

Russia testfires 5th generation Topol-M missile

DADAN UPADHYAY
MOSCOW, DECEMBER 24

RUSSIA today successfully test-fired a 5th generation Topol-M Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) from a modern mobile launching pad at the Pleseck Cosmodrome, in the Arkhangelsk region.

The Topol-M missile, an improved version of its predecessor, the Topol missile, is expected to be deployed soon. Silo-based Topol-M systems are in service in the Russian Strategic Missile Forces. In the future, Topol-M missiles may be used both in silo and mobile systems.

The test-firing was carried out by the Strategic Missile Forces in cooperation with the Space Forces. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov and commander of the Strategic Missile Force, Gen. Nikolai Solovtsov witnessed the test-firing.

"The main objective of the test-firing of the Topol-M missile was to confirm the serviceability of the system, evaluate its tactical, technological and flying characteristics and measure the efficiency of the new design," the

press service of the Strategic Missile Forces reported.

"The test-firing of the Topol-M Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile from the mobile launcher, was carried out under the Strategic Missile Forces' joint test plan," it said. "The pre-launch operations, the launch and the flight was carried out strictly under the set programme," it added.

The first RS-12M Topol-M ICBMs (SS-X27 under NATO classification) were phased into service in 1997. Four missile regiments with Topol-M systems have already been put on combat duty. According to official data, each of them has six to 10 ICBMs. With its warhead, the Topol-M missile is 22.7 m long, has a 1.95 m diameter, a 47.2 metric ton launch weight, a 1.2 metric ton payload and a range of more than 10,000 km.

The missile's three engines enable it to move at a greater speed than the previous versions of the missile. The several dozen auxiliary engines and control equipment that control the missile's trajectory also make its flight path difficult to track.

West isolating Russia: Putin

29/12 Rummia S.F.J.
Associated Press

MOSCOW, Dec. 23. — President Vladimir Putin today said that he valued the partnership of President Bush, but voiced suspicion that the USA might be behind “efforts to isolate” Russia.

With Russia already feeling hemmed in by US bases in formerly Soviet Central Asia and US military trainers in Georgia, Mr Putin has taken issue with Western and particularly US activism in Ukraine, where the presidential election that sparked a weeks-long crisis goes into a third round this weekend.

His emotions came boiling to the surface at a three-hour Kremlin news conference, during which he took questions from 51 journalists.

Mr Putin was asked for a reaction to an interview in which Polish President Mr Aleksander Kwasniewski said that “for every superpower, Russia without Ukraine is better than Russia with Ukraine.” “If we interpret this (statement by Kwasniewski) as

striving to limit Russia’s ability to develop relations with its neighbours, then it means a desire to isolate the Russian Federation,” Mr Putin said.

“I don’t think that is the goal of U.S. policy,” he said, but added he would ask Bush about it when they meet in Slovakia in February. Mr Putin then blamed the USA, for their policy on Chechnya “aimed at creating elements that would destabilise the Russian Federation.” The comments were in line with Mr Putin’s increasingly combative attitude toward the West and especially the USA. The Kremlin is convinced that the USA is behind a campaign to install Ukraine’s pro-Western Opposition leader Mr Viktor Yushchenko at the helm of the nation Russia has always regarded as its main satellite.

Analysts close to the Kremlin have accused Poland of working in Ukraine at the behest of the USA. President Kwasniewski today told reporters in Warsaw that Mr Putin’s remarks were unfair.

24 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

Left party to fight Putin power

Fred Weir

Moscow, November 13

RUSSIA'S ONCE-MIGHTY Communist Party (KPRF), plagued by internal strife and facing electoral extinction, has embraced a surprising late-life mission — to champion democracy against the encroachments of an increasingly authoritarian Kremlin.

"We are ready to work with all who support multi-party politics, human rights and civic freedoms," says Vladimir Kashin, deputy chair of the party and member of its dwindling parliamentary caucus. "The Communist Party is the only organised force in Russia still able to stand up for peoples' power."

President Vladimir Putin, who enjoys vast constitutional powers and an obedient two-thirds majority in Russia's 450-seat State Duma, has introduced sweeping measures in recent months to eliminate elec-

tions for regional governors, crack down on independent civil society groups and ensure that only big Moscow-based parties can run for parliament.

A new law put before the Duma last week will condemn many small regional parties to oblivion by requiring any party to have a minimum of 50,000 members in over half of Russia's 89 provinces before it can participate in elections.

Only the KPRF, with its disciplined bloc of 50 Duma deputies, has voted consistently against these measures. Over the summer the Communists joined with liberal groups to mount street demonstrations against Putin's latest round of reforms, which cancelled health and housing benefits for war veterans. "The Communists aren't an ideal instrument for defending democracy, but they're all we have right now," says Vladimir Pribylovsky, president of Panorama, an independ-

ent think tank. "And I must admit that they're getting better at it."

The party founded by Vladimir Lenin in a smoke-filled London meeting hall a century ago has enjoyed far greater historical success and a much longer lifespan than many would have predicted.

For seven decades after the Russian Revolution of 1917 it ruled the world's largest country, and built a totally state-run economy and ideologically-ordered society. Though the system ultimately failed, the Communists at their peak commanded a mighty superpower that won converts worldwide and challenged the capitalist West for global supremacy. Putin has undermined the KPRF's appeal by stealing its thunder: The Kremlin has imposed tough law-and-order, prosecuted wealthy oligarchs, reinstated old Soviet symbols and is trying to forge an economic union with ex-Soviet neighbours Belarus and Ukraine.

14 NOV 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Basayev owns up for Beslan siege

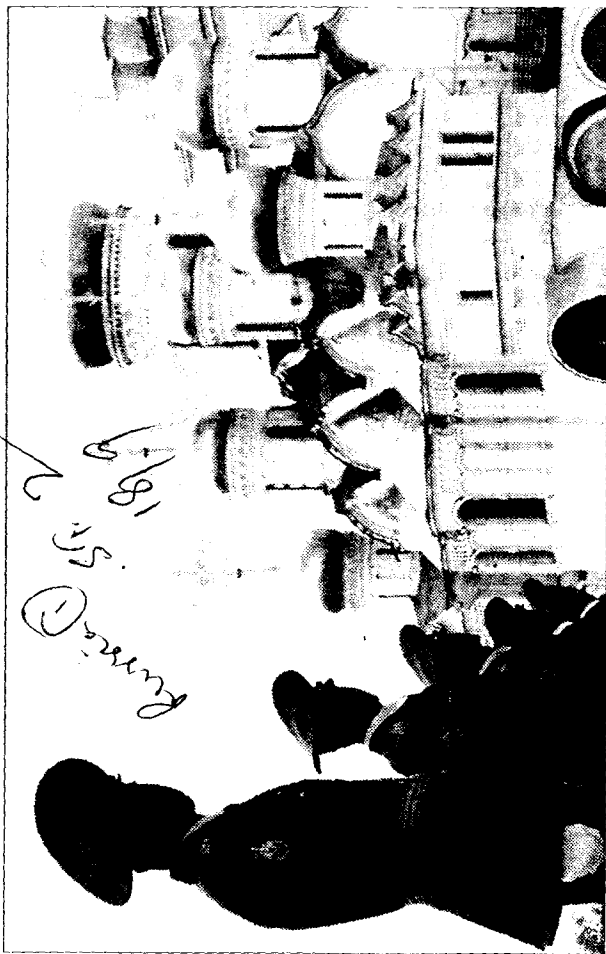
The Times, London

MOSCOW, Sept. 17. — Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev claimed responsibility for the Beslan school siege today, but said he regretted its bloody conclusion, which he blamed on President Vladimir Putin.

In a statement on the rebel website, www.kavkazcenter.com, Basayev said his brigade was behind the Beslan siege, the downing of two Russian airliners and the bomb attacks in Moscow in the last month, causing the biggest political crisis of Mr Putin's presidency.

"They (Russian forces) are fighting us without any rules, with the direct connivance of the whole world, and we are not bound by any circumstances or by anybody, and will fight by our rules, as is comfortable and beneficial for us," he wrote in an e-mail signed with his nom de guerre, Abdallah Shamil.

"We regret what hap-



BATTLE STATIONS: Russian soldiers from the Presidential regiment stand in front of the Kremlin during a ceremonial showing on Friday. — AFP

pened in Beslan. It's simply that the war, which Putin declared on us five years ago, which has destroyed more than 40,000 Chechen children and crippled more than 5,000 of them, has gone back to where it started

from," he said. Mr Putin made no direct response to the statement.

Although impossible to authenticate, Basayev's statement corroborated the Kremlin's claim that he was behind the school siege, in which almost 340

people died, half of them children. But the statement also challenged the Kremlin's account of what happened at the school and its attempts to portray the conflict with Chechen separatists as part of the global war on terror.

Russia preparing for action: Putin

MOSCOW, Sept. 17. — President Vladimir Putin today said Russia was seriously preparing for preventive actions against terrorists, the Interfax news agency reported.

Mr Putin told a meeting of world mayors in Moscow that "now in Russia we are seriously preparing to act preventively against terrorists".

Defence minister Mr Sergei Ivanov has threatened preventive strikes against terrorists abroad, and it was not immediately clear whether Mr Putin was referring to actions only at home or abroad, too.

The Russian President said the steps would be "in strict accordance with the law and norms of the Constitution, relying on international law".

Recalling the attempts to appease Nazi dictator



Mr Putin: It's war on terror

Adolf Hitler in the 1930s, Mr Putin said there could be no "bargaining" with terrorists. "Every concession leads to a widening of their demands and multiplies the losses."

Mr Putin said Russia had long tried to warn the rest of the world of the danger of terrorism, and that even today, it confronted double standards that hurt the anti-terrorist campaign. — AP

Putin beefs up Kremlin power to fight terror

Fred Weir
Moscow, September 13

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR Putin on Monday announced sweeping measures to create a single Russian security force and beef up Kremlin power in Russia's far-flung regions, as part of a national strategy against terrorism.

The proposed changes include effective Kremlin appointment of Russia's 89 regional governors, who are currently elected. Reforms to the State Duma, the lower house of parliament, will eliminate local constituency races in favour of election by national party lists. Half of the Duma's 450 seats are currently filled by constituency contests, which tend to send more independent deputies to parliament.

Critics are already denouncing the plan as "anti-democratic" but Putin said the dramatic increase in Kremlin authority is necessary because "the organisers of terror attacks are aiming at the disintegration of the state, the breakup of Russia".

Putin added that Russia's security forces would be amalgamated and placed under consolidated leadership. "We need a single organisation capable of not only dealing with terror attacks but also working to avert them, destroy criminals in their hideouts, and if necessary, abroad," Putin said.

Experts have pointed out that the threat to strike overseas enemies lacks teeth. Russia possesses nothing like the US armed forces' vast airlift capability; its ar-



A shopkeeper watches a TV broadcast of President Vladimir Putin during a meeting of the Russian Cabinet in Moscow on Monday.

senal contains no weapon comparable to the American Tomahawk cruise missile, and Russia's only aircraft carrier, the Kuznetsov, never sails far from its Arctic home port.

"Putin's claims are just words," says Alexander Goltz, an independent security expert. "Our army is not able to move military units freely around Russia, much less abroad."

The Russian armed forces

will acquire just 14 new tanks next year, he says, which is a huge improvement over previous post-Soviet years, which saw almost zero procurement.

"We have no modern weapons in serial production, and recent increases in the defence budget have been swallowed up by our military-industrial complex with no visible results," he says.

Earlier, Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov said Russia

will cooperate more closely with the US in the war on terror. "We have talked twice with (US Defence Secretary Donald) Rumsfeld recently," he said. "It is easier for us to find grounds for understanding with the US than with some European countries."

Russia was angered recently when leaders of Holland and France asked for an "explanation" of what happened at the school siege

in Beslan, North Ossetia, where 330 people died after security forces and terrorists fought a 10-hour gunbattle.

"Our political elite feels close to the administration of George W. Bush because they don't ask any questions about what's going on in Russia's domestic policy," says Goltz. But substantial cooperation in the global war on terror is hindered by continuing Cold War suspicions, he adds.

Caucasus conflict cauldron sizzles

Agencies
Moscow, September 13

FEARS ARE growing in the North Caucasus that the Beslan school siege is close to re-igniting a decades-old ethnic conflict in the volatile region.

Russian media reports say people from neighbouring Chechnya and Ingushetia have begun leaving North Ossetia, fearing reprisals over the tragedy.

Some Beslan residents say they want revenge, seizing on reports that there were Ingush among the hostage-takers.

A local official said several had asked for the hostage-takers' addresses.

Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper quoted the official as saying that many people had contacts in the local administration and it was possible that such information had already changed hands. "Relatives... are standing there with their rifles and are ready to go to take revenge," the official said.

Beslan resident Irina Parfiyeva told the *Moscow Times*: "We have fought



An Ossetian policeman with a sniffer dog searches a classroom in a school in Beslan on Monday.

the Ingush with weapons in our hands. Today, our men are ready to go after them once again."

A territorial dispute between mostly Christian North Ossetia and Muslim Ingushetia led to fighting in 1992. Experts say a new conflict could further destabilise the North Caucasus.

There are reports that some ethnic Ingush in North Ossetia are now afraid to send their children to schools and other public places, fearing retaliatory

attacks. Some Ossetians have already started asking strangers questions to check who they are, reports say. The radio station Ekho Moskvyy reported quoting listeners in the region that some Ingush families had begun fleeing North Ossetia on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Ossetian student Alan Khadikov said all Ingush and Chechen students from the university in the North Ossetian capital Vladikavkaz had been sent out of the region.

Russia threatens strikes on terror bases

Agencies

MOSCOW, Sept. 8. — Russia today threatened to launch pre-emptive strikes on terrorist bases anywhere in the world as it announced a reward of \$10 million for information that could help “neutralise” renegade Chechen warlords Aslan Maskhadov and Shamil Basayev, said to be the masterminds behind the Beslan school carnage.

The announcements came hours after a chilling video from inside the school seized by the masked gunmen last week was broadcast on television, providing first hand glimpse of horror with hundreds of people huddled in the gymnasium.

“We will take any action to eliminate terrorist bases in any region of the world. But this does not mean we will carry out nuclear strikes,” Russia’s Chief of Staff General Yuri Baluyevski said.

He said Russia’s action would be determined by the concrete situation wherever it may be in the world. “Military action is the last resort in the fight against terrorism.”

Pointing out the involvement of Basayev and Maskhadov in the bloodiest terror attack in the country that claimed over 330 lives, Russian security service FSB offered a \$10



Chechen warlords Shamil Basayev (top) and Aslan Maskhadov

million (300 million roubles) reward to those providing “reliable information” about the two Chechen war-

12 hostage-takers identified

MOSCOW, Sept. 8. — Twelve of the Beslan school hostage-takers have been identified, a senior Russian official said today, quoted by Interfax. “We have established the identities of 12 of the bandits who took part in the attack on school number one in Beslan,” deputy state prosecutor Mr Sergei Fridinsky said. He said some of those identified were also known to have taken part in attacks in North Ossetia and Ingushetia in June that left dozens dead. — AFP

lords “leading to the neutralisation of these people.” “Shamil Basayev and Aslan Maskhadov have committed inhuman terrorist acts on the territory of the Russian Federation resulting in irreplenishable losses,” an FSB release said.

Govt promise

North Ossetia President Alexander Dzasokhov today promised his government would step down amid criticism for its handling of the Beslan school hostage siege.

China announces aid

Chinese President Mr Hu Jintao today condemned the recent terror attacks in Russia as “atrocious terrorist acts” and announced material aid worth \$1.2 million to the victims.

Russia warns West not to meddle in Chechnya

Moscow, Sept. 9 (Reuters): Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov warned the West not to meddle with Russia's Chechnya policy today in the wake of a bloody hostage crisis, highlighting a growing rift over the issue between former Cold War foes.

He said, in a reference to British and US offers of asylum to spokesmen for Chechen rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov, that the West was directly interfering in an internal issue. "When our western partners say we should re-examine our policy, what you call our tactics I would advise them not to interfere in our Russian internal affairs," he said. "Some try to interfere by offering political asylum to terrorists who are directly linked to the Chechen tragedy."

At least 326 hostages — half of them children — died in last Friday's chaotic storming of School No. 1 in Beslan, southern Russia, after it was seized by gunmen demanding Chechen independence. Another 356 are still in hospital.

Russia blames Maskhadov and warlord Shamil Basayev for Beslan and other Chechen-related violence and links them to groups who conducted attacks such as the September 11, 2001, strikes on US cities and the Madrid train bombing in March this year.

President Vladimir Putin has promised to investigate the hostage raid properly. Today, Alexander Dzasokhov

— the president of North Ossetia, where the hostage drama took place — sacked his government, Russian news agencies reported. Though the EU and the US have been quick to condemn the latest string of violence, they have infuriated Moscow by pressing it to deal with the root causes and address the grievances of the Chechen people.

Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet President when the Chechnya crisis started, also called today for talks with the rebels. Putin, speaking after the hostage drama, said the demands for the Kremlin to negotiate with separatist rebels were akin to inviting Osama bin Laden to the White House for dialogue.

Russia has instead sought

to end Chechen demands for independence by force of arms, fighting two wars there since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 saw long-suppressed ethnic and national tensions boil over into violence. "This policy is supported by the Chechen people which voted in a referendum for a constitution to keep the Chechen people in the Russia Federation," said Lavrov.

Defence minister Sergei Ivanov, a close Putin ally, today repeated threats to stage pre-emptive strikes on militant bases outside Russia, Russian news agencies said.

Today was the fifth anniversary of a midnight bomb blast which destroyed an apartment block in Moscow, killing nearly 100 people.

