



ALEXANDER BELENKY / SPT

A Nation's Tragedy

People lay flowers outside the Japanese Consulate in St. Petersburg on the Moika River in a gesture of respect for those killed in the tsunami and earthquake that struck the country last week. As the threat of the island nation's damaged nuclear plants remained uncertain Tuesday, the Kremlin reached out to the neighboring country. See story, page 9.



ARTS & CULTURE

Celebrating St. Patrick

City set to host festival of contemporary Irish film. [Page 15](#)

LOCAL NEWS

Okhta Center Reincarnated

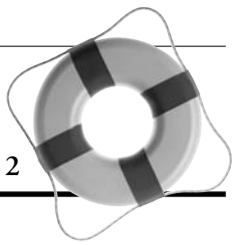
Gazprom Neft earmarks a new local site for its headquarters. [Page 3](#)



LOCAL BUSINESS

A Marketing Goldmine

Marketing experts see the future in mobile technology. [Page 6](#)



Ice Ensnares Dozens of Vessels in Gulf

By Irina Titova
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

At least 97 ships were stranded in the ice in the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland while waiting for help from icebreakers Tuesday, the administration of the St. Petersburg seaport reported.

On Monday, there were 138 ships awaiting help, and two days ago, the line consisted of 160 ships. The problem has been particularly serious during the last month.

Ten icebreakers are leading the ships to open water in convoys, Rosmorrechflot said.

Ten icebreakers, including the nuclear ship the Vaigach, which came to the rescue from Murmansk, are currently trying to ease the maritime traffic jam.

The icebreakers are leading the ships to open water in convoys, the Federal Agency of Sea and River Transport, or Rosmorrechflot, said.

The severe winter in Western Europe this year has had consequences across the region, including in the Baltics. Meteorologists said in January that the area saw a lot of winds coming from the west that compacted the ice in the eastern part of the Gulf of Finland. Such dense ice was last registered in the area in 1992, Rosmorrechflot said.

The ice is most dense close to St. Petersburg, where in some places it is



A man fishes on the ice on the Gulf of Finland, where ships entering and leaving the city's port have found themselves trapped.

more than a meter thick. The strength of the pressure exerted by the ice is measured at three points — a serious threat for the exteriors of the vessels.

Most of the ships trapped in the ice are cargo vessels, but some are passenger ferries. The Princess Maria ferry that travels between St. Petersburg and Helsinki reportedly arrived seven hours late in the Finnish capital last week. The vessel's operators then decided to temporarily postpone its trips through Tuesday, March 15.

Another ferry — the St. Petersburg — that carries passengers between the port of Ust-Luga in the Leningrad Oblast and the city of Baltiisk in the Kaliningrad Region waited for help from icebreakers for six days from March 3 through March 9 — triple its usual journey time of two days. The ferry's 12 passengers, who included a pregnant woman, were reportedly running out of food.

A tanker and a dry cargo ship collided in the Gulf of Finland on Sunday

due to the situation. As a result of the collision, the tanker sustained a three-meter-wide hole and the front part of the cargo ship was damaged. No fuel leaks or injuries were reported, according to the 100 TV local television station.

The captains and crews of some ships in the Gulf of Finland, especially large cargo vessels, turned out to be unprepared for navigation under conditions of thick ice, as well as for traveling in a convoy and under manual operation, Rosmorrechflot said.

Professor Faces Jail for Links To Natsbols

THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

MOSCOW — A St. Petersburg professor faces up to two years in jail over his ties to the banned National Bolshevik Party, RIA-Novosti reported Monday.

Andrei Pesotsky, who teaches at the St. Petersburg State University of Economics and Finance, is accused of creating a local branch of the party in 2009, the report said, citing the Investigative Committee. The National Bolshevik Party was banned for extremism in 2007.

Eight other people are charged with being members in the group, including Andrei Dmitriyev, an unemployed local resident also accused of co-organizing the St. Petersburg branch.

The suspects held regular meetings, collected membership fees and participated in illegal events staged by the group, the report said.

The branch ended activity in October, the investigators said, without elaborating.

Pesotsky and Dmitriyev have not been detained but face charges of organizing an extremist group. They have not commented on the case.

The National Bolshevik Party, which offered a mix of ultranationalist and leftist views, was the brainchild of Eduard Limonov, who is now leader of the unregistered Other Russia coalition.

THE WEEK IN REVIEW

The Pros and Cons of Snow

By Philip Parker
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

The world is reeling from the news of the developing tragedies in Japan, which rather puts into perspective the mystery of St. Petersburg's own minor earth tremors, which has been surfacing in the local media during the last few weeks.

Residents of the city's northern outskirts first reported the earth moving in the last week of February, with repeated tremors strong enough to dislodge objects from shelves and cupboards, accompanied by something that sounded like distant explosions, according to reports on Fontanka.ru. Experts suggested that the cause could be minor seismic shifts, or possibly the effects of army exercises using heavy explosives some distance from the city.

The latter suggestion proved popular in the media and was taken seriously enough for frustrated officers of the Western Military District to invite journalists to the closest artillery testing area to the city last week to prove that even two kilometers from the site of the largest explosions, only faint sounds could be heard. The testing area at Yelizavetinka is about 27 kilometers from the borders of the city.

One disgruntled officer even went so far as to suggest that some seismologists were falsifying readings in the hope of obtaining government grants, Fontanka.ru reported.

Meanwhile, the more mundane tragedies of the St. Petersburg winter continue apace, with another warmer spell bringing another fatal accident involving falling ice. This time the victim was an



Snowdrifts this week thwarted a robbery on Ulitsa Rudneva.

18-year-old woman, Liza Latychevskaya, who was walking home from work along Ulitsa Zamshina on the Vyborg Side of the city last Friday evening. While similar accidents so far this winter have sparked fierce criticism of private management companies, in this case it appears that the ice fell not from the main roof of the building, according to a report in Izvestiya newspaper, but from the awning of an apartment balcony. As these awnings have been installed by apartment residents without planning permission, say the district authorities, the criminal case opened in the wake of the accident is unlikely to touch the management company.

There was however one incident, according to Rosbalt.ru, in which the negligence of a management company in cleaning snow actually had a happy end. When a resident of an apartment build-

ing on Ulitsa Rudneva arrived home by car late on Monday evening, she was approached by an unknown man from a nearby car who seemed to want to ask her to park somewhere else. When the woman opened her window, the man reached in and snatched her handbag, which was lying on the passenger seat.

The thief then ran back to the other car, where an accomplice was waiting to drive him away. Instead, they sped into a thick snowdrift, and were unable to go any further. The woman, meanwhile, jumped on the hood of the thieves' car while shouting for help. The desperate men threw her bag out of the window, but that did not stop her from smashing the windscreen, and her neighbors managed to detain one of the thieves. Thanks to the wonders of modern surveillance technology, the whole incident can be viewed online.

City Gets New Kindergartens

THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

ST. PETERSBURG (SPT) — Twenty new kindergartens will open in St. Petersburg this year, said Olga Ivanova, chairwoman of the city's education committee, at a press conference Tuesday, Interfax reported.

"This academic year, five new kindergartens have opened since September, and we plan to open 20 more in 2011. In addition, we have identified 14 buildings that will be vacated by their occupants during the course of the year," Ivanova said, noting that these

buildings had originally housed child-care facilities, and were then used for other purposes.

According to Ivanova, there are currently 1,200 people waiting to get into kindergartens in St. Petersburg. On Sept. 1 last year, 3,700 families were waiting for a place in a kindergarten.

"Those waiting for a place are concentrated in five neighborhoods: The Vyborgsky, Kolpinsky, Petrodvortsov, Krasnoselsky and Primorsky districts," Ivanova was quoted by Interfax as saying.

St. Petersburg Conservatory Rector Bemoans Lack of Repair Financing

THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

ST. PETERSBURG (SPT) — Sergei Stadler, rector of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, said that money allocated two years ago by the government for the reconstruction of the historic building has still not been received by the institution, Interfax reported Tuesday.

"The [government's] will is there, but the money isn't. And nobody knows where it is," Stadler said.

It was previously reported that the government had allocated 3.5 billion rubles (\$121 million) for the reconstruction of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, which celebrates its 150th anniversary next year.

The conservatory was due to have repaired one room by now, and other rooms remain in poor condition, the rector noted.

"The conservatory's budget is more or less just enough to survive. Of course, we cannot even contemplate renova-

tion work funded by our budget," Stadler was quoted by Interfax as saying.

"No one is even responding to our requests, although St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko wrote a letter to the government and appealed to the St. Petersburg Legislative Assembly asking where the money had gone," he said. "I've written many letters to various institutions. We have received no official response," he added.

He said that "the current conservatory building is 105 years old, and it has never undergone a proper overhaul."

The St. Petersburg Conservatory was founded in 1862. Anton Rubinstein was its founder and first director, and the first person to graduate from its composition class was Pyotr Tchaikovsky.

Stadler became rector in 2008. In 1995, a presidential decree placed the conservatory on a state register of objects of particularly valuable cultural heritage of the Russian Federation.

Gazprom Acquires New Site for Okhta Center Project

By Sergey Chernov
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

The controversial Gazprom business center project, originally planned to be built in the Okhta district close to the center of St. Petersburg and canceled after years of criticism from the public, professionals and international organizations for the damage it was expected to inflict on the city's historic views, has been moved to another part of the city.

Okhta Public and Business Center, a subsidiary of Gazprom created to deal with the design and construction of the business center, which is to host the headquarters of Gazprom Neft, has acquired a plot of land in the Primorsky district of St. Petersburg from developer LSR, Interfax reported Thursday. St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matviyenko was reported to have welcomed the decision.

The plot occupies an area of 140,000 square meters and is located in Lakhta, a district in northern St. Petersburg that is further from the center than the Okhta site. The cost of the plot was not disclosed.

The cost of the Okhta Center project has been estimated at 60 billion rubles (\$2.11 billion), with 7 billion rubles reportedly having been spent so far.

It is not clear what the new business center will look like. Late last year, Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller was reported as saying that the Scottish firm RMJM's planned 403-meter spiral skyscraper had been designed specifically for the site on Okhta.

