

The killing fields of Chechnya burning

Vladimir Radyuhin

THE KILLING of the self-declared Chechen rebel leader, Abdul-Khalim Saidullayev, last week highlighted a deep crisis in the 15-year-old Chechen independence movement. The "President" of Ichkeria, as Chechen separatists call Chechnya, was shot dead by special forces in an operation in his home town of Argun. Saidullayev, 39, took over when President Aslan Maskhadov was killed by Russian forces in March 2005. The previous two rebel leaders, Jokhar Dudayev and Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, also met a violent end.

Maskhadov's death provoked an outcry in the Western media, which accused Moscow of missing a chance to negotiate peace with the "moderate" rebel leader. No such suggestions were made with regard to Saidullayev, who had been a little known Muslim cleric before becoming a largely nominal leader for the increasingly fragmented rebel movement.

It was, however, under Saidullayev that the Chechen resistance was finally transformed from a fight for independence to Islamic *jihād*.

For many years, Maskhadov's name was a symbol of the rebels' campaign for an independent Ichkeria. It was he who led the military campaign against Russian forces in the first Chechen war and who signed a peace pact with Russia in 1996 giving Chechnya *de facto* independence. By contrast, Saidullayev's presidency was marked by a deep erosion of the "freedom fight" spirit. The turning point was the rebel raid on a school in Beslan, in neighbouring North Ossetia, which took place in September 2004, six months before Maskhadov's death.

The death of 331 civilians in Beslan, more than half of them children, destroyed whatever legitimacy the Chechen rebels had in the minds of Western politicians and Russian sympathisers. Under Saidullayev, the rebel movement finally degenerated into disjointed terrorist attacks on Russian troops stationed in Chechnya. These isolated attacks can no longer sustain demands for Chechnya's independence. In fact, such demands are barely audible today.

The Kremlin's strategy of "Chechenisation" of the conflict has paid off. The new pro-Moscow Chechen leaders, some of whom fought Russians

Moscow faces a difficult task in trying to strike a balance between rival power groups in Chechnya. Maintaining this balance is key to returning the region to normality.

in the first Chechen war, have drawn over to their side more rebel warlords. They continue to control territories of their native clans in much the same way they did when they were part of the resistance, but are now legalised as leaders of official security outfits.

The defeat of the "freedom for Ichkeria" cause has prompted an ideological and strategic shift in rebel resistance. Chechen nationalism has given way to international *jihādism*. The new ideology was articulated most clearly by Movladi Udugov, former Information Minister and chief ideologist in the separatist government who fled Chechnya after Russia launched the second military campaign in 1999 to reassert control over the rebel region.

In a long article posted on a Chechen rebel site earlier this year, Mr. Udugov argued against aspiring for an independent Chechen state because any state in the modern world is a brutal and corrupt instrument of oppression. What Chechens needed, he said, was not classic statehood, but organisation for launching a global *jihād* with the ultimate goal of establishing a worldwide Islamist caliphate.

This philosophy is consonant with what Al-Qaeda preaches — and also practises in Pakistan's tribal area of North Waziristan where the Taliban earlier this year announced the establishment of an "Islamic state" dedicated to the cause of *jihād* against NATO forces in Afghanistan.

In a symbolic show of solidarity with Chechen rebels, an Al-Qaeda-linked terrorist group in Iraq earlier this month abducted four Russian diplomats and killed one to demand the withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya.

In keeping with the new internationalist ideology, Saidullayev had called for extending rebel resistance throughout the Caucasus. Chechen rebels have lately shunned Beslan-type terror

strikes against civilians in an effort to win support for their campaign to spread Muslim insurgency across the volatile region. A series of terrorist attacks targeting police, security services, and the military have rocked the predominantly Muslim regions of Russia's Northern Caucasus — Ingushetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Adygeya, and Karachayev-Cherkessiya. While Chechen rebels have provided moral inspiration and technical assistance to their "brothers in faith," the new insurgency also has local roots.

The collapse of the Soviet Union critically weakened the federal centre's control over ethnically defined regions, precipitating total corruption of local elites, whose sole motive was self-enrichment. This left the majority of the population exposed to abject poverty, widespread unemployment, and police brutality. While elsewhere in Russia living standards have grown substantially in recent years, in the North Caucasus people remain as poor as ever. This created a fertile ground for the growth of extremism.

"Today the forces opposed to Russia, not finding other ways of fighting tyranny, come to us and that is a great help for us," Saidullayev said last year commenting on an armed uprising in Nalchik, capital of Kabardino-Balkaria, when about 200 men staged simultaneous attacks on police stations, and the headquarters of the security and prison services.

The Nalchik revolt, one of the biggest in the Northern Caucasus, was crushed within hours, leaving about a 100 people dead. Investigation revealed that most attackers were linked to local jamaats. These Islamic councils sprang up in the region to preach the return to "pure" Islam as opposed to the official Islam of their corrupt rulers.