Rebel prize on Putin head

Moscow, Sept. 9 (Reuters): Chechen rebels, in a swift reply to a Russian bounty offer for their leaders, promised today to give \$20 million to anyone helping them to capture President Vladimir Putin.

Yesterday, the government offered \$10 million for information that would help track down the two main Chechen leaders. "We offer an award of \$20 million to countries or individuals who give the Chechen republic help in detaining war criminal Vladimir Putin," said a statement on rebel websites.



Grieving residents of Beslan comfort each other in the destroyed school gymnasium. (AFP)

'Hostages' parents first launched attack'

Agencies
Moscow, September 6

THE ASSAULT on the seized school building in the south Russian town of Beslan was launched by furious parents and relatives even as the Kremlin had no plans to use force to seek the release of over 1000 hostages, local media on Monday reported.

"It seems that personnel of local riot police, flying squads — fathers of hostage children and volunteers manning the security cordon and bystanders launched the assault," an unnamed federal security officer was quoted as saying by *Izvestia* daily.

Giving details of the bloody end to the 52-hour long siege, an *Izvestia* correspondent, who was on the spot, said no explosion was heard in the beginning.

"It all began with firing of few shots turning into intensive firing, only a minute later an explosion was heard," *Izvestia* writes.

The firing was most probably started by the local volunteers manning the security cordon, which included parents and relatives serving in the local police and law enforcement bodies, it reported. Russian anti-terror experts share the opinion that it was impossible to avoid casualties, as the assault was spontaneous, provoked by hostage takers and turned into an ordinary street gunbattle.

According to another daily *Vremya Novostey* at the time of the beginning of the assault on the fateful Friday the crack FSB commando teams "Alpha" and "Vympel" had not even defined the sectors of responsibility as there were no plans for use of force.

"Alpha" commando team, famous for killing the unpopular Afghan President Hafizulla Amin after capturing his highly fortified palace in Kabul 1970s, could join the assault only 30 minutes later, as they were assigned a different task.

"Due to unplanned and spontaneous assault 'Alpha' and 'Vympel' suffered the



IN MEMORIAM A girl weeps while laying flowers for Beslan victims outside the sieged school on Monday.

largest ever casualties since their founding in early 1970s," *Vremya Novostey* reported quoting an officer of the FSB — the successor of ex-Soviet KGB.

Quoting FSB sources *Kommersant* daily reported that three commandos of 'Alpha' and 7 of 'Vympel' died in the security operation and up to 31 were wounded, an unprecedented high loss of life in the special anti-terror teams.

Meanwhile, the editor of *Izvestia* stepped down on Monday, in what he and media analysts linked to the paper's critical coverage of the Russian authorities' handling of the school seizure.

Putin should share blame for tragedy: Russian media

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin and his government were accused by the country's press today of failing to acknowledge their own responsibility in the deaths of hundreds of children and adults in the Beslan school siege.

Blaming such events on international terrorism, as the Kremlin has done, "allows governments all over the world not to assume their responsibilities for the deaths of their citizens", said the daily *Kommersant*.

"It's as if all the children did not die because of a war in Chechnya

that has been going on for 10 years, but because international terrorism has been on the attack," the business daily added.

In an address to the nation on Saturday after the three-day siege ended in carnage, Putin recognised that Russia had shown "weakness" in the face of the threat presented by "international terrorism".

He even drew a link between the hostage-taking, which left at least 335 children and adults dead, according to an official toll, and the breakup of the Soviet Union.

The speech was remarkable for not referring once to Chechnya, the war-torn republic whose instability is seen as the root cause of the nightmare sequence of terror attacks to have hit Russia in the past two weeks, also including the downing of two passenger planes and a suicide car bombing.

The President made only general references to the risk of war northern Caucasus region, preferring to let repeated references to "terrorism" speak for themselves.

AFP, Moscow

Chechen leader planned to kill Blair, attack UK

Press Trust of India
London/Moscow, Sept 6

THE CHECHEN warlord behind the Russian school bloodbath had plotted to kill British Prime Minister Tony Blair and is planning new attacks on British soil, said a media report.

Chechen militants, led by Shamil Basayev, targeted Blair for assassination during Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee in 2002 — a plot that could also have killed the Queen, Prince Charles and his sons William and Harry, *The Sunday Express* said quoting security sources.

Counter-terrorism chiefs have identified an international school in London as a "source of concern".

According to the report, it is a likely target because of the large number of wealthy Russian students who study there.

The security chiefs also believe that the savage slaughter at Beslan is evidence that Basayev is now frustrated and "out of control" and is a major threat to soft targets in Britain.

The "credible" threat to Blair led to a massive increase in security before the royal celebrations in June 2002. However, the Chechen link to the terror threat had been secret until now.

British security chiefs are also preparing a new warning for airport security chiefs that will highlight the potential danger posed by female suicide bombers who use Muslim dress to avoid detection.

This follows the downing of Russian airliners by Chechen "black widow" terrorists last week.



REUTERS
Relatives cry during the funeral of a 15-year-old hostage in Beslan on Monday.

Missing chopper

A Russian military helicopter with a three-man crew on board has gone missing on its way from the restive southern province of Chechnya, said Interfax news agency on Monday, Reuters adds.

Interfax quoted a military source in Chechnya as saying the Interior Ministry helicopter disappeared on Sunday evening on its way from the Khankala military base near the Chechen capital Grozny to the neighbouring region of Ingushetia.

The source said a search operation had so far found nothing. Military helicopters are frequent targets of Chechen separatist rebels.

More than 300 people, half of them children, died in a hostage drama blamed on Chechen rebels last week in the neighbouring province of North Ossetia.

Russia says it underplayed school crisis

SUSAN B. GLASSER & PETER FINN
MOSCOW, SEPTEMBER 6

THE Russian government admitted yesterday that it lied to its people about the scale of the hostage crisis that ended with more than 300 children, parents and teachers dead in southern Russia, making an extraordinary admission through state television after days of withering criticism from citizens.

As the bereaved families of Beslan began to lay loved ones to rest, the Kremlin-controlled Rossiya network aired gripping, gruesome footage it had withheld from the public for days and said government officials had deliberately deceived the world about the number of hostages inside School No. 1.

"At such moments," anchor Sergei Brilyov declared, "society needs the truth." The admission of an effort to minimise the magnitude of a hostage crisis that ensnared about 1,200 people—most of them children—marked a sharp turnaround for the government of President Vladimir Putin.

"It doesn't suit our President," a Kremlin political consultant, Gleb Pavlovsky, said on the show. "Lies, which really acted in the terrorists' favour, did not suit him at all. Lies were weakening us and making the terrorists more violent."

The broadcast included no apology and referred only to the

most blatant misstatement by officials, the claim that 354 hostages were inside the school.

It did not acknowledge the hostage takers had demanded an end to the war in Chechnya or that the government continues to give conflicting information about whether any of the guerrillas remain at large, who they were and how many were killed.

Nor did it mention that many residents of Beslan have been outraged that the government now appears to be understating the death toll, which stood officially at 338 Sunday night at

though nearly 200 people are still unaccounted for.

As for the hostage-takers, Deputy Prosecutor General Sergei Fridinsky said authoritatively on Saturday there were 26 of them, and all had been killed.

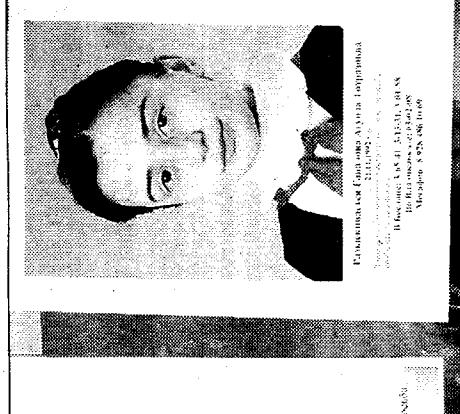
Yesterday, Fridinsky said there were 32–30 of them dead—and bragged about the capture of one "member of the gang" to be charged in court today. Two days after the President vowed in a televised address to take unspecified new security measures in response to the killing of "defenceless children,"

the Kremlin was silent on what those steps would be.

Sergei Markov, a political analyst close to the Kremlin, said it had been clear that the government had engaged in a clumsy cover-up. "Everybody understands they are lying," he said. "Everybody can do the math and know there were more than 1,000 people inside the school."

Pavlovsky said Putin had given Russia's political system "a no-confidence vote" for its handling of the crisis.

Such statements could never be aired unless the Kremlin di-



A child reaches out to touch the glass displaying pictures of still missing hostages in Beslan, North Ossetia on Monday. (Top) A video frame taken from Russia's Channel One television shows a member of a Chechen rebel group. Reuters

Chechen warlord targets Britain: Report

LONDON: The Chechen warlord responsible for the Russian school bloodbath had plotted to kill British Prime Minister Tony Blair and is planning new attacks on British soil, a media report said on Monday. Chechen militants, led by Shamil Basayev, targeted Blair for assassination during the Queen's golden jubilee in 2002—a plot that could also have killed the Queen, Prince Charles and his sons William and Harry, the *Sunday Express* said quoting security sources. Counter-terrorism chiefs have identified an international school in London as a "source of concern". According to the report, it is a likely target because of the number of wealthy Russian students who study there. —PTI

teachers and parents." At the Beslan House of Culture, a gathering point for families throughout the crisis, volunteers taking names said the list of missing stood at 190 as of Sunday afternoon.

Many families have left not only names but snapshots, such as one of a little girl celebrating New Year's wearing a snow princess dress and surrounded by boys in white rabbit costumes.

All along Beslan's Pervomaiskaya (1st of May) Street, they were burying the dead yesterday. —LATWP

One day that shook Russia

Beslan is Russia's 9/11: It will change the world, writes WILLIAM REES-MOGG

IN the past three years, the world has been adjusting to the consequences of 9/11. That one event has dominated American politics and policy. It has divided the Nato alliance, with France and Germany taking one line and the USA and Britain another. In both the USA and Britain, it has been the central issue of political debate. It has been a major influence on the increasingly unstable world market for oil. It has been the crucial event in the growth of Islamic terrorism.

On the day of 9/11, I was asked to write a short piece reacting to the event. I thought that the nearest to a comparable date was 7 December 1941, the day of Pearl Harbour, 60 years before. The American people responded to that with an absolute determination to destroy the power which had attacked them. They have done so again. President Roosevelt called it "a date which will live in infamy". The consequences included the dropping of the first nuclear bomb on Hiroshima; in many ways they persist in influencing the present.

Many other people saw 9/11 in the same way. Like Pearl Harbour or the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, 9/11 was one of the days which changed the world. Now we have to ask whether the hostage-taking of the schoolchildren of Beslan on 1 September 2004, the 65th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, was another of these historic tragedies. In Russia, at least, that is how it has already been understood.

Beslan is for the Russians another terrible event which changes everything. It changes many of the major factors of world relations, the future of Russia itself, including the future of the Putin presidency, the war against terrorism, including both Russian and Western relations with Islam, the response to nuclear proliferation, the basic relationship between Russia, Europe and the USA, the probable outcome of the American election and possibly even of the next British election, the future of the world oil market, the future of West Asia, and particularly of Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia, even the economic development of the emerging superpower, China.

Beslan is what strategists call "a low-probability, high-impact event". Potentially it changes everything. One must not underestimate the sheer impact of the horror of the event itself. It is something people find very hard to contemplate. The people who planned this massacre are every bit as evil as the SS men who ran Auschwitz. There is a blank horror about what they did to young children which



A woman breaks down as she lays flowers in front of the representative office of North Ossetia in Moscow. — AFP

fortunately has few parallels in the history of evil. It is important to hold onto that because the world's sense of horror will influence everything that will follow. A certain degree of wickedness is never forgotten or forgiven, whatever its motive or political justification.

One can however start by asking some practical questions, issues which are of unavoidable and therefore of legitimate concern. How, for instance, might Beslan affect Russian or Arab oil supplies, on which the world economy depends? That is not a cynical question. The oil inflation of the '70s destroyed two or three US presidents, a German chancellor, a French president, a couple of prime ministers in Britain, and even contributed to the defeat of the Gang of Four in China and fatally undermined the Soviet Union's Brezhnev regime. It damaged the world economy and grossly impoverished the Third World. Such far-reaching events require analysis.

In the past decade, oil prices were surprisingly low; that led to under-investment in the development of new supplies, while the rapid growth of the Chinese economy increased global demand beyond all market projections. At the same time, the growing Russian oil supplies were stolen by the oligarchs or kleptocrats of the Yeltsin era; the present Russian government — quite reasonably — wants to recover Russia's oil from the men who sold it to themselves, at knockdown prices, in the '90s.

The world oil market now largely centres on four countries, all of which lie on the fault-line of Islamic terrorism: Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. Osama bin Laden, the Al-Qaida leader, comes out of the Saudi oil industry. His family culture is that of an Islamic oil man. The US President, George Bush, has himself had experience in the oil industry and was Governor of Texas, the leading oil state. Both men know that terrorism's strongest weapon is the potential ability to disrupt global oil supplies. The oil element in the war on terrorism is not a cynical American ploy; oil is the economic base of the war, and that is well understood by both sides.

The men who planned Beslan want to destabilise Russia, and particularly to undermine President Putin, whom they see as their most formidable Russian enemy. That is true whether the terror was planned by Chechen nationalists or by Islamic radicals, or by some mixture of the two. The Beslan siege has indeed had some initial effect in destabilising Russia and weakening Putin. Yet, I expect that he will survive this crisis, for the same reason that Beslan may be helping to re-elect Bush. Democracies do not like war, but when they are engaged in a war, they tend to back the strongest leaders, such as Lloyd George in 1916, Churchill and Roosevelt in 1940, De Gaulle in 1958, or Ariel Sharon repeatedly in Israel.

The Western nations have an overriding interest in the economic and political stability of Russia — though after 175 years of blood, the Chechen problem will be at least as difficult to solve as those of Ireland or Cyprus. Beslan has reinforced the American understanding that it is at war, and is indeed under direct threat. Bush is their war leader, even if American voters might prefer John Kerry's domestic policies. Putin is an authority figure; he is the toughest Russian leader since the end of the Soviet Union. That may be what the Russians need; it is almost certainly what they prefer.

After oil, there is the issue of nuclear proliferation. Whoever is elected US President — and it will probably now be Bush — Iran will have nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles inside the next term of office, perhaps by the end of 2005. No one knows how to prevent that. The basic choices of policy are to do nothing, to apply political pressure, to impose economic sanctions or to use military force. It is certain that Bush would go higher up this scale of response than Kerry. The Cheney-Rumsfeld team, though, might be willing to go the whole way. Putin has

more reason to accept a strong line with Iran than he had before. Iran is involved in most of the terrorist plots in West Asia, and plays a big part in keeping Iraq destabilised. Russia has been committed by Beslan to the war against terrorism, and Iran is on the side of the enemy.

What about China? There was an interesting clue in the coverage of Beslan on CCTV-9, China's world television news service. The hostage-takers were called "separatist rebels". China does not support "separatist rebels" in China or anywhere else. Islamic terrorism seems to be a loose network; I doubt if there can be any central strategic controller. There is a strategic idea of uniting radical Islam against the non-Islamic world. Yet, such a strategy also makes the rest of the world more united against the terrorists.

Strategically, Beslan pushes Russia, which is a major power and a nuclear one, towards working with the USA against terrorism and in West Asia. China and India have similar motives and a similar fear of terrorism. Europe remains as doubtful as ever, but becomes less important. Objectively, as the Marxists used to say, the Chechen separatists have strengthened Bush; they have pushed Russia towards supporting his policy and they have helped him to win re-election.

— *The Times, London.*

7 SEP 2004

Numbered Russia buries its dead, toll climbs

Russia 17-15 69

Agence France-Presse
Beslan, September 5

MOTHERS WITH tears flowing down their faces and men trying hard to hide their emotions buried their children and relatives as the death toll from Russia's worst ever hostage crisis climbed towards 400.

Dozens of well wishers laid red carnations and bottles of water at the wreckage of School Number One, its charred remains a haunting memory to a three-day standoff that ended with some of the most violent scenes in modern Russian history. The water bottles were a stark symbol of how the children were left without water or food by captors who were demanding independence for separatist Chechnya.

"Why? What for? What for?" wept one woman over one of two coffins set under a blue tarp in a courtyard in this town of 40,000, where seemingly everyone knew someone who was affected by the attacks.

Under overcast skies, the men stood silently on the sidelines according to tradition and prepared huge pots over a wood fire for the solemn post-burial meal.

Some 22 people were to be laid to rest on Sunday and the Patriarch of Russia's Or-



Fatima Tetova, mother of Irina (13) and Alina (12), cries during their funeral in Beslan on Sunday. (Right) Relatives of 11-year-old Alina Khubetseva at her funeral.



REUTERS

thodox church, Alexy II, asked that a mass be held in every church across the country to remember the victims of the siege.

Toll figures continued to swing wildly, with the official toll standing at 338 people, with more than 400 others in hospital. But one worker at a main morgue in the region

said that nearly 400 bodies have already come in.

"As of yesterday, we have tagged 394," said Vita, a medical worker at the Vladikavkaz morgue. "Some of the bodies are so mutilated the relatives can't recognise them, so we are taking samples of hair and blood," she said.

Amid a wave of attacks linked to Chechnya that have now killed hundreds in just over a week, President Vladimir Putin — who rose to power on a law and order ticket — vowed before the nation to toughen up security and admitted to some "weakness" in the past.

Addressing the nation on

television a day after the school hostage-taking in southern Russia ended in carnage, Putin admitted failings by law enforcement agencies and said he would act to bolster the country's security.