Speaking to RIA Novosti last week, RMJM's Philip Nikandrov said



The Okhta Public and Business Center has found a new plot of land for its project in the Lakhta district of the city.

that the company "would definitely take the job" on the Lakhta project, if it was offered to them.

From the announcement of the project in 2006, the company was criticized for multiple violations of the law, using rent-a-crowds at public hearings,

ignoring the opinions of local residents, rigging opinion polls and placing biased articles supporting the project in local newspapers.

In its turn, City Hall provided as much support as it could and turned a blind eye to the violations, while ban-

ning or heavily policing rallies held by the project's opponents.

The project met opposition from Russian and international architects and UNESCO. Last December, following criticism from the Ministry of Culture and state-controlled television

channels, Matviyenko withdrew a controversial permit she had issued for the construction in 2009.

Earlier this year, the company replaced Okhta Center's massive slogan "The Impossible Is Possible" on the former construction site with a sign announcing that the plot was for sale, accompanied by a Moscow telephone number. A similar ad was placed on the Okhta Center's web site.

Pyotr Zabiorkhin, a coordinator of preservationist organization Living City, said he greeted the news about moving the planned business center to Lakhta with "cautious optimism."

"In a nutshell, it's a step forward compared to the old one, because it's outside the protected heritage area and there are no archeological monuments there, but we can talk more specifically when we've seen a concrete plan," he said.

Archeologists found the remnants of a Neolithic settlement and well-preserved elements of the medieval Swedish fortresses Landskrona and Nien-schanz on the project's former site in the Okhta district. Concerned citizens are demanding that the findings be preserved and an archeological museum to be established on the site.

The Yabloko Democratic Party's local chair Maxim Reznik said that the main thing is that the project should be realized in correspondence with the law. "If the law starts being violated again, then, of course, we will demand that they obey the law."

The Okhta Public and Business Center's press officer did not answer calls on Tuesday.

Desperate Parents Appeal for Funds for Lifesaving Operation

By Irina Titova
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

Four-year-old Nadezhda Chernoknizhnaya now has only one chance left to survive, and the price of that chance is \$198,000 — the cost of the complex surgery urgently required on her brain tumor, which can only be performed in a few hospitals in the world. Both Russian and American doctors have concluded that Chernoknizhnaya needs the surgery within a month.

"Nadezhda wants to live very much. In her very short life she has spent most of the time in hospitals, but she is a very kind, intelligent and happy child," Alexandra Chernoknizhnaya, the girl's 31-year-old mother said in an appeal for help.

When she was only six months old, the girl was diagnosed with a glioma (a type of tumor) on her optic nerve. A year spent undergoing chemotherapy unfortunately did not help. She began to experience severe headaches, and could not even be hugged by her parents for the excruciating pain it caused her to be held.

Two years ago, Russian doctors decided to operate on her tumor. The surgery was complicated and doctors were unable to remove the whole tumor due to its problematic location. Before the operation, Nadezhda's parents were warned that a possible consequence could be loss of the girl's sight. Devastatingly, this was indeed the result of the unsuccessful intervention.

When Nadezhda opened her eyes after the operation in a St. Petersburg hospital she could not see anything. Her parents did not know how to explain to a two-year-old that she had gone blind.

But Nadezhda and her courageous parents still learned to manage without the girl's vision. They taught their daughter to walk again, a teacher introduced her to Braille script, and Nadezhda started going to a kindergarten for blind children.

Having endured all of this, Alexan-



Nadezhda Chernoknizhnaya.

Doctors have said that if the tumor is removed, Nadezhda's vision could even be restored.

dra and her husband Afanasy had hoped that the worst of Nadezhda's suffering was behind them. In fact, it was then that they decided to change their daughter's name from Zlata to Nadezhda (Hope), in the hope that the new name might prove a lucky talisman for the girl.

The tumor began to grow again. Recently, Nadezhda has developed stronger pains, mainly in her eyes. She has also begun to have difficulties swallowing, and she tends to sleep longer and longer even during the day.

"The problem is that Nadya's tumor is located just next to all twelve of the most important nerves to the brain," Alexandra Chernoknizhnaya said.

"During the surgery, her optical nerves were affected. Now, the tumor, which is already the size of an egg, is obviously affecting the nerves responsible for swallowing. The next stages will be for her facial nerves to stop working, and so on," Alexandra said.

"The doctors have said that only another operation could save Nadya's life," she said.

However, the surgery on Nadezhda's tumor requires high-technology equipment that is not available in Russia. The family has managed

to find only two clinics that would agree to perform the operation, both of them in the U.S. — Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, and Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City. Doctors have said that if the family manages to battle the tumor, there is even a chance that Nadezhda's vision could be restored.

The cost of the surgery is approximately \$200,000, but that does not include the costs associated with any complications, or the possible need for additional hospitalization, tests or radiology studies, which could amount to an additional \$100,000, Alexandra said.

"We are a regular family where only my husband works to support us, while I look after Nadya. Therefore, there is no way we can afford that much money," Alexandra said.

So far, they have managed to raise \$34,000 in donations.

The Chernoknizhnaya family has created a web site for their daughter's appeal with medical records and other details including the bank accounts where donations can be sent: <http://zlata.1gb.ru/eng/Zlata>. The Advita Foundation also has information about the girl and ways in which people can donate money to help her at <http://www.advitaua.org>

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United Russia Wins, But Unconvincingly

By Alexandra Odynova
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

MOSCOW — United Russia scored an unconvincing victory in Sunday's regional vote, leaving analysts in doubt about whether it could perform better in the decisive battle for the State Duma in December.

Preliminary results showed that the ruling party swept most of the 3,300 elections held in 74 regions on Sunday but had the support of less than half the population, with an average 46 percent of the vote, according to preliminary results released Monday.

United Russia's time-honed electioneering strategies are becoming less effective, said regional analyst Rostislav Turovsky, referring to the use of so-called administrative resources, pressure on state employees to go to polls and vote "the right way," and, most important, capitalizing on the popularity of party leader and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

The regional elections, the last big vote before the Duma poll, indicate that United Russia faces an uphill battle in the next campaign, said Turovsky, director of the Agency of Regional Research.

The election results are "a serious warning for the party, reflecting an increasing mood to protest in the regions," said Alexei Makarkin, a political analyst with the Center for Political Technologies.

But United Russia still has a chance to do better next time, Makarkin said by telephone.

The party's main asset — Putin's popularity — will be more useful during the federal elections than the regional polls, which are more influenced by local issues, he said.

Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev have authorized United Russia to use their images but participated little in actual campaigning.

"A key role will be played by Putin," Makarkin said. "If he agrees to lead the campaign, United Russia will see a very different result, a higher one."

Turovsky, however, noted that Putin made several trips to regions but this did not help the party in more problematic spots like Kirov, which he visited in February. United Russia received its lowest results in any of the 12 regional legislative elections in Kirov, with 36.7 percent, followed by Tver, with 39.8 percent.

"We can't say the party's results are all bad, but they are far from what they strive for," Turovsky said.



Youngsters shout pro-Russia slogans as they gather in the center of Moscow on Friday to promote coming elections.

Indeed, United Russia's underperformance is relative: It swept majorities in all 12 regional legislatures that were up for grabs. In addition to Kirov and Tver, the list includes the regions of Kursk, Orenburg, Tambov, Kaliningrad and Nizhny Novgorod, the Chukotka and Khanty-Mansi autonomous districts and the republics of Dagestan, Adygeya and Komi.

United Russia won 375, or 70 percent, of all seats in regional legislatures, the Central Elections Commission said Monday. The Communists came a distant second with 71 mandates (13 percent) followed by A Just Russia with 48 mandates and the Liberal Democratic Party with 33.

Of the three parties not represented in the State Duma, only the Patriots of Russia managed to score, winning 10 seats in regional legislatures. Liberal Yabloko and Right Cause won nothing.

The turnout increased 3 to 5 percent in most regions compared with the last elections, the Central Elections Commission said, without elaborating.

Putin put on a brave face Monday, telling journalists that the party's performance was "considerably satisfactory" and its average nationwide support had

actually grown by 0.2 percent compared with the 2007 vote in the same regions.

"It means that people, despite being tired, evaluate United Russia's activity in a positive way and express with their votes a hope that the situation will change," Putin said during a visit to Tomsk, Interfax reported.

He avoided mentioning that the vote results showed a sharp drop in United Russia's popularity next to the State Duma elections in 2007. Compared with the last Duma vote, United Russia lost about 20 percent of the vote in most regions that elected legislatures on Sunday, except for Chukotka and Dagestan.

In an indirect acknowledgment of the problem, Putin said United Russia will consider firing party officials in regions where its performance dropped even by 1 percent.

Medvedev did not comment on the vote Monday.

A senior Communist Party official said on Ekho Moskvy radio that his party "sees a tendency in reinforcing its influence, while United Russia is gradually losing ground."

Boris Gryzlov, who heads United Russia's Duma faction, said he was sure

the party would win the December vote. But he also conceded that the party did not perform to its full potential, Interfax said.

Chukotka was United Russia's main success, with the party getting 71 percent of the vote amid unusually high turnout of 80 percent that critics said was due to voters being presented with free tickets to a pop concert held on election day.

Billionaire Roman Abramovich was elected to the Chukotka legislature as an independent with 92 percent of the vote. Abramovich used to govern the Arctic region and is fondly remembered by locals for his generous investments.

Billionaire Alexander Lebedev also was elected as an independent lawmaker to a Kirov district legislature.

While United Russia scored only 36.7 percent there, it will nevertheless control the legislature thanks to candidates elected in single-mandate constituencies, not on party lists.

In Tver, United Russia scored 39.8 percent compared with 59 percent in 2007. The Communists collected 24.6 percent, and A Just Russia got 21.3 percent.

Lukashenko Opponent Flees Belarus Secret Police

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MINSK — A former Belarusian presidential candidate says he has fled the country to escape its secret police, as Human Rights Watch strongly condemned Belarus' post-election crackdown.

Ales Mikhalevich said he was in a safe location abroad, after previously saying he was beaten, stripped naked and hung by his hands during two months' confinement at the hands of the police, which still go under their Soviet name, the KGB.

