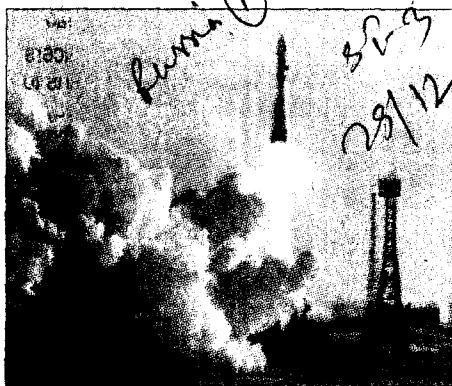


RUSSIA'S FIRST EUROPEAN GPS SATELLITE Galileo launched

Elizabeth Davies in London



A Russian Soyuz rocket carrying the test GIOVE-A satellite, part of the Galileo positioning system, blasts off at the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan on Wednesday. — AFP

MOSCOW, Dec. 28. — Russia today successfully launched the first satellite for the “Galileo” navigation system, Europe’s ambitious \$4 bn programme which seeks to end its dependence on US-controlled global positioning system (GPS) and put the use of the technology in civilian hands.

The first step towards a satellite navigation system “made in Europe by Europeans” was taken as the British-built Giove-A became the first spacecraft to be blasted into orbit as part of the EU’s biggest ever space mission.

The test satellite, one of a thirty-strong constellation planned for Europe’s multi-billion-euro Galileo project, was fired into the world’s atmosphere from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan aboard a Russian Soyuz rocket. After rising through clear skies for nearly four hours, the 600 kg satellite was released into orbit and began transmitting signals back to earth.

A Russian Soyuz carrier rocket with

European “GIOVE A” satellite lifted off around 10:30 IST and successfully placed it in the circular orbit at the altitude of 23,000 km at 14:32 hrs IST today, Russian Space Agency Roskosmos said in a release.

As it orbits the earth at a height of 14,300 miles, Giove A, its name stands for “Galileo In-Orbit Validation Element” will help test atomic clocks and navigation signals and secure Galileo’s frequencies in space. Its progress will be a crucial indication as to the likely success of the overall European space mission, which is planned to go into service in 2008. It is also supposed to be more exact than the US system, with a precision of up to one metre (compared with GPS technology’s five metres). They say the project will improve coverage in high-latitude areas such as northern Europe, and in big cities where skyscrapers can block signals. Galileo, they claim, could become a world-wide symbol of European success badly needed at a time of economic stagnation and political conflict.

Galileo’s supporters say they expect the system to more than double existing GPS coverage and will end Europe’s dependency on the Pentagon-controlled GPS system, which had “betrayed” its European subscribers during US strikes on ex-Yugoslavia in the Balkan war, a EU diplomat in Moscow said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The GPS is used worldwide for military purposes like precision strikes as also civilian use such as search and rescue operations and driver assistance.

Today’s launch was the result of an agreement last year between Washington and Brussels that put an end to a long-running trans-Atlantic feud. The European Space Agency has said it will guarantee Galileo’s operation at all times, except in “the direst emergency.”

— The Independent (with PTI inputs)

THE STATESMAN

Report on Beslan tragedy accuses local officials of negligence

Warning telegrams from Moscow to North Ossetia were not acted upon

MOSCOW: The head of a Russian parliamentary commission investigating last year's Beslan school siege said on Wednesday the regional police department had ignored instructions to strengthen school security and accused local law enforcement officials of negligence.

Alexander Torshin, summing up the results of the probe so far in the Upper House of Parliament, said investigators would later evaluate the role federal authorities played in a crisis that led to the deaths of 331 persons — more than half of them children.

He said that Russian Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev and his deputy had sent telegrams less than two weeks before the militants' raid instructing the police department in North Ossetia, where Beslan is located, to beef up security on the first day of school. But on Sept. 1 only a single policewoman was posted outside the Beslan school, and she was taken hostage.

Shortcomings in operation

"There was no information about the planning of terror attacks but there was a warning telegram ... on Aug. 21 and 31. In those telegrams, based on intelligence information, there was an order to the Interior Ministry branch in North Ossetia to strengthen protection of all educational facilities on Sept. 1. That could have prevented the terrorist attack. But they weren't fulfilled," Mr. Torshin said.

Mr. Torshin also said: "The counter-terrorist operation was plagued by shortcomings." He added that the current system in place for preventing terror attacks was inadequate.

"Many law enforcement officers did not know how to act in an emergency situation," he said.

Nearly 16 months have passed since armed Islamic militants



DAY OF TERROR: A soldier helps an injured woman during the rescue operation at Beslan's school, northern Ossetia, in this September 3, 2004 file photo. — PHOTO: AFP

seized more than 1,128 pupils, their teachers and parents in the southern Russian town of Beslan, provoking a tense three-day standoff with security forces

that ended in a bloodbath.

Mr. Torshin said the decision to report the lower number was taken by the local head of the Federal Security Service, Valery

Andreyev, who has since been transferred to another post. Mr. Torshin also blamed Mr. Andreyev, who had headed the crisis headquarters in Beslan, for

poor coordination between law enforcement authorities.

He accused police and security officials in North Ossetia and the neighbouring region of Ingushetia, from where the militants had launched their raid, of "negligence and carelessness."

With the release on Tuesday of a prosecutors' report that exonerated authorities and the results of the parliamentary probe — both only preliminary — the Government's handling of the crisis has come under renewed scrutiny.

Cover-up alleged

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who ordered the Prosecutor General's office to investigate, initially resisted the establishment of an independent commission by Parliament.

A probe by the regional legislature accused Russian authorities of botching rescue efforts and urged officials be punished.

Beslan residents accuse authorities of mounting a cover-up.

"You need to punish those who did not carry out their duties properly. Our children are no longer with us," Susanna Dudiyeva, head of the Beslan Mothers' Committee, said.

The militants who seized Beslan's School No. 1 herded the hostages into the gymnasium, which they rigged with explosives.

The hostages suffered in hot, unsanitary conditions and were denied water by their captors during the ordeal, which ended in explosions and gunfire on the third day of the standoff. The dead hostages included 186 children.

The rebels, who were demanding that Russian troops withdraw from Chechnya, had crossed heavily policed territory to reach Beslan, and victims' relatives said they got help from corrupt officials. — AP

29/12/2004

THE HINDU

Russia sees energy as key to unlock Asian doors

Vladimir Radyuhin

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR Putin made a strong bid to join the newly formed East Asia Summit (EAS) last week in Kuala Lumpur, the latest example of his successful use of Russia's growing energy clout to raise its global profile and promote a new economic and security architecture in Asia.

The invitation of Mr. Putin to the first EAS meeting largely reflected recognition of Russia's role as the world's biggest single producer of hydrocarbons. Asian nations have eagerly joined the race for access to the rich energy resources of Siberia and the Caspian. China and Japan are locked in a fierce fight over the route of a planned oil pipeline from the rich East Siberian fields. South Korea's President hopes to secure "stable deliveries of oil and gas from Eastern Siberia and Sakhalin." India has invested a record \$2.7 billion in the Sakhalin-1 oil and gas project and is keen to source up to 20 per cent of its energy needs from Russia. Members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are also looking to Russia to reduce their dependence on West Asian oil.

Addressing the EAS forum, Mr. Putin offered to help guarantee the energy security in the Asia-Pacific region. He said Russia was ready to provide "long-term and stable supplies of energy resources," and invited Asian nations to undertake "joint projects for prospecting and development of oil and gas fields and for the construction of pipelines."

Despite opposition to Russia's early membership in EAS from Australia and Indonesia (both see Russia as a competitor for oil and gas exports to the region) a majority of ASEAN members support Russia's membership. Mr. Putin has a good chance of joining the next East Asia summit in Jakarta in December 2006 as a full-fledged participant, rather than a special guest.

Energy is the key that will unlock Asian doors for Russia.

A 10-year Russia-ASEAN action plan adopted

Vladimir Putin is clearly positioning Russia for the role of main motor and coordinator of a new global strategy for energy security.

in Kuala Lumpur highlighted energy as a key area for bilateral cooperation. The plan, ranging from security and terrorism to trade, calls for identifying investment opportunities in the energy sector and cooperation in prospecting, extracting, and transporting oil and gas.

Addressing a second meeting of Asian energy producers and consumers in New Delhi last month, Russia's Energy and Industry Minister, Viktor Khristenko, detailed Moscow's plan for promoting energy security for Asia.

He called for stepping up oil and gas exports to the region, building new production and transport infrastructure to tie Russia's new oil and gas fields in Siberia and the Far East to Asian consumers, and attracting more Asian investment in the Russian energy sector.

In the past four years, Russia has quadrupled oil exports to Asia and built up gas deliveries to the region from zero to 5 billion cubic metres. However, Russian energy exports are still heavily tilted towards Europe.

"At present 90 per cent of Russian energy supplies go to Europe, but we are focussing more on Asia and the Pacific region," Mr. Khristenko said in New Delhi. "The share of Asian nations in the Russian oil exports is expected to grow from the current 3 per cent to 30 per cent [100 million tonnes] in 2020 and natural gas from 5 per cent to 25 per cent [65 billion cubic metres]."