"We have shown weakness in the face of danger and the weak get beaten up," said Putin, who had flown earlier

to Beslan. A shaken Putin admitted Russian weakness in the face of an "all-out war" by terrorists. He said Russians must mobilise against terrorism and promised wide-ranging reforms to toughen security forces and purge corruption.

"We have not paid due attention to defence and secu-

rity issues. We will, in the near future, take steps aimed at strengthening the unity of the country," he said in the 10-minute address shown on both state television channels on Saturday evening.

The interior minister of North Ossetia resigned within hours of Putin's comments.

Putin, who despite tough talk and nearly five years of conflict in Chechnya has failed to rein in separatist rebels or stop a spate of attacks across Russia, faces the most serious challenge of his four-and-a-half-year presidency with the horrific end to the hostage-taking.

He, however, made no direct reference to Chechnya in his 10-minute address.

Anxious relatives were scouring lists of names, desperately searching for their loved ones still missing after the chaos and bloodshed. The three-day hostage drama ended in nightmarish scenes described by the press as the "worst possible scenario".

Responding to the international anger and horror at the carnage, Putin said the special forces who had been amassed outside the school had not intended to storm the building. But events had "unfolded very rapidly and unexpectedly."

Beslan school to be turned into memorial

Press Trust of India
Moscow, September 5

THE SCHOOL in the southern Russian city of Beslan where over 330 people, mostly children, died as a result of the hostage crisis would be turned into a memorial.

The building would be turned into a memorial and a new school "will be shortly built at a different site," North Ossetian government spokesman LevDzugayev told Russia TV channel.

After clearing of mines and booby traps planted by the terrorists, the devastated school building was opened today for the relatives to pay homage to their loved ones. The school's 74-year-old PT teacher Yannis Kanidis was shot dead when he tried to persuade militants not to trigger the bombs inside the gym, ITAR-TASS reported.

Terror strikes in Russia

By Vladimir Radyuhin

The immediate goal of the Beslan raid was to spread violence beyond Chechnya and set Russia's entire North Caucasus on fire.

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AN UNPRECEDENTED wave of terrorist attacks in Russia that climaxed in the bloody school hostage drama in the southern town of Beslan last week has signalled a quantum jump in Chechnya-related violence. While in the past terrorism was linked to and fuelled by Chechen separatism, today it draws its strength from international terror networks.

The sheer scale and coordination of the latest terror strikes demonstrated a level of planning and execution Chechen rebels never showed before. Within the space of one week militants coordinated a series of attacks against civilian targets outside Chechnya. On August 24 two Russian airliners were brought down by bomb blasts killing 90 passengers and crew. The explosives were apparently carried on board by female suicide bombers of Chechen origin and detonated within nine seconds of each other, as was registered by flight recorders. Days later another suicide bomber detonated 2 kg of explosives outside a Moscow metro station, killing 11 and wounding over 50 people. The next day an armed group attacked a school in southern Russia and took hostage over 1000 children, their parents and teachers.

The gang that captured the school displayed unheard-of ferocity. It is for the first time that Chechen rebels targeted children. It is also for the first time that they started killing hostages when no force was used against them. The 52-hour siege ended in a carnage on Friday when terrorists blew up the mined gymnasium where most of the hostages were held and tried to break out of the building using the cover of fleeing children.

In another first in the history of Russian terrorism a foreign-based group took responsibility for some of the attacks. The Al-Qaeda-linked "Islambouli Brigades" said its "*shahidi*" downed the Russian planes and bombed the Moscow metro station. Out of 32 attackers killed in the commando storming of the seized school on Friday, nine were identified as Arabs and one as an African.

Chechen rebels are known to have long-standing ties with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Taliban-ruled Afghanistan was the only country that recognised breakaway Chechnya and opened its embassy in Kabul. Moscow at the time condemned the move as an attempt "to create a terrorist international."

There is evidence that the "terror-

ist international" has now matured and taken over the Chechen rebel movement. Responsibility for the Beslan hostage raid has been claimed "Salakhin Riadus Shahidi," a group led by Chechnya's notorious warlord, Shamil Basayev, and linked to Al-Qaeda. Security experts believe that Basayev received funding for the Beslan hostage-taking and other attacks from an Al-Qaeda operative of Saudi origin, Abu Omar al-Saif. He who pays calls the tune.

The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, described the Beslan attack as "direct aggression by international terrorism against Russia." One reason why terrorists declared war on Russia at this point is that they fear losing Chechnya as their stronghold in Russia. Mr. Putin has launched a large-scale programme of peaceful rehabilitation of the war-ravaged region. The Centre has increased allocations for rebuilding Chechnya's economy this year by 40 per cent, to nearly \$170 million in an effort to create more jobs and reduce the nearly 70 per cent unemployment that makes young people easy prey for rebel recruiters. Since last year Chechnya has an elected leader, and even though the first Kremlin-backed President of Chechnya, Akhmad Kadyrov, was assassinated in a bomb attack in May, the process of handing over power in the region from the Russian military to the Chechen administration has not been interrupted. A week ago Chechnya elected another Kremlin loyalist, Alu Alkhanov, as its President. Terrorists apparently timed their attacks to coincide with the election to play down the significance of this victory for Moscow.

The immediate goal of the Beslan raid was to spread violence beyond Chechnya and set Russia's entire North Caucasus on fire. In 1999 Basayev led a Chechen rebel invasion of neighbouring Dagestan under the slogan of setting up a pan-Caucasian *halifat*. In June this year a large rebel group attacked two towns in Ingushetia killing nearly 100 people. This time terrorists aimed to trigger a new ethnic conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia. The two Russian regions neighbouring Chechnya clashed in 1992 over a disputed border territory, when Ingush crowds

marched into North Ossetia's Prigorodny District in an attempt to reclaim land where they lived before Stalin exiled them to Central Asia after World War Two. It took Moscow great efforts to end the conflict, which claimed hundreds of lives and saw a massive eviction of Ingush residents from their homes in North Ossetia. It is Ingush militants who made up the core of the gang that seized the school in Beslan and there are fears that Ossetins will now try to take revenge on the neighbouring people. Their hostility is aggravated by the fact that North Ossetia is the only predominantly Christian territory in North Caucasus surrounded by Muslim regions. Also, the Ingush are closely related to the Chechens and are largely seen as sympathising with the Chechen rebel resistance.

"This attack (in Beslan) can blow a precarious balance of inter-confessional and inter-ethnic relations in the region," Mr. Putin said in televised remarks. "We will do everything we can to prevent the situation from taking such a turn."

A new conflict in North Caucasus may also upset a wider balance of power in the region. Addressing the nation after the Beslan tragedy, Mr. Putin said Russia's enemies sought to tear off parts of the country. He appeared to be hinting at Georgia, whose President, Mikhail Saakashvili, has vowed to reimpose Georgia's control over the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia's peacekeepers deployed in South Ossetia are the only factor that keeps Tbilisi from using force against the enclave, which voted in a referendum to unite with their brothers in Russia's North Ossetia. Ethnic turmoil between North Ossetia and Ingushetia could tie Russia's hands and enable Georgia to redraw the map of North Caucasus. Significantly, Mr. Saakashvili said in a recent interview that Chechen and Ingush people can be Georgia's allies in its struggle to restore territorial integrity. In his address to the nation, Mr. Putin also hit out at Georgia's Western supporters.

"There are those who want to tear off parts of Russia and those who help them. They help, supposing that Russia, as one of the biggest nuclear powers, still poses a threat to them, so they have to get rid of that threat,"

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the Russian leader said. "Terror of course merely an instrument achieving this goal."

Terrorism may also be an instrument in the internal power struggle in Russia. Chechnya has long been used as such an instrument. The then President, Boris Yeltsin, sent troops to Chechnya to bring down his plummeting popularity with a victorious war. In 1999 the clan and powerful businessman timed the launching of the second Chechen war with a presidential election campaign to their hand-picked successor, Vladimir Putin, to turn Mr. Yeltsin against his benefactor and to reassert government control over Russia's rich oil resources. Mr. Yeltsin sold out to Kremlin oligarchs and encroached their oil windfall.

Russia's most outspoken political leader, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, of those who thinks that the surge in terror strikes in Russia is linked to an intensifying struggle in Russia. In a televised interview after the Beslan tragedy said Mr. Putin fell a victim of an internal conspiracy masterminded by his sworn enemy, the exiled oligarch, Boris Berezovsky, together with other business tycoons who spy with Mr. Putin's policies. Their aim is to weaken and humiliate Putin to make him vulnerable to manipulation.

The conspiracy theory gained credence when Russia's TV Channel Three reported on Saturday that investigators found evidence of a Russian business group financing Chechen terrorists. The group named two Russian companies, the oil major Yukos, whose CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky, is on trial for fraud and tax evasion, and Logos company set up by Mr. Berezovsky.

Whatever the hidden spring put in motion the terror machine in Russia, it is clear that the only way to stop it is to solve the problem in Chechnya where all terrorists have come from. Winning the peace in Chechnya over to peaceful hands will take time, and in the meantime Russia must brace up to face more strikes, Mr. Putin said.

"We have shown weakness [in the face of new challenges] and we have got beaten up," the Russian President admitted, vowing to upgrade the country's security system, overhaul the corruption-ridden law enforcement structures and create effective crisis management mechanisms.

6 SEP 2004

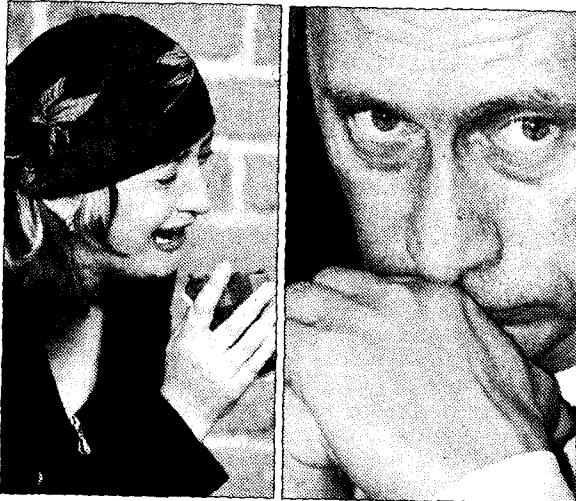
Putin vows to end terror run of militants

Moscow: Making a surprise pre-dawn visit to the southern city of Beslan on Saturday, where the school hostage crisis left 250 people dead and over 650 injured, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the militants tried to incite inter-ethnic strife in the region and warned against succumbing to terrorists' provocations.

"The whole of Russia is worrying and mourning with you," Putin said during a meeting with local authorities in the Beslan city of the republic of North Ossetia.

"One of the goals of the terrorists was to incite inter-ethnic strife and blow up the North Caucasus. All those who give in to terrorist provocations aimed to blow up the North Caucasus will be considered cooperators with the terrorist act and the terrorists' accomplices," he was quoted as saying by ITAR-Tass news agency.

The president said he had ordered the closure of the region's borders as security forces were searching for all



A Mother Mourns A Loss

Putin Talks Tough

those connected with the attack."I have ordered that Beslan and state border in North Ossetia be sealed, targeted checks be carried out in order to find out those involved in this terrorist act," he said.

Reaffirming that different scenarios had been considered in Beslan but no use of force had been planned, Putin said "the situation developed very rapidly and unexpectedly". He said law enforcement officials "showed incredible courage" and sustained heavy losses.

Putin, who visited the wounded at the hospital wards in the city, said the hostage-taking crisis occupied a "special place" in a series of recent terrorist acts in Russia because it "targeted children". The president said emergencies' minister Sergei Shoigu would stay in the republic to coordinate aid to the victims and their families.

"It is necessary to draw up the lists of all people who need aid and support, we will do everything we can to help people, assist them in treatment... If it is necessary to send children for rehabilitation, we will do that as soon as they are fit to travel," Putin said.

The end to the crisis came when a tank fired at one of the outhouses in the school complex, where the last batch of militants had been holed up engaging security forces in a gun battle, destroying it. Five militants were captured alive when they tried to flee from the school in civilian dress, TV channels reported. Reuters

জঙ্গিদের প্রতি কঠোর পুতিন,

মৃত বেড়ে ৩২২

বেসলান (রাশিয়া), ৪ সেপ্টেম্বর। রাশিয়ায় পণবন্দি কাণ্ডে মৃতের সংখ্যা বেড়ে দাঁড়াল ৩২২, এর মধ্যে ১৫৫টি শিশু। শুক্রবার বেসলানের স্কুলটিতে সামরিক অভিযান চালিয়ে পণবন্দিদের উদ্ধার করা হলেও হতাহতের সংখ্যা ক্রমশই বাড়ছে। আহত হয়ে ছ'শোরও বেশি মানুষ হাসপাতালে ভর্তি। এদের মধ্যে ৯২ জনের অবস্থা আশঙ্কাজনক। স্কুলটির জিমন্যাসিয়ামে এখনও বহু মৃতদেহ পড়ে আছে। স্কুল চত্বরের মধ্যে অসংখ্য মাইন ও বিস্ফোরক থাকায় দেহগুলি উদ্ধার করা যায়নি। কালকের অভিযানে এখনও পর্যন্ত ২৭ জন জঙ্গি মারা গিয়েছে, বেসরকারি মতে ধরা পড়েছে তিন জন। তবে বুধবার চেনেন জঙ্গিরা ঠিক কতজনকে পণবন্দি করেছিল তা এখনও স্পষ্ট নয়।

কালকের সেনা অভিযানের পর রাতেই রুশ প্রেসিডেন্ট দ্বাদিমির পুতিন বেসলানে আসেন। তিন ঘণ্টার সফরে তিনি হাসপাতালে আহতদের সঙ্গে দেখা করেন। বেসলান শহর ও ওসেতিয়া সীমান্ত সিল করে দেওয়ারও নির্দেশ দিয়েছেন তিনি। পুতিন বলেন জঙ্গিদের উদ্দেশ্য হল রাশিয়ার উত্তর ককেশিয়ান অঞ্চলে জাতি বিচ্ছেদ ও ঘৃণা ছড়ানো। তিনি বলেন, “এই প্ররোচনায় যারা সহানুভূতি দেখাবে তাদেরও জঙ্গি ও সন্ত্রাসবাদে মদতদাতা হিসেবে গণ্য করা হবে।” বহুসংখ্যক পুতিন সরকারি টিভিতে বিবৃতি দিয়ে বলেছিলেন জঙ্গিদের কবল থেকে পণবন্দি শিশুদের অক্ষত দেহে মুক্ত করা সরকারের প্রাথমিক কর্তব্য। এই কারণেই সেনা অভিযান বা জঙ্গিদের বিরুদ্ধে বলপ্রয়োগ করা হবে না বলেও



বেসলানে প্রিয়জনের শোক। — রয়টার্স

জানান তিনি। কিন্তু তাঁর বিবৃতির ২৪ ঘণ্টা পার না হতেই স্কুলে সেনা অভিযানে এত প্রাণহানি হওয়ায় স্ফোভ গোপন করেননি প্রেসিডেন্ট। অভিযানের জন্য দায়ী সেনা কর্তাদের বিরুদ্ধে ব্যবস্থা নেওয়ারও ইঙ্গিত দেন তিনি। জঙ্গিরা এই স্কুলটিতে হামলা চালানোর আগে দীর্ঘ প্রস্তুতি নিয়েছিল বলে জানা গিয়েছে। গরমের ছুটিতে স্কুলে যখন মেরামতির কাজ চলছিল সে সময়ই প্রচুর বিস্ফোরক ও আগ্নেয়াস্ত্র মজুত করা হয়েছিল বলে স্থানীয় নিরাপত্তাবাহিনী সূত্রে জানা গিয়েছে। আজও স্কুলের ভিতরে খোলা জায়গায় অন্তত ২৫টি মৃতদেহ পড়ে থাকতে দেখা গিয়েছে। স্কুলের জিমন্যাসিয়ামের ভিতরে ধ্বংসস্তুপের নীচে এখনও প্রচুর দেহ চাপা পড়ে আছে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। প্রত্যক্ষদর্শীরা জানিয়েছেন, কাল দু'টি বিস্ফোরণের পরেই বন্দিরা ছোট্ট ছোট্ট শুরু করে। বন্দি এক কিশোরী জানিয়েছে জিমন্যাসিয়ামের চারপাশে রাখা অসংখ্য বোমার মধ্যে একটির টেপ হঠাৎ খুলে গেলে প্রচণ্ড বিস্ফোরণ হয়। “তারপরই জিমন্যাসিয়ামে পরপর বোমা ফাটতে থাকে।” এর মধ্যেই জঙ্গিরা ছাদ থেকে বন্দিদের উপর গুলি চালালে বহু শিশু আহত হয়। বয়স্করা জানালা ভেঙে শিশুদের বাইরে ছুড়ে দেন। রুশ সেনা কর্তৃপক্ষও জানিয়েছেন, জঙ্গিরা বন্দিদের উপর গুলি চালাতে শুরু করায় তাঁরা অভিযান চালাতে বাধ্য হন। বুধবার গেরিলারা প্রায় ১২০০ জনকে পণবন্দি করার পর ক্লাসের মধ্যেই ২২ জনকে খুন করে বলেও প্রত্যক্ষদর্শীরা জানিয়েছেন। আহতদের চিকিৎসার জন্য দু'টি বিমানে শনিবার সকালেই চিকিৎসকের দল বেসলানে এসে পৌঁছন।

পশ্চিমী রাষ্ট্রগুলি বেসলানের ঘটনায় পুতিনের পাশে এসে দাঁড়ালেও ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়ন এক বিবৃতিতে রাশিয়ার কছে জানতে চেয়েছে কী ভাবে এই মর্মান্তিক ঘটনা ঘটল। মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশ ও ব্রিটিশ প্রধানমন্ত্রী টনি ব্ল্যয়ার এই ঘটনার জন্য আন্তর্জাতিক সন্ত্রাসবাদকেই দায়ী করেছেন। ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহও পুতিনকে পাঠানো শোকবার্তায় জানিয়েছেন নিরস্ত্র ও অসহায় শিশুদের এ ভাবে হত্যা করার ঘটনার পিছনে কোনও যুক্তিই থাকতে পারে না। আরব দেশগুলিও চেনেন জঙ্গিদের তীব্র সমালোচনা করেছে। — রয়টার্স

ANADARA AN DAIKKA

5 SEP 2004

Full-scale war against Russia: Putin

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BESLAN, Sept. 4. — President Vladimir Putin today warned the nation that international terrorists had declared “a full-scale war” against Russia.

