mr Putin has given enough hints that Russia should not be regarded as a soft state. He seems to be telling the world that the emperor may have no clothes, but he is still the emperor.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 JAN 2000

Q. A Russia to hit back at Taliban

# A Russia to hit back at Taliban

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, JAN. 17. Russia may ask the United Nations to harden sanctions against Taliban in response to its recognition of break-away Chechnya, diplomatic sources said in Moscow.

The Interfax news agency quoted sources in the Russian Foreign Ministry as saying that Moscow would respond "adequately" to Taliban's decision to extend formal recognition to the separatist Chechen government led by the President, Mr. Aslan Maskhadov, who is spearheading the rebels' armed resistance to Russian forces.

The Taliban Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Wakil Muttawakil, told the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) on Sunday that the Taliban supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar, had agreed to recognise Chechnya during a meeting with a Chechen delegation at his headquarters in the southern Afghan town of Kandahar. He asked the Chechen government to open its embassy in Afghanistan.

"Russia is prepared to demand that the United Nations step up sanctions against the Taliban," the Foreign Ministry sources told Interfax. The U.N. clamped sanctions on the Taliban in November



The acting Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin (right), greets the head of the delegation of the Council of Europe, Lord Russell-Johnson, in Moscow's Kremlin on Monday. — AP

that terrorism has international dimension."

Shortly before meeting today the Russian Acting President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, President of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, Lord Russell-Johnson, who is leading the Assembly's delegation to Moscow, warned that Russia's membership in the Council could be suspended over its conduct of the military offensive. However, after the meeting, Russia's Foreign Minister, Mr. Igor Ivanov, said the issue had not come up during the three-hour meeting.

Itar-Tass quoted the top Russian commander in Chechnya Gen. Gennady Troshchev, as saying that federal troops had embarked on a "decisive" phase in the campaign to drive "bandits" from the Chechen capital Grozny. Russian forces launched the assault on the Chechen capital on December 25, but have so far made little headway due to fierce resistance by about 2,000 guerrillas.

The Russian Committee of Soldiers' Mothers said on Sunday it estimated that 3,000 soldiers had been killed and 6,000 injured in the current campaign, six times more than officially reported.

told the Itar-Tass news agency that the Taliban's move will have no effect on the course of the military operation in Chechnya.

Gen. Leonid Ivashov, head of the Russian Defence Ministry's international department, said the Taliban was already giving "military aid" to Chechen rebels.

"One terrorist structure has backed another one," Gen. Ivashov told reporters in Moscow. "This goes to show once again



## 10-16 Kremlin cuts deal with Communists

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, JAN. 19. The first session of Russia's new Parliament that opened on Tuesday with the acting President, Mr. Vladimir Putin's plea for cooperation ended in uproar when four factions walked out in protest over a behind-the-scenes deal the Kremlin struck with the Communists.

The scandal broke out in the lower House, the State Duma, when three largest parties — Communists and two pro-Government groups, Unity and People's Deputy, which with allies control 285 seats in the 450-seat house — cut a deal that locked out most other factions from the sharing of the House chair and committees. They also steamrollered a decision to elect the Speaker in open, rather than secret ballot, in order to control the way their members voted.

The parties left out in the cold — the Liberal Yabloko, the Union of Rightist Forces, Father-

land-All Russia, and Russia's Regions, which together have over 130 deputies — withdrew from the race for the Speaker's post, refused to take up any Duma posts allotted to them by the "big parties" and walked out of the session in protest against what they described as a "stitch-up" between the Kremlin and the Communists.

The Communists, Unity and their allies voted 285-2 to elect the Communist candidate, Mr. Gennady Seleznyov, to the post of Speaker, which he held in the last Duma. Mr. Seleznyov has a reputation as a pro-Kremlin pragmatist capable of steering through Parliament legislation that is lobbied by the Government.

"I think what is happening now is profane," the former Prime Minister, Mr. Yevgeny Primakov, who is the parliamentary leader of Fatherland-All Russia, said as he withdrew his candidacy in anger. "Duma will not be able to

work constructively after this stitch-up."

The split in the lower House came shortly after Mr. Putin appealed for cooperation between the Government and the legislature and promised that the Kremlin would not "divide the lawmakers into 'ours' and 'theirs'".

The disgruntled groups said they were giving up all responsibility for the work of the State Duma and boycotted Wednesday's meeting of the House, but said they would attend later sessions.

Analysts said the Kremlin tied up with Communists to shut out Mr. Primakov from the race for Speaker because he had refused to give Mr. Putin a word that he would not run against him in presidential elections scheduled for March 26. The acting President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, is a hot favourite to win the elections, but Mr. Primakov's participation could wreck the Kremlin's hopes that Mr. Putin will win in the very first round.

# Rebels stop Russian advance in Grozny

ASSOCIATED PRESS

GROZNY, Jan. 20. -- Chechen rebels put up tough fights in downtown Grozny today, preventing Russian troops from advancing in several parts of the ruined capital and killing soldiers in surprise attacks from the rear.

In north-western Grozny, soldiers could not advance an inch under heavy Chechen sniper fire from nine-story buildings in the district.

Tanks fired salvo after salvo on the buildings, shrouding the entire area in smoke, while Russian helicopter gunships hanging overhead fired missiles at the Chechen positions.

Mr. Bislan Gantamirov, commander of a pro-Moscow Chechen force also fighting in north-western Grozny, told Russia's *Ras-Tass* news agency that the battles were "extremely heavy" and that some city zones were constantly changing hands.

Elsewhere in Grozny, squads of Russian infantry backed by air attacks and massive artillery barrages also tried to dislodge well-entrenched rebels from the centre, the military said.

Federal commanders gave no assessment of how the fighting was going and reported only five soldiers killed and 12 wounded yesterday.

But some officers said that about 26 members of a single regiment in north-western Grozny had been killed overnight when rebels sneaked through sewage tunnels to strike the Russians in the rear. The militants escaped.

The Chechen separatists were clinging to buildings they had

fortified and equipped with underground passages, Russian soldiers said. Small groups of militants were operating in parts of Grozny nominally controlled by the Russians. NTV television reported.

Federal forces, backed by air bombardments, have been pushing into downtown Grozny from several directions, trying to squeeze separatist fighters into a tightening circle.

About 50 separatists were killed and some 100 were wounded yesterday, said Col. Gaidar Gadzhiyev of the Russian military command in neighboring Dagestan. A Russian tank was destroyed, the military said.

Grozny has been a bastion of rebel resistance throughout the four-month war, and its capture would bolster the Russian forces after a number of surprise counterattacks by the rebels in Russian-controlled territory.