Mikhalevich detailed his situation in a blog Monday as Human Rights Watch released a 31-page report documenting persecution of opposition candidates and activists, abuse of detainees, trials behind closed doors, raids on rights groups and pressure on families and lawyers.

"The government has created a serious human rights crisis in Belarus, and the UN Human Rights Council should not remain silent about it," Anna Sevortyan, director of Human Rights Watch's office in Russia, said in a statement. "A council resolution would send a strong message to the Belarus authorities that the ongoing crackdown must end."

More than 700 people, including seven presidential candidates, were arrested after massive protests against fraud in the Dec. 19 vote in which President Alexander Lukashenko was re-elected. International observers said the vote was rigged.

More than 30 of those detained, including presidential candidates Andrei Sannikov and Nikolai Statkevich, have remained in custody.

Human Rights Watch said most of those accused of involvement in the election-day protest had no defense counsel and were not allowed to call witnesses.

It said detainees served their sentences in overcrowded cells, where they were forced to sleep on the floor, share beds or take turns sleeping. Many said their cells were freezing and lacked toilets, that there was no easy access to medical treatment, and that there were no hygiene items for women.

Mikhalevich told reporters last month after his release from prison that he had sent a letter to the United Nations Committee Against Torture describing his treatment by the KGB. He said that following his torture he was forced to sign a paper in which he pledged to cooperate with the secret police.

He said in his blog he had decided to flee after receiving summons from the KGB. "I had reason to believe I would never leave the KGB building again," he said.

The KGB, which has rejected Mikhalevich's claim of torture, wouldn't comment Monday.

Court Hears Plea to Ban Group of Nationalists

By Alexander Bratersky
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

MOSCOW — The Moscow City Court opened hearings on Thursday into prosecutors' request to ban the country's leading ultranationalist group, but asked for more proof of its wrongdoing.

Prosecutors, who suspended the activities of the Movement Against Illegal Immigration last month, have accused it of extremism, but the group's founding father told The St. Petersburg Times that the actual reason for the crackdown is political.

The Movement Against Illegal Immigration is being punished for attempting to register as a political party to run for the State Duma in December elections, Alexander Belov said by telephone Thursday.

Prosecutors cited Belov's proposal to deport Caucasus natives, voiced during ethnic riots in the Karelian town of Kondopoga in 2006, as an example of the group's extremist views, RIA-Novosti reported.

Belov also proposed the creation of the "people's militia," which pros-

ecutors claimed amounted to an extremist call, during one of the annual Russian March rallies, the report said.

But defense lawyers said at Thursday's hearing that the organization cannot be held accountable for Belov's statements because he was no longer a member. They also said a case opened against him over his Kondopoga statements has since been closed.

Belov left the group in 2009 to spare it legal trouble after he was convicted of inciting ethnic hatred during a speech and handed a one-year suspended sentence.

The court on Thursday asked that more evidence of the group's extremist views be presented by April 5, RIA-Novosti reported, citing court officials.

The Movement Against Illegal Immigration, founded in 2002 but never officially registered, remains the country's sole prominent ultranationalist group.

In a burst of activity that might have contributed to the court case, several of its members participated in Decem-

ber rioting on Manezh Square, where 5,500 football fans and nationalists clashed with police during a rally over the killing of a Muscovite during a brawl with North Caucasus natives.

Belov said Thursday that the organization would switch to "other activity" if it were banned. He did not elaborate.

Alexei Mukhin, an analyst with the Center for Political Information, agreed that the court case was likely caused by the group's aspiration to become a political party.

He said a ban would only encourage disgruntled youth to join the group.

Leftist opposition leader Eduard Limonov said the group's popularity was growing, forcing the authorities to "play it safe."

"They are trying to act pre-emptively, using dull Stalinist-era methods, even though it is the voters who should decide," said Limonov, who also tried in vain to register a political party.

A registration request by his The Other Russia coalition was thrown out by the Justice Ministry in January.

Laundering Ring Suspect Detained

THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

MOSCOW — A Master-Bank executive was charged Monday with participating in a money laundering ring that involved state companies and saw a daily turnover of 500 million rubles (\$17 million).

Meri Tevanyan, whom investigators identified as a "leading specialist" at Master-Bank, is accused of helping transfer laundered money to the accounts of fake firms and to plastic cards, Interfax reported, citing the Interior Ministry.

The money placed on the plastic cards represented her and other participants' cut for their work and amounted to 3.5 to 8 percent, depending on the operation.

Tevanyan, who is under house arrest, faces up to seven years in prison if convicted of illegal banking.

A Master-Bank representative told Interfax that the police have not officially informed the bank about the charges against Tevanyan.

Biden Lukewarm on Visa Idea

By Anatoly Medetsky
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

MOSCOW — In his final public appearance in Moscow, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden on Thursday chose to ignore a stunning proposal to cancel visas between his country and Russia and instead stressed how rule of law could attract investors.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin voiced the idea of visa-free travel during talks just hours before Biden's speech at Moscow State University to U.S. and Russian business people, State Duma lawmakers and students.

Moscow had never before brought up the issue of abolishing visas with Washington, at least at such a high level.

In support of the proposal, Putin said the abolition of visas would kill old stereotypes in bilateral relations.

"We would turn a very important page in our past and start all over again," he said. "It would create an absolutely new moral atmosphere" between the countries.

The move — also widely seen as a potential catalyst for tourism and business — would be "historic" if reached before the European Union agrees to visa-free travel with Russia, Putin said. Moscow and Brussels have been negotiating an end to visas with slow progress.

As Putin spoke, Biden interjected by saying, "Good idea." The remark prompted Putin to add that Biden could help promote the proposal as a senior member of the U.S. administration and someone who has "weight" in Congress.

Biden replied ambiguously.

"Mr. Prime Minister, in case you haven't noticed, there's a real difference between being president and vice president," he said, according to a transcript of the remarks on the White House web site. "The very good news is the president and I agree 100 percent on the need to continue to establish a closer and closer relationship."

During the university speech, which was part of an investment conference organized by the American Chamber of Commerce, Biden focused on other measures that could spur commercial ties.

He said potential U.S. investors often thought badly of Russia's investment climate, including judicial protection of property rights.

"It may be unfair, but that's the perception," he said, calling for a "bold and genuine change."



U.S. Vice President Joe Biden at Moscow State University on Thursday.

In what raised concerns about Russia's legal system, he went on to name the case of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who died in custody after accusing police of corruption. He also recalled — mispronouncing former Yukos chief Mikhail Khodorkovsky's name — that the United States had criticized his second trial, which ended in December in a conviction.

Building stronger commercial ties is the next challenge for both governments, he said, after the policy of a "reset" put political relations on the mend and paved the way for U.S. majors such as PepsiCo, Chevron and ExxonMobil to expand their business in Russia recently.

"Our trade and investment is not where it should be," he said. "We got to do better. And I believe we can."

Even though Biden didn't mention the visa proposal, attendees of the investment conference didn't regard the prospect of free travel as unrealistic.

"I am an American who has lived here for almost 20 years," said Peter Reinhardt, a partner at Ernst & Young in Moscow. "I can't recall a moment when the environment was better for such a discussion than it is now."

He added that visa-free travel was an excellent long-term goal.

David Yakobashvili, president of the Russian-American Council of Business Collaboration, said he was hopeful. Natalya Barsegiyan, chief financial officer at the U.S. chain Yum! Restaurants in Moscow, said the idea was a bit premature, but "that's where we should go."

Moscow Reclaims Crown As Billionaire Capital

By Irina Filatova
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

MOSCOW — Russia nearly doubled its number of billionaires this year, producing 101 of the 1,210 world's wealthiest people, compared with 62 last year, Forbes magazine said in its annual world billionaires ranking.

The country ranked third by number of billionaires, coming after the United States and China, which produced 413 billionaires and 115 billionaires, respectively, Forbes said in a list published late Wednesday.

The magazine also said Moscow had won back its status as the world's billionaire capital, from last year's champion New York.

The surge in commodities prices helped fuel the presence of the country's biggest steel magnates in the top 100 of the Forbes list.

Novolipetsk Steel chairman Vladimir Lisin retained his crown as Russia's wealthiest person, growing his fortune to \$24 billion from \$15.8 billion in 2010.

Lisin, who is also the sole owner of Universal Cargo Logistics, was ranked 14th, making him the only Russian in the top 20. The businessmen rose from 32nd place in last year's ranking.

Alexei Mordashov, owner of steel-maker Severstal, placed 29th with a total fortune of \$18.5 billion, growing from last year's \$9.9 billion.

Mordashov increased his wealth largely because of the recovery in steel prices, Forbes said, adding that sales of Severstal's international assets would allow the businessman to "focus on his Russian interests."

Last year, Severstal sold 51 percent of its loss-making Italian unit Lucchini and is now seeking to sell the rest. The company also owns loss-making steel plants in the United States.

Other prominent Russian billionaires significantly strengthened their positions on the list over last year.

Alisher Usmanov, owner of the country's biggest iron ore producer Metalloinvest, earned \$17.7 billion, jumping from 100th to 35th place.

Although the largest part of Usmanov's fortune comes from Metalloinvest, betting on technology assets also helped the businessman increase his wealth, which grew by \$10.5 billion compared with his net worth at the end of 2009, Forbes said.

Internet firm Mail.ru Group, co-owned by Usmanov, had a successful share float in 2010, raising \$900 million in London. The billionaire's Digital Sky Technologies also invested in Facebook, Zynga Game Network and social-commerce web site Groupon.

"All these assets are worth at least triple what they were a year ago," Forbes said in comments to the ranking.

Mail.ru Group co-owner Yury Milner, with a fortune of \$1 billion, is among the most notable newcomers to the Forbes list.

RusAl head Oleg Deripaska ranked 36th, after Usmanov, with a fortune of \$16.8 billion.

Deripaska, who rose from last year's 57th place, has been in an ongoing battle with Interros head Vladimir Potanin over control of Norilsk Nickel. A company extraordinary shareholders meeting, initiated by RusAl, will decide Friday whether to elect a new board of directors for Norilsk.

Potanin, with a net worth of \$17.8 billion, was ranked 34th, breathing down the neck of Onexim Group president Mikhail Prokhorov, who rose seven notches to 32nd place, with a fortune of \$18 billion.