Also today, anguished parents searched handwritten hospital lists as the death toll rose above 340 amid conflicting accounts of how the three-day seizure of a Russian school erupted into its bloody denouement.

In a solemn televised address, Mr Putin said the nation was weakened due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and was therefore unable to respond effectively as it must (to terrorism).

Mr Putin called for Russians to mobilise against what he said was the “common danger” of terrorism. Measures would be taken, he promised, to strengthen Russia’s unity and overhaul the law enforcement organs, which he acknowledged had been infected by corruption.

“What happened was a terrorist act that was inhuman and unprecedented in its cruelty,” he told the nation. “It is a challenge not to the President, the parliament and the government but a challenge to all of Russia, to all of our people. It is an attack on our nation.”

Meanwhile, regional

TOLL CROSSES 340, INCLUDING 156 CHILDREN AND 35 MILITANTS



UNITED IN GRIEF: A woman comforts a girl at the Beslan school on Friday. — AFP

emergency situations minister Mr Boris Dzhoyev said 323 victims, including 156 children, had been killed in School No. 1 in Beslan in North Ossetia. The minister said 35 attackers, includ-

ing women, had been eliminated after the 10-hour gun battle which erupted shortly after 1 p.m. yesterday. More than 542 people including 336 children were admitted to hospitals

after the crisis ended, medical officials said.

National mourning: Mr Putin has declared national mourning on 6 and 7 September in the memory of the victims of

Beslan school siege crisis, adds PTI. Igs will fly at half-mast and all the entertainment programmes will be cancelled throughout the country, the Kremlin press office said

Relatives lynch terrorist

BESLAN, Sept. 4. — Furious relatives of Russian school hostages today lynched one of the terrorists involved in the three-day bloody siege here, a top security official said. Twenty six terrorists were killed by security forces in a gunbattle and three were detained after Russian commandos raided the school building yesterday to rescue the hostages. Another terrorist, while being taken to a police station, was snatched away by relatives of the hostages and lynched, Federal Security Board chief in North Ossetia Mr Valery Andreyev said. Over 30 terrorists of various nationalities were involved in the siege, Mr Andreyev was quoted as saying by ITAR-TASS. “We can say with confidence that there were more than 30 bandits — Russian as well as foreigners. They were well trained and the casualties could have been much higher (if the forces had not stepped in),” — PTI

Trail leads to Chechen warlord

THE TIMES, LONDON

MOSCOW, Sept. 4. — When the latest attack unfolded this week, the Russian authorities knew that it had been masterminded by Shamil Basayev — a Chechen warlord and Russia’s most wanted terrorist.

Even though two of his field commanders, Doku Umarov and Magomed Yevloyev, are thought to have led the Chechen fighters into the school, the planning and orders are thought to have come from Basayev, who now heads a self-styled Islamic guerrilla force.

This year he is blamed for the killing of the pro-Kremlin President of Chechnya and then leading a raiding party into neighbouring Ingushetia, where more than 90 people were killed as the Chechen raiders made off with guns and ammunition.

His “black widows”, the Chechen women suicide bombers under his command, are also accused of blowing up two Russian civilian passenger aircraft last week and exploding a bomb outside a Moscow Metro station. He has also attracted foreign fighters to his cause,



Shamil Basayev, the Chechen warlord who masterminded the school siege.

mainly volunteers from West Asia and Central Asia, who are thought to have taken part in the school raid.

Previously, Basayev claimed responsibility for taking hundreds of people hostage at the Dubrovka theatre in Moscow two years ago, where 129 died in a botched rescue attempt. He conducted a similar operation in person nine years ago when 1,000 hostages were held at a hospital in Buddenovsk in southern Russia.

A day never to forget...

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

BESLAN, Sept. 4. — 1 September was to have been a festive day for Yana. But the first day of her final year of school went from happy to horrifying when armed men forced her into the gym where she and hundreds of others were held captive. “They yelled for us all to go inside, into the gym,” recalled the slender 15-year-old girl with dark hair and hazel eyes, who asked that her surname not be used, as she sat on a stretcher outside a hospital two days later.

Yana was among the children whom the armed group — authorities had said they numbered up to 20 but she thinks it was closer to 30 including two women — herded into the gym at the school.

It is still not clear exactly how many people ended up in that gym — throughout the siege authorities had placed the number at up to 400, but many of the residents said the number was more likely closer to 1,000.

“Our principal said there were 1,200 (schoolchildren) according to school lists, but there were less than that inside,” Yana said. In



CHAMBER OF HORRORS: A fireman looks at the wrecked gym of the Beslan school during the rescue operation on Friday. — AFP

addition to the children, there were also the mothers, grandparents and younger siblings, mostly of first-graders, who often come out to the first-day line-up, or “lineika”. The men who had taken them hostage wired the gym with explo-

sives, she said. “They always told us to keep away from the wires because if we tripped on the wrong one, we’d be blown up.”

For the next two days, the children and women at the gym did little but sit and sleep.



President Putin comforts an injured person during his visit to a Beslan hospital on Saturday. — AFP

Commandos storm Russian school

Over 100 Hostages Killed, 350ⁱⁿ

Injured in Rescue Operation ⁴¹⁹

Moscow: Russian commandos on Friday stormed a school building to end the three-day hostage drama with captives making a daring escape amid crossfire and explosions during which at least 100 hostages, including children, were killed and over 350 people injured.

Thirteen militants, including some disguised as civilians, escaped from the school in Beslan city north Ossetia. Some of them were holed up in a nearby building which was surrounded by troops.

After nearly two hours of operation, the commandos took control of the entire school complex, where about 400 students, teachers and parents had been held hostage by suspected Chechen rebels since Wednesday. All the hostages have been evacuated, Russian media reported, saying that 310 people, mostly children, were injured. Itar-tass said 158 children had been taken to hospitals.

The commandos stormed the building after about 30 children and women made a daring escape as explosions and gunfire were heard in the area. Some of the children were seen covered in blood.

Interfax news agency reported that militants fired at the children who ran from the building and that some children might have been taken away by women

terrorists. Security forces had to blow up a wall of the school to help hostages escape. There were also reports that the school's roof had collapsed, possibly from explosives strapped on militants' bodies.

TV channels showed dozens of children, wearing only underwear, running out of the school. Troops were also seen carrying the injured on stretchers.

Besides five militants, seven people, including at least four children, were killed.

Interfax quoted police as saying that during the raid militants were separated into three groups with some of them mixing with hostages.

President Vladimir Putin had said that everything possible would be done to end the "horrible" crisis and save the children. North Ossetia president Alexander Dzasokhov said the militants were demanding that Russian troops pull out of Chechnya.

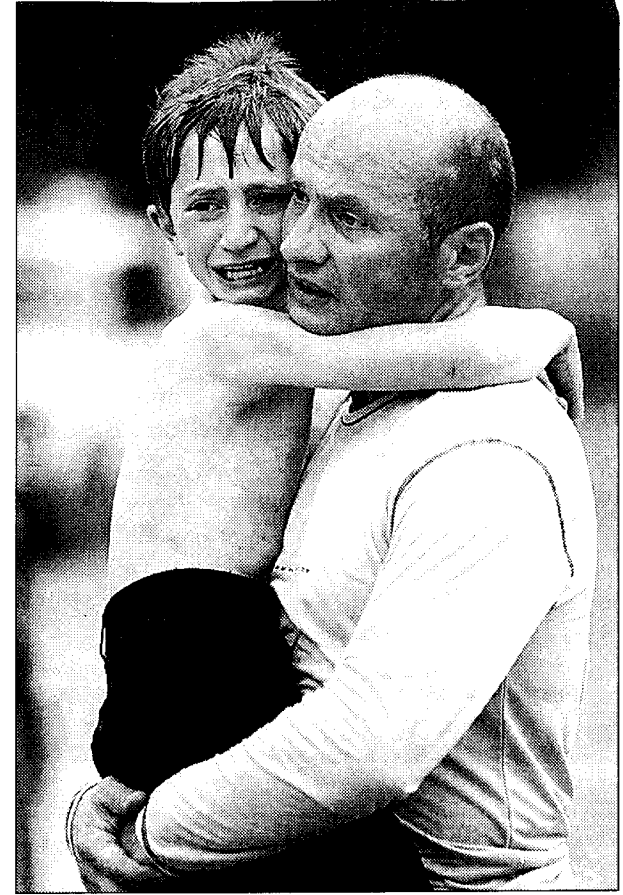
Over 400 local residents and former hostages were taken to hospital after being wounded in the hostage siege here. Interfax cited the health ministry as saying

Russia has been rocked by a series of attacks in recent times, including the suicide attack outside a subway station in Moscow which killed 11 people and wounded dozens others. Agencies



A boy hostage is carried away to safety as a soldier and volunteer stand behind a school fence during the rescue operation in the town of Beslan, North Ossetia, in Russia on Friday

In freedom, terrified kids run amok



(From left to right) A woman cries during the rescue operation at the school in Beslan, North Ossetia, a mother grieves over the body of her child, security forces hide behind a school wall and a terrified boy is carried by his father to safety after troops storm the school. (AFP, Reuters)

Beslan (Russia), Sept. 3 (Agencies): Half-naked and bloodied children ran terrified through the street, thirstily grabbing water bottles from medics as gunfire cracked, ambulance sirens sounded, and mothers and children wailed.

Russia's school siege ended in scenes of chaos and pandemonium today, with an unknown number of dead and injured among the up to 1,500 children and adults held at gunpoint by Chechen separatists for more than two days. Bodies were found in the school and 400 were injured, according to Russian officials quoted by Itar-Tass news agency.

A reporter for British ITV television said its cameraman saw up to 100 bodies inside the school gym where most hostages were held.

A stream of ambulances left the school carrying bodies, many of which looked lifeless.

"I smashed the window to get out," one young boy with a bandaged hand told Russian television.

"People were running in all directions... They (the rebels) shot from the roof." Six bodies lay covered with white sheets near the school gates, one the almost naked corpse of a girl of around 16 with an unnaturally pale face, another a young boy, less than a metre in height.

Men and women filed past, hands covering their mouths, tentatively lifting the sheets to see if they recognised the bodies.

A 40-year-old man wearing a light brown shirt knelt by a body, crying into his hands.

The lucky ones among the crowds of relatives who had waited day and night outside

ANATOMY OF A SIEGE

● During initial attack, some students managed to hide in the boiler room and escape

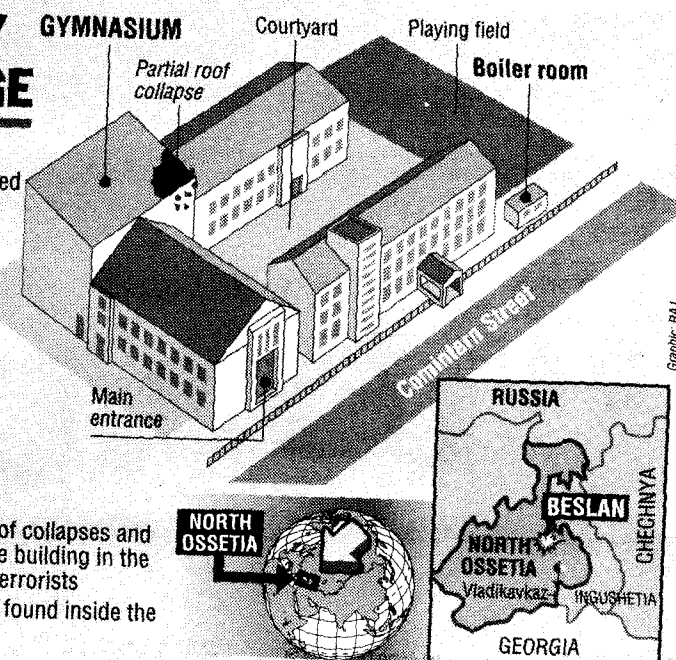
● Most hostages held in the gymnasium

● After talks with terrorists, a vehicle arrives to take away bodies of people killed in initial attack

● Soon after, a gun battle erupts between terrorists and troops

● A part of the gym's roof collapses and some manage to flee the building in the chaos, including a few terrorists

● More than 100 bodies found inside the heavily-mined gym



Middle School Number 1 held emotional reunions with children who had stripped to their underwear during two days in a stifling gym with little water and no food.

A weeping mother stroked her child's blonde hair, a grandmother tended a young boy's bloodied face.

As the battle raged, at least some of the hostage-takers fled the school building in the southern city of Beslan and were pursued by Russian troops.

Thick smoke rose over the school building.

Dozens of civilian cars rushed at high speed towards the school, some of them apparently commandeered by relatives desperate to find out what had happened inside the school.

Anger also flared in this

Russian Orthodox part of the Caucasus mountains, ethnically and religiously distinct from the nearby Muslim regions of Chechnya and Ingushetia.

A crowd of around 200 people started to attack a swarthy man who looked like he might be a Chechen, until police intervened, firing shots into the air to disperse them.

Others sought to organise care of the wounded at local hospitals where 1,000 beds had been prepared, health officials told the Interfax news agency.

"Everyone to the hospital! Quickly! The wounded will need blood!" shouted one policeman.

A woman in a pink dress, worn for the traditional festivities on the first day of school when the rebels seized the school, collapsed in a faint as

were freed, then went back in to join her own children still being held, authorities said.

The woman was named as Riya Yuzhenevich and her story was mentioned on a list of names of freed hostages posted yesterday inside a public building near the school being used as a shelter for family and friends of the hostages.

Yuzhenevich carried two-year-old Dyana Azieva out of the building to be returned to her family before walking back into the school in order to be with her own children.

Qaida links

The mass hostage-taking was led by a senior Chechen rebel commander and possibly financed by al Qaida, Itar-Tass news agency quoted sources in the regional security service as saying in Moscow.

The sources said that according to early information, Chechen commander Magomet Yevloyev led the operation. They said the operation had been planned by Shamil Basayev, Russia's most wanted Chechen rebel. Officials say rebels fighting for the region's independence are under strong influence from Wahhabism, a strict form of Sunni Islam. Wahhabism, the only permitted form of Islam in Saudi Arabia, is banned in Russia.

Barbaric, says White House

Moosic (Pennsylvania), Sept. 3 (Reuters): The White House today condemned the "barbaric" taking of hostages at a school in Russia and blamed "the terrorists" for the loss of life after Russian troops stormed the compound to free the parents, teachers and children.

"There is no justification for the taking of innocent life, and the barbaric nature of this terrorist act is despicable," White House spokesman Scott McClellan said in a statement.

"The responsibility for the tragic loss of life rests with the terrorists," McClellan said, adding: "The US stands side-by-side with Russia in our global fight against terrorism."

Putin
H.D.

Putin had to choose between two evils 9/9

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, SEPT. 3. The two-day hostage drama in a children-packed school in North Ossetia came to a bloody end on Friday when Russian commandos stormed the building two days after it was seized by Chechen gunmen.

The assault left hundreds of hostages dead or wounded. Security officials said the decision to assault the school was forced on them by the hostage-takers who opened fire on a group of hostages trying to escape during a negotiated evacuation of dead bodies from the building. One way or the other, this outcome appeared inevitable.

Gravest crisis

The hostage-taking drama in North Ossetia confronted the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, with the gravest crisis of his five-year presidency. It was the latest in an unprecedented spate of coordinated terrorist attacks in Russia over the past 10 days that began with the downing of two Russian airliners that killed 90 people, continued with a suicide bomb blast near a Moscow metro station that claimed 11 lives, and culminated with the seizure of over

1,000 children, their parents and teachers.

The crisis presented Mr. Putin with a painful dilemma: to succumb to the hostage-takers' demands to withdraw Russian troops from Chechnya and grant Chechnya independence in order to save the lives of the hostages or to storm the school, risking a bloodbath and inviting the wrath of their relatives and human rights organisations.

In reality, Mr. Putin had no

NEWS ANALYSIS

choice. He did say on Thursday that the safety of the hostages was paramount, but giving in to the terrorists' demands would have far-reaching negative consequences, not only for his efforts to end violence in Chechnya, but also for the global struggle against terrorism. It would encourage extremists to mount more attacks of catastrophic proportions in the hope that the greater casualties and psychological shock would cause Moscow's capitulation. This would also send a strong signal to terrorists world-wide.

Chechen rebels are known to have long-standing ties with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. More-

over, responsibility for the twin bombing the Russian airliners was claimed by an Al-Qaeda-linked group, the Islambouli Brigades. Given these facts, it cannot be ruled out that the latest string of terrorist strikes in Russia were part of a broader international terrorist plan targeting other countries as well.

Planned action

The Beslan hostage-taking raid had been planned by terrorists with a devilish aim of spilling over violence beyond Chechnya and triggering a new ethnic conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia, two Russian regions neighbouring Chechnya which clashed in 1992 over a disputed border territory.