The local authorities' clumsy attempts to sup-

press Muslim extremism with the help of violent police raids and mosque closures only served to further alienate thousands of believers. Before long, jamaats evolved into a network of clandestine militant outfits led by Chechen and Al-Qaeda emissaries.

"Kabardino-Balkariya is a wonderful country, all it needs is to be awakened," Chechnya's most notorious warlord Shamil Basayev once said. "And when it wakes up, the entire Caucasus will burn."

Russia's Deputy Prosecutor-General Nikolai Shepel admitted that an "international terrorist organisation" operates in Russia's South. "Its goal is to tear [the] Northern Caucasus from Russia and set up the so-called Islamic state — khalifah," he said a few months ago. "This underground network has a fairly large membership and poses great danger."

Russia's reaction

While vowing to suppress ruthlessly armed revolt, Moscow is also trying to address the social and economic roots of Islamic insurgency. A year ago, President Vladimir Putin appointed his right-hand man, Dmitry Kozak, as special envoy to North Caucasus to break the hold of corrupt ethnic clans on the region. Eight months after the Nalchik uprising, the Government of Kabardino-Balkaria was sacked and an ethnic Russian was appointed Prime Minister. The process of government change has also begun in other provinces.

Even as the thrust of rebel activity has moved outside Chechnya, the region is still Moscow's biggest headache in North Caucasus. But the nature of the problem has changed.

Russian forces based in Chechnya have been steadily tightening the noose, killing one rebel leader after another. In fact, only two well-known warlords are still at large — Basayev and Doku Umarov, 42, who succeeded Saidullayev.

Russia's main problem now is not rebels but Chechnya's *de facto* ruler, Ramzan Kadyrov, son of the Moscow-installed President Akhmad Kadyrov, assassinated in a rebel bomb attack in 2004.

Mr. Ramzan Kadyrov has since had a meteoric career, rising to the post of Chechnya's Prime Minister earlier this year. The Kremlin has apparently decided he is the best option in its plan to pacify the region, and is encouraging his presidential ambitions.

Decorated by Mr. Putin with Russia's top award, Order of the Hero of Russia, Mr. Ramzan Kadyrov has mounted a massive propaganda campaign to glorify himself and has been pressing President Alu Alkhanov to step down after October 30, when he turns 30, the minimum age to qualify for Chechnya's top job. In an incident last month, the bodyguards of the two leaders staged a shootout in the government compound in the capital Grozny.

Tension between the two leaders has grown so intense that they were recently summoned to the Kremlin by President Putin. Alkhanov has the support of several Chechen "battalion commanders" who are unhappy with Mr. Ramzan Kadyrov's attempts to put them down. Mr. Ramzan Kadyrov's thuggish methods of ruling Chechnya with the help of a personal army of several thousand bodyguards and paramilitary police have also antagonised large sections of the Chechen people. His men are accused of committing three out of four crimes that take place in Chechnya, abducting and terrorising members of rival clans.

Moscow, which still deploys an armed force of 80,000 in Chechnya, has so far been able to keep Mr. Ramzan Kadyrov in rein, forcing him recently to disband one of his armed outfits, the Anti-Terrorist Centre, after numerous complaints about human rights abuses. But the measure has left thousands of former militants jobless, raising the possibility of them going back to the rebels.

The incident highlighted the difficult choices Moscow faces in trying to strike a balance between rival power groups in Chechnya. Maintaining this balance is key to returning the region to normality, which in turn is a crucial condition for defeating insurgency across the Northern Caucasus.

CARTOONSCAPE



PUTIN SPEECH ■ 'It's premature to speak of end of arms race... it's rising to new tech level'

Russia must be strong against US

NEWS & AGENCIES
MOSCOW, MAY 10

RUSSIA faces a "fortress" United States and must embrace high technology to keep up in a growing arms race, as well as in fierce economic competition, President Vladimir Putin said today in his seventh state of the nation speech since his election in 2000.

Addressing both Houses of Parliament and other top officials in the nationally televised, hour-long speech, Putin said Russia must remain on guard in a post-Cold War arms race.

"It is premature to speak of the end of the arms race," Putin said. "It is in reality rising to a new technological level."

Putin said the United States spent 25 times more than Russia on its defence budget. "Their house is their fortress — good for them," he said. "But that means that we also must make our house strong and reliable. We must always be ready to counter any attempts

to pressure Russia in order to strengthen positions at our expense.

"The stronger our military is, the less temptation there will be to exert such pressure on us," Putin said.

He said the government would work to strengthen the nation's nuclear deterrent as well as conventional military forces without repeating the mistakes of the Cold War era, when a costly arms race against the United States drained Soviet resources.

In his sweeping address, Putin also laid out a vision of a Russia switching from an ageing and uncompetitive Soviet-era infrastructure to an economy centred on high-tech areas such as nanotechnology.