Viktor Vekselberg more than doubled his fortune to \$13 billion, after the value of his stake in TNK-BP jumped by 70 percent to reach \$5.4 billion. Forbes ranked Vekselberg 57th, compared with 113th place last year.

It was China's demand for commodities that resulted in the growing number of new Russian billionaires and the increasing wealth of those who had previously been in the list, said Chris Weafer, chief strategist at UralSib.

At the same time, domestic expansion of the technology and retail sectors amid investor concerns that Russia is too reliant on raw materials resulted in a growing number of new billionaires coming from those sectors, he said by telephone.

Another factor was the growth of the local stock market, which surged by almost 20 percent last year, said Yaroslav Lissovlik, chief economist at Deutsche Bank Russia.

Shares represent the largest part of the billionaires' assets, and stock market growth "supported the financial positions of the population's wealthiest representatives," he told The St. Petersburg Times.

U.S. Vice President 'Opposes' 3rd Putin Term

By Nikolaus von Twickel
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

MOSCOW — In an indication that the U.S. White House opposes a third presidential term for Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden told Russian opposition leaders Thursday that it would be better for Russia if Putin did not run for re-election next year, two participants said.

At a separate meeting with human rights activists, Biden linked Russia's human rights record to its bid to join the World Trade Organization, one activist said.

Biden and other U.S. officials offered no public comment about what the vice president had discussed with the opposition and rights leaders at the U.S. ambassador's Spaso House residence.

But Russian participants said they had been offered assurances that their plight would not be forgotten amid Washington's efforts to continue to improve relations with Moscow.

"At the end of the meeting, Biden said that in Putin's place he would not stand for president in 2012 because this would be bad for the country and for

himself," opposition leader Boris Nemtsov wrote on his blog.

Leonid Gozman, co-leader of the pro-business, Kremlin-linked Right Cause party, confirmed Biden's statement in a telephone interview with The St. Petersburg Times.

The question of who will take over as president is a sensitive one, with Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev saying they will make a decision at a later date. U.S. officials have not weighed in on the issue publicly, but they did deny a report in Nezavisimaya Gazeta last week that Biden's main goal for visiting Moscow was to press Medvedev into seeking re-election. The report said Putin would be offered the presidency of the International Olympic Committee as consolation.

Gozman said Biden also told the opposition leaders that he had "looked into Putin's eyes and saw no soul" — and personally told Putin about his observation. The quote is an apparent play on former President George W. Bush's famous summary of his first meeting with Putin in 2001, when he said: "I looked the man in the eye. I was able to get a sense of his soul."

Biden met with Putin right before the gathering with the opposition, which also included Vladimir Ryzhkov, Garry Kasparov and Grigory Yavlinsky, among others. He visited Medvedev at the Gorki presidential residence outside Moscow on Wednesday.

"[He] was very reactive and asked tons of questions," Nemtsov wrote. "He wanted to know in detail about falsification methods and pressure on the opposition."

Kasparov gave Biden a list of the country's political prisoners, Nemtsov said.

Earlier Thursday, Biden received a large group of civil society representatives at Spaso House.

"He said that human rights and democracy are highly important and that [the U.S. administration] would regularly bring it up," veteran human rights campaigner Lyudmila Alexeyeva said after the meeting, Interfax reported.

Alexeyeva, who heads the Moscow Helsinki Group, added that she discussed free and fair elections and the registration of opposition parties.

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Muscovite Alex Shumilov is the first customer out of New York's Fifth Avenue Apple Store with two iPad 2s last week.

FAS Declares City Hall Grants Illegal

By Nadezhda Zaitseva and Alla Tokareva

VEDOMOSTI

City Hall has broken the law "On the defense of competition" by granting one investor two historic buildings without a tender, according to the Federal Anti-monopoly Service (FAS). However, while the FAS forbids such practices, it has no plans to seize the properties.

In May last year, Lotus Hotels and Orange Development received from the city administration two monuments of federal significance — the 25,756-square-meter building at 1 Marsovo Polye and the 13,530-square-meter building at 1 Konyushennaya Ploshchad — earmarked for development as hotels. In return, the investors must transfer to the city budget 30 million rubles (\$1.05 million) and 19.9 million rubles (\$690,000) respectively. Both companies are controlled by Boris and Mikhail Zingarevich, the co-owners of Ilim timber concern.

The St. Petersburg office of the FAS launched the case against the city government for contravention of Articles 15 and 17 of the law "On the defense of competition" in December through an announcement in the newspaper "V kurortnom gorode S." The case also mentions the building located at 7-9 Nevsky Prospekt, which was granted to IFG Bazis Projekt for hotel development, also without a tender. A claim from the company Neva 88 led to the opening of a further case concerning the granting of the building at 26 Naberezhnaya Reki Moiki to a company named Saint Petersburg Development.

At a meeting on March 5, a commission of the FAS brought decisions concerning the two properties on Marsovo Polye and Konyushennaya Ploshchad, a representative of the office's press department announced last week. Infringements of the law by City Hall have been identified, and the city authorities will be issued with instructions not to grant properties for hotel development in the future, said FAS representative Oleg Kolomychenko. However, the FAS will not seek for the permits made by the authorities to be annulled in these two cases.

"The investors have already incurred significant expenses. At the two properties in question, more than 10 million rubles (\$350,000) have been spent on planning works. The companies are not to blame; it's the bureaucrats' fault," Kolomychenko said.

According to a representative of the press department of the Committee for Investment and Strategic Planning, the FAS commission decided not to annul the two permits because otherwise it would be necessary to compensate the investors from the city budget. No comment was available from the investors. According to CISP data, investment contracts for the two properties have not yet been signed. Transfer of property for designated purposes is permitted under the city law on the regulation of the granting of property owned by St. Petersburg for construction and reconstruction, passed in 2004, the CISP representative said.

The FAS's decision is probably a compromise between the federal agency and the city government, said Maxim Kalinin, a partner at Baker & McKenzie. Taking the buildings from the investor, recompensing them for investments already made and finding a new developer would be complicated for the city. To bring city laws in line with federal regulations, the FAS needs to appeal to the Prosecutor's Office, he added.

Meanwhile, the same city law was the basis for the transfer of another monument of federal significance into private hands earlier this month. Part of the Naryshkin Estate (9 Galernaya Ulitsa) was granted to Taleon company for development "to facilitate contemporary usage." Within 40 months, the developer will have to transform the building into a business center without damaging the building's protected features.

According to the agreement, Taleon must contribute 67.2 million rubles (\$2.3 million dollars) to the city budget for the development of city infrastructure.

The building is earmarked for development as a "Class A" office center. The city lacks sufficient high-class office space, said Taleon representative Vladimir Arkushenko.

Russia at the Front in App Revolution

By Natalya Sarakhanova

THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

The appearance of mobile handsets, smartphones and tablet computers, as well as the supporting technology and affordable good quality Internet access, has brought with it the demand for and the development of a whole range of new software products: Mobile applications.

According to experts, the variety of applications available for a device dictate the popularity of the model, and there are now more than half a million applications sold in stores such as AppStore, Google Android Market, BlackBerry App World, Nokia Ovi Store and Microsoft Marketplace. These include games, books, utilities and entertainment programs, as well as education, travel, lifestyle, music, sports and reference applications aimed at the casual user and the business sector.

In 2010, about eight billion applications were downloaded globally, and some experts predict twentyfold growth in the next five years.

"The mobile applications market is one of the fastest growing in the world," said Alexander Zveryev, general director of e-legion. "There are already more smartphones in the world than personal computers. For the most part, this is

thanks to Apple — they worked out how to get around the problem of piracy and how to give small companies the chance to make money by creating mobile applications.

"On the Russian market, which simply 'exploded' after the start of official iPad sales, more and more companies are looking at mobile applications as a new medium for managing loyalty, a space for advertising, a way of digitizing business processes, and so on," he added.

Alexander Savin, head of mobile advertising at Mail.Ru Group, also remarked on changes in the format and volume of consumption for Russian mobile services. He suggested that mobile applications are one of the key solutions for representing business in the mobile world.

Microsoft is also keen to announce its arrival on the Russian market. Official sales of phones with Windows Phone 7 will begin in Russia simultaneously with the expanded version of the operating system, the release of which is expected in the second half of this year. "The already existent applications — email, calendar, address book and mobile Office — will be developed to meet the specific demands of the corporate market, including improved integration

with SharePoint and Office 365," said Vladimir Kolesnikov, a software development expert for Microsoft Russia's strategic technologies department.

At "Mobility: How to Make Your Business Mobile," a conference held in the city at the beginning of March, market experts demonstrated the various opportunities for users and advertisers. Alesya Chichinkina, representing the Russian project www.toozla.com, presented applications for mobile phones that combine GPS positioning with information about the surrounding area, such as excursions around historic sites and dining information. The tool can be used to deliver advertising directly to the user. For example, while a traveler is listening to a guided tour with Toozla, they could be receiving news on their phone from a restaurant a few steps away.

Mobile devices are significantly altering the perception of the possibilities of the Internet among users, as well as creating new professions and new commercial opportunities. And developers and advertisers have been paying close attention to the Russian market from the earliest stages: In 2010, the number of smartphone and tablet users in Russia stood at approximately six million, a figure that is expected by some to triple by the end of this year.

Auditors: Ring Road Millions Over Budget

By Anatoly Tyomkin

VEDOMOSTI

Overspending of nearly 500 million rubles (\$17.45 million), including 200 million rubles (\$6.98 million) on road repairs, has been uncovered in the accounts of the government agency responsible for overseeing the construction of St. Petersburg's ring road.

The Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation announced through its press department last Friday that an audit of the use of federal budget resources assigned during 2008-2010 to the Federal Government Agency "Directorate for the Construction of a Transport Bypass of St. Petersburg" (DSTO) had been carried out on March 5. The auditors discovered that DSTO had spent 218.7 million rubles (\$7.63 million) to rectify rutting of the surface on parts of the ring road, in contravention of the contractual obligations of subcontractors. Moreover, the directorate assumed expenses of 300 million rubles (\$10.47 million) for the relaying of four oil pipelines belonging to Peterburgtransneftprodukt, which added further incidental expenditure to the budget.