Mr. Putin's energy plan for Asia is part of his broader strategy of promoting global energy security. He has put this issue on top of the agenda of next year's G8 summit in St. Petersburg when Russia takes over the chairmanship. Russia argues that with the demand for oil and gas beginning to outpace global supply and with oil

production set to decline in Europe and the United States in the coming years, producers and consumers must jointly work out a global plan to ensure stable energy flows to different parts of the world.

Moscow calls for developing new regional energy markets and making them more predictable on the basis of long-term contracts, for organising dialogue between producers and consumers, and for providing easier access to, and transparency of information on, resources, demand, stocks and production potential. Russian proposals also include increased investment in the energy industry and in research to develop alternative and more efficient sources of energy supply.

Now that Mr. Putin has largely restored state control over the country's booming energy sector, he is clearly positioning Russia for the role of the main motor and coordinator of a new global strategy for energy security. This is on the strength of Russia being the world's biggest holder of energy resources (13 per cent of proven oil reserves, 34 per cent of natural gas, and a quarter of all coals), the second largest exporter of crude, and the largest exporter of natural gas. In line with its global approach to energy problems, Russia plans to invite India, China, and some other countries to the G8 summit in St. Petersburg.

What makes Mr. Putin's energy plan strong and solid is that it harmonises Russia's interests as a major energy exporter with those of other exporters as well as consumers. In particular, the Russian energy security plan fully tallies with India's proposal for forming pan-Asian energy grids that would

unite Russia and West Asian oil suppliers, on the one hand, and Japan, China, India, and other Asian buyers, on the other. It is the commonality of interests shared by India and Russia that underpins their new "strategic alliance in the energy field."

Russia's energy policy has uniquely favoured India and other Asian consumers. One example is a seabed gas pipeline Russia has built jointly with Italy from the Russian coast of the Black Sea to Turkey. The Blue Stream pipeline, inaugurated last month, has solved some major geopolitical problems for Russia. It has created a potential new export route for Russian gas to Europe bypassing Ukraine and questioned the viability of U.S. plans to get a gas pipeline built from Azerbaijan to Turkey running parallel to the recent Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline. The Blue Stream has also warded off the threat of Russia and Iran competing for natural gas markets in Turkey and Europe, and helped turn Iranian gas exports to Asia and away from Europe. These efforts have been fully rewarded by a historic agreement among India, Iran, and Pakistan to build a gas pipeline from Iran's Pars fields through Pakistan to India. Russia's natural gas monopoly Gazprom, which carried out pre-feasibility studies for laying the pipeline, has already declared its interest in joining the project.

Russia also supports the proposal to build a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and India via Afghanistan, as it would divert Turkmen gas from the U.S.-lobbied Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. For the same reason, Russia is likely to back Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar's recent proposal to rope in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan to the project.

Look-East policy

Russia's look-East energy policy pursues economic as well as geopolitical goals. A regional energy market in Asia should help Russia diversify its oil and gas exports, thereby reducing its dependence on the European markets and enabling it to get a higher price for its hydrocarbons. Russia thinks its Urals-brand oil is heavily undervalued in Europe and hopes to get a better bargain for its crude by creating a separate benchmark for it in the Asian markets. Moscow also seeks to attract Asian resources to develop its energy-rich vast regions of Siberia and the Far East.

Russia hopes a common energy security strategy for Asia will help revitalise regional integration. Here again, India and Russia share the same perspective and are ready to join hands.

"Asia being the fastest growing energy market, Russia and India should jointly build an Asian oil and gas community, similar to Europe's steel and coal union which has led to the European Union, and in the case of Asia may lead to a much closer alliance between Asian nations," Mr. Aiyar said during a visit to Russia earlier this year.

Asia's road to integration will not be as straightforward as that of Europe due to far greater political, religious, and ethnic diversity of the region. Russia, for one, shares the view that the quest for an Asian identity can begin with the interaction of various regional organisations and forums set up in the region. Russia itself was a moving spirit behind two regional initiatives aimed at forging a new Asian architecture — the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which India joined last summer as observer together with Iran and Pakistan, and the triangular dialogue among Russia, India, and China. Both began as security forums, but eventually acquired an economic dimension, embracing above all energy security.

At its summit in Uzbekistan last year, the SCO proposed setting up a network of multilateral partnership arrangements between various organisations in the Asia-Pacific region and showed the way by signing a memorandum of understanding with the ASEAN. Russia's energy diplomacy has paid off well in Europe where it has made important headway in relations with the European Union thanks to its flawless record as a reliable supplier of a quarter of the region's gas needs. Russia is determined to repeat this success in Asia.

CARTOONSCAPE



Pro-Kremlin party leading in Chechnya polls

GROZNY (RUSSIA): A top pro-Kremlin party was leading in early returns on Monday from Chechnya's first parliamentary elections since federal troops invaded more than six years ago, and Russian President Vladimir Putin hailed the vote as a key factor in restoring law and order. Sunday's elections were the centrepiece of the Kremlin's strategy to restore stability to the southern region.

However, international observers who monitored the balloting for the flaws that marred three previous votes and a Council of Europe fact-finding mission decried a climate of fear which it said made it hard to hold a genuine democratic ballot. Analysts fear the new Parliament will be nothing more than a rubber-stamp body for the republic's Kremlin-backed governing elites.

About 350 candidates campaigned for 58 seats in the two-chamber Parliament, with most of Russia's national political parties fielding contenders. Early returns showed the Kremlin-backed United Russia party ahead with 61 per cent of the vote. — AP

THE HINDU

28 NOV 2005

A trouble-torn land goes to the polls

The election of Parliament, however flawed, is a big step forward in returning Chechnya to peaceful life.

Vladimir Radyuhin

CCHECHNYA ON Sunday voted to elect its first Parliament since Russia crushed a separatist regime in the region six years ago. Over 350 candidates, representing all main federal parties, as well as independents, contested 18 seats in the regional assembly's upper house and 40 seats in the lower chamber.

The parliamentary vote is the final phase in a three-stage plan devised by Russian President Vladimir Putin to re-integrate Chechnya into Russia and hand over local power from a Russian military administration to a civilian government. The military have controlled Chechnya since October 1999, when they entered the region to remove a secessionist government of President Aslan Maskhadov and put down rebel resistance, which defeated Russian forces in the first Chechen campaign in 1994-1996.

Under the Kremlin peace plan, a constitu-

tional referendum was held in Chechnya in March 2003 to cement its status as an integral part of Russia and approve a power structure for the region. This includes a powerful President, a government the President nominates, and a legislature with limited authority. In October 2003, Chechnya moved to the second phase of the peace plan by electing Moscow-appointed regional administrator Akhmad Kadyrov as its President. Presidential elections had to be held again in August 2004 following the assassination of Kadyrov in a bomb attack in May 2004. The new Parliament is bound to be loyal to Moscow as separatists have been excluded from running.

However, the candidates include four former rebels who have changed sides, including Magomed Khambiyev, Defence Minister under the late rebel president Aslan Maskhadov. A pre-election poll by Chechen authorities found that the pro-Kremlin United Russia party would win 35 per cent of the vote, followed by the liberal Yabloko party

(10 per cent) and the Communist Party (10 per cent). Parties must garner at least 5 per cent to win seats.

While the Moscow peace plan for Chechnya is being implemented according to schedule, the situation in the region is far from stable. Russian troops and local Chechen police and security forces continue to suffer casualties almost daily in hit-and-run rebel attacks. There is a risk that the new legislature may become a rubber stamp for Chechnya's security supremo Ramzan Kadyrov, son of the slain President, Akhmad Kadyrov.

Although Ramzan, who holds the post of Deputy Prime Minister in charge of police and security forces, is officially number three in the Chechen administration after President Alu Alkhanov and Prime Minister Sergei Abramov (ethnic Russian), he is widely regarded as the real ruler of Chechnya.

He heads a much feared 5,000-strong paramilitary force that has been accused of kidnappings and other abuses, and controls

Chechnya's only functioning industry of oil production. He is widely expected to become Chechnya's next president after he turns 30 next year.

A recent survey, carried out in Chechnya by an independent think tank, showed that over 70 per cent of respondents said the vote would be fraudulent.

The election of Parliament, however flawed, is a big step forward in returning Chechnya to peaceful life. Now that a civilian structure of government has been fully established, Moscow is prepared to hand over to it control over the region where separatism is no longer popular. According to a study conducted by the Moscow-based Institute of Social Marketing this year, 86 per cent of war-weary Chechens accept the idea of remaining within Russia, compared with 67 per cent three years ago.

The Chechen election will also strengthen Russia's case with the West that political settlement in Chechnya is making good progress.

28/11

19-11

Lessons for Russia from France?

Review
10-13
1/1/11

Russia is entering a stage of post-industrialisation, which will never provide workers the social guarantees they had under socialism.

Yuri Filippov

ARE THERE lessons for Russia in the current unrest in France? Several Russian politicians and journalists have started looking for similarities between the acts of vandalisms perpetrated by teenagers in French suburbs and the situation in the big Russian cities, where the share of Muslim immigrants has reached 10 per cent or more.