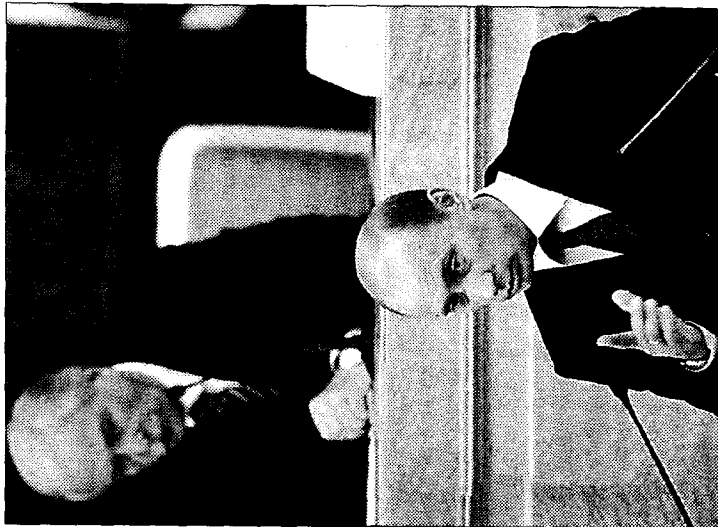
"In conditions of fierce international competition, the country's economic development must be based, essentially, on its scientific and technological advantages," he said. "Unfortunately, one has to face that the majority of the technical equipment used in the national economy is not years behind the top level, but decades."

In another apparent barb aimed at the US, he said countries should not use Russia's World Trade Organisation membership negotiations as a vehicle to make unrelated demands. "The negotiations for letting Russia into the WTO should not become a bargaining chip for questions that have nothing in common with the activities of this organisation," Putin said.

In April, US Senators visiting Moscow said Russia's democracy record and its stance in the Iranian nuclear crisis would influence Congress as it considers Moscow's bid to join the global trade body.

Expressing concern over what he said was an annual decline of nearly 700,000 people a year, Putin said that childcare benefits should be increased and other incentives created to raise the birth rate.

"We must at least stimulate the birth of a second child," said Putin, lamenting that concerns about housing, health care and education and income prompt many families to stop at one.



Vladimir Putin delivers the state of the nation address in Kremlin on Wednesday. AP

Russia in the grip of its bureaucracy

Vladimir Radyuhin

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR Putin has warded off the threat of the Russian state being privatised by oligarchs and unruly regional barons only to see it being gradually taken over by corrupt bureaucracies. When six years ago Mr. Putin was plucked from obscurity by President Boris Yeltsin to succeed him, he looked desperately for a power base from which he could wage the battle to reassemble the country that was falling to pieces.

As the political party system was (and still is) incipient, Mr. Putin had little choice but to fall back on the bureaucracy to reassert the Kremlin's supremacy over semi-independent provinces and the oligarchs, who had become omnipotent powerbrokers during Mr. Yeltsin's chaotic rule. Bureaucrats helped Mr. Putin counter separatism and politically ambitious moneybags, but in the process gained more power than they had even in the Soviet Union.

There are 18 million civil servants in the Russia of 144 million today, compared to 12 million civil servants in the Soviet Union with a population of 300 million. In the old system, the civil service was under the constant scrutiny and control of the Communist Party. After the Communist system collapsed, no new system of checks and balances replaced it. With the President being the source of ultimate power in Russia, the bureaucracy is free from control either by a compliant Parliament or the judiciary.

"Russian bureaucrats are still largely a closed and arrogant caste which perceives state service as just another kind of business," Mr. Putin said in his 2005 state-of-the-nation address. He accused Russian bureaucrats of using economic growth to line their own pockets at the expense of public well-being and vowed to cut the bureaucracy to size. "We have no plans to hand over control of the country to inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy," he warned.

However, the bureaucracy has already emerged as Russia's only ruling class, which controls key businesses, lobbies its interests in Parliament, and dictates its will to the judiciary. The

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rise of the bureaucrats' economic power began during the Yeltsin era's sweeping privatisation, when government officials awarded state-owned factories and oil companies to businessmen in exchange for a share in the assets. The most glaring example was the case of the former Deputy Prime Minister, Vladimir Potanin, who after leaving the government gained control of Norilsk Nickel, the world's biggest platinum producer.

Under President Putin, the bureaucrats have further consolidated their hold on the economy, presiding over a massive redistribution of private assets through a semi-criminal mechanism of bankruptcy, the rules for which they wrote themselves. "There are good reasons to believe that by appropriating the political and administrative rent the civil servants have become the second biggest owner of big private assets after the corporate sector," said Sergei Peregodov of the Russian Institute of World Economy and International Relations. His research showed that only a section of bureaucrats left government jobs to become regular businessmen, while a majority stayed on. "They are rentier-businessmen, who do not contribute to economic growth, but live off it," says Prof. Peregodov.