The pipelines ran directly across the highway, explained a spokesman for DSTO. The extra expenditure on road repairs after last winter, meanwhile, was caused by the fact that subcontractors had not fulfilled their guarantee obligations on the sections of road they had laid, said the spokesman. According to him, this concerns three subcontracting companies that constructed sections in the region of the Vyborg Highway, the Murino Highway, and the cable-stayed bridge across the Neva River. The directorate is trying to recover the expenses from the three companies — Kosmos, Vozrozhdeniye and Mostootryad No. 19 — in court. According to information on the web site of the Arbitration Court of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Oblast, between the end of December and the middle of February, DSTO filed claims for 65 million rubles (\$2.27 million), 154 million rubles (\$5.06 million) and 4.2 million rubles (\$146,500) against the three companies respectively. The cases are still being reviewed.

However, a representative of Vozrozhdeniye claims that all the companies' guarantee obligations in relation to the section of road in question expired be-

fore the beginning of last spring, and responsibility for the maintenance of the ring road lies with the directorate. A Kosmos employee, who asked to remain anonymous, said that the company could no longer guarantee the normal functioning of the elevated sections of the road, as the volume of traffic they carry is already significantly higher than that forecast in planning. An employee of Mostootryad No. 19 declined to comment for this article.

Instead of the predicted 110,000 vehicles per day, the road currently sees 180,000 automobiles, admitted the DSTO spokesman. Normally subcontractors give guarantees of between one and three years on similar construction projects, said Vladimir Kalinin, president of ABZ-1, a group of companies specializing in road construction. The guarantee periods can vary widely depending on the complexity of the project and the exact conditions of the contract.

Changes in the conditions of use of the structure could be grounds for the subcontractor to abdicate their guarantee obligations, said Maxim Kalinin, a partner at Baker & McKenzie.

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Sberbank Buys Troika Dialog

By Howard Amos
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

MOSCOW — Sberbank, the country's biggest lender and oldest bank, announced Friday the much-anticipated purchase of the private investment banking outfit, Troika Dialog, for \$1 billion.

Amid the lurid green lighting and upbeat electronic music in Sberbank's Moscow headquarters, German Gref, Sberbank's chief executive officer and former minister of economic development, said the deal was a "logical step forward" and a "symbolic event for the Russian financial market."

Gref said a binding agreement will be signed in the last quarter of 2011 and that no decision had yet been taken on whether the Troika Dialog brand will be preserved.

The payment of \$1 billion will see Sberbank acquire the 36.4 percent of Troika Dialog owned by Johannesburg-based Standard Bank and the 63.6 percent belonging to a shareholding group headed by chairman and chief executive Ruben Vardanyan.

A further "earn-out" payment will be made in 2013 on the eve of the final stage of integration. This will be calculated as half of the difference between an average of the annual 2011-13 profits multiplied by 13.5 and the original \$1 billion sum.

Gref said the expected yearly profit of Troika Dialog would be in the region of \$200 million, putting the total cost of the deal for Sberbank at \$1.85 billion.

But, "the lower the income, the lower the payment," he added.

Sberbank deputy chief executive Andrei Donskikh was more modest, estimating Troika Dialog's average annual profit at \$173 million, and the final additional payment at \$700 million, Interfax reported.

Sberbank has guaranteed that, even if market conditions are unfavorable, the payment will not fall below \$200 million.

Vardanyan will stay on at Troika Dialog at least until 2013, said Gref, who will head the company's supervisory board during the consolidation period.



Gref says a binding agreement will be signed in the last quarter of 2011.

The three-year integration process is likely to be an attempt by Sberbank to make sure there is no exodus of Troika Dialog employees and their profitable corporate clients.

The extra time, said Alexandra Lozovaya, an analyst at Investcafe, will help Sberbank "preserve the company's business."

If the deal had been concluded quickly, she added, "people and clients would have left."

Gref made a point of highlighting the "support and enthusiasm" from Troika Dialog staff for the announcement, but Citigroup said Thursday that it had hired some top bankers from Troika Dialog, Bloomberg reported.

Sberbank's shares traded down 1.02 percent at 98.75 rubles at market close on Friday after reaching a high of 100.16 earlier in the day.

The acquisition of Troika Dialog fulfills a long-held ambition of the former Soviet savings bank to offer a full range of financial services to corporations, as well as individuals, and to develop a global presence.

"We will become a meaningful participant in international markets," Gref said, adding that Sberbank will "expand and develop" Troika Dialog's offices in London and New York.

Standard Bank, which will sell its stake in Troika Dialog to Sberbank, was "excited but at the same time slightly sad," its chief executive officer Jacko Maree said.

The company may set up a small office in Moscow to continue its work in Russia, Maree added.

Any misery for Standard Bank brought on by the loss, however, will be tempered by the \$72 million profit made on the \$300 million investment it put into Troika Dialog in 2009 during the financial crisis.

The expansion of Sberbank, in which the Central Bank has a controlling stake, marks an increase of the state's presence in the financial sector, said Svetlana Kovalskaya, a banking analyst at Renaissance Capital.

"Two of the three [top investment banks] are going to be state," she said. The other big state-controlled investment bank is VTB Capital, whose successes have been a driving force behind Sberbank's interest in Friday's deal.

Entering the state-owned fold will give Troika Dialog greater access to the estimated \$29 billion in government assets to be privatized over the next three years.

Usmanov Forms RusAl Alliance Over Norilsk

By Irina Filatova
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

MOSCOW — The conflict between United Company RusAl and Interros over control of Norilsk Nickel took an unexpected turn on Monday, as billionaire Alisher Usmanov's Metalloinvest announced plans to increase its stake in the nickel producer and help develop the company jointly with RusAl.

Usmanov will eventually transfer his personal four percent stake in Norilsk to Metalloinvest, which will increase its stake by buying shares on the stock market, a company spokesman said, declining to specify the size of the stake to be acquired.

The announcement came after Norilsk Nickel on Friday held an extraordinary shareholders meeting initiated by RusAl, which was seeking to elect a new board of directors.

Official results of the meeting will be made public in the coming days, but Metalloinvest said its chairman, Farhad Moshiri, would likely join the board because his candidacy had received more than 6 percent of the votes, including RusAl's.

RusAl declined to comment on the issue, but a source close to Norilsk Nickel's shareholders said Metalloinvest decided to join the board "to make its structure more balanced," in light of concerns that Norilsk Nickel's management and Interros had taken over control of the nickel giant.

Since Metalloinvest's stake wasn't enough for its representative to be elected, the company asked RusAl to back Moshiri, the source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told The Moscow Times.

If Moshiri joins Norilsk's board it will strengthen RusAl's position, but it won't significantly affect the conflict between RusAl and Interros, said Dmitry Smolin, a metals and mining analyst at UralSib Capital.

Smolin expects that Interros and Norilsk management are likely to get seven seats on the board, retaining control over the nickel giant, while RusAl and Metalloinvest are likely to get only five seats.

In another unexpected move, Metalloinvest on Monday expressed support for RusAl's position that efficiency

of Norilsk management's work should be increased in order for the interests of all shareholders to be taken into account.

"There's currently an agreement between Metalloinvest's and RusAl's shareholders on joint actions to develop Norilsk Nickel," a Metalloinvest spokesman said in e-mailed comments.

Meanwhile Usmanov said Metalloinvest would seek to merge its assets with RusAl and Norilsk Nickel to create the country's biggest mining and metals company.

Norilsk Nickel and Interros declined to comment on the issue.

Three years ago, RusAl head Oleg Deripaska actively promoted a merger of his aluminum giant with Norilsk Nickel. The initiative was opposed by Interros president Vladimir Potanin, who at the time favored a tie-up with Metalloinvest. The deal did not go through, however.

Potanin said last week that he had increased his stake in Norilsk Nickel from 25 percent to 30 percent.

Merging Metalloinvest, RusAl and Norilsk is only possible in the long term — with an initial public offering of Metalloinvest as a prerequisite, Smolin said, because the deal participants need to be able to agree on the holding's valuation.

Usmanov said in late 2010 that the company could float shares this year.

RusAl, which controls 25 percent of Norilsk Nickel, lost board parity with rival shareholder Interros after the nickel producer's shareholders meeting in June and failed to push through an election of a new board of directors at the previous extraordinary shareholders meeting in October.

The aluminum giant nominated four representatives at Friday's shareholders meeting, including Deripaska, corporate development director Maxim Sokov, En+ Group chief executive Artyom Volynets and En+ Group board member Nathaniel Rothschild.

The company also nominated three independent directors, including former Norilsk chairman Alexander Voloshin, who had lost his seat in June.

"We supported Voloshin and hope that he will join Norilsk Nickel's board of directors," Sokov said in e-mailed comments.

Medvedev Recruits Foreign Experts for Financial Center

By Howard Amos
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

MOSCOW — Nineteen foreigners will become members of a committee of 27 advising President Dmitry Medvedev on how to turn Moscow into a center of international finance.

The lineup features top names from Wall Street and the City of London including JPMorgan Chase's Jamie Dimon, Citigroup's Vikram Pandit and Goldman Sachs' Lloyd Blankfein, Bloomberg reported.

Medvedev has made improving Moscow's status in the world of finance one of the central planks of his modernization platform.

"A lot of the building blocks are already in place," Jeffrey Costello, president of JPMorgan Russia, told a conference hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce last Thursday, but things must be "bigger, better, faster, smarter and cheaper."

The new presidential advisory committee joins a plethora of other groups exploring the issue.

There is already a "Committee

for the Development of a Financial Market" reporting directly to Medvedev, and a series of working groups on the subject led by Alexander Voloshin — who was Kremlin chief of staff under the late President Boris Yeltsin and his successor Vladimir Putin. Voloshin was also named as a member of the new committee Thursday.

In addition, there are several "project groups" examining specific issues, including legislation, administrative procedures, taxation and infrastructure.

Other foreigners named as members of the new committee come from Bank of America, Morgan Stanley, Deutsche Bank, Blackstone Group, PricewaterhouseCoopers, KPMG and Ernst & Young, Bloomberg reported.

Russians who made the cut included Sberbank chief German Gref and Andrei Kostin, head of VTB Group. Troika Dialog's Ruben Vardanyan and billionaire lawmaker Suleiman Kerimov will also join the effort.