The Russian insistence on taking Grozny, which has a more symbolic than strategic meaning, appeared part of the Kremlin's predicted scenario of ending the campaign by late February or early March, ahead of Russia's 26 March presidential elections.

Continued bloodshed could dent the electoral chances of acting President Vladimir Putin, Russia's *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* said today.

"Tentatively in March, Moscow will announce the completion of the anti-terrorist operation. Otherwise, the whole election campaign would lose its logic... by all appearances, large-scale combat actions will indeed stop," it wrote.

THE STATESMAN  
21 JAN 2000

# Russian general captured in Grozny

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, JAN. 20.** The Russian military admitted a top army general was missing in Chechnya, while rebels claimed to be holding the general captive.

The famous rebel commander, Shamil Basayev, said the Chechens had captured a Russian general in Grozny, where fierce fighting was raging for the third day Thursday as Russian forces pressed on with their storming of the Chechen capital. The NTV television quoted Basayev as saying on Chechen television that the general, identified only by his family name, Malafeyev, was captured in Grozny and was now being interrogated at a secret location outside the city. He also said a Russian colonel had also been captured along with the general.

The Russian military admitted that Gen. Mikhail Malafeyev, deputy chief commander of the northern group of Russian forces in Chechnya, was "missing in Grozny," the Itar-Tass news agency said. Moscow Echo radio said the general had taken part in the fighting in Grozny two days ago and, according to some reports, had been killed.

The Interfax news agency quoted Chechens as claiming Russians had lost over 1,500 soldiers in Grozny over the past few days. The Russian military said their losses did not exceed 20 killed.

The pro-Moscow Chechen



**Russian Interior Ministry troops arrest a Chechen man for trying to jump a queue of refugees waiting to cross the Adler checkpoint in Ingushetia on Thursday.** — Reuters

commander, Bislan Gantamirov, said federal forces had taken control of the central square Minutka and a key river bridge in

NTV television said Russian forces had advanced deep into Grozny from the north and the east, but were still fighting rebels on the outskirts in the west and the south, where Chechen defences were the strongest. Gen. Vadim Timchenko, deputy chief of staff of the Russian forces in Chechnya, told NTV that Chechens had built "multi-tier defences" that had survived air and artillery bombardment. He said Chechen snipers presented the gravest danger to the Russians, often hitting advancing troops from behind.

Gen. Timchenko said fierce fighting was also going on in the mountains, south of Grozny, as rebels tried to ease Russian pressure on the Chechen capital and break through to the help of its defenders.

AFP reports:

The seizure of Minutka square would allow Russians an access to the heart of Grozny from their heavily-fortified positions on the city's south-east.

Russian warplanes have steadily intensified their raids in an effort to flush out the rebels from the mountains, with more than 200 sorties recorded over the last 24 hours.

Another 300 Russian soldiers were also sent in as reinforcements to the foot of the mountains where ground battles raged and into Grozny. Interfax reported.

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# Will Putin be the new Russian emperor?

**H**elsinki: President Bill Clinton's national security adviser, Samuel Berger, recently said he was worried that Vladimir Putin might turn out to be a nationalist. His use of that term reveals how much things have changed.

During the Cold War, nationalism was a capital crime in the Soviet Union, while the West applauded every manifestation of a nationalist spirit within Moscow's orbit. Today the West regards nationalism as a reactionary force, an enemy of a stable world order, while in Russia it keeps alive faith in a return to greatness.

I would prefer to see as the leader of Russia a true nationalist dedicated to making his country sound and strong, rather than an imperialist bent on conquest. But what is Russia if not an empire? The question has been much debated: it reveals an unresolved identity crisis. The British and the

French, too, have experienced the pain caused by the loss of empire, but they have been able to withdraw from overseas possessions to their well-established nation-states. Russians do not have such a fallback position.

Before the breakup of the Soviet Union, the present Russian Federation was an administrative entity, not a nation-state. Furthermore, 25 million Russians have found themselves separated from the main body of the Russian people by new state borders.

Except for the three Baltic states, which were independent between the two World Wars, the former Soviet republics gained independence by default, as it were, with little or no preparation for statehood.

Every Russian I have met in recent times has taken for granted that most of the lands of the former Soviet Union will eventually be reunited within the Commonwealth of Independent States.

southern states of the former Soviet Union are being actively courted by Turkey and Iran, as well as by American oil interests. China, too, is getting involved. The Commonwealth of Independent States has become a mine field of potential conflicts and crises.

**A** crucial test for relations between the West and Russia will come with eastward EU enlargement. So far, the Russian government has made no objection to EU membership for any of the Baltic states. It is strongly opposed to any former Soviet republic joining Nato, but the EU has been seen as a toothless free trade area. Few Russians seem to have grasped the profound consequences of the EU process of integration. It will have the effect of moving the Baltic states irrevocably out of Moscow's orbit.

The intentions of the EU are of course benign. Its expansion is

meant to be a friendly embrace, bringing political stability and economic progress to Eastern Europe, for the benefit of Russia as well.

But those who run Russia today have not yet been converted to the EU concept of security through integration. Their thinking is still dominated by traditional geopolitics.

Mr Putin has publicly castigated those who believe that Russia has no enemies. Russia's new strategic concept, published recently, calls for more military spending to counter a possible threat from the West, with nuclear weapons if needed. The tough language designed to secure the political support of the military leadership for a Putin presidency, reveals the conceptual gap that exists between Russia and the West.

**MAX JAKOBSON** is a former Finnish ambassador to the UN. By arrangement with the *International Herald Tribune*

# Moscow on alert as Chechen conflict worsens

Fred Weir  
Moscow, January 28

MOSCOW AND other Russian cities have been placed under an intensified security regime amid worries that the worsening conflict in Chechnya could mutate into fresh terror attacks against "soft" targets in Russia.

Thousands of interior troops and special anti-terrorist police have been brought into Moscow to bolster militia patrols around — train stations, stadiums, bridges, shopping centres and other areas — where large numbers of civilians congregate.

The order to step up vigilance was given by acting President Vladimir Putin.

Putin had warned that Chechen guerrillas could seek to extend their four-month old war against federal forces in Chechnya by targeting vulnerable Russian population zones.

Russia was hit by a wave of apartment bombings in September, which killed almost 300 people in Moscow and many other cities.

The Federal Security Service says it has identified eight suspects in the blasts.

All the eight suspect, it says, were trained in "terrorist camps" in Chechnya.

"The police and security organs are taking additional precautions against possible terrorist acts in several urban areas," a spokesman for the Federal Security Service said.