Despite Mr. Putin's diatribes against the Russian bureaucracy, its symbiosis with the corporate sector has almost become official. Cabinet members openly engage in business activities through their next-of-kin. The wife of Health and Social Development Minister Mikhail Zurabov, for example, controls a number of wholesale companies that supply medicines under social security programmes run by her husband's Ministry. The only Russian woman to appear on this year's *Forbes* magazine list of world billionaires was Yelena Baturina, owner of

a booming construction business and wife of Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov.

Regional officials are taking the cue from their federal colleagues. The former head of the Southern Federal District, Viktor Kazantsev, was in the news recently when he went to court to claim part of his business empire from his estranged wife and daughter. Factories and chain stores Mr. Kazantsev acquired during his official tenure were registered to members of his family as government officials are formally banned by law from doing business. When he divorced his wife she refused to part with the assets. The court, instead of putting Mr. Kazantsev in the dock for breaking the law, heeded his arguments and awarded him some of the contested assets.

Even though it is typical for Russian civil servants to have business interests, hardly any of them have been convicted for abusing official position to enrich themselves. The feeling of impunity has pushed government corruption in Russia to staggering proportions.

A study conducted last year by Indem, an anti-corruption think tank, found that businesses were paying about \$316 billion a year in bribes, a nearly 10-fold increase from four years earlier. The total amount of bribes government officials took from businesses in 2005 exceeded all federal budget revenues by 2.7 times.

Two years ago President Putin set up a Kremlin anti-corruption watchdog with the Prime Minister as its head. Inaugurating the Presidential Council for Combating Corruption in January 2004, Mr. Putin lambasted the Government for lack of progress in fighting corruption. "The government in Russia repeatedly and loudly proclaimed the need to fight corruption, wrote programmes and took isolated harsh measures,

but frankly speaking these have not yielded much effect," Mr. Putin said.

However, the new body was never heard of again after its first and only meeting. A little later Mr. Putin made yet another attempt to reduce corruption and improve the efficiency of bureaucracy through a Cabinet reform. He slashed the number of Ministries from 24 to 13, and turned them into policy-making bodies, delegating their other functions of implementation, enforcement, and regulation to "agencies" and "services." But the reform created more confusion and red tape, as Ministries contrived to retain control of agencies and services. To all appearances, the Kremlin has since given up on the anti-corruption fight.

What really bothers corrupt Russian bureaucrats today is how to legalise their enormous fortunes. A few days ago, the Finance Ministry submitted for Cabinet approval a tax amnesty bill that purportedly seeks to encourage the repatriation of tens of billions of dollars Russian businessmen have stacked overseas. However, experts are sceptical that businessmen will take advantage of the amnesty, as there are many cheaper and safer ways for them to bring their money back to Russia. The bill may be more useful for government officials who may want to declare their multi-million dollar property and assets and win immunity from prosecution by paying a flat 13 per cent income tax.

Economy stifled

Rampant corruption and the merger of bureaucracy and business are having a stifling effect on the Russian economy. While big corporations have learnt to oil the greedy bureaucratic machine, small and medium businesses are the most to suffer. A survey of small and medium businessmen last year revealed that they feared bureaucrats more than the Russian mafia. Two-thirds of entrepreneurs said they had no chance of upholding legitimate interests if they ran afoul of local government. Suffocating bureaucratic pressure is the main factor behind the stagnation of the small and medium sector. It has registered almost no growth over the past 10 years and accounts for a modest 10 to 12 per cent of Russia's gross domestic production.

Russia's aged industrial infrastructure, health, and education sectors are in urgent need of investment, but Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin has dug his heels in against spending from the overflowing stabilisation fund, the country's rainy-day pot of windfall oil revenues, which is set to touch \$80 billion this year. His two main arguments are that government investment will drive up inflation and that it will be "ineffective" because it is likely to be squandered by corrupt officials.

"The Russian state machine is one of the least reformed institutions in this country," says Mikhail Dmitriyev, head of the Centre for Strategic Studies, the Kremlin's main think tank. "In many respects government efficiency in Russia remains at the level of African countries."