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Kremlin Mending Fences With Japan Over Disaster

By Olga Razumovskaya
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

MOSCOW — Building the momentum in repairing ties with Japan, President Dmitry Medvedev scrambled to send energy supplies to the devastated country, three planes were dispatched with humanitarian aid, and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov laid flowers at the Japanese Embassy.

As a second explosion rocked a Japanese nuclear power plant just 800 kilometers southeast of Vladivostok, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin played down fears of a global nuclear disaster and insisted that Rosatom would press ahead with plans to build dozens of nuclear power stations.

Japan is mired in what Prime Minister Naoto Kan has described as its toughest crisis since World War II after a massive 9.0-magnitude earthquake shook the country Friday, causing a tsunami and two separate explosions at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant just north of Tokyo. A third nuclear explosion took place early on Tuesday.

The official death toll in the disaster rose to 2,800 on Tuesday, but more than 10,000 people are feared dead.

Japan has asked Russia for extra energy after the nuclear incident maimed its energy sector, 30 percent of which relies on nuclear energy, and Medvedev ordered Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin on Monday to maintain close contact with the Japanese and let him know whether any deals were reached.

"I have always been for the comprehensive development of trade and economic ties with Japan," Medvedev said, according to Interfax. "In this situation it is our duty to help."

He said he spoke with the Japanese prime minister by telephone about the additional fuel supplies Monday.

Sechin said Gazprom was preparing shipments of liquefied natural gas. "We are looking into the possibility of increasing supplies, even though there are some issues related to the product being bound by contract," Sechin said.

Medvedev urged Sechin to find a way around the contracts. "Despite this volume being contract-bound, this is a case when partners can meet each other halfway," he said. "This is a big tragedy, and in this case something can be changed in the agreements."

In addition to LNG, Russian companies are ready to supply Japan with coal and about 6,000 megawatts of electric energy, Sechin said. "This week, a SUEK delegation will be in Japan for negotiations," he said.

Putin first discussed the energy issue with Sechin on Saturday.

Russian-Japanese relations have been tense since Medvedev incurred Tokyo's wrath in November by visiting



Satellite views of Natori, Japan, before and after Friday's disaster. The photo on the left was taken April 4, 2010, while the other was taken on Saturday.

disputed islands that Moscow seized from Japan during the waning days of World War II. Tokyo wants the return of the islands — known as the southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan — and the 65-year dispute has prevented the two countries from signing a peace treaty officially ending World War II.

Tokyo has suggested that the dispute was hampering the growth in economic ties with Russia.

Medvedev made no mention of the two countries' sore spot Monday.

In Tokyo, 79 Russian rescue workers arrived on Monday aboard two aircraft: a helicopter and a cargo jet carrying three vehicles and emergency equipment, the Emergency Situations Ministry said on its web site. The team will be able to work independently in quake-affected areas for two weeks.

Another plane with 50 rescue workers left Moscow on Monday afternoon and was to pick up an additional 25 workers en route to Tokyo. It was followed by a third plane with 25 rescue workers.

Japan has accepted offers for assistance from about 70 countries.

"We are very grateful for the help that has been offered to us and for the condolences that have been extended to us by Minister Lavrov and the Russian people," said Akira Imamura, a spokesman for the Japanese Embassy in Moscow.

"We hope for an improvement of our relationship" with Russia, Imamura said by telephone.

Lavrov visited the Japanese Embassy to sign a book of condolences and joined well-wishers in laying flowers outside the embassy earlier Monday.

As for Medvedev's efforts to arrange energy supplies, "those are transactions between interested parties, but this is something we welcome," the embassy spokesman said.

Even if contracts between Russia and Japan are renegotiated, the profits that Gazprom might gain from it will be marginal, said Svetlana Grizan, an oil and gas analyst at VTB Capital.

While it is difficult to say what might ultimately happen with the island dispute, the disaster will make it a non-issue for at least the next one to two years, said Alexander Lukin, a Japanese expert at Moscow International Affairs University.

"A country that ends up in a situation like Japan will be distracted from any kinds of political affairs for a while," said Lukin, who directs the university's South Asia and Shanghai Cooperation Organization Research Center and Institute of International Research.

The estimated cost of the disaster so far is \$35 billion, or about a third of the 1995 Kobe earthquake, said John Hardy, a foreign-exchange consultant at Saxo Bank, a privately held Danish bank with offices in Tokyo. "But we wouldn't be surprised to see this estimate soar far higher in the coming days," Hardy said in an e-mailed statement.

Russia's second-largest steelmaker Evraz and coal producer Mechel may profit as Japan increases imports to re-

build its infrastructure and buys more fossil fuels to substitute for nuclear power, Vladimir Zhukov, an analyst at Japan's Nomura Holdings, wrote in a note Monday, Bloomberg reported.

Companies selling radiation-checking devices also stand to benefit, with worried customers snapping up Geiger counters in Vladivostok.

"There is an unprecedented demand," a spokeswoman for the company Primatechnopolis told RIA-Novosti. "We are getting so many calls. Customers say they want the Geiger counters considering what is happening in Japan."

She said the cheapest Geiger counter sells for 3,600 rubles (\$125).

Radiation levels are at normal levels in the Far East, authorities said.

But Putin, who said he had spoken with the Japanese prime minister by phone, dismissed fears about a global nuclear disaster resulting from the explosions at the Japanese power plant.

"Our experts think that a nuclear explosion that could lead to the destruction of the reactor itself should not take place," Putin said during a trip to Tomsk.

"I repeat: Our information, based on the data we have, is that we do not see a global threat," he said, according to a transcript on the government web site. "Nevertheless, we are continuing to fully monitor the situation."

Putin also said he did not share international jitters about nuclear power. Switzerland announced Monday that it

would shelve plans for new nuclear power plants, and Germany suspended work on extending the life of its nuclear power plants.

"No, we do not plan to change our plans," Putin said, referring to Rosatom's intent to construct dozens of nuclear power plants over the next few decades.

But, Putin added, "we, of course, will draw conclusions from what is happening in Japan."

Dangerous levels of radiation leaking from the crippled nuclear plant forced Japan to order 140,000 people to seal themselves indoors Tuesday after an explosion and fire dramatically escalated the crisis spawned by the tsunami.

In a nationally televised statement, Prime Minister Kan said radiation had spread from the four stricken reactors of the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant along Japan's northeastern coast. The region was shattered by Friday's 9.0-magnitude earthquake and the ensuing tsunami that has plunged millions into misery and pummeled the world's third-largest economy.

Japanese officials told the International Atomic Energy Agency that the reactor fire was in a fuel storage pond — an area where used nuclear fuel is kept cool — and that "radioactivity is being released directly into the atmosphere." Long after the fire was extinguished, a Japanese official said the pool might still be boiling, though the reported levels of radiation had dropped dramatically by the end of the day.

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Owen Publishes Book on Sick Politicians in Russian

By Galina Stolyarova
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

There are two things with which Russian society traditionally has a problem: One is that many people, including politicians at the highest level, do not seem to be willing to learn from the past, and another is that the majority of the population, including those very close to the powers that be, have difficulty looking at their governors critically.

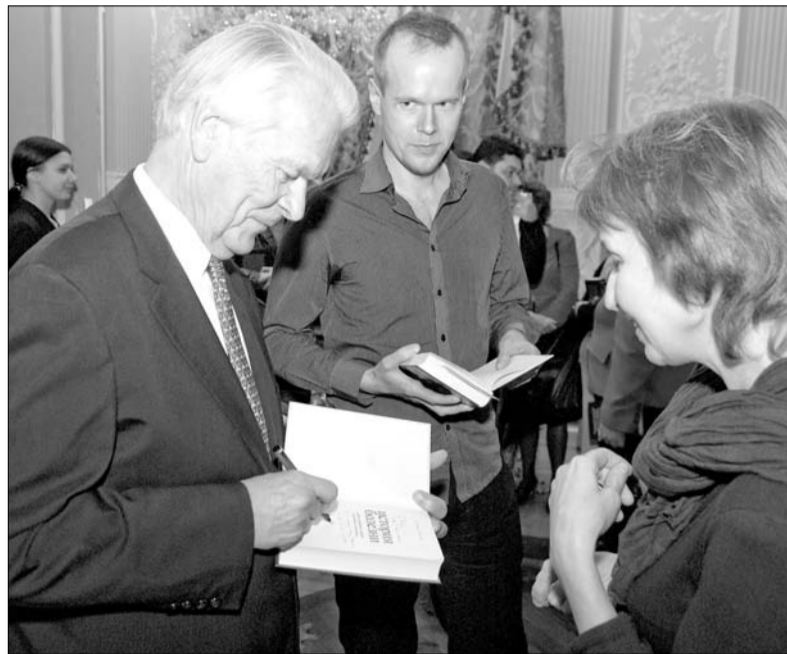
Sir David Owen's 2008 book, "In Sickness and in Power: Illness in Heads of Government During the Last 100 Years," which has just been printed in translation by Amphora publishing house in St. Petersburg, looks set to come in handy for treating the above-mentioned mentality blocks.

The author, an experienced politician, focuses on a series of crucial episodes in world politics, from the Cuban Missile Crisis, when the world was dangerously close to a nuclear exchange between the U.S. and Russia, to the War in Iraq, and investigates the states of mind of the leaders involved in making decisions in those crucial moments.

The book covers the period from Theodore Roosevelt's presidency of the U.S. in the early years of the 20th century right through to heads of government today, looking at the way leaders in many different parts of the world have influenced the world — and naturally, some of those under scrutiny are Russian. One of the chapters of the book is devoted to John F. Kennedy, and weaving through that chapter is the personality of then-U.S.S.R. leader Nikita Khrushchev.

Owen, a prominent European politician who served as British Foreign Secretary from 1977 to 1979, is well-versed in the subject: His extensive experience as a politician is complemented by his training as a doctor.

"When I was first elected to the House of Commons in 1966, I was a junior doctor at St. Thomas's hospital on the banks of the Thames directly opposite the Palace of Westminster. I specialized in neurology, which also in-



Sir David Owen signs a copy of his book during a visit to St. Petersburg this week.

involved undertaking some psychiatry," Owen writes in his book.