I would say that the situation in Russia, which faced an uncontrolled influx of immigrants in the mid-1990s and has not yet come to terms with its consequences, differs radically from that in France and other countries of the European Union. The French are paying for an ineffective immigration policy, which their authorities have pursued for decades; the Russian leadership is "sowing the wind" and is yet to learn from its own and from others' mistakes.

The suburbs of some French cities are being ransacked by the children of immigrants who came to the country from North Africa in the 1960s to 1980s after Paris decided to pull out from Algeria. The fathers of these teenagers never gave a thought to participating in student riots, which swept Europe and the United States in the 1960s in a kind of unsuccessful "orange revolutions." Arab and African immigrants wanted to settle in Europe, whose economy was on the rise, so as to work and earn what was a good living for them. They did not count on getting unemployment benefits because there was almost no forced unemployment in the rapidly growing Western economies of the 1960s.

The situation is very similar in Russia today. Most migrants come to earn money; even the worst paid manual job in Russia earns an Uzbek or Tajik immigrant enough to provide for their families at home.

Moscow and St. Petersburg are among the most expensive cities in Europe, but what little these people earn here make them rich men in the poor villages of Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Russian television has recently showed a house that Gadji, an average trader on an outdoor market in Moscow, is building in a suburb of Baku, Azerbaijan. His backyard is about 600 square meters, as much as the Soviet Government used to allot to an ordinary Muscovite for a dacha.

Moscow's fears that the illegal immigrants would never leave Russia and would eventually demand social justice in the streets are groundless, at least in the foreseeable future. There is one more major difference from France. The Marx boulevards and Lenin streets where the cars are burning are the heritage of the French social tradition, the welfare state into which the immigrants from North Africa tried to become integrated.

Rejecting socialism

Modern Russia is departing from socialism with dizzying speed. The cancellation of benefits in kind and the transition to market mechanisms of distribution have shown that the number of social dependents will be quickly min-

imised. The country is hard-pressed to help its own unemployed and has no time or money for immigrants. It has adopted harsh immigration legislation and created barriers to obtaining Russian citizenship. The arguments against immigration to Russia are common knowledge. The main one is that immigrants take away the jobs from the Russians. Sergei Mironov, the Speaker of the Federation Council (Upper House of Parliament), said recently: "We must create conditions to encourage our women to have more children, and then there would be no need to look for more workers."

But do Russian women — or French, German, and other European women for that matter — want to have more children, who would grow up to become the country's "working class"? Demographic statistics show that they would rather raise their children to become economists, lawyers, journalists, businessmen, managers, oil and gas specialists, office staff, state officials, and security specialists.

Like France and the rest of the Western world, Russia is moving to a post-industrial stage of its development, when manual labour is seen as of secondary importance. Ordinary workers were not the driving force of the recent victorious "colour" revolutions in some countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which the West supported as proof of mass democratic aspirations. The conservative working-class Donbass region of Ukraine, which supported Viktor Yanukovich at the presidential election, lost to the onslaught of Kiev intellectuals who had made a deal with the independent businessmen from western Ukraine.

Russia went through the stage of industrialisation with a giant workforce that made the authorities respect its rights during the socialist period of its history, with its huge social guarantees and a state policy of egalitarianism. Socialism coupled with a powerful persecution mechanism and ideological pressure ensured a relatively conflict-free development of Russia in the greater part of the 20th century. Now Russia is entering a stage of post-industrialisation, when a big workforce is not needed in conditions of capitalism, which will never provide workers (even domestic ones) with the social guarantees they had under socialism.

Economists have calculated that if Russian businessmen gave West European wages to their staff, most of them would quickly become bankrupt. It is no coincidence that the West has moved its basic production requiring a substantial workforce to the Asia-Pacific region, where labour is cheap. Russia, which wants to become competitive and promote its economy with minimum outlays, is importing cheap labour from the South Caucasus and Central Asia. This has suited all sides so far. Russia still has a few decades before events similar to the recent French riots occur on its streets and it should use the time to learn from France's mistakes. — **RIA Novosti**

THE END

TROOPS RESCUE 18 HOSTAGES ■ TOTAL KILLED 108, INCLUDING 12 MILITANTS

Russian rebellion crushed

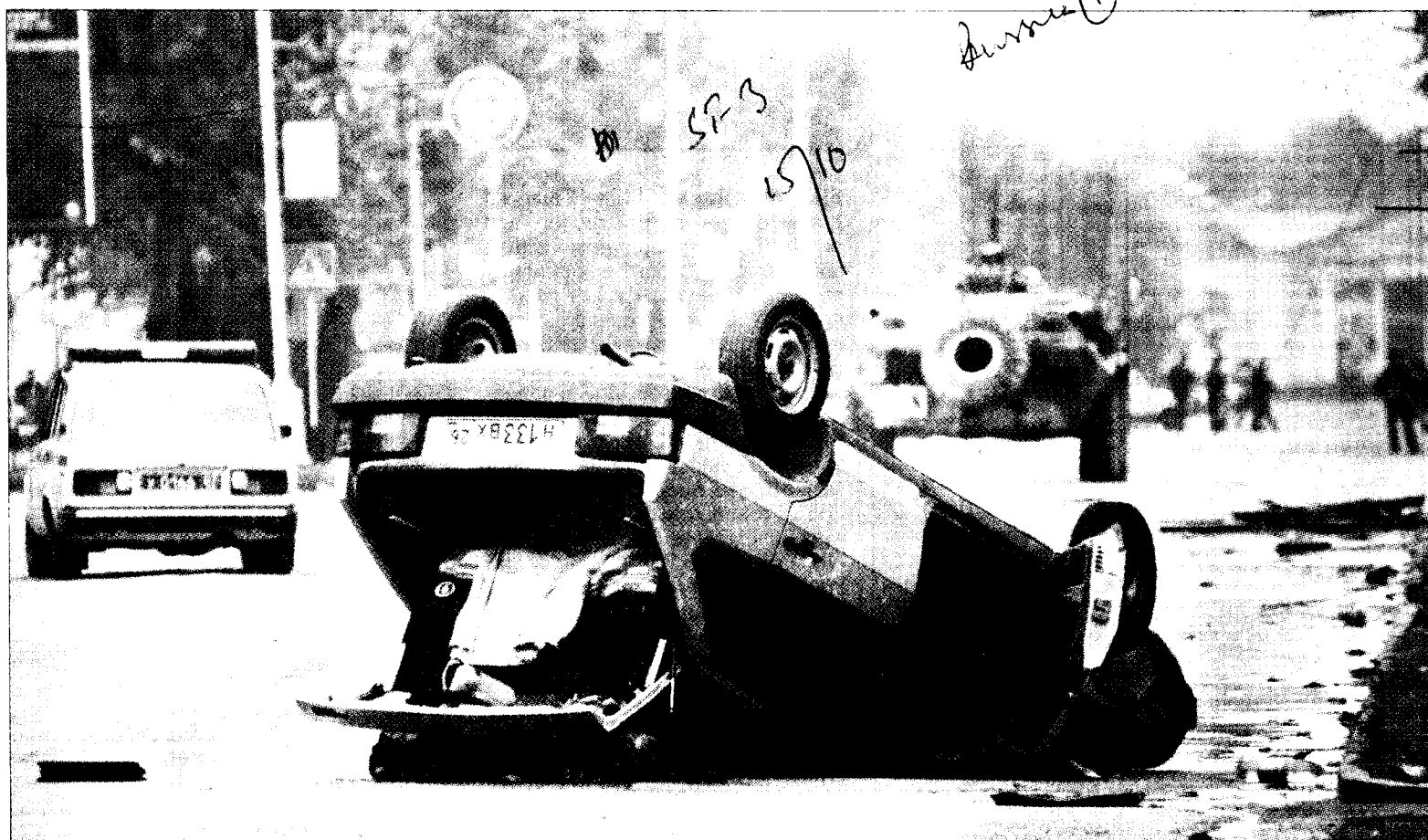
Associated Press

NALCHIK, (Russia), Oct. 14. — Russian soldiers and police combed through a city of shattered glass and bloodstains today, searching for alleged Islamic militants who launched a series of fierce attacks that left at least 108 people dead.

Authorities claimed that all pockets of active fighting had been put down a day after the attacks on the Caucasus Mountains city of Nalchik began, but concern was high that fighters could have melted into the civilian population to regroup. President Mr Vladimir Putin promised that Russia would put down all attacks "hard and consistently," but the bloodshed underlined how violence in the restive Caucasus region is spreading. As officials announced successful operations to liquidate rebels today, it became clear that militants had freed at least 18 hostages in various offices around the city.

Soldiers shot grenades through the barred window of a gift shop in the town centre, and security forces used an armored personnel carrier to smash through the shop wall to save two hostages. Three militants were killed there, deputy prosecutor general Mr Vladimir Kolesnikov said. Four police officers whom gunmen had taken with them in a van in a get-away attempt were rescued unharmed and the militants were killed, deputy interior minister Mr Andrei Novikov said.