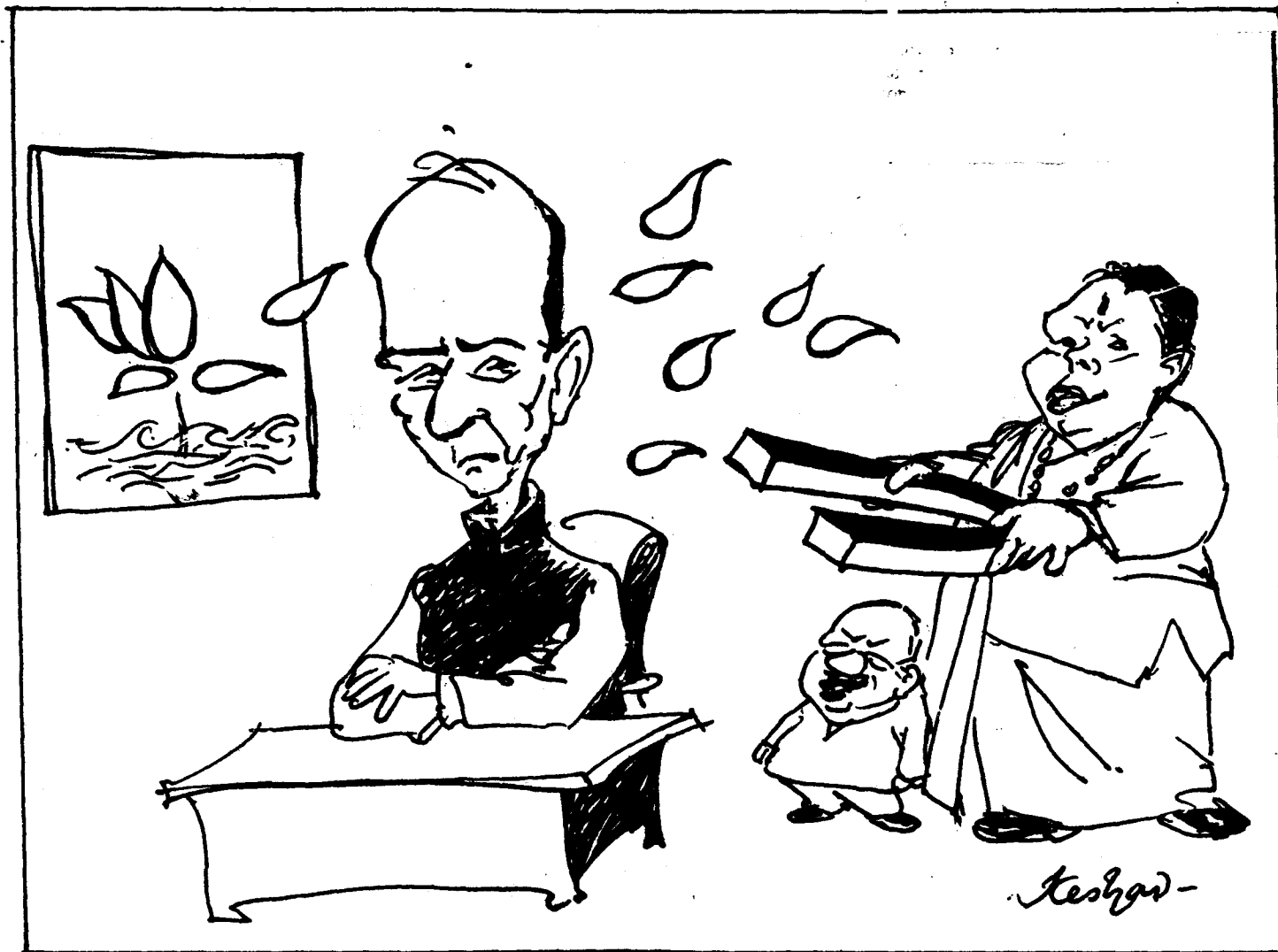
In an effort to overcome the bureaucratic hurdles to economic modernisation, President Putin has opted for centralisation of economic power in the hands of his most trusted aides to steer Russia's economic modernisation. He has appointed his former Kremlin administration head, Dmitry Medvedev, as Deputy Prime Minister in charge of overseeing key social projects, which involve pumping an additional \$4.6 billion in budget funds into health care, education, agriculture, and residential housing in 2006.

Another close confidant of Mr. Putin, Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov, has headed a new defence industry committee tasked, among other things, with tightening Kremlin control over the corruption-prone sphere of defence contracts.

However, Mr. Putin seems aware that a long-term solution to the problem of a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy lies down the road of democratic reform. "We believe that it is not only imperative, but also economically profitable to have developed democratic procedures in our country," the Russian leader said in his 2005 state-of-the-nation address.

Russia's dynamic growth propped by high oil prices gives the hope that an increasingly powerful middle class will eventually create an institutional framework for political competition, which alone can rein in the bureaucracy.

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Russia Approves Divisive Pipeline Plan

Critics Cite Threat to Lake Baikal, Political Pressure on Panel

By Peter Finn
Washington Post Foreign Service
Tuesday, March 7, 2006; A14

MOSCOW, March 6 -- A controversial plan to build a major oil pipeline passing within half a mile of Siberia's Lake Baikal, the world's largest freshwater lake, was approved by a Russian government regulatory agency Monday.

The decision followed a review process that environmentalists and some Russian experts involved in assessing the route say was marked by manipulation of an expert panel and political pressure on dissenting scientists.

"Even if billions of dollars are at stake, the Russian government cannot put Lake Baikal at risk," Andrei Poyarkov, a member of the expert panel and a biologist at the Institute of Ecology and Evolution in the Russian Academy of Sciences, said at a news conference in Moscow. "They do not have the right."

The head of Rostekhnadzor, the Federal Service for Environmental, Technological and Nuclear Oversight, signed a decree Monday accepting the vote of an expert commission last week to give the project the green light, according to the Russian news agency Interfax.