In Owen's opinion, people tend to underestimate the importance of personality and the effect of illness on those personalities.

"For the following two years I crisscrossed Westminster Bridge, continuing to work on the chemistry of the brain in my laboratory while also attending parliament on the other side of the river. The neurologists and psychiatrists for whom I worked at St. Thomas's tended to treat a

number of prominent politicians, and I saw the strains and stresses of political life within the confidential context of the doctor-patient relationship."

The years at St. Thomas's hospital sparked the future foreign minister's interest in the effects of politicians' illnesses, stress, psychological state and even medication that they take on government decisions, especially at the

highest level.

One of the chapters of the book is titled "The Intoxication of Power" and is devoted to the dangerous syndrome of hubris that the author identifies in some 20th-century leaders, including Britain's former prime minister Tony Blair and former U.S. president George W. Bush.

"These people even start to walk differently: If you watch pictures of Blair and Bush, they have a sort of swagger, a sort of cocky, ebullient, 'we are the leaders of the world, we know what is going to

happen'," the writer said. "And they fed on each other. When people said that taking Baghdad was difficult, that we need a lot of troops, there are a lot of problems, they didn't take any advice. This is extraordinary. Bush's father had done the very successful kicking out of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1989 — and did not go to Baghdad. And the reason he did not

go to Baghdad was because he knew how difficult it was to contain that country."

As Owen points out, in ancient Greek drama, a hubristic career proceeds something along these lines: The hero wins glory and acclamation by achieving unwonted success against the odds. "The experience then goes to his head: He begins to think himself capable of anything," he explains.

"This leads him into misinterpreting the reality around him and into making mistakes. Eventually he gets his comeuppance and meets his nemesis, which destroys him."

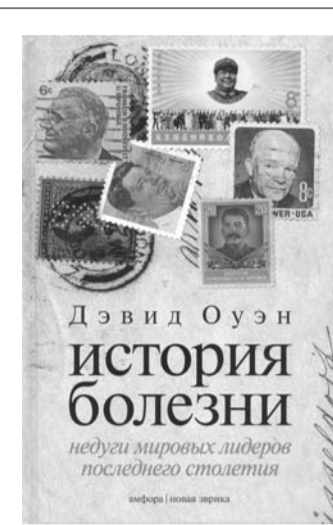
According to Owen, the behavior of George W. Bush and Tony Blair over deciding whether to invade Iraq in 2003 and in handling the consequences of that move is a graphic example of big time hubris syndrome.

"There have, of course, been incompetent presidents and prime ministers before, but Blair's incompetence was of a very particular sort, and it was largely shared by Bush," Owen explains. "It was triggered by three characteristic symptoms of hubris: Excessive self-confidence, restlessness and inattention to detail."

For more curious members of the public who would like to attempt to detect hubris in leaders of their countries, the crucial element to look out for is contempt, Owen says — contempt of the leader for advice, colleagues, opponents and the public.

Does Russia's Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who has for years been accused by human rights advocates of marginalizing the opposition and strangling political competition, suffer from hubris, then?

"I do not think so," Owen replies, noting that he has never met Putin in person. "I have friends who know him, and they say, 'If you talk to him, you engage with him,'" he recounts. "[Former U.S. Secretary of State] Henry Kissinger is the man who talks to Putin, and has done for quite a few years, and he certainly thinks that a conversation with Putin is a proper dialogue: He listens, he asks intelligent questions. I have questioned



"In Sickness and in Power: Illness in Heads of Government During the Last 100 Years," is published in Russian by Amphora publishing house, 638 pp., average retail price 311 rubles (\$10.80).

Originally published by Methuen Publishing in London, 448 pages, 25 pounds sterling. www.amphora.ru

Kissinger quite carefully on this, and he feels it is worth his while to talk to Putin."

Another factor that testifies against hubris is a sense of humor, Owen notes.

"Putin is obviously a dynamic, confident and young leader but he is not a hubristic leader; he also seems to have a sense of humor," he concludes.

"Of course, we need leaders who take risks, we need leaders who are probably hubristic, and yes, they are almost arrogant," Owen says. "The whole thing about leadership is that it involves charismatic personalities. But this is normal, or containable. It is when it gets uncontained, when it becomes supreme arrogance, when people become deaf to advice, when they do not want to comprehend that someone else has something intelligent to say — that is what I call hubris syndrome."

BusinessLunchGuide

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Fish House

FISH HOUSE

4 Pereulok Grivtsova.
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Email: info@stroganoffsteakhouse.ru

The Fish House menu has been developed by the head chef of Russian Vodka Room No. 1, Igor Dashkevich. The range of fish and seafood at the restaurant includes traditional fish house dishes, such as salmon and tuna steaks, seabass and lobster, prawns and scallops, as well as delicacies rarely found on the menus of other restaurants in St. Petersburg, including fish from Siberian rivers – Siberian white salmon and muktun whitefish.

The Fish House wine menu offers selections from almost every region in the world at affordable prices. For true connoisseurs, a wine cellar is being created that will comprise exclusive wines from the Top 100 list of Wine Spectator magazine.

The restaurant's main room can seat 100, while the basement floor has been designed for hosting banquets and private events. Business lunch daily from midday to 4 p.m. Guests can choose from a selection of salads, soups and hot dishes, as well as non-alcoholic drinks.



Stroganoff Steak House



4 Konnogvardeysky blvd.
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Tel.: 314-55-14.

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Cafe Vienna



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57 Nevsky Prospekt
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E-mail: reservation@corinthia.ru
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ITALIAN

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+ 20 meters along Ul. Degtyarnaya.
Tel: +7 (812)941 1744,
www.probka.org
Gusto is an Italian restaurant whose Italian chef, Fabricio Fatucci, last year had the honor of cooking for the Russian President, for which he received warm words of gratitude. We invite you to come and sample our chef's special menu. Menu highlights include: foie gras creme-brulee and Angus beef Carpaccio. Fresh seafood every weekend. In March, when you buy a bottle of wine at Bon Vin on Nevsky Prospekt, you can drink it with your meal free of charge at Gusto when you show the shop's receipt.

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Restaurant Da Albertone



23 Millionnaya Ul.
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Open daily from 11 a.m. till 2 a.m.
To reserve a table call 315-86-73.
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MEDITERRANEAN

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RUSSIAN

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Metro: Vladimirskaya
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www.palkin.ru
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Russian Vodka Room No. 1 is the first place in St. Petersburg to present Russian cuisine from different historical periods. Here, you can try pre-Petrine dishes such as "oven-cooked buckwheat porridge with chicken hearts and porcini mushrooms;" dishes featuring cuisine of the merchant and aristocratic classes such as "pike perch rissole with mashed potato;" and Soviet cuisine such as, "chicken Kiev" or "Russian salad." The restaurant's premises comprise two spacious rooms with a capacity of 160. In the neighboring rooms is housed the Museum of Russian Vodka which presents fascinating exhibits dating back to the appearance of vodka culture in Russia and running right through to the present day. The restaurant also has a "rumoch'naya" (a "standing-room-only" café) decorated in the 20th-century style where you can sample a variety of vodkas with traditional Russian "zakuski" snacks. Business lunch menu from midday to 4 p.m.

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Russian Kitsch Restaurant



25 Universitetskaya nab.
Tel.: 325-11-22.
Russian Kitsch is a restaurant and party house. You can celebrate any event here 365 days a year! Every day is a celebration here, with parties dedicated to the most outrageous, madcap and frivolous excuses: Complex-Free Day, Geisha Day, Ukraine Armed Forces Day etc. And all this in unforgettable interiors: Soviet politics-themed Baroque-style paintings, leopard print chairs, ostrich feathers, Pioneer bugles and oriental sofas with embroidered cushions that would delight an Arab sheik. As in any decent Russian restaurant, the menu includes Italian, French and Japanese dishes, as well of course as Russian classics like "herring in a fur coat," Olivier salad, pelmeni, pickles, pies, pancakes and homemade moonshine.

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United Russia in Trouble

By Vladimir Ryzhkov

While President Dmitry Medvedev drives on about “freedom being better than no freedom” and the world tries to understand why long-standing Arab dictatorships collapsed overnight, Russia’s corrupt autocracy continues to do what it does best: manipulating and falsifying elections.

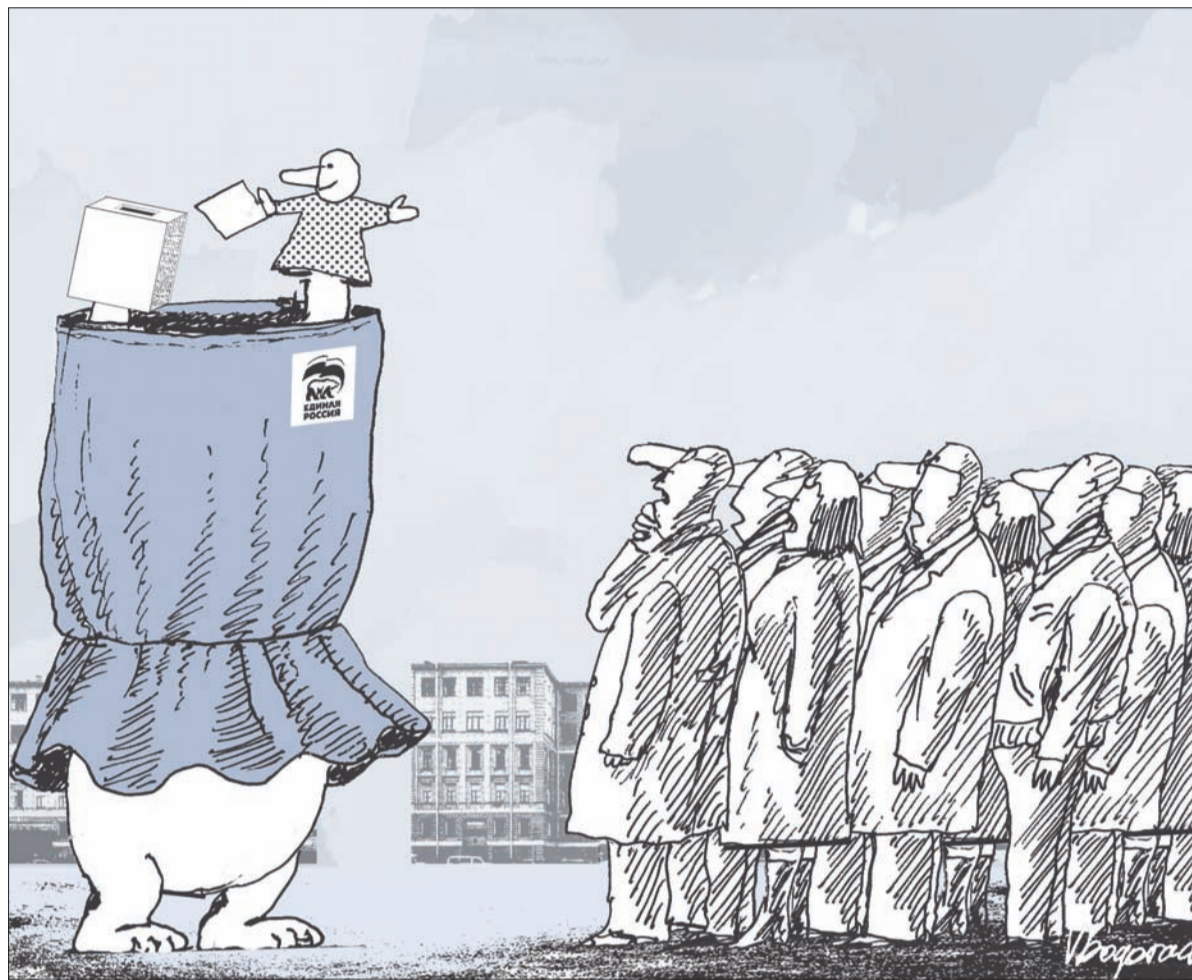
The regional and municipal elections on Sunday are just the latest example.