It took Moscow great efforts to end the conflict, which cost hundreds of lives, but relations between the two ethnic groups have remained tense at best. Their hostility is aggravated by the fact that North Ossetia is the only predominantly Christian territory in North Caucasus surrounded by Muslim regions. Moreover, the Ingushi are closely related to Chechens and are largely seen as sympathising with the Chechen rebel resistance.

Russian commandos storm school

● Over 100 bodies found ● 556 people hospitalised ● 10 Arabs among 20 terrorists killed

By Vladimir Radyuhin with agencies

MOSCOW, SEPT. 3. Commandos today stormed the school in Beslan, Northern Ossetia, where militants strapped with bombs had held hundreds captive for three days. Over a hundred bodies were found in the school gym, where the captors had herded the majority of the hostages. The total number of casualties was yet to be established. Hundreds have been freed.

The assault came when emergency aid workers went to the school to evacuate bodies of hostages under an agreement with the militants. A local security chief said explosions rocked the school building at that moment and dozens of hostages, including children, fled the school building. The militants then opened fire on fleeing people and the commandos fired back and launched the assault. The official said the security forces had no plans to storm the school building and had been forced to act in view of the developments.

Toll may mount

"More than 400 hostages have been set free," officials told the NTV television. Reporters on the spot said the final death count was likely to run into several hundred. The region's Federal Security Service chief, Valery Andreyev, said over 556 people, including 332 children, were hospitalised.

Television showed near-naked school children (it was stifling hot in the building), many of them wounded being led and carried away from the school. Thousands of anguished relatives and friends gathered near the school added to the general chaos at the scene. At some stage of the assault several powerful explosions were heard from the school building, triggering a fire. It was later extinguished. The blasts also caused the roof of the school gym to collapse killing many.

Initially, officials estimated the number of hostages at 354, but later admitted the figure could be three times as high. The school accommodated 890 pupils, and only a handful of them fled when militants attacked it on September 1.

In hot pursuit

Some of the estimated 25 to 30 militants broke out of the school during the operation and troops backed by tanks and helicopters



SCHOOL SIEGE ENDS: A volunteer carries an injured child out of the school in Beslan, southern Russia, on Friday after Russian special forces stormed it ending the three-day-old standoff. Militants had been holding hundreds of people, mostly children, hostage in the building. — AFP

were pursuing them across the town. Hours after the assault began around 1 p.m. (local time), sporadic fire was still cracking on the school grounds as a group of terrorists was holed up in one of the buildings. Another three militants were barricaded in the school cellar, firing at the troops. Security forces killed 20 gun-

men including 10 Arabs, Interfax news agency said. "There are 10 people originating from the Arab world among 20 killed terrorists," it quoted Mr. Andreyev as saying.

Eyewitnesses said a crowd of Beslan residents lynched a suspected terrorist as he was being led away by security forces from

the school building. Furious people knocked the man to the ground and beat him to death with boots.

Terrorists' demand

Regional president Alexander Dzasokhov said the hostage-takers had demanded that Russian troops leave Chechnya —

the first clear indication of their demands and of a direct link between Wednesday's attack in the region of North Ossetia and the ongoing war in the neighbouring region. Itar-Tass news agency quoted sources in the regional security service as saying Chechen commander Magomet Yevloyev led the hostage-takers.

They said the operation had been planned by Shamil Basayev, Russia's most wanted Chechen rebel, who has been behind several major attacks outside Chechnya.

More photographs on Page 20;

Putin had to choose between two evils: Page 14

Russia crisis: Use of force ruled out

OLIVER BULLOUGH
BESLAN, SEPTEMBER 2

RUSSIA ruled out using force to free hundreds of children, parents and teachers being held hostage for a second day on Thursday by armed men at a school near rebel Chechnya.

"Our main task is to save the life and health of those who have ended up as hostages," President Vladimir Putin said in nationally televised comments. "All the actions of our forces... will be devoted to solving this task." "There is no question at the moment of opting for force. There will be a lengthy process of negotiation," Valery Andreyev, head of the FSB security service in North Ossetia province, said.

The crisis, in which the gunmen have threatened to blow up the school and about 350 hostages in tactics bearing the hallmarks of Chechen rebels, gives Putin one of the hardest choices in his 4-1/2 years in the Kremlin: Should he risk a slaughter by following his past practice of sending in troops to end such sieges, or try to save the children by breaking a long-held vow not to negotiate with



Troops patrol in Beslan on Thursday, (inset) Dr Leonid Roshal who is negotiating with the terrorists. Reuters & AP/PTI

eight people when they broke into the school and herded pupils, parents and teachers into a gym. The gunmen have said they would talk only to Dr Roshal and regional leaders — apparently to press their demands for the release of rebels held by authorities.

Dzaniyev said they had rejected offers to deliver food and water, but had assured Roshal the children were fine. "No one tells us anything," said Nikolai Dzaparov, whose wife and 2 1/2-year-old granddaughter were inside the school. "Some say the terrorists are Chechens. Some say they are Arabs. But we don't know." "There are Chechens and Ingushis among terrorists," Dzaniyev said.

There was confusion over the number of attackers. Officials first said there were 17, but Dzaniyev later said the gang included up to 40 men and women. Reports said the attackers had demanded the release of insurgents jailed after a raid in Ingushetia, in which 98 people died. "The terrorists wanted to... make Russians feel the 'Chechen hand' can reach them in a bus, on the metro, in a plane and in a busy street. — anywhere," *Kommersant* daily wrote. —Reuters

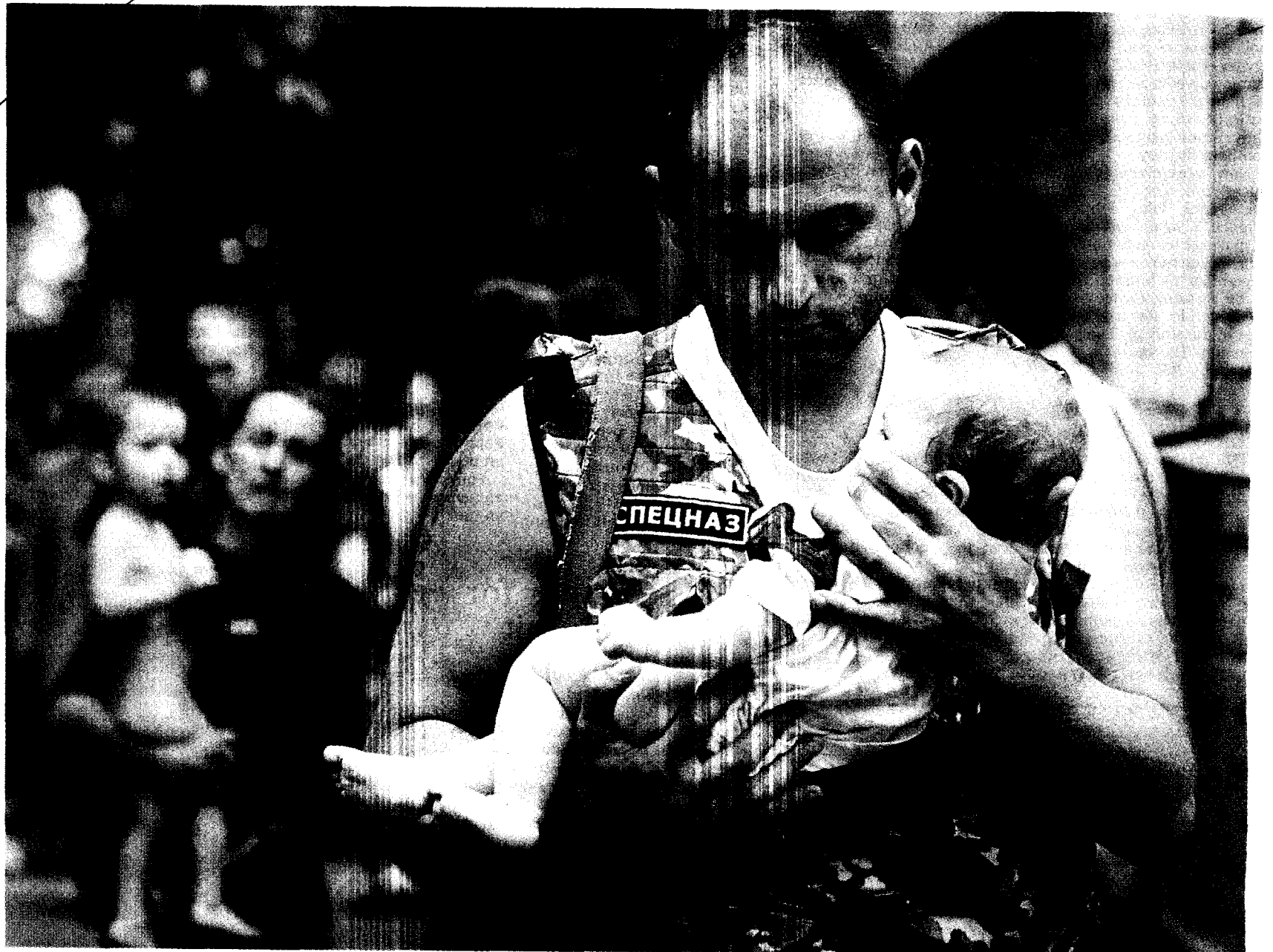
free way out," said Soslan Pagnuyev whose daughter and friends were among those held. The terrorists, some strapped with explosives, held talks by telephone with a paediatrician, Leonid Roshal, who helped negotiate the release of kids in the 2002 Moscow theatre siege. There was no word on the progress of the talks.

Officials said the gang had threatened to kill 50 children for each of their comrades killed. "President Putin faces the most difficult decision in the whole of his presidency," the *Izvestia* daily said. "It is obvious that the threat to President comes... from terrorism." The armed gang killed

"terrorists"? Throughout the morning, rifle shots cracked across Beslan, with the occasional blast of a grenade echoing among apartment blocks.

The heavily-armed gang seized the children and other hostages on Wednesday on the traditionally festive first day of the school year. The hostage-taking was the latest in a spate of deadly attacks the government believes are the work of Chechen separatists. Putin rushed back to Moscow on Wednesday and cancelled a planned trip to Turkey.

Their demands must be fulfilled, whatever they want. If they want to get away from here, they should be given a



SAVE THE CHILDREN: A Russian soldier carries a child from the school in the southern Russian town of Beslan where an armed terrorist group is holding hundreds of people, mainly children, hostage. The terrorists have freed 26 children and women. — Reuters

Russia
40-7
3/9

26 Russian hostages released

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, SEPT. 2. In the first good news in the school hostage crisis that continued for the second day in Russia today, gunmen released 26 women and children as the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, vowed to save the lives of all the hostages.

The gunmen, who seized the school in Beslan, southern Russia on Wednesday taking 354 as hostages, released 26 women and infants today after the intervention of a former leader of Ingushetia, Ruslan Aushev. The action came hours after Mr. Putin promised to do all he could to prevent harm to the hostages.

"Our main task is to save the lives and health of those who have ended up as hostages," Mr. Putin said on television.

Anguished parents gathered

outside the cordoned-off school area said they had recorded a TV address to Mr. Putin, urging him to fulfil the terrorists' demands and save their children, but no Russian channel had played the appeal.

Negotiators had so far failed to persuade the hostage-takers to accept food and medicine for the hostages. The militants had

also rejected offers of safe passage out of the region and refused to exchange the trapped children with adults.

There were conflicting reports about the captors' demands. Initially, they were said to be demanding the withdrawal of the Russian troops from Chechnya, but officials said here that no concrete demands

had been made.

North Ossetia's Interior Minister, Kazbek Dzantiev, said the hostage-taker had threatened to kill 50 children for every abductor killed and 20 children for every rebel injured.

Sporadic gunshots

Russian commandos surrounded the school, but North Ossetia's top security official said there were no immediate plans to storm the three-storey school building.

Sporadic gunshots and occasional grenade blasts echoed today as the attackers fired on any vehicle that approached the school ground.

Authorities said seven adults were killed and 12 injured when the gunmen stormed the school on September 1, the opening day of the new academic year in

Russia. Security officials said they had identified some of the 30-strong gang that seized the school, but refused to give any names.

They said the gang included Chechen, Ingush, Ossetian and even Russian militants.

Another photograph on Page 14

Security Council condemns attacks

UNITED NATIONS, SEPT. 2. The United Nations Security Council has condemned "in the strongest terms" the gunmen holding hundreds of children and adults captive in a school in southern Russia.

At a special meeting yesterday requested by Moscow, the 15-member Council demanded "the immediate and uncon-

ditional release of all hostages of the terrorist attack" in North Ossetia.

The Council's statement urged all nations to cooperate with Russian authorities in efforts to bring to justice "the perpetrators, organisers and sponsors of these terrorist acts." — Reuters

News Analysis: Page 14

Old motive, new method

BEN WETHERALL examines the political turbulence in Chechnya in a historical framework and comes to the conclusion that without earnest attempts at diplomacy, Russia's security and international interests will continue to be at serious risk

THE majority of Russians awoke the morning of 25 August to familiar scenes of bewilderment and confusion, as news emerged that two Russian domestic airliners had disappeared and crashed within minutes of each other. Eighty-nine passengers died; there were no survivors.

Though the tragedy has been confirmed as a terror attack, the perpetrators remain unknown. A group with links to Islamic *jihadis* in Pakistan has claimed responsibility for the attack. At the same time, forensic evidence suggests a Chechen rebel group may be behind the attack. Regardless, the prevention of further terrorist attacks is fundamentally tied to Moscow's deftness in handling grievances of the Muslim-majority state of Chechnya.

Despite the obvious suspicions about terrorist involvement, the Putin administration initially seemed determined to discount that supposition – perhaps to avert critiques of negligent airport security and failure to acknowledge Chechen problems mere days before a scheduled election. Instead, the administration suggested a number of other theories, including industrial sabotage, human error and technical failure.

In an unusual act of dissent, the Russian media told the administration that it would not tolerate any distortion of the truth. Air traffic control had received hijack warnings, and experts maintained that the chances of two aircraft going down simultaneously, hundreds of kilometres apart, were less than one in a million. The weight of physical evidence from the two crash sites made it even more difficult for the media to accept the administration's alternative scenarios.

Chechen separatists have a long history of high-profile terror "spectaculars." In the chaos surrounding the fall of the Soviet Union, Chechnya declared independence from Russia in 1991 and fought against Federal forces in two wars. The first conflict, between 1994 and 1996, was conventional in nature and largely successful for the Chechen rebels. After 1999, however, they became increasingly reliant on terror attacks. Particularly notable attacks include a series of Russian apartment bombings, which left over 300 dead; the October 2002 Dubrovka Theatre siege in Moscow, the Metro bombing, also in the Russian capital, and Wednesday's seige in a school at North Ossetia. Traces of RDX, an explosive used in a number of these attacks, were found at both of the airplane crash sites. This evidence reinforces the belief that Chechen rebels were responsible for this atrocity.

Of those rebels, a likely suspect may be the radical Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev, a



Soldiers take position near the school in North Ossetia, Beslan, where rebels are holding hostage over 300 people, including more than a hundred children. — AFP

leading separatist figure with a long history of implementing large-scale terror attacks outside Chechnya. He was implicated in the Dubrovka siege, the Metro bombings and a string of other attacks. He also boasts to have trained a brigade of female suicide bombers – the infamous "Black Widows" – willing to carry out attacks against Russian institutions, at any time and at any place. Investigators confirm on the basis of the remains of two female passengers – Amanta Nagaeva (who boarded the Tu-134) and Satsia Jebirkhanova (on the Tu-154) – that the 25 August incident was a case of suicide bombing. Close relatives of Chechen rebels who were abducted or killed in the fighting, both women fit the "Black Widow" profile.

Basayev is also believed to maintain links to the Al-Qaida network. In 1995, he formed an alliance with the Saudi-born former Afghan *jihadi* , Amir Khattab, while founding training camps for disillusioned Chechen youth. The group's exploits resulted in further funding, as Arab sources funnelled ever-larger sums of money to the radical Islamic cause in Chechnya. In fact, on 31 August – two days after the Chechen elections – Vladimir Putin, at a meeting with German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and French President Jacques Chirac, announced a link between the suspected female suicide bombers and Al-Qaida.

Still, it is easy to overstate the extent of Al-

Qaida involvement; while many foreign *jihadis* have come to Chechnya to fight federal authorities, the numbers are low compared to similar foreign involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, Chechen terrorists do not appear to desire indiscriminate holy war; their demands relate solely to the independence of Chechnya.

Divisions do exist, however, between the secular-nationalist Chechen rebel groups, led by Aslan Maskhadov, and the Islamist Chechen groups epitomised by Basayev and his allies. A combination of Russian military attacks against Maskhadov and the sheer volume of foreign funding to Basayev have helped his forces gain the upper hand.

The apparent global aspect of the Chechen conflict was highlighted when the unknown "Islambouli Brigade" claimed responsibility for the airline attack. The group had also claimed responsibility earlier last month for the attempted assassination of Pakistan's Prime Minister-designate, Shaukat Aziz. The confirming of these claims would indicate a worrisome extension of the Chechen conflict to a wider world. Already, Chechen rebel fighters are reportedly active in the tribal areas of Waziristan, on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Despite these reports, the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that the motive for the

airline attacks is domestic. In the wake of 29 August Chechen presidential elections, the Putin government is desperate to ensure that nothing prevents the consolidation of the new Moscow-friendly leadership. A so-called "normalisation" policy allows Chechens to assume responsibility for their own affairs while maintaining ties to Russia. Thus, Putin may withdraw troops from the region and announce the fulfillment of his inauguration pledge to bring Chechnya to heel. The policy also involves sidelining Chechens that favour independence, including Maskhadov and Basayev.