The expert panel's vote overturned one last month by the same group to reject the route on grounds that a pipeline rupture in the earthquake-prone area could send thousands of tons of crude oil into the lake, a Russian natural treasure. UNESCO designated the lake a World Heritage Site 10 years ago.

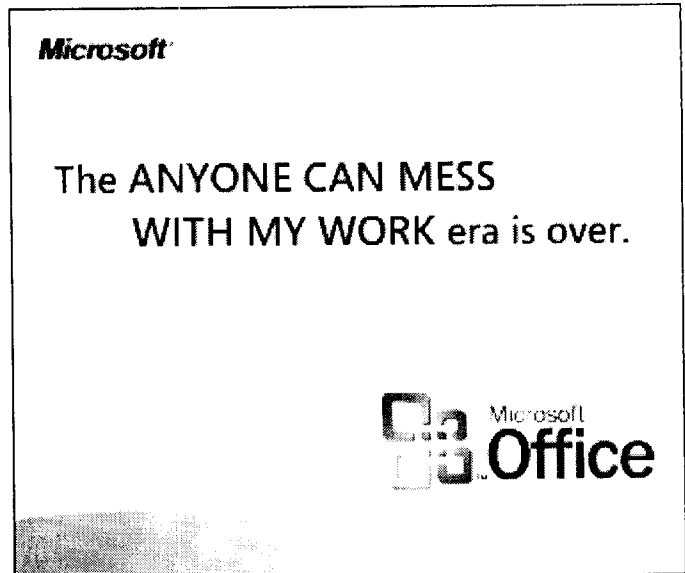
Transneft, the state-controlled pipeline operator, is set to build the 2,500-mile pipeline, which would run from Taishet in eastern Siberia to the Pacific coast. With an annual capacity of 80 million tons of crude, it would allow Russia to increase its oil exports to China, Japan and other Asia-Pacific economies.

The \$11.5 billion project is a strategic goal of President Vladimir Putin's government, which wants to diversify the country's export network and build Russia into an energy superpower.

Officials at Transneft argue that rerouting the pipeline would add hundreds of millions of dollars to the project's costs and cause major delays in starting construction. They also insist that the project will not endanger the lake.

"Transneft will take all the requisite precautions for Baikal to stay safe," said Simon Vainshtok, president of the company, in an interview last month with the government newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta. "For instance, the average thickness of the pipe we use across Russia is 9 millimeters, whereas in the vicinity of Baikal it is 27 millimeters." Those measurements are equivalent to about 0.35 inches and 1.1 inches.

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The advertisement features the Microsoft logo at the top left. The main text is centered and reads "The ANYONE CAN MESS WITH MY WORK era is over." Below the text is the Microsoft Office logo, which consists of the four-pane window icon and the word "Office" in a bold, sans-serif font.

The project has a history of rejection, then acceptance by official bodies. Last September, the Natural Resources Ministry turned down the proposal for the route near Lake Baikal but reversed itself two months later under what Russian news reports have called pressure from the Kremlin.

In a vote last month, 46 of 52 members of an expert panel that Rostekhnadzor had appointed to study the project rejected the route.

After that vote, Rostekhnadzor added 34 experts to the group, all of whom favored the proposed route, according to Gennady Chegason, a dissenting member of the panel. Chegason said group members who voted to reject the pipeline came under strong pressure. People were told, "If you vote against construction, it will be the end of your scientific career," he said.

Supporters of the plan still had trouble mustering the two-thirds majority necessary to approve construction, Chegason said. In the end, 58 members of the expanded commission voted for the project, with 27 against.

"I remember the Communist Party and the meetings of the party were not like this," said Stanislav Tronin, another member of the panel and a chemist at the Institute for Emergency Situations.

Last week, Putin was presented with a petition signed by 14,000 Russians asking him to take measures to change the route.

A spokesman for Rostekhnadzor could not be reached Monday. In the past week, the agency has declined to comment on allegations that it manipulated the process.

Roman Vazhenkov, the Baikal Campaign coordinator for Greenpeace, said opponents would appeal to the Russian courts and seek to influence international lenders not to finance the pipeline. He said his organization had already written to major banks in the United States, Europe and Japan.

Greenpeace and other opponents of the project said they recognized the need for a pipeline and objected only to the route.

Vainshtok, Transneft's president, told Rossiyskaya Gazeta that Greenpeace and other environmental groups were being manipulated by "puppet masters" outside Russia who do not want China to grow in strength by importing more Russian oil.

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Row over Russian law to shoot down hijacked plane

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Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW: A row has broken out in Russia over a new law that authorises the military to shoot down hijacked passenger planes.

Russian human rights activists have launched a campaign for striking down the provision from an anti-terror bill approved by the Russian Parliament last week. The bill calls for, among other things, forcing to land or destroy "aircraft that are being used for committing a terrorist act or have been hijacked by terrorists."

The law states that anti-air defences may shoot down an aircraft after confirmation that it has been hijacked and if its flight path poses a threat to vital targets or sites with a high concentration of people.