The move comes amid signs that the war against breakaway Chechnya has become bogged down and is exacting a heavy toll on Russian servicemen.

The Defence Ministry announced this week that casualties among Russian troops are

much higher than previously admitted.

Senior officers quoted by the Interfax agency said that 1,173 soldiers have been killed since fighting began in October.

That is almost twice the number previously given, and it does not include servicemen of the Interior Ministry forces, who do much of the dangerous cleaning up and pacification work behind the front lines.

Despite many optimistic claims over the past month, the Russian operation to seize Grozny appears to be faltering.

Military experts say about 2,500 rebels are deeply entrenched in the city centre and making use of bunker and tunnel systems that are virtually impervious to Russian heavy weapons.

"The main problem of the Russian forces is that we lack enough well-trained infantry to do the serious house-to-house fighting," says Pavel Felgenhauer, an independent military analyst.

"The Chechens are masters at this kind of combat, while we throw mostly raw recruits at them. So, our casualties are climbing and the war is dragging on".

The worsening war news has so far not affected the popularity of acting President Vladimir Putin, the leading contender in Presidential elections slated for March 26.

"All our surveys show Putin way out in front, even though he is considered the person responsible for the war in Chechnya," says Vladimir Petukhov, an analyst with the Institute of Social and National Problems in Moscow.

"He seems to be made of teflon. Russians want to believe he will solve all our problems, and they don't seem to care about a little bit of bad news from Chechnya".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 JAN 2000

# Putin says Chechen rebellion must be crushed decisively

Fred Weir  
Moscow, January 29

HR-10 30/1  
RUSSIA'S ACTING President Vladimir Putin warned at the weekend that separatist rebellion in Chechnya must be decisively crushed or it will tear the Russian Federation apart.

Speaking at the St Petersburg funeral of Major-General Mikhail Malofeyev, the first Russian General to die in combat since 1945, Mr Putin on Friday slammed Western critics and said the country must step up its sacrifices for the sake of unity. "Whenever Russia weakened in the past, diabolical forces appeared and tried to tear her to pieces," Mr Putin said. "But they never succeeded because common Russians -- soldiers and civilians -- stood up for their Motherland against them."

Gen Malofeyev was killed while trying to rally his troops, after being ambushed by rebels, on the outskirts of the Chechen capital of Grozny on Jan 17. His body was recovered two days later, riddled with bullets. "Unfortunately it is the best people who die," Mr Putin said. "They die because they do not hide behind their comrades' backs. This was the case with Mikhail Yurievich Malofeyev. He did not die in vain."

The funeral came amid a storm of bad news for the Kremlin. Mr Putin's popularity rating has taken a tumble for the first time since he was appointed Prime Minister last August and later raised to acting President by the New Year's resignation of former President Boris Yeltsin.

According to a poll taken last week by Russia's leading public opinion agency, VTSIOM, Mr Putin's popularity has fallen back to 49 per cent from 55 per cent a week previously.

Presidential polls are slated for March 26, and Mr Putin is still regarded as the almost certain winner.

But analysts say Mr Putin's public approval rating is closely tied to battlefield results in Chechnya, and those are turning grim.

Despite repeated Russian claims that Grozny would be taken within "a matter of days", the city's centre appears solidly under control of highly-mobile, urban warfare-wise Chechen rebel groups. There is also a renewed threat of terror directed at Russian civilians, which has prompted intensified security.

A top guerrilla leader, the Arab-born Emir Khattab, said last week that his men were prepared to "strike not only any city in Chechnya, but any city in Russia as well".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 JAN 2000

# Can Putin turn Russia around?

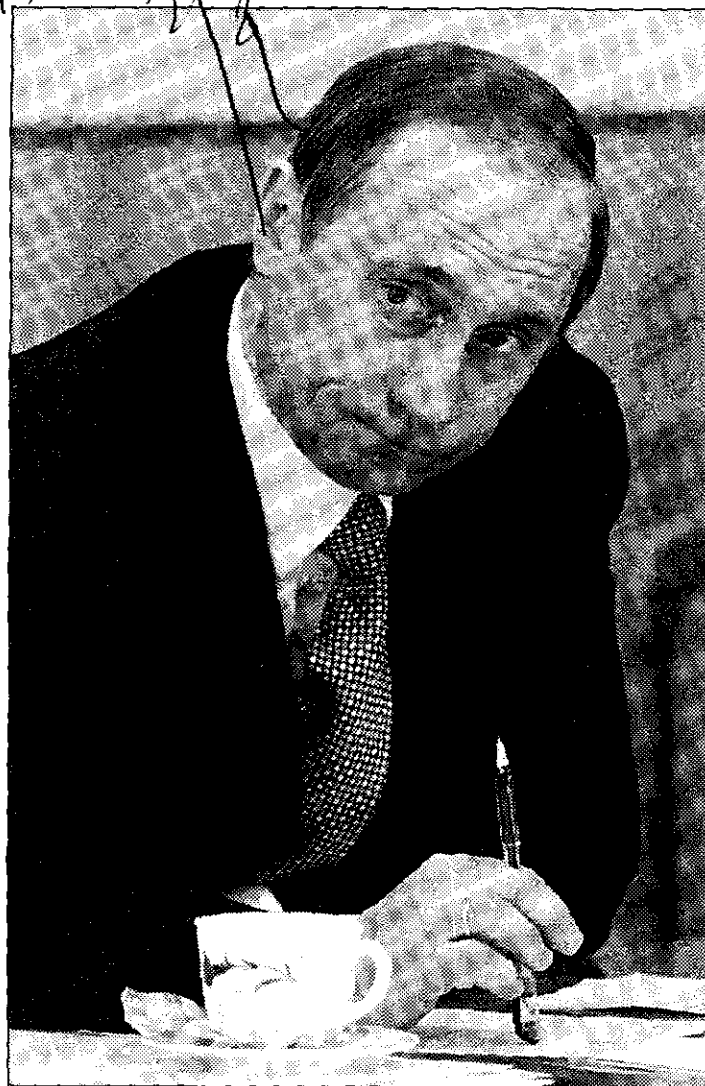
*Fresh from a resounding poll victory, the Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin's most challenging immediate task will be to tackle Russia's oligarchs and break their cozy relationship with the bureaucrats, writes*

**VLADIMIR RADYUHIN.**

**L**AST WEEK, Russia turned a page in its post-Soviet history with the election of Mr. Vladimir Putin as its new President. The largely-expected convincing victory of Mr. Putin, who scored 52 per cent of the votes against 29 per cent for his communist rival, Mr. Gennady Zyuganov, was a vote in favour of putting an end to chaos, corruption and economic disarray that marked the eight-year rule of Mr. Boris Yeltsin, but at the same time it was a vote against returning to a communist past.