By midday, the head of the regional government, Mr Gennady Gubin, announced that all rebel resistance in the southern Russian city had been suppressed, all hostages freed and the city was being searched for rebels, the *Interfax* news agency reported. *Interfax* reported later that 12 militants had been killed in the office of



A destroyed car is seen at the street of the southern city of Nalchik, on Friday. (Below) The body of a suspected rebel killed during battle lies on the ground in front of a police station in Nalchik, Russia on Thursday. — AFP

the Russian prison administration, according to deputy administration chief Mr Valery Krayev. Other news agencies reported nine or 10 militants were killed there.

Nine hostages were freed from the building earlier today, *Interfax* said. Three police officers who had been held there were killed, the *RIA-Novosti* news agency said. "It is bad that such bandit raids are still possible here (in Russia)," President Mr Vladimir Putin said. "It's a great tragedy that we are sustaining losses among law enforcement officers and peaceful civilians." The president of Kabardino-Balkariya, Mr Arsen Kanokov, blamed the attack on social conditions, which rebels have capitalised on. The attack came amid a long-running regional campaign aimed at undermining nascent Islamic extremism.

Dozens killed in Chechen chain attacks

Nalchik (Russia), Oct. 13 (Reuters): Chechen fighters attacked police and army buildings in a southern Russian town today in a brazen operation that killed dozens and challenged Kremlin assertions it had the turbulent Caucasus under control.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who came to power in 2000 by talking tough

on Chechnya, ordered his security forces to throw a ring of steel round the town of Nalchik and kill any gunman who put up resistance.

"The city has been taken under firm control. Not one car, not one train, not one bus will go past without being closely checked," said deputy interior minister Alexander Chekalin.

Now our main task is to find the bandits in the city, including their wounded."

Officials said two small groups of fighters were holed up in a police station and in a shop and were holding small numbers of hostages.

Justice officials said in a morning of mayhem in which up to 100 rebels attacked key security points in Nalchik,

main city of the Muslim Kabardino-Balkaria region near rebel Chechnya, 12 residents and 12 policemen were killed.

Deputy state prosecutor Vladimir Kolesnikov said 20 fighters were killed and 12 of their number captured by security forces. The police said more than 50 rebels had been killed and 17 captured.

Several corpses lay in the

streets in pools of blood and covered over with blankets during the attack, which wound down by around midday.

"It all started at 9 am, all hell broke loose, and the impression was that there was shooting everywhere," said Makhmud, a resident, as he stood on the main square.

The coordinated attack on police, army and Federal Secu-

rity Service buildings in the garrison town marked the first major rebel operation since Abdul-Khalid Sadulayev took over as leader of the Chechen separatists in March.

It made good his threat to broaden the war for independence against Russian troops in Chechnya to encompass the whole of the mainly Muslim north Caucasus region.

100

Handwritten: Russia

Chechen rebels lay siege to city

Handwritten: 10/13

NALCHIK, (Russia), Oct. 13. — Scores of militants launched simultaneous attacks on police and government buildings in one of the main cities of Russia's turbulent Caucasus region on Thursday, sparking battles involving heavy arms fire and explosions. At least 63 people were killed, officials said.

Chechen rebels claimed responsibility for the attacks in Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkariya, a republic near Chechnya, which involved between 60 and 300 insurgents, according to various estimates.

In response, Russian President Mr Vladimir Putin ordered a total blockade of the city of 235,000 to prevent militants from slipping out, and said armed resisters would be shot, an official said.

Deputy interior minister Mr Alexander Chekalin told Mr Putin that 50 militants had been killed and that 10 police officers had also died. Local health ministry spokesman Mr Stepan Kuskov said at least three civilians were among the dead, and that 84 people had been wounded.

The republic has suffered a growing wave of violence apparently connected to Islamic extremists and the Chechen rebels' decade-long fight against Russian forces. Mr Dmitry Kozak, Mr Putin's envoy to the southern region, said the assailants were holding hostages at a police station. An interior ministry spokeswoman denied that hostages had been taken. — AP

THE STATESMAN

100

Relatives mourn Beslan victims

BESLAN (RUSSIA): Stifling anguished cries, survivors of the Beslan tragedy and relatives of more than 300 dead hostages observed a minute of silence on Saturday at the ruins of School Number One on the anniversary of the disaster.

Gathering under rain clouds, mourners stood in and around the ruins of the school to observe a minute of silence at 1:05 p.m. local time, the precise moment when Russian rescue forces a year ago launched a chaotic attempt to rescue more than 1,100 hostages. Only the sound of sobbing interrupted the silence.

Then white balloons were floated into the dark sky, one for each of the 319 hostages who died.

All but one of the 32 gunmen, who had been demanding an end to the war in Chechnya, were also killed in the battle. — AFP



PAINFUL MEMORIES: Women react near the school, where hundreds of persons died a year ago after a siege by Chechen militants, in Beslan, Russia on Saturday. — PHOTO: AP

0 4 SEP 2005

Mothers blame Putin for Beslan tragedy

Reuters
Beslan, August 31

BESLAN'S BEREAVED mothers will tell Russian President Vladimir Putin he is to blame for the death of their children and that unless lessons are learned from official blundering the tragedy could be repeated.

Susanna Dudiyeva, whose 12-year-old son Zaurbek was among 331 people, half of them children, killed after Chechen rebels seized their school in southern Russia, said late on Tuesday her grief gave her the right to speak frankly to Putin. She and the Beslan Mothers' Committee she leads will tell him in the Kremlin on September 2 — a year and a day on from the start of the siege — that official incompetence that made the bloodshed worse is being covered up, she said.

"I will say that we think President Putin is to blame for what happened. As for what else I will say, well I am unpredictable and I can't tell the exact words I will use but it will be serious," she said in the group's office, where black-clad women meet daily to discuss their plans. For a year, Beslan residents have demanded a meeting with Putin to ask how the tense stand-off collapsed into a bloody gunfight and inferno on September 3. The meeting



A schoolgirl watches a sniffer dog during security check in one of the schools in Moscow on Wednesday.

is unusual because Putin usually steers clear of potentially embarrassing public encounters with angry voters. Ordinary Russians he does meet are almost always deferential. Putin visited Beslan immediately after the bloodshed but arrived at night, stayed a few hours and spent most of the time in meetings with officials.

The mothers also want to complain about the incompetence

they say allowed Chechen rebels to drive to their small town from Chechnya along Russia's most heavily-guarded roads.

Shamil Basayev, the Chechen warlord who says he organised the raid, said late on Tuesday security forces allowed his fighters to reach Beslan as part of an ambush planned by Russian intelligence that went wrong. Officials rejected his version.

"We have the right to speak

out. Our right to speak out was forced on us. We got this right at the price of our children's lives," said Dudiyeva, slim and pale in her mourning outfit of black dress and headscarf.

An opinion poll published on Wednesday by Levada-Centre, a polling organisation, said half of the Russians questioned share the Beslan mothers' view that officials mishandled the response.

But there has been very little political fallout for Putin, who enjoys consistently high levels of popularity and has overseen a booming economy fuelled by high oil prices.

The siege followed other hostage-takings by Chechen rebels fighting a 10-year war to end Moscow's rule over their homeland, which borders the North Ossetia region that includes Beslan. The Beslan mothers say the other raids, notably the Nord-Ost theatre siege in Moscow in 2002 and the Budyonovsk hostage-taking in 1995 — which each cost more than a hundred lives — brought no reforms.

They want their loss to be the last. "I think that if after this, after our visit, nothing changes, like nothing changed after Nord-Ost or Budyonovsk ... then we will know that nothing is going to change and that we will have to do it all for ourselves," she said.

0 1 SEP 2006

THE MIDDLETOWN PRESS

U.S., Britain, Japan join rescue efforts for Russian submarine

AP-13
7/8

Oxygen supply aboard may last till Sunday afternoon

Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW: An unprecedented international rescue effort to save seven crew members trapped inside a Russian mini-submarine stranded on seabed gathered pace on Saturday as hope was expressed that air supply aboard the stricken vessel could last another 24 hours.

Ensnared in cables

Two days after the AS-28 mini-submarine of the Russian Navy got ensnared by an underwater antenna cable at a depth of 190 metres off Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia's Far East, officials said the crew was still safe and had enough oxygen to survive till about Sunday afternoon IST.

Earlier, they said the oxygen would run out by Saturday noon.

An attempt to drag the 13.5-metre-long vehicle to shallow waters on Friday night failed because the tows were unable to

move a 60-tonne concrete anchoring system fixing the antenna on which the submarine was caught.

Meanwhile, the U.S., Britain and Japan have joined the rescue operation.

A British and two U.S. remote-controlled underwater rescue vessels were airlifted to Kamchatka on Saturday morning.

It is the first time since World War II that a Western military plane has been allowed to fly to the region packed with Russian naval bases.

The British and U.S. deep-diving Scorpio submersibles are equipped with manipulators that can cut cables up to seven centimetres thick.