"Civil Control" group based in St.

The measure calls on the Defence Minister to approve a complicated verification procedure before action

Petersburg has demanded that airtickets for Russian flights contain a mandatory warning – "The flight you are travelling by may be shot down if the anti-terror centre concludes that there are terrorists onboard." The group's lawyers said air passengers have the right to know about the potential threat to their lives. Similar warnings should also be posted near booking offices.

Opposition politicians share this view. "The decision to destroy 200

hostages on a plane in order to save an administrative building or some other target will be highly questionable from the moral and ethical point of view," said Homeland Party leader Dmitry Rogozin.

Supporters of the law argue that shooting down a hijacked plane may avert 9/11 type terror attacks on vital installations including nuclear reactors.

"Decision to use force will be taken if a plane seized by terrorists is headed towards a nuclear power station, for example," said Defence and Security Committee of the upper House of Parliament Viktor Ozerov.

The anti-terror law calls on the Defence Minister to approve a complicated verification procedure before air defence forces can be ordered to shoot down a passenger plane.

Ramzan Kadyrov is Chechnya's Premier

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Promises early results in restoring order

GROZNY (RUSSIA): Ramzan Kadyrov has been formally appointed head of the pro-Russian government in the war-ravaged Russian province of Chechnya and promised early results in restoring order.

In his first statement after being confirmed in a job he already occupied on a provisional basis, he said he was ready to resign if he was not successful in "making significant improvements to the situation in the republic [of Chechnya]" in three months.

Russian troops are still locked in the sixth year of a shadowy war against guerillas demanding independence for Chechnya from the Russian Federation.

"If in the space of three months there are no changes for the better I shall write my resignation letter," he said, according to the Ria-Novosti news agency.

All 39 deputies present for the parliamentary ballot voted in favour of Mr. Kadyrov (29), who was nominated for the post by Chechen President Alu Alkha-



New Chechen Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov speaks in Grozny on Saturday. - PHOTO: AP

nov after the previous government chief Sergei Abramov resigned, citing health concerns after a serious car accident.

"I want to underline that you have taken on a heavy load," Mr.

Alkhanov told Mr. Kadyrov in front of reporters as he signed the decree confirming the appointment.

"I hope you do not forget that this road was chosen by your father," he said.

Ahmed Kadyrov, like his son a pro-Moscow figure, was assassinated in May 2004.

Mr. Ramzan Kadyrov heads a powerful militia of his own in Chechnya and was already regarded as the strongest figure in the province despite holding only the title of Deputy Prime Minister before the latest vote.

His confirmation as Prime Minister — individual provinces within the Russian Federation have Governments of their own led by local Presidents and Prime Ministers — was a recognition in title of the de facto power he already held in Chechnya.

The new Prime Minister told deputies that he had the backing of Russian President Vladimir Putin. — AFP

THE HINDU

Anger rises in Muslim world over cartoons

Militants Threaten Abductions, World Leaders Appeal For Calm

Copenhagen/London/Jakarta: Furore escalated on Friday in the Muslim world over the publication of cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in the European media as a battle line was drawn between freedom of the press and respect for Islam.

The offending caricatures were first published by Denmark's Jyllands-Posten last September, and have been since reprinted by a dozen or so European papers in as many countries. The European media, including papers in Norway and France, argued on the grounds of freedom of expression and the need to depict the controversy. Some said they wanted to support Jyllands-Posten. Aside from the drawings being cartoons, Islamic tradition forbids depictions of The Prophet.

Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen tried to bridge the differences even as a leading Danish exporter to Arab countries, Arla Foods, announced job cuts after a goods boycott.

About 300 militant Indonesian Muslims went on a rampage inside the lobby of a Jakarta building housing the Danish embassy on Friday. Shouting "Allahu Akbar", the protesters smashed lamps with bamboo sticks, threw chairs around and pelted rotten eggs and tomatoes at the Danish embassy symbol in the lobby.

In the Palestinian territories, masked gunmen briefly seized a German national from a hotel in Nablus "thinking he was French or Danish, and handed him over to police after realising their mistake", said a source from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. Gunmen have threatened to abduct citizens from nations where the cartoons are printed.

Danish PM Rasmussen, in an interview on Dubai-based Al-Arabiya TV, said, "I



Protestors burn a Danish flag in Lahore

am deeply distressed that many Muslims have seen the drawings in the Danish newspaper as a defamation of the Prophet Muhammad. I know that this was not the intention of the newspaper, (which) has apologised for that and I do hope that we can find a solution on that basis."