Russia's failure to negotiate with the rebels is the reason for the assassination of the previous pro-Moscow Chechen president, Akhmad Kadyrov. And now, the newly elected pro-Moscow Chechen President, Alu Alkhanov, has the most dangerous job in Russia. He must placate the Russian government, handle the hawks eager for war in Chechnya and convince the majority of the Chechen population that he is not merely a Russian stooge. He must also maintain a close working relationship with Akhmad Kadyrov's son, Ramzan, who controls the Chechen security organs in the region and is the real power broker. Alkhanov has stated that he will be willing to negotiate a solution with rebel leader Maskhadov, and this will add to the tensions with the younger Kadyrov, who will not want to relinquish his power or lucrative oil revenues.

Ultimately, a long-term solution in Chechnya can only be found by negotiating with the secular-nationalist rebels. The Russian policy of attack and isolation has succeeded only at increasing the credibility of radical Islamic groups. If a solution is not found, then another large terror attack may likely occur on international interests in Russia. A number of minor attacks have already been made on the main international oil pipelines that traverse the region, including the vitally important Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.

What does a recent escalation of Chechen attacks mean for security inside Russia and for international aviation? The Russian authorities have already heightened national security. But even if Russian authorities can improve their aviation security to a level comparable with that of Israel, the fact remains that Russia is not Israel; it is a country so vast that the "bomber will always get through." If Russia is determined to stop Chechen terrorism, then at some stage it will have to negotiate with the very people it has demonised.

This article appeared in YaleGlobal Online, a publication of the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, and is reprinted with permission.

Masterly use of limited force

Associated Press

MOSCOW, Sept. 1. — Chechnya is often called a breakaway republic, but the militant separatists who have harried Russian forces for years and struck with bold attacks beyond the mostly Muslim region's borders are a relatively small segment of a population long tired of bloodshed.

Russian authorities say rebel numbers have shrunk to the low thousands after a decade of war and chaos, and while that may be wishful thinking, most residents of the region — whose population has been counted at over a million — do not overtly back the militants, let alone collaborate.

"People are simply weary of war," said Mr Alexander Sharavin, director of Institute of Political and Military Analysis in Moscow. He estimated that 10 to 30 per cent of Chechnya's people support the militants, with the higher numbers in the mountainous south where the rebels are concentrated.

The militants have been "using their limited forces masterfully," Mr Sharavin said yesterday.

TERROUR

TRAIL

2004:

- Sept. 1. — Siege of an elementary school in North Ossetia.
- Aug. 31. — Car explosion outside a Moscow subway, killing 10 people.
- Aug. 24. — Two airliners crash within minutes of each other after taking off from the same airport.
- May 9. — Bomb rips through a stadium in Grozny.
- Feb. 6. — Explosion in Moscow metro

2003:

- Dec. 9. — Female suicide bomber blows herself up near the Kremlin
- Dec. 5. — Suicide bombing on commuter train in southern Russia, killing 44
- Sept. 16. — Two suicide bombers drive a truck laden with explosives into a government security services building near Chechnya
- Aug. 1. — Suicide bomber rams truck filled with explosives into a military hospital near Chechnya, killing 50
- July 10. — Russian security agent dies in Moscow while trying to defuse a bomb a woman had tried to carry into a cafe
- July 5. — Double suicide bombing at a Moscow rock concert

Nobody has claimed responsibility for the seizure of a school and hundreds of hostages in the neighbouring North Ossetia region yesterday, and Russian authorities have not placed the blame on Chechen rebels or any particular group. But suspicion has fallen on Chechens or people with ties to the region — particularly female suicide bombers — in explosions that brought down two planes last week



A TV grab of pupils who escaped from the gunmen at a school in Russia on Wednesday. — AFP

- kills the female attackers and 15 others.
 - June 5. — Female suicide attacker detonates bomb near a bus carrying soldiers
 - May 14. — Woman blows up explosives strapped to her waist in crowd of thousands of Muslim pilgrims, killing 18
 - May 12. — Suicide truck—bomb attack kills 60 people in northern Chechnya.
 - April 3. — Passenger bus hits remote—controlled land mine in Grozny
- 2002:**
- Dec. 27. — Suicide truck—bomb attack destroys headquarters of Chechnya's Moscow—backed government, killing 72.

and a series of attacks that have killed hundreds of people in Moscow and in the past two years. The suicide bombers are a new phenomenon for Russia, but hostage-taking raids have been part of militant strategy since shortly after Russian forces rolled into the region in 1994 in a bid to crush the separatist government of its now dead leader Dzhokhar Dudayev.

132 kids among hostages

Russia ①

SF7
SCHOOL NEAR CHECHNYA UNDER SIEGE

299

MOSCOW, Sept. 1. — About 132 children were among 400 taken hostage by a band of attackers who raided a school at Beslan in Russia, near Chechnya today. While authorities could establish contact with the militants 10 hours into the siege, the UN Security Council will meet at 2.30 a.m. IST tomorrow to discuss the crisis.

Barely a day after a suicide bomber killed 10 people in Moscow, the abductors, wearing suicide-bomb belts, warned that they would blow up the school if police tried to storm it. They forced children to stand at the windows, said a police spokesman. Mr Kazbek Dzantiyev, head of the region's interior ministry, said the hostages have threatened to kill 50



A TV grab from a Russian channel shows troops evacuating a little girl and her mother on Wednesday. — AFP

children for every "destroyed fighter" and 20 for every "injured fighter", reported ITAR-Tass. While the agency reported that 15 children were released, Mr Ruslan Ayamov, spokesman for North Ossetia's interior ministry,

said 12 children and an adult managed to escape.

At least eight people were killed, including a raider, and nine people injured, says ITAR-Tass.

Well-known paediatrician Dr Leonid Roshal, who had helped in the

2002 Moscow hostage negotiations, has arrived at Beslan for talks, as demanded by the attackers. They also want the release of fighters detained over a series of attacks on police facilities in neighbouring Ingushetia in June, ITAR-Tass reported, citing regional officials.

"In essence, war has been declared on us, where the enemy is unseen and there is no front," Russian defence minister Mr Sergei Ivanov said.

UN Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan today condemned the incident and called for the release of the hostages. The Indian government also expressed shock at the "act of terrorism". — SNS & Agencies

Masterly use of limited force, page 3

RUSSIA'S 8/24

RUSSIA
10-12

EVEN THOUGH RUSSIAN authorities are yet to announce the official causes of the two air crashes on Tuesday, it is almost certain now: the airliners were brought down by terrorists. Investigators have found traces of explosives in the wreckage of one of the planes — the first direct proof that a bomb went off aboard the plane. Circumstantial evidence also abounds. A Tu-154 and a Tu-134 took off from the same airport and crashed within a minute of each other when they were a thousand kilometres apart. The catastrophe happened so fast that the pilots of both planes had no time to report to flight control even as their aircraft took a full 10 minutes to plunge to the ground from an altitude of about 10 km. All that the pilot of the Tu-145 managed to do was to press an SOS button. Under suspicion are two Chechen women who travelled on the aircraft; they were the only two passengers no friend or relative enquired about.

August 24 became Russia's 9/11. It was the first time civilian aircraft came under terrorist attack in Russia's post-Soviet history. There is little doubt either that the attack has Chechen roots. Chechnya is the one place in Russia where terrorists are active. Despairing of reaching out to the West with their raids on Russian troops in the region (as information flows are tightly controlled by Russian authorities), rebels have acted on their longstanding threat to take the war beyond Chechnya. By downing two Russian planes five days before a presidential poll in the region, rebels clearly wanted to demonstrate the strength of their resistance and to refute Moscow's claims of having brought the situation under control. The attacks were a fresh blow to the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, in his efforts to pacify the rebellious region. These efforts suf-

ferred a major setback in May when the Kremlin-backed President of Chechnya, Akhmad Kadyrov, was killed by a bomb during a V-day parade in the capital, Grozny, just six months after his election. It is reassuring that the plane crashes have not weakened the Kremlin's resolve to push ahead with its peace plan for Chechnya and to hold Sunday's elections. But Mr. Putin now needs to take a hard look at the efficiency of Russian intelligence and law enforcement agencies in dealing with Chechen terrorism and to review security at Russian airports, which appears to be lax.

Three days after the attacks an Islamist group, "the Islambouli Brigades," claimed responsibility for downing the Russian aircraft. The group, which also claimed the assassination attempt on Pakistan's Prime Minister-designate, Shaukat Aziz, last month, said it protested the "slaughtering of Muslims" in Chechnya. If the Arab group was indeed involved in the attack on the Russian planes, it would corroborate Moscow's warnings that Chechnya has long become a hub for international terrorists. Several foreign militants have been killed in the region in recent years; they included the most notorious Khattab, a Jordanian-born warlord who took responsibility for the bombing of homes in Moscow and Volgograd in 1999 that claimed more than 300 lives. The Islamist connection in the outrage adds urgency to Russian demands that the West should renounce double standards in dealing with terrorism by giving shelter to Chechen rebel emissaries, as several Western countries, including Britain and the United States, have done recently. 8/24 should serve as a wake-up call to the international community to jointly tackle terrorism, one of the worst scourges of the 21st century.

THE HINDU

28 AUG 2004

Two Russian planes crash, 90 killed

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, AUG. 25. Two Russian airliners crashed on Tuesday night within minutes of each other, killing 90 people in what is feared to be a terror attack.

Both aircraft took off from the Domodedovo Airport after 2200 hours (12.30 a.m. IST) and within 40 minutes of each other, disappeared from the radar screens at about 2300 hours. While the TU-134, flying to Volgograd with 35 passengers and a crew of eight,

crashed near Tula, about 200 km from Moscow, the other one, a TU-154, carrying 38 passengers and eight crew flying to the Black Sea resort of Sochi, went missing near Roston-on-Don, a town some 1,000 km south of Moscow.

'Explosion', hijack alert

Air-controllers said there had been no reports of any problems from the crew of the Tu-134 before it crashed. However, witnesses reported seeing an explosion before the airlin-

er hit the ground. In the case of the TU-154, two minutes before it was reported missing, it had sent a hijack alert. Sibir Airline, which operated the flight, said in a press release that it received a report from the military air control that "the hijack message was generated right before all contact was lost with the plane and it disappeared from the radar screens."

Putin orders probe

President Vladimir Putin or-

dered the FSB security service to investigate both crashes "without delay," the Kremlin press service said. Security has been tightened in all airports of the country.

A spokesman for the FSB said investigators had not yet found evidence of a terrorist act or explosion but he did not rule out either.

"The main line of inquiry we are following is violation of the rules of operating civil aircraft," said the spokesman, Sergei Ignatchenko.

Officials said the recorders had been recovered and sent here for analysis.

Several security experts felt that the simultaneous crash of two airliners which had taken off from the same airport looked like a terrorist attack.

"It may be a well-planned attack by Chechen or Al-Qaeda terrorists," said Mr. Viktor Ilyukhin, a member of the security committee of the State Duma lower house.

Chechens deny hand; photograph on Page 13

Mystery stalks double air crash

TALE OF TWO FLIGHTS

CRASH SITE OF Tu-134

- Airline: Volga-Aviaexpress
- Flight number: 1303
- Passengers: 44 including nine crew
- Left Moscow's Domodedovo airport at 1815 GMT
- Contact lost at 1856 GMT

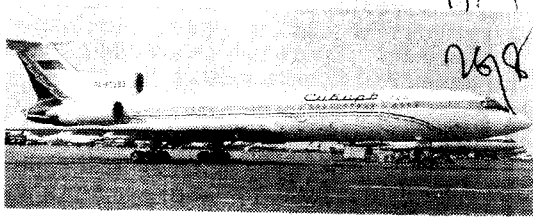
CRASH SITE OF Tu-154

- Airline: Sibir Airlines
- Flight number: 1047
- Passengers: 46 people including eight crew
- Left Moscow's Domodedovo airport at 1735 GMT
- Contact lost at 1859 GMT



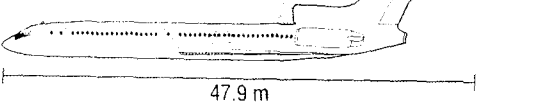
The Tupolev 154

Tu-154: Russian medium-haul plane



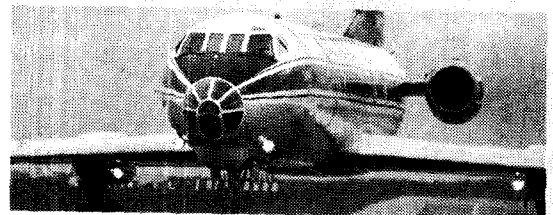
Introduced: 1972

- Engines: 3 x 93.2kn Kusnetsov turbofan engines
- Cruising speed: 850 kmph
- Range fully loaded: 4,000 km+
- Passengers: 155-180



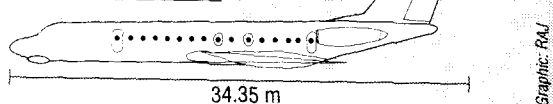
The Tupolev 134

Tu-134: Russian short-haul plane



Introduced: 1967

- Engines: 2 x 64.5kn Soloviev turbofan engines
- Cruising speed: 880 kmph
- Range fully loaded: 2,800 km
- Passengers: 80-96



Moscow, Aug. 25 (Reuters): Two Russian passenger planes crashed almost simultaneously, killing all 89 people on board in what investigators said today might have been a terrorist attack or simply a mysterious coincidence.

The planes, which belonged to two different companies and were bound for different destinations, took off from Moscow's Domodedovo airport around an hour apart late yesterday and crashed within minutes of each other.

President Vladimir Putin ordered the FSB security service to investigate the case, something it is normally only asked to do where terrorism is suspected. Security has been tightened at all Russian airports since the crashes.

Later in the day Putin broke his summer holiday in the Black Sea resort of Sochi

and returned to Moscow, the Kremlin said.

Russia's chief prosecutor told Putin today that there was no clear view of what caused the crashes that killed 89 people. "We are examining a number of versions, among them a terrorist act, and human and technical factors," prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov was quoted by Itar-Tass as telling Putin. "We don't rule out any one of these theories today."

"Before we begin our work, I would like to express my condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims," Putin was quoted as saying. He called a day of national mourning tomorrow.

Fear of attacks in Russia is already high ahead of next Sunday's presidential election in restive Chechnya which separatist rebels have vowed to disrupt.

A Tu-134 flying to Volgograd went down near the town of Tula south of Moscow. Within minutes and 800 km away, a Tu-154 bound for Sochi crashed near the southern town of Rostov-on-Don.

The owner of the Tu-154, Sibir Airlines, said the pilots had triggered a hijack alert just before their plane with 46 passengers and crew on board crashed. "The message was generated right before all contact was lost with the plane and it disappeared from radar screens," Russia's number two airline said in a statement.

The company also said there were indications that its plane exploded in the air.

"The wide distribution of large fragments indirectly confirms the conjecture that the plane broke up in midair because of an explosion," a company statement said.

Volga-Aviaexpress, a small regional carrier which owned the Tu-134, said the crew did not report any problems on board before the plane crashed with 43 passengers and crew.

Interfax news agency quoted an aviation source as saying the coincidence of both planes leaving from the same airport and disappearing at the same time would suggest it was "a planned action."

"In such a situation one could not exclude a terrorist act," the source was quoted as saying. But the FSB officials said they were more likely accidents. "The main line of inquiry we are following is violation of the rules of operating civil aircraft," FSB spokesman Sergei Ignatchenko said.

Ignatchenko said this meant pilot error, mechanical defects or problems with fuel

quality — prime suspects in Russia, where pilots are poorly paid and planes often old.

"We are also examining the possibility of a terrorist act, but we have no evidence to support this."

Sibir and Volga-Aviaexpress rejected the possibility of human or technical faults, saying that the planes were properly checked before the flight and had experienced crews.

The Tu-134 was piloted by the head of the company and was carrying two auditors from the aviation authority, who perform regular checks of all air carriers.

The crashes came against a backdrop of violence in Chechnya, where Moscow has been battling separatists for a decade. Rebels launched a major raid in the local capital Grozny last week.

Witnesses on the ground heard an explosion from the Tu-134 before it crashed 150 km south of Moscow. "Around 1900 GMT, give or take five minutes, there was this strange noise in the sky, then this torn-up book fell onto our garage," a local man told NTV television, holding up the book with its tattered pages.

Local prosecutors opened criminal probes into both crashes. Investigators recovered the flight recorders from both planes and sent them to Moscow for analysis.

Interfax said more than 1,500 servicemen were involved in search operations.

Rescuers had found the bodies of all 43 killed in the Tula crash, while the recovery effort in Rostov was taking longer, as wreckage from the crash was spread over several kilometres.



Investigators examine the tail unit of the Tu-134 outside Tula, 180 km south of Moscow. (AFP)

Athletes mourn at Athens

Athens, Aug. 25 (Reuters): Russia's Olympic team observed a minute's silence at the athletes village in Athens today in memory of the victims of two overnight air crashes in Russia.

Investigators do not rule

out that they were attacked.

Vyacheslav Fetisov, the Kremlin sports supremo and former NHL ice hockey star, led the ceremony during a reception for Russian medal winners, a team spokesman said.

Asked if security would be stepped up at the Games, a government spokesman said Greece was already on full alert and would remain so until all participants had left after Sunday's final day of the Olympics.

"Nothing has changed," Theodoris Roussopoulos said.

Games spokesman Michael Zacharatos said: "Security continues to remain our top priority until all athletes arrive safely back home."