Mr. Putin, who showed his steely hand in crushing Chechen rebels, won the hearts of Russians craving for a strong leader, law and order. People backed him because he is everything his predecessor was not. Whereas Mr. Yeltsin was impulsive and unpredictable, Mr. Putin is pragmatic, reserved, and self-disciplined. Mr. Yeltsin was a hard drinker, Mr. Putin is a near teetotaler. Mr. Yeltsin was old and ill, Mr. Putin is young and robust, boasting a black belt in judo. For Mr. Yeltsin ascension to the Kremlin throne was the pinnacle of a life-long career, for Mr. Putin it is the beginning of a long road. A fiery anti-communist has yielded place to a disciplined pragmatist. For Mr. Yeltsin power was an end in itself, for Mr. Putin it is an instrument to achieve a goal.

What are his goals? The media has dubbed Mr. Putin, a former KGB officer catapulted from obscure Kremlin official to President-elect in the space of one year, a "black box" because he is yet to spell out his plans in detail. The President-elect campaigned on a platform of restoring a strong state governed



**The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin... will his writ run?**

by law and building a social-oriented market economy. In foreign policy, he preaches putting Russia's relations with other countries on a more business-like, pragmatic footing to help economic revival at home.

Mr. Putin said his ultimate goal was to raise people's well-being by promoting stable economic growth. This requires massive investments into Russia's aging industries, which in turn calls for political stability. "There will be no major investment until we have a solid political system, stability and a strong Government defending the market and creating favourable conditions for investment," Mr. Putin said in a recent interview.

Mr. Putin will need to overturn Mr. Yeltsin's "divide-and-rule" method, which allowed the ex-President to govern during his long bouts of ill health. The new

President is expected to end rivalry between the Kremlin administration and the Cabinet of Ministers and restore central authority by curbing the runaway powers of regional bosses, who have taken full advantage of Mr. Yeltsin's ill-advised offer to "take as much authority as you can digest". Mr. Putin is also determined to fight rampant corruption and cut to size Russia's oligarchs who grabbed much of Russia's natural resources and gained undue political influence under Mr. Yeltsin.

Many analysts say that tackling these daunting tasks in a country as vast and diverse as Russia, especially after years of chaos, will be impossible without reverting to authoritarian rule. Optimists predict that Mr. Putin could turn out to be Russia's De Gaulle. "Like De Gaulle, Putin came to power at a time of chaos and anarchy. He enjoys the

support of most elite groups and a majority of the population. And his prescription for Russia is very similar to what De Gaulle proposed — rapid modernisation under a regime of personal power and guided democracy," said Mr. Sergei Markov of the Institute of Political Studies. "It should be a very limited and 'tender' authoritarian regime, one that can lead us to normal democracy in the near future."

Pessimists fear that Mr. Putin's announced "dictatorship of law" will in effect be simply a dictatorship, a police state in which the whim of the President or his administration will be the law. They say the bloody military operation in Chechnya is the first sign of things to come. However, most experts agree that Mr. Putin does not need to resort to dictatorship. He has inherited vast constitutional powers which enabled Mr. Yeltsin to rule like a tsar while retaining all the trimmings of a democratic state. In fact, authoritarian-guided democracy is already in place in Russia, as evidenced by the installation of Mr. Putin in the Kremlin as Mr. Yeltsin's chosen successor and the Kremlin-manipulated victory of the pro-Government Unity party in the parliamentary polls in December.

Indications are that Mr. Putin's authoritarian rule will take civilised forms. Unlike Mr. Yeltsin, who loved head-on confrontations with his enemies, Mr. Putin prefers compromise. He has quietly persuaded the country's most restive regional barons, Mr. Mintimir Shaimiyev of Tatarstan and Mr. Murtaza Rakhimov of Bashkortostan, to resume paying taxes to the federal budget, which they stopped doing under Mr. Yeltsin. He has indicated his willingness to cut deals with the communists, saying that their strong performance in the parliamentary and presidential elections dictated the need to pursue policies that would be "more balanced and directed towards lifting the real standard of living of ordinary people".

Mr. Putin's most challenging immediate task will be to tackle Russia's oligarchs and break their cozy relationship with the bureaucrats. The first test of Mr. Putin's strength will come when he names a new Government in about six weeks time. The Cabinet lineup will show whether he has been able to get rid of people linked to various business groups and the notorious "Kremlin family" which helped him win the elections.

# Putin vows to keep nuclear might

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, APRIL 1.** In his first public address since being elected Russia's President, Mr. Vladimir Putin vowed to keep a strong nuclear deterrent but also called for deeper arms cuts.

"We must increase the effectiveness of our nuclear deterrence potential," Mr. Putin said in televised remarks during a one-day visit to Chelyabinsk-70, a nuclear research and production centre in the Urals Mountains on Friday. It was Mr. Putin's first trip outside Moscow after his triumphant victory in last Sunday's elections.

He told a meeting of atomic industry chiefs in the secret Siberian town that nuclear weapons had "strategic importance" for Russia's "ability to defend itself from aggression."

"We will retain and strengthen Russia's nuclear weapons and its nuclear industry," Mr. Putin said.

Russia's Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeev, who travelled with Mr. Putin to the Urals, announced plans to rearm nuclear submarines and perfect the new long-range nuclear missile Topol-M, whose deployment began last year.

At the same time, Mr. Putin insisted that he was not advocating a new arms race or expanding Russia's nuclear arsenal and promised to redouble Government efforts to get Parliament ratify the START-II arms reduction treaty.

"We are not talking about increasing weapons which we have a surplus of anyway. We are talking about enhancing the country's security and reliabil-

ity of its nuclear shield," Mr. Putin said. "Russia holds and will continue to hold talks on further cuts in strategic offensive weapons, in order to make the world safer and reduce arms stockpiles."

The 1993 START-II treaty calls for the United States and Russia to roughly halve their nuclear arsenals to 3,000 to 3,500 warheads each. The treaty was ratified by the U.S. Senate in 1996, but Russian lawmakers balked at endorsing the pact, linking it to Washington's renunciation of plans to deploy an anti-ballistic missile system. Following the election of a new Parliament in December, which is loyal to the Kremlin, chances of START-II ratification have greatly improved.

Mr. Putin promised to allocate 1.5 billion roubles (\$50 million) to finance conversion of some nuclear defence plants to civilian production. This will be the first time in recent years that any major funds have been earmarked for the purpose.