Muslim groups in Denmark initially appeared pleased with the paper's apology, but many have since complained that the paper's Danish statement was far less straightforward than the English and Arabic versions, and that subsequent comments gave the impression the apology was not sincere. Papers in Cairo chastised the European press. "It is a conspiracy against Islam and Muslims which has been in the works for years," said Al-Gomhurriya, a state-owned daily. Agencies

Jordan paper runs cartoons

Amman: A Jordanian paper published the caricatures, resulting in the dismissal of the editor and a government threat of legal action. Jihad al-Momani, editor of Shihan, said he reprinted the cartoons to show "the extent of the Danish offence". But an editorial signed by him asked: "Who offends Islam more? A foreigner who endeavours to draw the Prophet as described by his followers... or a Muslim armed with an explosive belt who commits suicide in a wedding party in Amman?" AP

BBC airs images

London/Washington: The US media has largely shied away from reproducing the cartoons even as the UK's BBC and Channel 4 risked a Muslim backlash. BBC broadcast the images as they appeared in a French paper and also showed them on BBC World the international channel seen around the globe, including the MidEast. AFP & Daily Mail

1-4 FEB 2006

Russia has world's best missiles: Putin

Associated Press

MOSCOW, Jan. 31. — President Mr Vladimir Putin boasted Tuesday that Russia has new missiles capable of penetrating any missile defence system and said he had briefed French President Jacques Chirac on their capabilities. "Russia has tested missile systems that no one in the world has," Mr Putin said. "These missile systems don't represent a response to a missile defence system, but it doesn't matter to them whether that exists or not. They are hypersonic and capable of changing their flight path." Mr Putin said the new missiles were capable of carrying nuclear war-

heads. He wouldn't say whether the Russian military already had commissioned any such missiles.

Mr Putin said he had shown the working principles of the missile system to Mr Chirac during a visit to a Russian military facility. "He knows what I'm talking about," Mr Putin said.

In April 2004, Mr Chirac became the first Western leader to visit Russia's top-secret Titov space control centre of the Russian military space forces the control point for all of Russia's satellites, which is also involved in launches of Russia's intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Mr Putin said that the new Russian missiles were capable of changing both the altitude and

NGO peeve

MOSCOW, Jan.

31. — Mr

Vladimir Putin

today reiterated

his criticism of

foreign-suppor-

ted non-govern-

mental

organisations,

saying NGOs

should not be

controlled by what he called

"puppeteers" abroad and stressed the

importance of nonprofit groups. — AP



counter missiles moving along a ballistic trajectory." Mr Putin and other Russian officials haven't identified them or given any further details other than about their ability to change their flight path on approach to a target.

Military analysts said Russian forces experimented with a manoeuvring warhead during a missile launch several years ago, but voiced doubt about Russia's ability to deploy such weapons any time soon. Analysts said the new warheads, designed to zigzag on their approach to targets, could be fitted to new land-based Topol-M missiles and the prospective Bulava missiles for the Russian navy, now under development. Russia opposed

Washington's 2002 decision to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in order to deploy a national missile defence shield, saying the 30-year-old US-Soviet pact was a key element of international security. Putin called the decision a mistake that would hurt global security but not threaten Russia. The ABM treaty banned missile defence systems on the assumption that the fear of retaliation would prevent each nation from launching a first strike, a strategy known as mutually assured destruction. Defence Minister Mr Sergei Ivanov said today that Russia would commission new early warning radars to replace those located in former Soviet republics.

Russia burns millions for image makeover

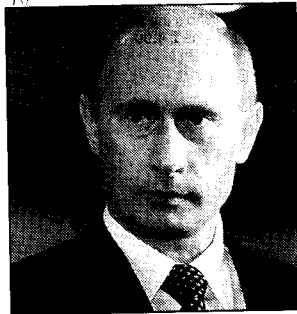
TONY PATERSON AND
SIMON SARADZHIAN

Moscow, Jan. 8: Vladimir Putin's government has embarked on an emergency propaganda drive to bolster Russia's standing among its citizens and improve its tarnished image abroad.

Stung by criticism over human rights, press freedoms, Mafioso business practices and its latest attempt to cut gas supplies to its Western-learning neighbours, the Kremlin has decided to hit back.

In a grotesque comparison more likely to offend than impress, Gleb Pavlovski, a Kremlin media adviser, said: "The Russians have become the Jews of the 21st century. They are regarded as the pariahs of Europe."

The Kremlin is believed to be spending almost £70 million a year on its campaign, which includes backing for pro-government rock groups, new "patriotic" magazines



Putin: Blitz ahead

and radio programmes and funding for an English-language television channel.

The drive has been timed to coincide with Russia's year-long chairmanship of the G8 group of leading industrial nations that began this month. When G8 leaders assemble for their summit in St Petersburg in July, they will be treated to a lavish state-backed demonstration of Russian prowess.

Sergei Mironov, the head of the Russian Federation Council and a loyal Putin supporter,

sought to justify the huge financial backing for the campaign: "The West has learnt how to hurt us by portraying us in a very bad light. For that reason the honour of the homeland has become an extremely costly matter."

Three weeks ago, the Kremlin began targeting Western audiences with a £17 million government-funded satellite television channel, Russia Today, which broadcasts programmes portraying Putin's government in a wholly favourable light across Europe, North America, Asia and Africa.

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