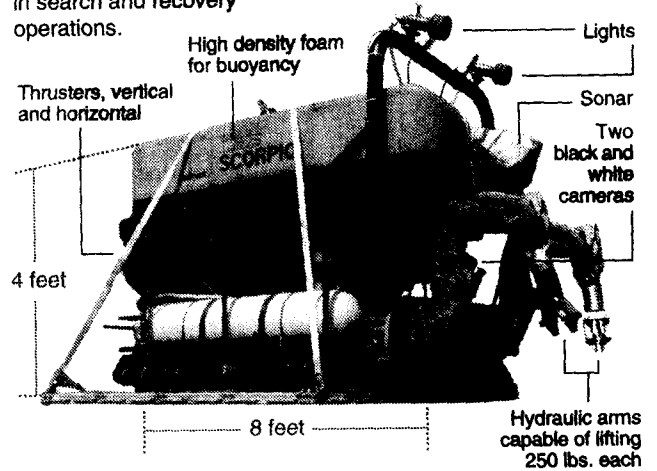
The U.S. has also sent along seven deep-water divers who will try to deliver oxygen canisters to the submarine crew.

Japan has dispatched four military vessels, but they would arrive only in three or four days' time. On Saturday, preparations

At least two unmanned Super Scorpios bound for Russia will help free seven crewmembers and their mini-sub stuck on the Pacific floor. The robots are usually used in search and recovery operations.

Underwater robot

Maximum depth	5,000 ft.
Weight	4,500 lbs.
Maximum speed	4 knots



SOURCES: U.S. Navy

AP

were made to lift the submarine either by blowing up the anchoring system or by cutting the cables that trapped the vessel. The operation is scheduled to begin after 2:30 a.m. IST on Sunday.

The *Kommersant* daily reported that the mini-submarine was on a mission to replace sections of an underwater military monitoring system when it was trapped in antenna cables.

07 AUG 2005

THE HINDU

Foreigners meddling in Russia, says Putin

Moscow, July 20 (Reuters): President Vladimir Putin said today foreigners were meddling in Russian politics by funding campaign groups, echoing similar complaints from some authoritarian leaders in ex-Soviet states.

Putin told a group of human rights experts and academics he had reliable information cash was being channelled from abroad through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to finance political activity, though he gave no details.

"I am categorically against the foreign financing of (NGOs') political activities in Russia... We understand that he who pays the piper calls the tune," he told the Kremlin meeting.

"Not a single self-respecting country will allow that, and neither shall we ... Let us solve our internal problems ourselves."

Dozens of foreign groups like the Open Society Insti-

tute, funded by billionaire philanthropist George Soros, have been active in former Soviet states since the fall of communism in 1991, promoting democracy, transparency and human rights.

But they ran into trouble in several conservative ex-Soviet republics in the past two years after officials accused NGOs of funding the popular revolutions that installed pro-western leaders in Georgia and Ukraine.

Soros's group says official pressure forced it to cease activities in Belarus, described by Washington as a dictatorship, and it has also effectively quit authoritarian Uzbekistan, again blaming obstruction by officials.

Putin, who has been guiding through political reforms widely seen as aimed at consolidating the Kremlin's grip on power, has criticised NGOs in the past.

In his annual state of the nation address in May, he

blasted NGOs for using foreign funds to "serve dubious group and commercial interests."

But today was the first time he accused NGOs of meddling in politics.

"(We have) very specific information about money being channelled from abroad for specific political activities in Russia" he said.

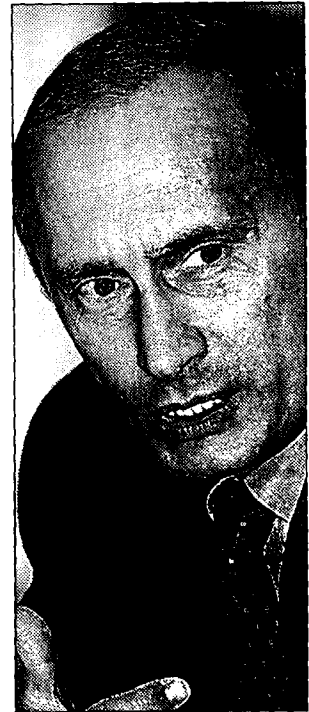
However, Putin said that any financing NGOs were getting from abroad was paltry.

"If we look at the grants our organisations of this sort receive, including from abroad, it's peanuts," he said.

He offered Kremlin funding for NGOs.

"We are ready, I, personally, am ready to do this," said the Russian leader.

"The only thing I am concerned about is that there shouldn't be any concerns from your side that this is some kind of bribery ... , that this is some form of dependency," he said.



Vladimir Putin in
Moscow. (Reuters)

21 JUL 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

NATIONALIST TERRORISM

A New Threat To Russia

By YURY FILIPPOV

Russian investigators have found those they believe carried out the attack on the Grozny-Moscow train in the early hours of 12 June, 2005.

Nobody was killed in the explosion but 42 passengers were injured, which was symbolic in two ways: it was staged on Russia Day and the passengers were coming from the Chechen Republic.

Political uproar

It was not clear who was responsible for the attack: Chechen extremists or Russian nationalists. Some indicators pointed to the latter, and the investigators were right. The Moscow Region Prosecutor's Office reported that both suspects arrested, Vladimir Vlasov and Mikhail Klevachyov, are members of Russian National Unity, a radical nationalist organisation that has been banned as overtly fascist. The explosion was yet another link in the chain of extremist actions and terrorist acts that are not directly associated with international terrorism, in particular with the Islamic terrorists.

An attempt on the life of Anatoly Chubais, head of RAO UES, in spring created the biggest political uproar in Russia even though nobody was hurt as a result of the explosion. The Prosecutor's Office blamed Russian nationalists for it. Retired Russian Army Colonel Vladimir Kvachkov, the main suspect, is believed to have set up a kind of a nationalist terrorist club at his country house to plan measures for harassing and even eliminating "enemies of Russia".

Incidentally, a whole arsenal of explosives was found in the apartments of those arrested for blowing up the Moscow-Grozny train. The investigators are now

The author is a political analyst associated with Ria Novosti

checking whether the suspects are implicated in the abortive attempt to kill Chubais.

Recently, the Moscow Regional Court prohibited the extrem-

ities has been very tough. Those who seized the Healthcare Ministry got five years in prison, despite public attempts to present this act as harmless. In deter-



ist National Bolshevik Party, whose leader, Eduard Limonov, has already served a term in prison for terrorism and possession of arms.

'Peaceful' acts

For the time being the National Bolsheviks, who are not going to stop their activities despite the court's ruling, are mostly involved in reasonably "peaceful" acts, such as throwing added eggs at "enemies of Russia", putting up anti-government posters and seizing state offices. Last summer they stormed the Ministry of Healthcare and Social Development to protest against the reform of replacing benefits in-kind with money compensations. Later, they occupied the reception area of the Presidential Administration office.

The response from the autho-

mining the punishment the court paid special attention to the National Bolsheviks ideology, which justifies the use of violence and terror for political ends. Their manifesto, "A Different Russia", speaks about possibly waging clandestine struggle abroad and setting up guerilla units in a country bordering on Russia.

Deputy Presidential Administration head Vladislav Surkov expressed grave concern over the threat of local, nationalist terrorism in a recent interview with German magazine Der Spiegel: "If chauvinist pro-fascist elements provoke a splash of Islamic extremism, the integrity of our multinational country may come under serious threat".

In other words, the Kremlin is alarmed that international Islamic terrorism that has already spilled from Chechnya to adja-

cent Dagestan and other Russian republics of the North Caucasus may be aggravated by the emergence of local, Russian nationalist terrorism against liberal politicians and national minorities. If these two types of terrorism collide, a multinational and multi-religious Russia with its 20 million-strong Muslim population will be in for the worst-case scenario. It may be engulfed by the same large-scale civil war as the one that raged in the Balkans in the 1990s.

No guarantee

At the beginning of his second term, President Vladimir Putin called Russian extremists "fools" and "provocateurs". But despite his 70 per cent approval ratings, words are not enough to stop the spread of nationalist extremism in Russia. The authorities are aware of this and do not limit themselves to words.

This type of extremism is particularly dangerous because it appeals to the younger generation. According to law-enforcement agencies, up to 50,000 Russian teenagers consider themselves "skinheads", a youth movement oriented to nationalist extremism. For the time being, these youngsters mainly drink beer and beat up foreigners who are unlucky enough to come their way. But sometimes they beat their victims to death, such as the recent murder of a Vietnamese student in St Petersburg. There is no guarantee that, in a couple of years, these nationalists will not turn into an organised, aggressive political force.

This is exactly why the authorities will be extremely tough in suppressing nationalist extremists. If the suspects in the explosion of the Moscow-Grozny train are found guilty, they should get ready to serve very long terms behind bars without the right to pardon or amnesty.

It's particularly barbaric that this has happened on a day when people are meeting to try to help the problems of poverty in Africa and the long-term problems of climate change in the environment... it is designed and aimed to coincide with the opening of the G-8. We will not allow violence to change our societies or our values. — Mr Tony Blair, on behalf of the G-8, after the terrorist attack in London.

★
Their resolve is as strong as my resolve. And that is we will not yield to these people, will not yield to the terrorists and at the same time, we will spread an ideology of hope and compassion that will overwhelm their ideology of hate. — President George W Bush at the G-8 summit.

★
The dreadful events in London this morning have deeply shocked us all. I know I speak for the whole nation in expressing my sympathy to all those affected and the relatives of the killed and injured. I have

nothing but admiration for the emergency services as they go about their work. — Queen Elizabeth.