Chechens deny hand

London, Aug. 25 (Reuters): A London-based spokesman for the leader of Chechnya's main rebel group said today it was not responsible for near-simultaneous air crashes in Russia which killed 89 people.

Asked if his group was responsible for the crashes, Akhmed Zakayev, a spokesman for Chechnya's separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov, said in London: "Of course not."

"To us any form of terrorism is absolutely unacceptable. We have condemned it and continue to condemn it," he said. Two Russian passenger planes crashed almost simultaneously late yesterday, killing all 89 people on board in what investigators said was probably a freak coincidence but might have been a terrorist attack.

The planes took off from the same Moscow airport and disappeared from air traffic controllers' radar screens within minutes of each other late yesterday. The crash sites were some 800 km apart.

The incidents came against a backdrop of mounting violence in Chechnya, where Moscow has been battling separatists for a decade.

In the past Chechen rebels have blamed extremist Chechens for attacks on civilians such as a deadly hostage crisis in a Moscow theatre in 2002, but Zakayev said he did not think such people were responsible in this case.

"Even those Chechens who



A relative cries at Domodedovo airport, Moscow. (AFP)

have been driven to such desperate methods as suicide, I think even they have realised that this brings no benefits to the Chechen people," he said. "So I rule that out."

Yesterday, a blast from a device planted near a bus stop in southern Moscow injured at least 3 people, city police said.

Police said no one was killed in the explosion which happened at around 1545 GMT. They were unable to give further details. Interfax quoted a police source as saying that the explosive device was attached to a street light close to the bus stop. There was no indication as to who may have planted the device.

57 killed in Chechen attacks

Associated Press

CHEMEN (Russia), June 22. — Thousands of federal troops streamed into a southern Russian republic today in pursuit of Chechen rebels who attacked police and government buildings in coordinated assaults that officials said killed at least 57 people.

The dead included 47 security officers or officials, the ITAR-Tass news agency cited Mr Beslan Khamkoyev, acting interior minister of the Republic of Ingushetia as saying.

The UN office of humanitarian aid coordination in Russia said a UN worker, Magomed Getagayev, was among the dead, caught in a crossfire while returning home from work in Nazran, the main city of Ingushetia.

The militants' foray into Ingushetia underscored the Russian military's failure to defeat separatists in neighbouring Chechnya after five years of fighting, and raised new fears that violence could spread to other parts of southern Russia.

President Mr Vladimir Putin ordered authorities "to find and destroy" the raiders. "Those who can be caught must be taken alive



PEACE IN PIECES: A policeman is seen through the broken car window near a police station in Nazran, Ingushetia, on Tuesday. — AFP

and brought to trial," Mr Putin told a Kremlin meeting of police and security officials.

The raid on Ingushetia came amid preparations for an August election in Chechnya to replace Kremlin-backed Chechen President Mr Akhmad Kadyrov, killed

last month in a bomb attack. Kadyrov's death was seen as a significant blow to Mr Putin's efforts to bring some stability to Chechnya.

Shortly before midnight on Monday, about 100 fighters armed with grenade- and rocket-launchers seized the home ministry in

Nazran and attacked border guard posts there and in two villages near the border with Chechnya, Karabulak and Yandare, regional emergency officials said.

Russian authorities sent in reinforcements shortly after dawn today. The troops moved into Nazran through the border village of Chermen in neighbouring North Ossetia, in a long column of armoured personnel carriers and Army trucks. But by morning most of the militants had already fled into the thick forests on the border of Ingushetia and Chechnya, authorities said. Ingush President Mr Murat Zyazikov told Interfax news agency that a large number of weapons and ammunition were also missing from police depots.

Russian news media reported only two militant deaths. An AP reporter also saw the body of one militant near Yandare. At least one group of rebels were caught by police as they retreated through Galashki, near the Chechen border, a spokesman for Ingushetia's interior ministry said.

A spokesman for the Russian forces in Chechnya, blamed Chechen rebels for planning the attacks, but said the raids were carried out by fighters recruited from both Chechnya and Ingushetia.

Russia bleeds in Chechen charge

GA 22/6
Nazran (Russia), June 22 (Reuters): Suspected Chechen rebels rampaged through a southern Russian region in attacks early today that killed 48 people and raised new doubts about Moscow's ability to stamp out Chechnya's separatist violence.

In a brazen operation, the rebels seized the interior ministry building in Ingushetia region and held it for several hours, raided police arms depots and reduced police headquarters and a building housing border guards to gutted wrecks.

The large-scale offensive was the biggest armed operation by rebels in Ingushetia since war between separatists and Moscow erupted in neighbouring Chechnya a decade ago.

The coordinated strikes, concentrated in the regional capital Nazran, led to fierce overnight battles involving grenade-launchers and automatic weapons as security forces fought to dislodge the rebels from the ministry building.

Coming just six weeks after the assassination of Chechen leader Akhmad Kadyrov, the daring operation dealt a further blow to President Vladimir Putin's assertion that the tide had turned in Moscow's favour in its nine-year battle with the separatists.

There was no immediate word from the Kremlin. Itar-Tass news agency said Ingushi President Murat Zyazikov kept Putin informed on the situation

by telephone. *luna*
Tass quoted police as saying a small army of up to 200 guerrilla fighters staged the operation that began with rebels tricking their way into checkpoints on one of the main highways.

Using false documents that identified them as members of anti-crime and special service squads, they commandeered the checkpoints and then gunned down police who turned out to answer the alarm, police said, quoted by Tass.

Forty-eight people — 18 policemen, five regional justice officials and 25 civilians — were killed, Yakhya Khadziyev, a spokesman for the regional interior ministry, was quoted as saying by Tass. He said the dead included the acting regional interior minister Abukar Kostoyev, who had been in the building when it was captured.

Another 60 people were injured. Two rebel fighters had been killed.

Footage shown by ORT Channel One television showed bodies of combatants and civilians lying in the streets today, many of them charred and mutilated from the intense fighting.

Witnesses said they had seen the bodies of many police officers in the ministry building which the rebels held for several hours before pulling out in the early hours.

A police officer who gave his name only as Timur said: "In our section alone, 30 people were killed and wounded".



REUTERS

Mourners at the funeral of assassinated Chechen President Akhmad Kadyrov in Tsentoroi on Monday.

119 HT 11 Kadyrov laid to rest Ramzan

CHECHENS BURIED their assassinated President Akhmad Kadyrov on Monday and began three days of mourning while the Kremlin scrambled to figure out a new strategy for winning control of the region after the death of its main ally.

Kadyrov's two sons Ramzan and Zelimkhan — seen as some of the most powerful figures in Chechnya — helped carry his body, covered by a white wool cloth on a bier in accordance with tradition.

The attack was a huge blow to Russian President Vladimir Putin — who only two days earlier in an inauguration ceremony to his second term took pride in stamping Moscow's control on the region after more than four years of war.

Putin appointed Sergei Abramov, a 32-year-old former banker who most analysts agree has limited influence in Chechnya, to head the republic on an interim basis. Kadyrov's son, Ramzan, was appointed the first deputy head of the separatist republic's government. Ramzan Kadyrov is seen as one of the more powerful figures in Chechnya. He will serve as the right-hand man to Sergei Abramov.

"We are losing our friends, but we will not be backing down. We will be fighting until the end," said one of the current top commanders in Chechnya, Vyacheslav Tikhomirov. "We are ready to bring in new reserves if necessary."

AFP, Tsentoroi

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 MAY 2004

Chechen leader buried, Russia claims control

Moscow, May 10 (Reuters): The leader of Russia's restive Chechnya region was buried today, the day after an assassination that shook President Vladimir Putin's plans to tame rebellion he sees as a threat to the fabric of his country.

Thousands of mourners attended the funeral of President Akhmad Kadyrov, an ex-Muslim cleric central to Putin's bid to pacify mainly Muslim Chechnya but viewed by rebels as a traitor.

Security appeared tight at the ceremony at his home village, Tsentoroi. Kadyrov was killed with six others by a bomb blast at a World War Two victory ceremony in a stadium in the regional capital Grozny yesterday. The bomb was planted under the VIP stand where top Russian and Chechen officials had gathered.

Kadyrov, 52, once a leading figure among the separatists, ruled Chechnya with an iron fist and was increasingly taking over powers from his Kremlin masters, negotiating with moderate rebels and suppressing opposition among rival clans.

As mourners flooded tightly guarded roads to attend the funeral in Tsentoroi some 50 km from Grozny, Russian officials insisted the security situation was under control.

Television pictures showed heads of neighbouring Russian

regions and many Chechen dignitaries at a mourning ceremony, but Moscow sent no senior officials to attend it.

Russian and Chechen officials blamed rebels for the assassination. But rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov, in an interview with rebel news agency Chechenpress, denied involvement. Russian news agencies quoted investigators as saying they were still trying to determine how a bomb could be planted in the tight-security VIP area and who triggered the explosion.

Deputy prosecutor general Sergei Fridinsky denied media reports yesterday about first arrests. He told Interfax news agency: "No one was officially arrested and there are still no suspects in the case."

"In general the situation in the republic is under the control of law-enforcement bodies and federal forces," Interfax quoted the newly appointed Russian commander in Chechnya Colonel-General Mikhail Pankov as saying. Pankov's predecessor, Colonel-General Valery Baranov, was badly injured.

Despite confident noises from officials the situation looked bleak for Putin's plans to establish an effective authority there that would eventually snuff out the separatist rebellion.

"Kadyrov's death has left a

political vacuum in Chechnya," Russian parliamentary deputy Ramazan Abdulatipov said.

The defection of Kadyrov from the rebel cause was a coup for Putin, who sent troops in 1999 to end short-lived independence.

Kadyrov's moves to get rid of power rivals with Moscow's heavy-handed help devastated Chechnya's political landscape, leaving few potential successors of quality for Putin to choose.

Two hours after Kadyrov's death, Putin met his son Ramzan in Moscow, fuelling rumours the head of Kadyrov's security forces — accused of involvement in human rights violations — could be handed the hot job. These rumours strengthened today when Ramzan was appointed first deputy head of the regional government. Reuters journalist Adlan Khasanov was buried today a day after being killed in the bomb attack. Khasanov was laid to rest in at a cemetery in Novye Atagi, his home village.



Ramzan Kadyrov, son of assassinated Chechen leader Akhmad Kadyrov, at his father's funeral in the village of Tsentoroi. (AFP)

10 MAY 2004

STADIUM BLAST KILLS 20, INCLUDING JOURNALIST ■ SEPARATISTS' HAND SUSPECTED ■ PUTIN PROMISES RETRIBUTION

CHECHEN PRESIDENT ASSASSINATED

Associated Press

GROZNY, May 9. — The Kremlin-backed President of Chechnya and more than 20 others, including a journalist, were killed today in a bomb explosion at a stadium in the Chechen capital during Victory Day observances.

The explosive was believed to be a land mine, an emergency situations ministry spokesman, Mr Sergei Kozhemyaka, said. NTV television quoted an investigator as saying it had been made out of a 152-mm artillery shell and detonated with a wire or timer. The bomb was planted under the seats where Chechen Pre-

sident Akhmad Kadyrov and other dignitaries were watching the ceremonies marking the defeat of the Nazis.

Also killed was Hussein Isayev, head of Chechnya's State Council, the Interfax news agency reported, citing President Vladimir Putin's representative in the southern Russian district, Mr Vladimir Yakovlev. Eli Isayev, the region's finance minister, was also killed. Russian news reports said.

A top Russian commander, Col.-Gen. Valery Baranov, initially was reported killed, but officials later said he was in critical condition, with one leg amputated. The city's emergency medical centre said 24 people in all were killed and 46



President Akhmad Kadyrov. (Right) Policemen carry a Reuters photographer who was fatally wounded in the explosion in Grozny on Sunday. — AFP



However, Mr Yakovlev said six people had been killed in the blast, Interfax reported. He said 53 people had been wounded. The Reuters news

agency said one of the dead was its photographer Adlan Khasanov (33).

The explosion in the heart of the capital, where Russian troops are omnipresent, underlined the intense security problems even as the Kremlin says normalcy is being restored after nearly five years of fighting against separatist rebels. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the explosion, but suspicion inevitably fell on the rebels. Police and soldiers launched an extensive search after the blast and detained at least five people, reports said.

"Justice will take the upper hand and retribution is inevitable," Russian President Mr

Vladimir Putin said at the conclusion of Moscow's Victory Day parade on Red Square, the ITAR-Tass news agency reported.

Mr Putin today met Kadyrov's son Mr Ramzan Kadyrov, the Kremlin press service said, although there was no further immediate information. Chechen Prime Minister Mr Sergei Abramov would become the republic's acting President, the Kremlin said.

The stadium's VIP section collapsed into a jagged hole of torn wooden planks, sending up a plume of brown smoke. Panicked people dressed in their Sunday best clambered over the bleachers and shots split the air amid the chaos.

Probe will not restore honour: ex-prisoner

BAGHDAD, MAY 7. Haider Sabbar Abed points at the picture showing a naked prisoner, posed for the camera with his head hooded, his hands behind his head. "That's me," Mr. Abed says.

Mr. Abed was one of a group of seven Iraqi prisoners now at the centre of the storm over the abuse of detenus by U.S. guards at Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison. The abuse allegation has exploded from an investigation into guards into wider review, anger at the U.S. Congress and promises that justice will be served by the U.S. President, George W Bush.

But Mr. Abed (36) — looking at the photos now seen around the world — said today all the investigations would not do anything for him. "Will any of this restore my honour to me? My dignity has been crushed under foot," he told The Associated Press. "Bush says they (the guards) will be punished, but who knows? In all seriousness, do you really think they will?"

In pictures first made public by *The Washington Post* and *New Yorker* magazine, prisoners are shown stripped naked as guards taunt them and force them into humiliating poses. The

prisoners' heads are hooded, but Mr. Abed said he recognised scars and tattoos on his body in the pictures. "My mind is drenched with the memory of this. Every pose and position," he said.

Mr. Abed, a Shia from the southern city of Nasiriyah, was detained in July during a visit to Baghdad to get some paperwork from his time in the military under Saddam Hussein. He said a car that was giving him a ride was stopped by U.S. troops because it was of a make often used in anti-U.S. attacks. — AP

Putin pledges push to economy

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, MAY 7. Russia's youthful President, Vladimir Putin, took the oath for a second term on Friday with a pledge to impart new dynamics to the country's already impressive economic growth and ensure people's well being.

Eight weeks after his landslide re-election, Mr. Putin was sworn in at a glamorous Kremlin ceremony attended by some 1,700 guests and crowned with a march past by presidential guards and a 30-gun salute.

The former Russian President, Boris Yeltsin, was present on the occasion to hear a barely disguised jab at the legacy he had left to his hand-picked successor four years ago.

"The past years have not been easy for all of us. To put it bluntly, they were a time of grave trials," Mr. Putin said in his inaugural address.

"Back in 2000, too many problems seemed to have no solution at all."

During his first term, Mr. Putin has pulled the country away from "the looming threat of disintegration" and presided over a 30-per cent GDP growth.

This earned Mr. Putin over 70 per cent of the vote in the March poll. Setting a distinctly nationalist tone to his inaugural address, Mr. Putin stressed that

Russia has bounced back, relying on its own strength, rather than foreign credits that Mr. Yeltsin had solicited and squandered to no effect.

"Standing together, we have achieved a lot, and we have done it ourselves only," the President said.

Russia today is "a country that has bolstered its positions in the world and learned to uphold its legitimate interests by peaceful means in the fast-changing world."

Mr. Putin (51), has vowed to set the country on a path of still faster growth in his second and last term allowed by the Russian Constitution.

Last year, he called for doubling the gross domestic product by 2010 and promised administrative reforms to streamline the bureaucracy.

"The main task for the coming four years is to translate the potential accumulated so far into new energy for development in order to achieve a quantum jump in the quality of life and an effective, tangible improvement in the well being of our people," Mr. Putin said in his address.

He called for the development of a "mature civil society" in a country that "has never had any democracy," as he admitted in a recent interview.



The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, walks through St. George's Hall during his second term Inauguration in the Kremlin on Friday. — Reuters

Russia *10-10* *1977* **PUTIN TRIUMPHANT** *Russia*

VLADIMIR PUTIN'S RE-ELECTION as President of Russia was never in doubt; he had consistently and heavily outscored the five other candidates in opinion polls conducted before the vote on March 14. While the losers complained that his hold over the administration and the electronic media gave him an unfair advantage, they cannot explain away a verdict in which the incumbent President has taken over 70 per cent of the votes cast. Russian voters could have registered their disenchantment with the electoral exercise either by staying away from election booths or by indicating on their ballot papers that they did not approve of any of the contenders. A turnout of less than 50 per cent of eligible voters would have invalidated the elections and destroyed the President's credibility. With over 60 per cent of the electorate turning up at the polling stations, Mr. Putin can begin his second term in the confidence that a steamrolling majority of his countrymen approve of his rule. While living standards have not improved in any significant manner over the past four years, the majority of Russians are apparently satisfied with Mr. Putin's success in arresting the drift and decline that characterised the rule of his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin.