The Russian leader also pledged to help market Russian nuclear technology worldwide, reiterating Moscow's rejection of U.S. demands to roll back Russian nuclear cooperation with Iran.

"We will protect Russia's interests in global markets, and won't allow anyone to push Russia from those markets under the guise of falsely formulated values," Mr. Putin said when asked about prospects of cooperation with Iran.

Russia's Nuclear Power Minister, Mr. Yevgeny Adamov, said later Iran had asked Russia to build another three reactors in addition to the one being constructed in that country at present.

THE HINDU  
- 2 APR 2000



HD-25 22/10

# Closing ranks

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**R**USSIA HAS embarked on a sweeping reshaping of its relations with the former Soviet states, abandoning attempts to breathe life into the moribund Commonwealth of Independent States in favour of building an alliance with its closest allies on the basis of shared interests. The new strategy is likely to aggravate splits in the CIS, a loose grouping of 12 out of 15 ex-Soviet republics, but may also start economic integration among at least some of the CIS members.

Meeting in Astana, capital of Kazakhstan, earlier this month the Presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Belarus, set up a new economic trade zone, the Eurasian Economic Community. The five countries agreed to gradually pull down economic barriers and encourage free movement of goods, capital and workforce. Russia showed willingness to put up with certain economic losses resulting from the opening of the domestic market to its partners. Moscow also forfeited the right to dominate the grouping, although it will control 40 per cent of the votes in the new union.

A day after they formed the Eurasian Economic Community the five former Soviet states, joined by Armenia, another Russian ally, met in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan, to resuscitate the 1992 Collective Security Treaty. The six nations resolved to set up a rapid deployment military force to repulse both external aggression and internal insurgency. Moscow also agreed to supply weapons to its allies at the same discount the Russian army gets them, or at nearly half the price they fetch in the international market.

The new attempt at economic and military integration is driven above all by shared fears of the growing threat of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia. The Taliban's recent military gains in Afghanistan and Islamist incursions into post-Soviet Central Asia have convinced Moscow that it will be cheaper to make the states in the region strong enough to stand up to the threat of religious extremism and terrorism than fight it on Russian territory.

Russia's move to build a mini-union within the CIS has met with protests from other members of the Commonwealth. "Several countries got together and announced the community, and

**Russia has embarked on a sweeping reshaping of its relations with the former Soviet republics, says VLADIMIR RADYUHIN.**

what about the others," Ukraine's President, Mr. Leonid Kuchma, complained at a news conference during a recent visit to Uzbekistan. "We ask ourselves, why haven't we been invited?"

The Ukrainian leader of course knows the answer: since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 Uk-

NATO. From the start it favoured closer economic, political and military cooperation with the West.

The establishment of the Eurasian Economic Community and rekindling of the Collective Security Treaty has highlighted a split in the CIS into pro-Russia and pro-NATO camps. The President of Uzbekistan, Mr. Islam Karimov, refused to attend the Moscow-led summits in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and played host instead to the Ukrainian President. The two leaders vowed to cement military and political ties between their countries and branded the Eurasian Economic Community a "still-born" creation built on "illusory foundations".

Under Mr. Putin, Moscow has adopted distinctly different poli-

would cost Ukraine many millions of dollars in lost gas transit revenues.

At the same time Moscow is not turning its back on these countries or folding up cooperation with them. It has just made it clear they can no longer count on Yeltsin-era largesses, when he could write off a multi-billion debt to Ukraine just for the pleasure of calling its leader a friend and strategic ally. During a meeting with the Ukrainian President last week, Mr. Putin agreed to continue supplying Ukraine with oil and gas on condition that the piling debts of Ukrainian energy companies be converted into Kiev's sovereign debt. Moscow has also agreed to supply new weapons to Uzbekistan, repair its Soviet-made hardware and train its military, but the latter will pay in



**The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, with leaders of some of the other former Soviet republics during their meeting in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan.**

raine has been drifting away from Russia and opposed any CIS accords that could hamper this process. Last year Ukraine set up a NATO-oriented security arrangement with Georgia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, which refused to prolong the Collective Security Treaty with Russia, as well as Moldova.

The new alliance, GUUAM, which drew its abbreviation from the first letters of its member-states' names, was formally established in Washington in May 1999 where its leaders attended celebrations of the 50th anniversary of

ties towards the two camps within the CIS. It has agreed to increase by half the amount of oil Kazakhstan can pump for export through Russian pipelines and allowed Belarus to repay its debts for Russian oil with commodities.

At the same time Russia's Lukoil major has pulled out of a consortium of Western-led companies that are planning to build oil and gas pipelines from Azerbaijan to Turkey and the Russian natural gas monopoly, Gazprom, has drawn up plans to build a pipeline to Europe bypassing Ukraine. This

hard currency and will not enjoy discounts available to members of the Collective Security Pact.

There is a risk that Moscow's differentiated policy towards different CIS states may further alienate some, but success of the Kremlin's new strategy will ultimately depend on speedy economic recovery in Russia, signs of which are already in evidence. Kremlin strategists hope this will generate growth in the other member-states of the Eurasian Economic Community and encourage more CIS countries to join the union.

# 40-12 The Russian economy — II

By Prem Shankar Jha

RUSSIA'S FUTURE is by no means assured. The reason does not lie in the economy's fundamentals but in Russians' own confusion about how the turnaround took place and, therefore, their uncertainty about how to sustain it. The uncertainty is mirrored by the near universal lack of belief that the good news will continue. As late as May, despite a 6.8 per cent growth in the first quarter, the most optimistic prediction for the year was a GDP growth of 5.2 per cent. The return of good times has revived the conflict over what policies Russia should follow in the future. To many peoples' surprise, despite the spectacular failure of their policies in 1998, the liberal reformers are neither down nor out. The President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, has picked some of his closest advisers — the Economic Adviser, Mr. Andrei Ilarionov, the Deputy Prime Minister for Finance, Mr. Alexei Kudrin, and the Minister for Economics, Mr. German Gref — from the ranks of the "St. Petersburg liberals". Liberal prescriptions are also being broadcast virtually day and night by the print and audio-visual media (which are mostly owned by Russia's new business tycoons, the oligarchs), by corporate economists, and western advisers and analysts. These advantages have enabled the liberals to seize the high ground and set the agenda for economic policy once again. But this time they are meeting stiff opposition.