★
Rejoice, Islamic nation. Rejoice, Arab world. The time has come for vengeance against the Zionist crusader government of Britain in response to the massacres Britain committed in Iraq and Afghanistan. — Secret Organisation of Al-Qaida in Europe, after the terrorist attack in London.

★
I was on the bus in front and heard an incredible bang. I turned round and half the double-decker bus was in the air. — Mrs Belinda Seabrook, an eye-witness, after the attack in London.

★
I was walking along. There was a whole crowd of people around the bus. The next thing I knew I was on the floor and loads of glass were raining down. Someone fell on me and someone fell on him. For a moment I thought

I was going to be trampled... I picked myself up and everyone was running. There was glass everywhere. — An eye-witness in the Tavistock Place area.

★
The Government views the incident as a serious one and all states have been alerted to take adequate precaution for protecting monuments. — Dr Manmohan Singh, after the terrorist attack on the makeshift temple at Ayodhya.

★
The attack is a very serious thing to have happened and the country should respond to it proportionately. — Mr LK Advani, after the attack in Ayodhya.

★
Whereas the CMP and the LS resolution have clearly spelt out that the country approves of multilateral military actions only with UN ratification, the Indo-US defence pact endorses such actions under the US leadership without the UN's involvement. — Mr Sitaram Yechuri, on the

Indo-US defence pact signed during Mr Pranab Mukherjee's visit to the USA.

★
A tax is necessary to provide safe and filtered drinking water to all citizens. — Mr Bikash Bhattacharya, the new mayor of Kolkata.

★
The logistics and forces to be deployed should be worked out between the neighbouring states at frequent intervals for effective tackling of extremism. — YS Rajashankar Reddy, Andhra Chief Minister, during an interstate council meeting.

★
It is obvious that Arjun Singh is acting as a tool in a communist-sponsored vendetta. — Mr Murlu Manohar Joshi, former Union minister, on the government's "detoxification" of textbooks.

★
Sex is great if you are in a relationship, otherwise I find sex actually not so interesting. Without a relationship it is confusing. — Tom Cruise, Hollywood actor.

ON RECORD

Russian oil magnate sentenced to 9 yrs in jail for tax evasion



Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Platon Lebedev in the defendant's box during their trial.

FRED WEIR
Moscow, May 31

DISGRACED OIL tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky, once Russia's richest man, is headed for nine years in a labour camp after being sentenced on Tuesday on several counts of fraud, tax evasion and embezzlement.

Khodorkovsky showed no emotion as the judge ended the marathon 12-day verdict reading with the 9-year sentence, just one year short of the maximum. His co-defendant, Platon Lebedev, who received the same sentence, told the court: "There's not a sane person who can understand what you have decided". Both men have been in pre-trial detention for almost two years, which will be subtracted from their prison time.

Since his October 2003 arrest, the successful oil major, Khodorkovsky-led

Yukos, has been battered to the brink of bankruptcy by back tax bills totalling \$28 billion. Late last year, Yukos' most profitable production unit, Yuganskneftegaz, was effectively re-nationalised and taken over by the state-owned oil firm Rosneft.

Experts say the 'Yukos affair', which has rattled Russia's political stability and soured its international reputation, is likely to long remain a cause of public unease, especially considering the harshness of Khodorkovsky's sentence. "This is an absolutely illegal verdict," says Robert Amsterdam, one of Khodorkovsky's defence lawyers. "It is sheer infamy."

Shares of Yukos, once Russia's most profitable company, have plummeted by 97 per cent since Khodorkovsky's arrest, and are currently worth less than 5 cents apiece. The deeper damage may be hard to quantify. Experts say the le-

gal confusion and fears of arbitrary state persecution whipped up by the case have caused Russia's economic growth to plunge, capital flight to soar and foreign investors to depart for less hazard-laden markets.

"The atmosphere of fear has undermined the business climate in Russia," says Mikhail Delyagin, director of the independent Institute of Globalisation Problems in Moscow.

"Every local official, seeing how the central authorities dealt with Yukos, has begun abusing companies in his jurisdiction. What we have is robbery of business taking place under the cover of law and tax collection, and all Russians understand this."

In his final plea to the court last month, Khodorkovsky alleged that the criminal case against him — including 7 charges of fraud, forgery and tax evasion — were fabricated by high-rank-

ing officials intent on stripping the assets of a successful private firm. "Those people who are occupied with plundering Yukos' assets are not acting with the interests of the Russian state in mind," Khodorkovsky said. "They are back-alley, self-seeking bureaucrats, nothing less."

For the Kremlin and much of the Russian public, Khodorkovsky symbolises everything that went wrong in the country following the collapse of the USSR.

"(The Khodorkovsky case) is an effort to overcome the contradictions of the 1990s," says Gleb Pavlovsky, Kremlin-connected analyst.

"Most of the Russian public does not believe that the big wealth accumulated by some in the past decade is legitimate. Russians want to live in a free country, not in a Yukos-owned country."

Residents add twist to Beslan tragedy

Agence France Presse

VLADIKAVKAZ, May 18. — As the sole trial of an alleged hostage-taker captured in the Beslan school siege opened here, several Beslan residents insisted many hostages were in fact killed by the Russian special forces who were supposed to free them.

They say the special forces used flame-throwers and rocket launchers against the school as hostages were still inside, contrary to the official version. And they say they can prove it.

Officially, many of the 330 people, more than half

of them children, who died in the attack last September were killed by powerful explosives the hostage-takers detonated inside the school. But the editor of a local newspaper, Mr Murad Kabuyev, and many Beslan residents argue that their own inquiry into the circumstances of the assault carried out by Russian forces on September 3, 2004 shows very different results.

"We know flame-throwers were used before the evacuation" of the school, says Mr Kabuyev, a respected journalist who received an award from the Russian Journalists Union for his

work on the tragedy.

The editor said he can display two exhibits to prove this — a flame thrower and a rocket launcher residents found near the school. "We know the special forces set them up on the roof of a house facing the school as early as 2 September. Witnesses saw them," he added.

Mr Kabuyev and several residents have founded an association called the Initiative Group for the Submission of Evidence to the Forces of Law and Order.

The group demands a second inquiry into the way the special forces stormed the school.

19 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

Khodorkovsky found guilty of four charges

Moscow: Judges on Monday found Russian oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky guilty of four charges in his fraud trial at the end of a 22-month case in which his YUKOS oil firm has been torn apart.

Khodorkovsky, who is on trial with business associate Platon Lebedev, was convicted of theft with conspiracy, damage to property rights via court order and personal tax evasion. Judges still had to announce their verdicts on three remaining charges. Sentence was due to be passed later. The 11-month trial has scared investors and soured President Vladimir Putin's image abroad.

A defence lawyer, Yuri Schmidt, said it had been clear from the judges' summing up that the 41-year-old tycoon, once Russia's richest man, would be convicted. They repeatedly referred to Khodorkovsky and Lebedev as the leaders of an "organised criminal group."

"In the hour that the judge has

been talking, it is clear that the verdict is guilty ... (the conclusions of the judges are) completely following the conclusions of the prosecution," Schmidt told reporters during a court recess before the verdicts.

The billionaire and Lebedev face seven counts of fraud, embezzlement, tax evasion and theft that have their roots in alleged deals going back to the murky days of post-Soviet privatisation in the mid-1990s. The affair, widely seen as part of a Kremlin campaign to destroy Khodorkovsky for his political ambitions, has drawn criticism from the United



Mikhail Khodorkovsky with defendant and business partner Platon Lebedev behind bars during a trial in Moscow

States, calling for his release, one of which read: "Mikhail in jail is Russia's shame." But a small group of elderly people also called for him to be jailed. Whatever the judges decide — and their verdict and sentence may take up to three days to deliver — prosecutors have vowed to bring new charges to keep Khodorkovsky behind bars. Khodorkovsky and Lebedev — a YUKOS minority shareholder facing almost identical charges — were driven to the court in an armoured mini-van with tinted windows and escorted in handcuffs into the courtroom by armed guards. The two listened to their fate from a metal cage in the courtroom. Khodorkovsky has branded the trial a farce.

Former top businessman Boris Berезovsky, whose opposition to Putin forced him into London exile, said the persecution of Khodorkovsky only increased his public appeal as a politician. "Please demonstrate your principles," he said in an open letter published. Agencies

Khodorkovsky trial has been the key issue of Russia's domestic and foreign policy for almost two years," Nezavisimaya Gazeta daily said. The prosecution is seeking the maximum 10-year prison term for Khodorkovsky while his defence wants him fully acquitted.

Outside the courtroom about 500 supporters gathered with banners

It has now been indicated that the postponed Saarc Summit will take place in Dhaka towards the end of May. This is a welcome development. The purpose of this regional organisation wears thinner with every postponement, when discord rather than any sense of common purpose is placed on display. This was especially visible when the attempt to con-

gregate in Dhaka earlier this year was shelved in a volley of irritated statements from more than one regional capital.

The pendulum has swung and it seems now that the region's leaders who met in the margins of the Asia-Africa meeting in Indonesia a few days ago decided it was time for corrective action and that fresh dates should be set for the Dhaka meeting.