President Putin made a clean break with the past when he dismissed Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov who had been foisted on him by Mr. Yeltsin. He also signalled an intent to further intensify the crackdown on crony capitalists, who had brazenly looted national assets during the Yeltsin years, by appointing a loyalist experienced in economic administration to the premiership a few days before the election. Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov and his team are expected to reform the administrative machinery and to ensure that the oligarchs observe the rules and pay taxes. As the Putin administration begins to re-emphasise the state's role in the economy, it will indirectly

challenge the foreign commercial interests that worked in tandem with the Russian oligarchs. That in turn could provide another cause for friction between Russia and the United States. Mr. Putin promised that he would not use aggressive methods or adopt confrontationist postures in promoting a resurgent Russia's interests. However, Washington has made inroads into several spheres where Moscow traditionally wielded influence. The Russian President's diplomatic skills and astuteness will be tested as he tries to dissuade the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus from providing bases for western forces over the long term. Even as Moscow seeks to reassert its role in these regions and check NATO's eastward expansion, it has to avoid the impression that a new imperium is being created. Mr. Putin has opposed the Bush administration's policies on a range of international issues, but has taken care to ensure that the differences did not lead to a rupture in the relationship between the two countries. While the Russian strongman is not likely to abandon this carefully calibrated approach during his second term in office, the international community and India in particular have reason to be happy over Russia's re-emergence as a significant player in global politics.

Washington was less than ecstatic about Mr. Putin's electoral triumph. In a negative assessment of the electoral exercise, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell noted that the other five candidates were not provided a level playing field. Mr. Powell might have been particularly irked because the nominee of the Communist party was the only other candidate to get a double digit vote share. His irritation would only have increased after Mr. Putin responded by referring to the bewilderment that gripped the world when the weaknesses of the American electoral system were thoroughly exposed in 2000.

THE HINDU 17 MAR 2000

Putin wins by a landslide

Associated Press
Moscow, March 14

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin won a second term in elections on Sunday with 69 per cent of the vote, according to an exit poll.

The poll, conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation, surveyed 120,000 voters at 1,200 polling stations. Official figures with 15 per cent of the vote counted gave Putin 66.5 per cent, Central Election Commission chief Alexander Veshnyakov said.

Ninety minutes before polls closed in heavily populated western Russia, electoral officials said that 61.18 per cent of voters nationwide had cast ballots. Once the turnout exceeded 50 per cent, the election was considered valid.

Assured of victory, Putin was looking for a powerful turnout to further strengthen his grip over Russia — already tightened by his appointment of a loyal new Cabinet just before the vote and by December parliamentary elections that gave the main pro-Kremlin party full control over lawmaking.

Putin, who reined in Russia's independent media following his first election in 2000, dominated the nationwide television networks before the vote. His five challengers received less coverage, adding to the widespread impression that the vote was a one-horse race.

"I voted for Putin because he is going to win anyway and what is the point in voting for someone else," said financial inspector Yelena Chebakova, 31, one of a handful of early voters at a Moscow polling station.

A frenzy of television appeals by Putin, his rivals and even top religious leaders urging people to vote reflected Kremlin concerns that the lack of a challenger with a chance of unseating the president might keep Russians away from the ballot box.

After voting in Moscow on Sunday morning alongside his wife, Lyudmila, Putin made a last-minute plea, saying that "much depends on this election" and that "the feeling of involvement must increase year after year".

The election lasted 22 hours, stretching over 11 time zones.

The absence of an alternative in the forthcoming elections is the result of a crisis in the more than decade-long development of the party system in post-Soviet Russia

PEOPLE FOR PUTIN

Бурсин SF 8 1913
By IRINA NEDYAK

PRESIDENTIAL elections will be held in Russia on 14 March and everyone is saying that the victory of the incumbent President is pre-terminated and the elections will turn into a vote of popular trust in Vladimir Putin. Polls show that about 70 per cent of the respondents would vote for Putin now, while none of the other candidates would get five per cent.

For the first time in more than 10 years of democratic reforms in Russia, the country is not wondering if the next President will carry on the reforms or not. However, the situation is more complicated than it may seem at first glance, and this year's presidential elections are no less dramatic than the previous ones, which were held under the banner of a fierce struggle between the "Communist" and "democratic" ideologies.

What is the drama of the 2004 presidential elections? "They do not offer an alternative and hence pose a threat to democracy and promote the growth of authoritarianism and personal power of the President", say many people. Is this true? Are there political forces in Russia that can keep presidential power within the bounds of democracy?

Irina Khakamada, a leader of the Union of the Right Forces (SPS) — a party that failed to win the requisite minimum of five per cent of the vote at the parliamentary elections — is the President's rival on the right flank. Only two per cent of the people are ready to vote for her.

The author is senior researcher at the Institute of Comparative Political Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.

Two candidates stand on the left flank, one from the Communists and the other from the so-called New Left. Slightly more than three per cent would vote for them. Why are their ratings that low in a country with strong left-wing traditions? As the voters see it, neither candidate is a worthy ideological opponent of Putin. Moreover, polls show that a considerable part of the left electorate think the incumbent President upholds their values and hence

elections.

Since the opposition would have lost a battle of ideologies or platforms (the only exception is Sergei Glazyev, the leader of the New Left who is working for his political future), Putin's opponents decided to undermine the value of elections as such. This is why they are saying that there is "no alternative" and "Putin will win anyway" and are calling on the public to boycott the elections or vote for "none of the above".

The public views Putin not as a person with an ideology but as a manager and pragmatist



view him as "one of us". Putin's other opponents are not worth discussing.

Thus, the absence of an alternative in the forthcoming elections is a result of a crisis in the more than a decade-long development of the party system in post-Soviet Russia, which resulted in the election defeat of the leading opposition parties — Yabloko and the SPS on the right, and the KPRF on the left.

The presidential campaign began very soon after the parliamentary elections, which is why the parties had no time to regroup and prepare for a serious struggle. This is the drama of the 2004 presidential

There is a danger that some voters will not come to the polling stations because they believe the opposition, while Putin's supporters will not attend because they think that Putin will win anyway.

It can be said in this case that the candidates of the left and right-wing opposition, without being serious rivals of the incumbent President, have managed to create a certain and highly dangerous alternative in the form of a threat to the legitimacy of the President's power. The only acceptable result for Putin will be a convincing victory in the first round. There is certainly no alternative.

The public views Putin not as a person with an ideology but as a manager and pragmatist who has found "the golden mean" between the establishment of democratic values in society and their social price that suits the majority of the people. The public supports Putin's policy of modernisation because society does not have to pay for it with the weakening and impoverishment of the country, as was the case under Boris Yeltsin. It brings to mind President Roosevelt, who said that poverty and freedom are incompatible and that "true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence".

Putin's presidency suits the values of the majority, such as the patriarchal political culture, the desire to have a strong socially-orientated state, as well as market relations, the right to private property, freedom of the press, and other democratic values that Russians have taken on and paid a high price for.

Society tends to consolidate around certain leaders, such as Churchill, de Gaulle and Roosevelt, and one can speak about authoritarian modernisation in this connection. In fact, the phenomenon of Putin's popularity is the result of healthy conformism in a society that has been worn out by the great shocks of the previous decade. Power in Russia has nearly always determined the economic course of the country, rather than vice versa. Today, for the first time in Russian history, political power is trying to proceed from the logic of the country's economic development, which is why it is supported by the majority of the pragmatically thinking people with different political views.

Putin makes major changes in Cabinet

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, MARCH 9. The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, has appointed the U.N. envoy, Sergei Lavrov, as Russia's Foreign Minister in a drastic overhaul of his Cabinet today.

Mr. Lavrov's predecessor, Igor Ivanov, was named Secretary of the Security Council. Mr. Ivanov had been Foreign Minister since 1998 when he succeeded Yevgeny Primakov, who became Prime Minister.

The new Government will have 15 Ministries instead of 24 in the previous administration and only one Deputy Prime Minister (Alexander Zhukov) instead of five.

Only 9 members of the outgoing Cabinet have retained their jobs, including the Defence Minister, Sergei Ivanov, the Finance

Minister, Alexei Kudrin, and the Economics and Trade Minister, German Gref.

The former Deputy Prime Minister, Boris Alyoshin, who was appointed Co-Chairman of the Indo-Russian Intergovernmental Commission barely two months ago, appears to have been shut out of the new Cabinet.

The Atomic Energy Ministry has been demoted to the status of agency subordinated to the new Industry and Energy Ministry headed by the former Deputy Prime Minister, Viktor Khristenko.

The appointments came four days before presidential elections in Russia, which Mr. Putin is tipped to win, and two weeks after he sacked the old Cabinet and named Russia's envoy to the European Union, Mr. Mikhail Fradkov, as Prime Minister.

This is the first major government reshuffle

Mr. Putin has made since becoming President four years ago, and it signalled his final break with the former President, Boris Yeltsin.

The last remaining appointees of the Yeltsin era have lost their posts, including the Information Minister, Mikhail Lesin, the Natural Resources Minister, Artyukhov, and the Security Council Secretary, Vladimir Rushailo.

Unveiling the new Cabinet lineup Mr. Putin said it was the product of an administrative reform that had been in the works for the past two years.

The Cabinet will be much slimmer, with bigger and more powerful Ministries and fewer decision-making levels.

He said there would be no further changes in the government should he win re-election on Sunday.

RUSSIA TRANSFORMED

Under Putin, It Has Travelled From Siege Mentality To International Leadership

From the 1999-2000 foreign policy chaos to a fundamentally new status of Russia on the world scene and new problems related to this new status. From the leader of a state in crisis to the head of state that has become a new leader of world economic growth. This is the service record of Vladimir Putin as the country's senior diplomat.

Doing business

In the autumn of 2000, this author wrote: "I want to remind those who forget easily that a year ago Moscow was shaken by absolutely schizoid and completely unbelievable scandals, like the one over the Bank of New York, the smouldering Yugoslav war and the recently avoided Russia-NATO confrontation over Pristina. Meanwhile, the Americans were preparing to walk out of the ABM Treaty, which was fraught with the disintegration of our security system. Taken together, this formed a picture of apocalypse and nascent isolation of Russia in Europe and America... But the appearance of Vladimir Putin disrupted these plans and the attempts to put pressure on Putin's Moscow were ineffective."

Today, in 2004, some people may wonder what all this meant. They do not remember that the US air strikes against Yugoslavia and open disregard of Moscow's protests could have developed into a war. At least this is what could have happened after the forced march of Russian paratroopers to the airfield in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, and the order issued by General Wesley Clark, this year's presidential candidate, to attack the Russians. Thank God, the British troops in the province refused to comply.

Few people today remember the case of the New York bank, which amounted to the wholesale persecution of US bankers who worked with Russian accounts. The idea was to "teach" the Western business community not to work with Russian businessmen, who were indiscriminately viewed as corrupt operators or members of organised crime.

The new president began by getting down in earnest to foreign policy. Before Putin, Moscow had one problem, which I described in this way: "...Suffice

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By DMITRY KOSYREV

it to recall the long list of summit meetings which Boris Yeltsin was invited to attend and the favourite 'pastime' of that era. We tried to guess which would Yeltsin do: refuse to attend, send one of his numerous premiers or the foreign minister, or wreck the meeting at the last possible moment."

leaders interpreted his calmness as an unwillingness to provoke a conflict and a desire to cooperate.

The latter was graphically confirmed at the turning point in the history of Putin's diplomacy. This refers to his intuitive decision to call George Bush with an offer of assistance after the Sep-



The new leader used this situation to his advantage. Here are a few examples. In the spring of 2000, Vladimir Putin, who was running his election campaign, refused (rather like Yeltsin did) to go abroad and in this way created a long list of foreign leaders who wanted to meet him. That spring, British Prime Minister Tony Blair came to Moscow and subsequently signalled to his Western colleagues that Putin was a man one could do business with.

Trial of strength

The world media wrote at the time that the unexpected style of the new president helped him to become one of the club of world leaders. That style was described as boring, ineffective, soft, remote, calm and unruffled. Putin was presented as a classical example of a Eurobureaucrat, acceptable to the likes of him. It was said that he had not worsened relations with any country but had won new friends without losing old ones.

As for the possible isolation of Russia, it ended at the G7 meeting in Okinawa in 2000, where Putin arrived from Pyongyang and thus became a key and irreplaceable figure at the summit — at least during the discussion of the Korean problem. Putin's trial of strength was over: he was accepted as not just a competent leader, but as "one of them". G7

tember 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. The call was logically followed by a long line of events that created Russia's current status on the world scene, the status of a power that can refuse to agree with its partners, be they NATO, the USA or Britain, without discontinuing co-operation with them.

But, the shrewdness of Putin's telephone call and his personal style aside, it is the substance of his diplomacy that matters. A new Foreign Policy Concept adopted in the summer of 2000 incorporated amendments on the "economic" and "pragmatic" nature of the policy that came from the new president. It was not isolationism or foreign policy modesty but the proclamation of a new position, according to which Russia's economic development should be the end goal of its foreign policy and a powerful foreign policy instrument. Before Putin, Russia was seen as — and indeed was — a victim of inept reforms and financial crisis, which made her an economic disaster zone. The beginning of Putin's presidency coincided with the beginning of economic growth.

Few people remember that Vladimir Putin stressed at the APEC summit in Brunei in November 2000 that he represented a country that would register year-end economic growth of 7%. That shocking news did not sink in immediately. The world

refused to believe it, thinking that it was a striking but unique achievement. However, economic growth continued in the subsequent years, in particular thanks to a calm and conflict-free foreign policy.

As a result, Russia has attained a new status at the end of Putin's first term. It is no longer an international patient. Last autumn international research structures that report the world's economic results recognised Russia as a record-setting country in terms of economic growth and one of the brilliant four world leaders of the future — China, India, Russia and Brazil.

Inertia

It was a signal event promising Moscow radical change. We can foresee new trials and tests similar to the ones China had to pass ten years ago. When China was viewed as a poor and problem country, it was hardly noticed. But when it became clear in the 1990s that the Chinese economy would soon surge ahead of the US economy, the world's attitude to China changed dramatically. The US administration has stopped its trials of China's strength, which lasted throughout the 1990s, only recently. China has become one of the accepted world leaders. Russia is only facing this trial.

It is this, rather than Iraq or Russia's internal events, the elections in the USA or the expansion of the EU that can explain the strange pause in Russia's relations with the USA and Europe. They have not decided yet what to do with Russia (or India and Brazil, for that matter) as a leader of tomorrow — to help it or hinder its development.

The Russian mindset is marked by certain inertia, too. The psychological shift from disease to health, from the siege mentality to international leadership takes time. The main foreign policy problems of Putin's first term were connected above all with this inertia, with the psychological unwillingness of departments and major corporations to accept the new situation. Russia's new role in the world, the fact that they lag behind changes in the world, and their inability to think ahead.

This is why the foreign policy of the next presidential term will be most probably focused on a different set of tasks than those he tackled during his first term.

Putin displays confidence by purge

Moscow, Feb. 24 (Reuters): Russian President Vladimir Putin sacked his government today and pledged to appoint a team to overhaul policy ahead of next month's presidential election.

The move underscored Putin's confidence in winning a second term, and he said it was intended to set the country's course after the election.

A new head of government was now certain to be appointed to replace outgoing Prime Minis-

ter Mikhail Kasyanov well before the March 14 poll.

Putin immediately signed a decree naming a Kasyanov deputy, Viktor Khristenko, as interim Prime Minister.

The president's decision - or at least its timing - took the country by surprise, as under the Constitution the government is formally required to submit its resignation anyway after an election.

Russia's President enjoys considerable powers under the

post-Soviet constitution, leaving the Prime Minister responsible for implementing Kremlin policy and overseeing the economy.

Putin has long expressed impatience with Kasyanov, associated with Boris Yeltsin's former administration, for failing to produce quick reforms or sufficient economic growth.

The suave Kasyanov was the only major official to criticise the incarceration of oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky pending

trial on charges of fraud and tax evasion. Igor Bunin, an analyst, said Putin's decision was largely psychological. "Putin just simply can't stand Kasyanov. There has been a lot of disagreement over economic policy."

"Secondly, it's a symbolic move. Putin stood up and effectively said 'I want to make it clear that all ties with Boris Yeltsin's family and its son, Kasyanov, have now been severed. Voters are only going to like that.'"



Mikhail Kasyanov (left) and Vladimir Putin

Putin 1
5-5 2572

MOSCOW BLAST / CHECHEN HAND SEEN

Russia ①
HD-13

Putin vows to crush terrorism 712

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, FEB. 6. Nearly 40 persons were killed and 122 were wounded by a bomb blast that ripped through a packed metro train in Moscow on Friday. The explosion tore through the second wagon of an underground train as it was approaching the Avtozavodskaya station in morning rush-hour. The Deputy Interior Minister, Alexander Chekalin, said 39 commuters had been killed and 122 wounded, but emergency workers on the scene said the toll could rise to 50, as witnesses said arms and legs were scattered about the carriage.

Security officials said the bomb had the power equivalent to one or two kg of TNT. A severe fire that broke out after the blast increased the number of

casualties. Television pictures of the carriage showed twisted metal and charred seats. In rush hours, one metro carriage can carry up to a 100 persons.

It was not immediately clear whether the bomb had been set off by a suicide bomber or was hidden in a bag terrorists placed in the carriage. In July 2003, two Chechen women blew themselves up at an open-air music festival at the Tushino airfield, killing 14 people.

Friday's blast was the worst terrorist attack in Moscow yet. In December, a woman suicide bomber blew herself up outside a hotel in central Moscow close to the Kremlin, killing at least five persons. Two suicide bombers blew themselves up at a Moscow rock concert in July, killing 14 people.

Security measures have been

tightened throughout the Moscow metro since the December attack, but officials said it was next to impossible to spot a terrorist among two million people who travel by metro every day.

The President, Vladimir Putin, blamed the blast on Chechen rebels and vowed to destroy terrorists.

"Russia does not negotiate with terrorists, it is destroying them," Mr. Putin said in televised remarks.

He did not rule out that the metro attack could be linked to the March 14 presidential election which he is expected to easily win.

"I do not rule out that such action may be used... in the presidential election campaign as an instrument of exerting pressure on the head of state," Mr. Putin said.

THE HINDU

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