The focal point of debate is a 10-year economic reconstruction plan prepared by the Centre for Strategic Research, which was headed till he became a Minister by Mr. Gref. The Gref Plan calls for a further sharp reduction through privatisation of health, educational and social expenditures by 30 per cent in the next ten years; privatisation of Russia's remaining 24,000 state-owned enterprises; breaking up and privatisation of public utilities such as the railways and United Energy System, the energy supply monopoly; a comprehensive restructuring of the banking system to make it capable of giving medium term loans for investment, something that virtually no private bank does today; allowing bankrupt or

poorly managed banks to fail or be bought out by their competitors; making sweeping reforms to the taxation system and enacting and refining laws to permit bankruptcy, foreclosure, and retrenchment of surplus labour.

Not surprisingly the Gref Plan has become the focus of bitter controversy in Russia, between the vast silent majority that has suffered grievously in the past ten years and now wants above all else a respite from uncertainty and fear, and a vocal minority that wants to use the present respite from stress to complete the transition to a capitalist paradise even if

providing and even enhancing social security in the short and medium term, diluted the proposals for banking reform, and instead of forcing changes in it that would immediately make it capable of meeting the economy's need for investment capital, placed this responsibility on two State investment bank set up after the 1998 crash, the Russian Development Bank and the Rosselkolkhoz bank, a bank to finance investment in agriculture.

On two issues, however, Mr. Putin is one with the liberals. These are tax reforms and the need to restructure the massive state monopolies in the public

steady nominal exchange rate will mean a real appreciation of the rouble against other currencies. Everyone believes that this does not pose any threat to Russian exports, but prescriptions on how to 'neutralise' the excess roubles differ sharply. One school of liberals argues that the Bank should let Russians hold up to 50 per cent of their export earnings in dollars instead of the present 25 per cent. This will reduce the inflow of dollars into the Russian Central Bank. A second — which includes Mr. Kudrin — advocates sterilising some of the additional money supply by using the massive increase in tax revenues to pay back some of the debt to the Russian Central Bank that the Government incurred during the period of growing insolvency.

## *The unresolved conflict between liberals and conservatives threatens to do the most harm in day-to-day making of policy.*

this means some more reduction in socialist life support systems, and increased labour redundancy in the short run.

Mr. Putin who was elected by the silent majority because he was seen to be a 'professional' who had remained untainted by links with either the mafia or the oligarchs and promised to restore 'the dictatorship of law', is admirably suited to play the role of the reconciler. For apart from the above virtues, he is also university educated, speaks four languages, and comes from St. Petersburg, citadel of liberalism. Not long after he was elected he summed up his philosophy in a phrase that has become famous throughout Russia: "He who does not regret the passing of socialism has no heart, but he who wants to bring it back has no head".

Mr. Putin accepted the Gref plan in principle and signalled his support for continuing reform by bringing the author into his Cabinet. But then went about systematically diluting its rigours. Based on the Plan, called the "Main Guidelines for a Long-Term Perspective" the Government brought out its own Plan called the "Plan for Top Priority measures for 2000-2001". The differences between this document and the original plan would be tedious to report. It is sufficient to say that the latter maintained the States role in

utilities and complete the privatisation process. He has already got the Duma to pass a new tax code with only four chapters held up for further discussion. The reforms already enacted include a 13 per cent flat rate of income tax, and the reduction of a number of other nominal rates of tax (which were very high but seldom enforced) with a simultaneous closure of loopholes. Preliminary steps have been taken to break up some of the state monopolies, but here as in privatisation, Mr. Putin is not in a hurry.

It is not in the framing of long term goals and structural reforms that the unresolved conflict between the liberals and conservatives threatens to do the most harm, but in its effect on the day-to-day making of policy. The potential for harm is most evident in the realms of exchange rate policy, finance and industrial reconstruction. Needless to say, the three are closely interlinked. The key issue being debated today is how to cope with the adverse side effects of the oil bonanza. The trade surplus has risen by 130 per cent so far. The Central Bank continues to buy 75 per cent of all export dollars to bolster reserves, but the roubles it is releasing into the market as it buys dollars are pushing up prices.

But a higher rate of inflation with a

What no one is looking at is the impact of rouble appreciation not on exports but on imports. If the rouble gets sufficiently strong for imports to start displacing domestic products, the revival of Russian industry will be endangered. No one knows at what value of the rouble in real terms imports will start hurting domestic industry once more. What is more, it will affect not just consumer goods but the revival of the capital goods industries too. Today, an estimated 60 per cent of the capital stock inherited from the Soviet Union is worn out. New investment has been running at barely half of the replacement level. A huge market is thus developing for capital goods. The future of the Soviet economy will in all probability depend upon whether this demand is met by indigenous industry or imports.

Surprisingly, no one is suggesting, at least in print, that the scope for remonetising the economy and thus increasing demand without causing inflation is not exhausted and therefore that the Government should use its windfall tax revenues to pay off the remaining wage arrears and raise salaries and pensions above the subsistence level. In all likelihood, increasing Government expenditure will lead to faster growth without much additional inflationary pressure. It remains to be seen which way Mr. Putin will eventually lean.

(Concluded)

40-17  
29/10

# Putin... tightening grip



The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, at a meeting of the State Council... cracking down.

**T**HE RUSSIAN President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, is demonstrating growing determination to gather all reins of power into his hands and uproot the corrupt bureaucracy which has emerged in Russia during the ten-year-long rule of his predecessor, Mr. Boris Yeltsin. Just hours before voting booths opened in the Kursk region last weekend, a local court struck the Governor, Mr. Alexander Rutskoï, from the ballot and prevented him from running for re-election.

It is the first time in Russia's post-Soviet history that an incumbent regional leader was disqualified from elections. Mr. Rutskoï was found guilty of abusing office to gain an advantage in the race and falsely reporting his assets to the election commission. A former air force general and hero of the Afghan war, Mr. Rutskoï, served as Mr. Yeltsin's Vice-President in 1991-1993, then led a parliamentary revolt against Mr. Yeltsin in September-October 1993, which the president crushed with troops and tanks. After a brief imprisonment Mr. Rutskoï was granted an amnesty and was elected Governor of Kursk, his home province, in 1996. Since then he has become embroiled in numerous corruption scandals. His two brothers and top aides have been charged with fraud and embezzlement and he himself has come under investigation for buying a \$ 1-million flat in Moscow and appointing relatives to lucrative Government jobs.

Mr. Putin has denied any Kremlin involvement in Mr. Rutskoï's removal, but it is impossible to imagine a local court in Russia challenging an incumbent Governor without strong prodding from Moscow. By taking Mr. Rutskoï from the race the Kremlin sent a double message to regional Governors: do not try to build an opposition front to Mr. Putin's reforms and be more concerned with the national good than with stuffing one's pockets. In a further warning to regional bosses, police last week arrested a deputy head of the Smolensk Region accusing him of embezzlement and invited for questioning the Governor of Chukotka region, Mr. Alexander Nazarov, suspected of tax evasion and abuse of office.