As it is, Saarc has little substance to its credit apart from periodically renewed good intentions. It is not lacking in good ideas to back these good intentions but the pace of implementation has been painfully slow. The form and structure of the organisation require attention if there is to be any future growth. This means that the annual summits, which are the core of it, should not be permitted to fall behind schedule. So reviving the Dhaka meeting should help put the organisation back on the rails.

Yet there is a long way to go before the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation begins to fulfil expectations. While the main assemblies continue to grind out communiqués and declarations, attention has tended to shift to the meetings on the side, for this is where in the last few summits the real action has taken place.

Most conspicuously, Saarc became a forum for the leaders of India and Pakistan to meet and to agree to resume the dialogue between their countries. While Saarc undoubtedly provided a useful and important setting for this and other meetings, that is not the main purpose for which it was devised.

Unfortunately, attempts

Reviving Saarc

within Saarc to promote regional cooperation through programmes such as the South Asian Preferential Trading Agreement and South Asian Free Trade Agreement have not reached very far and may even have lost some of their earlier significance as intra-regional projects have come up against more generalised demands for liberalisation within the World Trade Organisation.

The smaller countries of Saarc, with some justification, tend to blame India-Pakistan differences for the lack of progress, but they too have often been parochial and uninspired in their approach. There is much to be done on all sides if momentum is to be regained.

Looking back at the reasons for deferring the summit, it can be seen that the royal coup in Nepal virtu-

ally mandated postponement, as a minimum gesture of other members' disapproval of this blow against democracy. In addition, India had security anxieties that Bangladesh failed to assuage about its leader visiting Dhaka, though this hardly merited

wide angle

SALMAN HAIGAR

becoming a public issue between them.

Now that the summit is being revived, it is evident that little has changed, and the situation in South Asia is much as it was when the meeting was put off. Although the Nepal King has lifted Emergency in his kingdom, his rule has been strict and the divide between the palace and democratic forces in Nepal cannot be any wider.

Perhaps security liaison between India and Bangladesh has improved, for this no longer seems to be a complication for the summit. On hindsight, one can see that the harsh exchanges at the time of postponement were unnecessary and served little purpose. Bilateral differences will crop up from time to time but it is best not to let these be reflected in the management of Saarc's affairs.

Though the summit is now soon to materialise, it is not quite clear what to expect from it. Bangladesh leaders have expressed the hope that it will provide an opportunity to smooth over their country's differences with India which have become so evident lately. That would certainly be desirable, the more so as there is little substance to these differences. Unfortunately, insubstan-

tial matters have been permitted to become irritants, which is helpful to neither party. Perhaps the Dhaka meeting will start an overdue process of amelioration of India-Bangladesh ties.

What is predictable, however, is that other events will be overshadowed by the anticipated meeting between the leaders of India and Pakistan. They have just had a successful get-together in New Delhi, and a meeting in Dhaka would be a timely follow-up. However, in India-Pakistan relations, nothing is to be taken for granted. At this stage it cannot even be certain that President Pervez Musharraf himself will go to Dhaka: he has the option of asking his Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz to attend if for any reason he would like to keep away.

But assuming that the two principals meet, and that the occasion goes as well as their last meeting, the Dhaka summit could well mark an important stage in the ongoing dialogue between India and Pakistan.

At the regional level, easing of India-Pakistan ties offers the hope that Saarc will finally be in a position to make real progress on its agenda of strengthening economic links between its members. The organisation needs to get out of the rut and come up with fresh thinking and fresh commitment. One can hope that as bilateral problems between its members show some signs of improvement, Saarc can assume real significance as a factor for growth and development in South

(The author is a former Foreign Secretary, Government of India.)



(Left to right) Commerce Ministers of Saarc nations — Altaf Hossain Chowdhury from Bangladesh, Humayun Akhtar from Pakistan and Kamal Nath from India listen to reporters' questions during a press conference at the end of a three-day Commerce Ministers' meeting in Islamabad last year. — AFP

03 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

King lifts emergency, keeps special powers

KESHAV Pradhan
Kathmandu, April 30

IN A one-step-forward-and-two-back move, King Gyanendra at midnight lifted the state of emergency but retained all special powers that he had acquired while taking direct control of governance for three years on February 1.

He announced the withdrawal of emergency hours after he returned home from a 10-day foreign tour on Friday. The move came amid intense international pressure, especially from India, the US, the UK and the EU.

Manmohan Singh had called for the restoration of democracy and basic rights in Nepal during his recent meeting with Gyanendra in Jakarta. On arrival home, the king said: "I'm impressed by his excellency Dr Manmohan Singh's statesmanship. I've taken seriously whatever he has told me."

The king decided to end the emergency two days before it completed its stipulated 90-day tenure on May 1. To retain his stranglehold, he invoked Article 127 of the Constitution (which he used to assume the role of an

REACTIONS

The PM and I had conveyed to the king that political processes should be restored, political prisoners freed, the emergency lifted, Indian channels aired and processes that culminate in multi-party elections started. This is the first step

The king has tried to take everyone, particularly the world community, for a ride

One has to wait and watch

The king must prove his commitment to democracy by action, not words

absolute ruler earlier) to give continuity to the controversial Royal Commission for Corruption Control (RCCC). Set up after February 1, the RCCC, designed to keep democrats under pressure, can try and punish anyone on the basis of information provided by any individual.

Fresh restrictions were im-

posed on demonstrations and meetings within Kathmandu city on Saturday morning. This was done in view of seven mainstream parties' decision to stage a rally on May Day. Besides, the royal proclamation was silent on press censorship and continuing imprisonment of hundreds of political activists that were carried out under different rules.

Reacting cautiously, India described it as the "first step" towards restoration of multi-party democracy, which still required the immediate release of political prisoners and other measures.

India has called its ambassador to Nepal Shiv Shanker Mukherjee for "consultations". Mukherjee will arrive in New Delhi on Tuesday. The consultations are aimed at helping New Delhi arrive at a decision on resumption of arms aid to Nepal.

Nepali Congress chief G.P. Koirala described the announcement as "an attempt to hoodwink the international community." Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist) leaders demanded that the king prove his commitment to democracy by action, not words.

See also Page 13

01 MAY 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Putin regrets collapse of Soviet Union

Russia ①
10-17
26/7

Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW: The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, described the break-up of the Soviet Union as the biggest political catastrophe of the 20th century and rejected Western sermons on democracy in Russia.

"It must be admitted that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century," Mr. Putin said in his annual state of the nation address to Parliament on Monday.

He said the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 was "a true drama" which left tens of millions of Russians stranded outside Russia, destroyed old ideals and

robbed people of their savings.

Mr. Putin made it clear that foreign advice on democracy in new Russia was unwarranted. Russia would develop as a "free and democratic country" but at its own pace, he said.

Free nation

Russia "will decide for itself the pace, terms and conditions of moving towards democracy," he said. "We are a free nation and our place in the modern world will be defined only by how successful and strong we are."

Mr. Putin also warned the West against trying to stage a "velvet revolution" in Russia similar to those in Georgia and

Ukraine.

"Progressive development of democracy in Russia is only possible on the basis of law," Mr. Putin said. "Any unlawful methods of struggle for ethnic, religious and other interests contradict the principles of democracy. The state will react to them with legal, but tough, means."

Mr. Putin called for an amnesty for Russian capital stashed away in offshore banks. "We must allow private individuals to declare their capitals that have been amassed in previous years in line with a simplified procedure," he said. "The money must work for our economy instead of lying on offshore accounts."

26 APR 2005

THE HINDU

Mafia-style attack on Russia reform architect

Moscow, March 17 (Reuters): Anatoly Chubais, head of Russia's state power monopoly, survived an assassination attempt today by assailants who detonated a roadside bomb and sprayed his convoy with automatic gunfire.

The 49-year-old Chubais, one of Russia's best-known figures, came to prominence as the architect of post-Soviet economic reforms under which two dozen "oligarchs" acquired vast wealth while ordinary people suffered a huge slump in living standards.

He is now chief executive of Unified Energy System, and the prime mover behind reforms to introduce competition to the power sector.

Chubais told a hastily arranged press briefing that he had been aware of a plan to kill him, but would not say who he suspected of carrying

out the attack. "I have an idea of who could have taken out a contract on me," a shaken but defiant Chubais said from the safety of UES headquarters in Moscow. "We had reason to believe something like this might happen."

Chubais was travelling to work from his country home along a narrow stretch of the Minsk Highway at 0630 GMT when a roadside bomb rocked his two-car cortege and attackers opened fire with automatic weapons.

Chubais said his armoured BMW had been able to flee the scene despite being hit in the windscreen, hood and front tyre. Security guards for Chubais travelling in a Mitsubishi Lancer returned fire at two hitmen, who escaped into the surrounding woods. Police said they had found a green Saab they believe was

used as a getaway car by the would-be assassins.

The bomb blast had a force equivalent to at least 500g of TNT, investigators said. Television footage from the scene showed a large crater at the side of the two-lane highway. Chubais, a leader of the Union of Right Forces party, quit active politics in 1998 to take over UES. He was ranked in a recent opinion poll as Russia's most influential businessman.