Mr. Rutskoï was knocked off at a time when some Governors became more outspoken in their opposition to Mr. Putin's attempts to reimpose Moscow's control over the regions. Shortly after taking over as Russia's President in May, Mr. Putin installed his overlords to supervise the regions and steamrolled through Parliament Bills to strip Governors of their seats in the Upper House, the Federation Council, and of the immunity they enjoyed as legislators. Mr. Putin set up an advisory State Council comprising all regional bosses to compensate them for the loss of parliamentary seats, but they were unimpressed.

Last week, the Governors prepared to vote in the Upper House on a proposal to lodge a complaint with the country's apex judicial body, the Constitutional Court, against Mr. Putin's laws curbing their powers. The exemplary punishment of Mr. Rutskoï, a strong supporter of the move, discouraged other Governors from challenging the President.

The Kursk Governor became the first victim in Mr. Putin's campaign to remove scandalously corrupt, inept or disloyal regional bosses in the course of this fall's election campaign in half of Russia's 89 regions. The Kremlin chose to remove Mr. Rutskoï from the race because it feared that none of his rivals was strong enough to defeat the incumbent. In many other regions, the Centre feels no need to resort to such a drastic measure as its candidates are hot favourites to win the elections.

**Mr. Vladimir Putin needs political control over the regions to rebuild Russia's economy... But, his crackdown on regional leaders also helps eliminate any threats to his re-election, says VLADIMIR RADYUHIN.**

In some regions, the Kremlin has fielded candidates from the military and Federal Security Service, or FSB. They include the Commander of the 58th army and a Chechen war veteran, Lieutenant General Vladimir Shamanov in Ulyanovsk Region, Commander of the Baltic Fleet, Admiral Vladimir Yegorov, in Kaliningrad, Lieutenant General in the border troops Viktor Voitenko in Chita, General Teterin in the Republic of Mary-El, and FSB Generals Viktor Surzhikov in Kursk and Vladimir Kulakov in Voronezh. Most of them stand a good chance of coming on top because they are running in distress regions where popular discontent is high and their military background meets people's longing for strong leadership.

The election of disciplined military men as Governors will strengthen the hand of presidential envoys appointed by Mr. Putin to supervise the regions. Five out of seven envoys come from the ranks of the FSB, police and military. They preside over seven newly-formed federal districts which mirror Russia's seven military districts. Regional branches of law enforcement agencies have been made accountable to the envoys, and their control over the regions is expected to grow when they become responsible for disbursing federal subsidies.

Yet, the battle for control of the regions is far from over. Regional leaders, who used to rule their territories like feudal serfdoms during the presidency of Mr. Boris Yeltsin, are some of the most powerful political figures in Russia. They control local industry, natural resources and regional media and can still put up a formidable challenge to the Kremlin. But if the Kremlin wins the current round of gubernatorial elections, consolidated opposition from regional leaders will no longer be possible.

Mr. Putin needs political control over the regions in order to rebuild the economy devastated by ten years of Mr. Yeltsin's rule. It is a challenging job that will obviously take longer than the four-year presidential term Mr. Putin has ahead of him. So his crackdown on regional leaders also serves the purpose of eliminating a possible threat to his re-election in four years time.

THE HINDU

29 AUG 2000

# Russia bids farewell to Kursk victims

49-16  
30/10

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, Oct. 29. More bodies were recovered from the sunken Kursk submarine as Russian officials pledged to raise the ship and determine the cause of the disaster.

Russian and Norwegian divers recovered on Sunday several more bodies from the

Kursk lying on seabed in the Barents Sea at the depth of 108 metres, the Itar-Tass news reported.

The bodies were pulled out of the rear eighth and ninth compartments of the craft, where 23 people are known to have taken shelter after two powerful blasts sank the boat. Itar-Tass did not say how many bodies

had been recovered, but Russian television cited unofficial reports saying two bodies had been lifted. Four bodies retrieved earlier were flown Sunday to the Kursk's home port of Severomorsk, where a memorial service was held for 118 sailors who had died aboard the submarine.

Addressing the grieving relatives of the Kursk crew, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Ilya Klebanov, promised to establish the cause of the tragedy. "We cannot say today what exactly caused the submarine to sink, but we will find out the answer and the families of the crew will be the first to know," said Mr. Klebanov, who is in charge of investigation into the Kursk sinking. Mr. Klebanov said the remains of all the crew members would be recovered and the submarine itself would be raised from the floor of the Arctic sea.

Speaking at the memorial service, the Defence Minister, Marshal Igor Sergeev, asked forgiveness from the relatives of Kursk crew, which he called the best in the Russian submarine fleet. "The death of the Kursk crew is irreplaceable loss," the defence chief said. "It is essential to establish the cause of the catastrophe to avoid its repetition."

Meanwhile, the President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, attended a memorial service in Moscow on Sunday for victims of another catastrophe in the Russian armed forces that killed 83 people. On Wednesday night, a military transport aircraft with officers and their families returning from holidays to a Russian military base in Georgia, ploughed into a mountain killing all those on board. A day later, a civilian tow boat with 13 people on board disappeared off Russia's Far Eastern coast in stormy seas. Two bodies were later found on an inflatable escape raft.



A man lays flowers at a coffin of one of the 118 seamen, who were killed when the Russian nuclear submarine Kursk sank, as the coffin is transported atop an APC during a memorial service at the ship's home port of Severomorsk, on Sunday. — AP

THE HINDU

30 OCT 2000

140-16  
14/11

## Russia calls for halving of n-arsenal

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, NOV. 13.** Russia is mounting a new disarmament offensive, with the President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, proposing slashing the Russian and American nuclear arsenals by half.

Mr Putin called for cutting strategic nuclear warheads to 1,500 by the year 2008, down from the level of 3,000-3,500 warheads envisaged by the 1993 START-2 treaty.

"As is well known, we proposed to the United States, including at the highest level, to aim towards a radical reduction in nuclear warheads of our countries to 1,500, which is perfectly attainable by 2008," Mr. Putin said in a statement released by his press service on Monday. "But, this is not the limit. We are ready in the future to consider still lower levels."

The Russian proposal, announced on the eve of Mr. Putin's talks with the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, in Brunei later this week, is clearly designed to stake out Moscow's bargaining position ahead of a change of guard in the White House in January.

Mr. Putin reiterated Russia's opposition to the U.S. proposal to modify the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to enable Washington to build a strategic missile defence.

The proposed nuclear weapons cuts "should be carried out in conditions of preserving and strengthening the 1972 ABM Treaty," the Kremlin statement said.

The Russian leader on Monday embarked on a tour of Asia which will take him to Mongolia and an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Brunei.

THE HINDU

14 NOV 2000

# Come clean on *Kursk*: Russia to Nato

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE  
BRUSSELS, NOV 10

RUSSIA's military asked NATO states on Thursday to prove their claim that none of their submarines were responsible for the Kursk tragedy by allowing Russian officials to inspect their underwater vessels.

The head of Russia's armed services, Anatoly Kvashnin, said that, so far, none of the NATO members had responded to his request, made in a meeting with his NATO counterparts in the alliance's headquarters in Brussels.

"To remove doubts, we have asked that NATO member-countries show us some of their assets, even though they've said that none of their submersibles were in-

95-8  
11/11  
volved," he said. The Kursk nuclear submarine — one of the most modern in Russia's fleet — was sent to the Arctic sea-bed during navy exercises on August 12 after its bow was ripped apart in a still-unexplained explosion.

All 118 sailors aboard died in

## SUBMARINE TRAGEDY

the incident.

Moscow has favoured an explanation that a NATO submarine monitoring the exercises collided with the Kursk, and pointed out that three NATO submarines — two US and one British — were in the vicinity at the time.

On Wednesday, after Russian divers entered the Kursk to recover the bodies, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov said video-footage of the submarine suggested that the Kursk sank after a collision, but said a conclusion would not be made until the Kursk is brought to the surface in an operation set for the middle of next year.

Both the United States and Britain have vigorously denied that any of their craft were close enough to the Kursk to cause the accident.

In October, Britain recalled all 12 of its hunter-killer submarines for what the Defence Ministry said was an inspection system problem with the HMS Tireless, currently docked in Gibraltar.

### Sub's log found

MOSCOW: DIVERS have recovered the log of the doomed Kursk nuclear submarine and other documents that may help determine what sent the craft to the bottom of the Barents Sea, a top minister said on Thursday. Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov told RIA Novosti that the documents were recovered when Russian divers briefly entered the craft's fourth section before ending all work on the craft Tuesday. On Wednesday, Klebanov announced that investigators had come across new evidence suggesting that the Kursk sank after crashing into another submarine, presumably one belonging to either the US or Britain.

INDIAN EXPRESS

11 NOV 2000

59-14  
6711

# Putin overhauls defence exports

1

By Vladimir Radyuhin

**MOSCOW, NOV. 5.** The Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, has ordered an overhaul of Russia's defence exports system in a bid to streamline the arms trade and tighten his grip on this profitable business.

Presidential decrees released on Saturday call for the merger of the two State arms mediators, Rosvooruzheniye and Promexport, into a single company, Rosoboronexport (Russian Defence Exports). In another major change of policy, the new arms trade monopoly will be placed under the supervision of the Defence Ministry and taken away from the Ministry of Industry, Science and Technology.

Mr. Putin has appointed Mr. Andrei Belianinov, former deputy chief of Promexport, as head of Rosoboronexport and dismissed the heads of both Rosvooruzheniye and Promexport, appointed by the former Russian President, Mr. Boris Yeltsin. The move is seen as part of Mr. Putin's efforts to get rid of his predecessor's appointees in Government structures. Mr. Alexei Ogaryov, the sacked chief of Rosvooruzheniye, is believed to be a protege of Mr. Yeltsin's younger daughter, Ms. Tatyana Diachenko, who lobbied his appointment in spring 1999.

An online newspaper linked to the Kremlin said Mr. Yeltsin had personally telephoned Mr. Putin to ask him not to fire Mr. Ogaryov.

The latest shakeup of Russian defence exports effectively reverses Mr. Yeltsin's reform of 1997, when three State mediators were appointed to deal in three different spheres of arms trade: Rosvooruzheniye was to export new weapons, Promexport to sell from Defence Ministry stocks, and Rossiiskiye

Tekhnologii was made responsible for the sale of licences. However, the three kept stepping on each other's turf. The weaker Rossiiskiye Tekhnologii was quickly elbowed out of the business by its stronger rivals and devoured by Promexport earlier this year.

The decision to merge Rosvooruzheniye and Promexport was apparently prompted by fierce competition between the two companies which resulted in losses to the Russian budget. Media reports said, for instance, that Russia lost \$50 million on a \$170-million deal to sell India 40 Mi-17 helicopters because Promexport quoted a lower price to undercut an offer from Rosvooruzheniye earlier this year. Rosvooruzheniye has exported nearly \$3 billion worth of arms this year, against about \$300 for Promexport.

THE STATESMAN

6 NOV 2000

## Kursk search operation to end on Nov. 11 40-12

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, NOV. 4. The operation to recover bodies from the sunken Kursk submarine will continue for another week, a news agency said quoting the Russian naval chief as saying.

"The operation will be halted on Nov. 11, as envisaged by a contract with the Norway-based U.S. company Halliburton," Admiral Vladimir Kuroyedov told the Interfax news agency.

Russian and Norwegian divers have resumed work to cut into the fourth front section of the submarine after storms in the Barents Sea abated on Saturday night. Plans to enter the subma-

rine through a hole in the third section had been abandoned because of too great risks to divers from mangled debris.

Officials said all the 12 bodies raised from the eighth and ninth rear sections had been identified. Altogether, 118 men were killed when Russia's biggest nuclear submarine sank after two explosions ripped its nose open during naval games on August 12.

The recovery operation has so far failed to provide a clue about the cause of the explosions on board the Kursk, with proposed theories ranging from a collision with another vessel to a torpedo attack from a friendly ship taking

part in the exercises. The Russian Navy Chief on Friday reasserted his belief that a foreign submarine rammed into the Kursk, causing its stock of torpedoes to explode, the Interfax news agency reported.

"I have facts, but not enough evidence yet. But there will be evidence, it's just a matter of time," Admiral Kuroyedov said, adding mysteriously: "Evidence does not only lie on the seabed."

He also said a Russian cruiser had detected a foreign submarine close to the Kursk on Friday, suggesting the vessel could be attempting to remove some piece of evidence of the collision.

Britain and the United States have denied their submarines, spotted in the area during the war games, were involved, saying an experimental torpedo could have exploded on board the Kursk. A Russian mini-submarine that searched the seabed around the Kursk last month did not find any proof of collision.

Meanwhile, newspaper reports last week said the Kursk had been accidentally sunk by a Russian navy warship. Two Russian newspapers carried interviews with unidentified naval officers saying a missile fired from the Peter the Great cruiser hit the Kursk.

THE HINDU

5 NOV 2000