The tough-talking economist was a leading member of the "young reformers" close to former Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar and architect of a 1990s privatisation drive which led to vast wealth being concentrated in very few hands. Critics accused Chubais of launching an era of "wild capitalism" when killings became a widely used method to acquire control of businesses.



Anatoly Chubais

\$10 m for Maskhadov head

Associated Press

MOSCOW, March 15. — Russia's Federal Security Service today said that it had paid a reward of \$10 million for information on the exact location of Chechen rebel leader Mr Aslan Maskhadov.

Maskhadov was killed last week in a special operation in Tolstoy-Yurt village in northern Chechnya. The security service, known by its Russian acronym FSB, had announced in September that it would pay the reward for tips on



This undated AFP file photo shows Anzor Maskhadov, son of Aslan Maskhadov, sitting beneath a portrait of his father.

the top rebel leader's whereabouts.

FSB, which is one of the main security agencies to succeed KGB, said in a statement today that it was prepared to help people who provided the information to move to another region of Russia or to a Muslim country. It was unclear how many people would split the reward.

The killing of Maskhadov, one of Russia's most-wanted men, was a victory for the security services, who have struggled to penetrate the tightly-knit clan society of Chechnya. Maskhadov

and other rebel leaders appeared able to move about fairly freely in the region, where they boasted of a large network of collaborators.

The announcement of the reward came a day after authorities said they had blown up the house where Maskhadov was killed because they feared the building could have been booby trapped. But rights activists and the government's critics questioned the motives for the destruction of the building.

Colonel-Gen. Arkady Yudelev, chief of the federal headquarters for the

campaign in Chechnya, yesterday said that the demolition experts who inspected the bunker where Maskhadov was said to have been hiding had discovered and detonated a box containing documents and riddled with explosives.

Basayev's turn

Russia's security service said on Tuesday it would pay \$10 million for information that helps it track down the Kremlin's No 1 foe, Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev. Basayev has claimed responsibility for attacks including the one on Beslan.

Maskhadov's killing dashes peace hopes

Nick Paton Walsh
Moscow, March 9

THE DEATH of Aslan Maskhadov, leader of the Chechen separatist movement, and the more moderate of the separatists still carrying out attacks on Russian troops, will quash what dim hopes remained for a negotiated settlement of the 10-year conflict, in which Maskhadov was the only player prepared to negotiate.

The Chechen leader was killed on Tuesday night when troops from the elite Alfa and Vimpel units of the Russian security services, the FSB, tried to arrest him in the Chechen village of Tolstoy Yurt. He was killed, apparently by accident, in an explosion.

His corpse was shown on Russian TV channel NTV in a pool of blood in the courtyard of the house in whose basement he had been hiding. A soldier pulled from the wreckage a plastic bag containing the flag Chechnya used during its independence under Maskhadov from 1996 to 1999. Maskhadov's right eye was swollen with bruising and he had a puncture wound in his head. The chief of the FSB, Nikolai Patrushev, told President Vladimir Putin that his men sustained no losses during the operation.

Akhmed Zakayev, Maskhadov's spokesman who has political asylum in London, told the *Guardian* by telephone,



Newsletters at a stand in Tolstoy-Yourt village, Chechnya, on Wednesday. AFP

"I can confirm his death. I have spoken to people there (in Chechnya). He was killed in a fight, a shootout. He was without his security practically alone. The Russians would know themselves that he would never be taken alive."

The Kremlin will seize on the death as

a political victory for Putin's hardline policy on Chechnya, coming at a time when domestic reforms have plunged the Kremlin head's ratings to an all-time low. Putin said, "There's still a lot of work to do there. We have to build up our forces to protect the people of the republic and cit-

izens of all Russia from the bandits." A Russian army officer said, "We received information that there was an international terrorist (in Tolstoy Yurt) and undertook a special operation to arrest him." He said troops had to detonate an explosive to gain access to the bunker, in which Maskhadov and three accomplices had barricaded themselves. He said Maskhadov was probably killed as he was too close to the blast.

However, Ramzan Kadyrov, the influential son of the late pro-Russian president of Chechnya, Akhmed Kadyrov, said the separatist had been killed by a careless shot fired by his bodyguards. Kadyrov said that the death was a "gift" to all Chechen women on the public holiday of International Women's Day.

The officer doubted if the three accomplices held during the operation had information that could assist them in killing Chechen separatist militant Shamil Basayev, Russia's most wanted man. Zakayev said, "Maskhadov was caught absolutely accidentally. The village is small and he did not have his usual security detail so as not to attract attention." He said a Chechen separatist committee would soon meet and appoint Maskhadov's successor, declining to name any candidates. "For the resistance it is a loss, but another will take his place. Russian propaganda has for hundreds of years tried to say

that the problem is not with the Chechen people but with one of their leaders. Maskhadov was a young and promising Soviet commander who headed our forces at the start." He added, "All the peaceful initiatives in past years had come from Maskhadov's side."

Zakayev said the "political killing of our President will increase the position of the radical side," namely Basayev.

Maskhadov was born in Kazakhstan in 1951, his family having been deported from Chechnya by Josef Stalin, along with the rest of the Chechen people, in 1944. Maskhadov became a Soviet artillery colonel. Later he led his breakaway region's forces in a 21-month war that ended in 1996 with a humiliating defeat of the Russian troops. Maskhadov won a landslide presidential election victory in January 1997. In May, he and President Boris Yeltsin signed a peace accord, but Chechnya's final status was left unresolved. Moscow said Chechnya must remain a part of the Russian Federation, albeit with wide autonomy.

Last month, Maskhadov was said to have ordered a ceasefire by his forces as a gesture of goodwill aimed at ending the conflict. Leaders of Chechnya's pro-Moscow government rejected the offer, calling it a cynical ploy to allow the rebels to regroup.

The *Guardian*

Russia
40-17

Russia adds submarines, missiles to nuclear arsenal

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, JAN. 29. Russia's armed forces will get two new nuclear submarines, seven long-range nuclear missiles and a range of other weapons in what appears to be the biggest addition to its armoury since the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The First Deputy Defence Minister, Colonel-General Alexander Belousov, said on Friday the Russian Navy will induct two fourth-generation nuclear submarines, Dmitry Donskoy and Yuri Dolgoruky, armed with the latest Bulava intercontinen-

tal ballistic missiles.

He also disclosed that seven Topol-M strategic missile in silo-based and mobile versions will be added to the Russian nuclear arsenal.

More in the pipeline

Both the Topol-M and Bulava missiles can reportedly overcome the star-war missile shield the United States is currently deploying.

"If everything goes according to plan, we will also deploy six S-400 missile-defence complexes," the Minister said.

The S-400 Triumph is Rus-

sia's latest long-range ground-to-air missile system capable of intercepting both low and high-flying cruising missiles and aircraft.

In addition, the Defence Ministry will acquire two T-160 strategic bombers armed with cruising missiles, as well as fighter-planes, helicopters, tanks and other armoured vehicles.

Russia's spending on military weapons is to rise by 26 per cent next year, with money channelled to high-tech projects to boost industry.

30 JAN 2005

THE HINDU

Russia roars for Soviet salve

Moscow, Jan. 22 (Reuters): Thousands of poor Russians demonstrated across Russia today as part of a campaign of protest against abolition of some benefits that has dented President Vladimir Putin's popularity.

Several thousand pensioners gathered in the centre of Moscow demanding the government be fired and calling on Putin to resign over a decision to give cash payouts in lieu of social benefits, such as free travel, a legacy of the Soviet era.

Demonstrators led by the Communist Party carried placards reading: "Stop robbing pensioners", "Putin resign" and "Hitler+Yeltsin+Putin=genocide" as well as red flags and portraits of former communist leaders Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin.

The communists, who control 48 seats in the 450 seat parliament and constitute the only real organised opposition to Putin, also led a thou-

sand people in the southern city of Stavropol in protest against the cash payouts.

Opponents say they do not cover the benefits and leave many pensioners, used to cheap basic amenities such as housing and energy in Soviet times, living in deep poverty.

"Volodya (Vladimir Putin), what on earth do you think you're doing to the country?" said Vadim, a former KGB officer in his 60s, at the Moscow demonstration.

Protests against replacing benefits from the start of the year led Putin, president since 2000, to publicly chide members of the government over the way the substitution was carried out.

An opinion poll published in the *Izvestia* daily said yesterday the benefits crisis had reduced the number of people who said they would vote for Putin to 43 per cent, from 48 per cent last month.

Finance minister Alexei

Kudrin said yesterday the government took full blame for the move and that he might draw on a budget stabilisation fund to boost pensioner payouts.

Some Opposition parties, dealt a heavy blow in 2003 parliamentary polls dominated by a pro-Kremlin party, are attempting to use popular discontent over the measures to make their mark again after more than a year in the back-ground.

Communists and the nationalist Rodina party led several thousand protesters in Samara in central Russia. About five thousand people in Ufa in the Urals also demanded the dismissal of the local government over the benefits issue.

About 200 people, headed by communists and local trade unions, held a two-hour demonstration against electricity price hikes, which affected not only pensioners, in Krasnoyarsk in Siberia.



Russians during protests in different parts of the country. (Reuters, AFP)