This was essentially the dress rehearsal for State Duma elections in December. It showed that the country’s corrupt ruling bureaucracy — with United Russia playing the role of the bureaucracy’s party of power — will use every dishonest and illegal trick in the book to preserve its monopoly on power. Golos, an independent election watchdog, recorded violations in practically all 12 of the regions that voted for regional legislatures, in the elections of 10 regional capitals and in voting for municipal offices in many regions.

On the eve of the elections, United Russia central executive committee head Andrei Vorobyov confidently predicted another crushing victory for the party. His explanation for the optimistic forecast speaks for itself: “Our leadership strength is indisputable, and our programs are the most substantial.”

Let’s take a closer look at United Russia’s “substantial programs”:

Regional and local authorities — all United Russia members — have purged their most outspoken and critical rivals from the field of candidates and party lists well in advance of the December elections. Once again, the main victims of that process were independent candidates and members of parties without seats in local legislatures. In all, 60 percent of such candidates and 40 percent of independent candidates in regional legislatures were not allowed to register for the elections.



For example, in the Tambov region, Yabloko’s candidate was denied registration, along with all nine of the party’s district candidates. In the Kursk region, only one of Yabloko’s 11 candidates was registered, and in the republic of Adygeya, which is enclaved within the Krasnodar region, only two Patriots of Russia party candidates were allowed to register. Both the Yabloko and Right Cause party lists were excluded from participating in the Stavropol municipal elections, and Yabloko candidates were similarly shut out from elections in Vladimir, Kaliningrad and Syktyvkar.

In all, hundreds of candidates across the country were denied their constitutional right to participate in elections. As before, election officials rejected candidates by unfairly disqualifying their signature lists and by conducting a meticulous search for technical and typographical errors in their registration forms.

At the same time, the barrier to registering a political party was raised from 5 percent to 7 percent in the Nizhny Novgorod, Orenburg and Tver regions, while a long-term campaign to eliminate mayoral elections continued as residents of Stavropol and Khanty-

Mansiisk were the latest municipalities to lose the right to directly elect their mayors. The residents of Perm and Vladimir lost the same right a short time earlier.

During the election campaign, candidates from parties other than United Russia were not permitted to rent premises for meetings with voters, media outlets refused to run their ads, and their fliers and posters were torn down or painted over. United Russia once again dominated the television airwaves, barraging viewers with reports of how much United Russia has accomplished for the public good in recent

years. As in previous elections, United Russia is pressuring the heads of schools, hospitals and other state institutions to vote for the party of power.

In Vladimir, regional television aired a program called “We Listen to Everyone” in which only United Russia candidates participated. In the Komi republic city of Inta, local authorities banned a rally by opposition members, citing concerns over a flu epidemic. United Russia has also been showering worthy causes with budgetary funds, labeling such gifts as “assistance from the United Russia party.” Kemerovo Governor Aman Tuleyev gave poor families up to 4 tons of heating coal each, which was presented as “United Russia support for the needy.” And while Just Russia leader Sergei Mironov was meeting with voters in Kursk, he was drowned out by the noise from a disco organized by United Russia. What’s more, Mironov was pelted with a sack of feathers.

With “substantial programs” like these, it was a foregone conclusion that United Russia would win in Sunday’s vote. But what is most interesting is that even these once tried and true manipulations aren’t working as well as they used to. In seven of the 12 regions in which legislative elections were held Sunday, United Russia got most, but not the majority, of the votes. In the Kirov region, for example, United Russia got less than 40 percent of the vote, a record low.

This means that United Russia has to think up new and more devious tricks to deceive voters and manipulate the vote. This is the only option available. If United Russia had to rely exclusively on its track record and “political and economic platform” in a free and fair campaign, it would never win a single election.

Vladimir Ryzhkov, a State Duma deputy from 1993 to 2007, hosts a political talk show on Ekho Moskvy radio and is a co-founder of the opposition Party of People’s Freedom.

R U S S I A N U N O R T H O D O X

The Tsar’s Unfinished Business

By Galina Stolyarova

Artist Oleg Vorotnikov was recently released after spending several months in custody. In September he and other members of the non-conformist art group Voina, or War, overturned several police cars in a highly visible protest in St. Petersburg over a bill to reform the police that they have branded a sham.

After his arrest, some of Vorotnikov’s possessions were impounded by the police. After his eventual release, he filed a formal request at the police station for the return of his items. It did not cut much ice with the officers.

“The police officers tore up my letter in front of me,” Vorotnikov said. “And then the boss said that he would piss over what I had in my hands if I didn’t shut up and stop demanding my stuff.”

While he was being held his wife was ordered to surrender her passport and other documents to the police.

“Both my wife and I knew it was pointless to protest. We are well aware that in Russia any ordinary citizen has no more rights than did the serfs in tsarist Russia.”

A strong claim. Some might even say over the top. But does it contain a grain of truth?

By coincidence, a few days after Vorotnikov gave a press conference revealing details about his arrest after the police car protest, President Dmitry Medvedev came to St. Petersburg to attend a conference marking the 150th anniversary of the abolition of serfdom

in Russia. The president made a passionate speech, conveying the basic message that “liberty is better than no liberty.”

A little more intriguingly, Medvedev suggested that since the time of Tsar Alexander II, who abolished serfdom in an 1861 manifesto, no real progress in liberating the Russian people has actually taken place. Medvedev then magnanimously offered to pick up where the tsar had left off.

I would agree with Medvedev that progress in overcoming the servile mentality of Russians has been slow. But I find it amazing that both the Russian president and his predecessor, Vladimir Putin, now prime minister, are both so keen on drawing parallels between themselves and the tsars. I thought that as elected leaders they were meant to be the opposite of unelected despots.

Just like the tsars, both seem convinced that they know better than the electorate what is best for their subjects — sorry, their fellow citizens.

Clearly, it was this attitude that led Putin to decide in 2006 that governors in Russia should be appointed, not elected. And the same attitude no doubt motivated Medvedev when he imposed a gag order on civil servants in 2009, banning them from discussing state affairs with members of the press, excluding official spokespeople.

It is the modern-day master-servant relationship that Gorbachev seemed to be driving at in a recent statement that

won the former Soviet leader more notice in Russia than he has had for a long time.

Gorbachev claimed that the presidential election process in Russia has degenerated into “election arrogance.” In a much-quoted speech in February, he lambasted Putin for giving the impression that he and Medvedev would just sit down together and decide which of them would run as the candidate in the next presidential race.

“Putin said it as if there are not — and definitely will not emerge — any other worthy candidates,” an indignant Gorbachev said.

At the very least, Putin was implying that he and Medvedev were by far the strongest candidates. For Putin it seems no one else, regardless of intelligence, skill, or political potential, should be given a chance to enter the race.

But arrogance is not confined to the masters in Moscow. On 3 March Russia’s news agencies announced that Chechnya was holding a literary competition for students.

Called “A Hero of Our Time,” the contest is for fine prose “about the outstanding personality among the Chechen people, the man who has made the greatest contribution to the revival of the Chechen Republic — the Hero of Russia, Mr. Ramzan Kadyrov.”

Maybe the students should have been offered the choice of writing an essay on the distinction between re-

spect, worship, and deification. Even in Soviet days, a school essay on “A hero of our time” would at least have offered pupils the chance to write about their own chosen hero.

Serfdom in modern Russia has many forms. Some are direct, such as when conscripts, prisoners or illegal immigrants are forced — under threats or blackmail — to carry out slave labor. Others are indirect, like repressive tax regimes that make owners of small enterprises work around the clock just to stay afloat.

An ideal serf does not argue, does not resist, and does not challenge the master. So the first step in delivering the legacy of 1861 is to break out of the servile mentality.

Contemporary Russians have a major advantage over the serfs before 1861: The law is already on their side. At least on paper, they are not serfs anymore.

So some of us need to take the lead. And not by leading a hopeless charge against the underpaid officers of our local police.

We need to start thinking for ourselves and deciding for ourselves, and not being led by the nose by media dominated by the Kremlin or the oligarchs. Thinking for ourselves all the way to the ballot box and beyond. For the battle to throw off the shackles of serfdom must surely start right here — in our own minds.

A full version of this commentary is available at *Transitions Online*, an award-winning analytical online magazine covering Eastern Europe and CIS countries, at www.to.org.



Galina Stolyarova

The St. Petersburg Times

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The Word's Worth



A NEW PRODUCTION OF RICHARD STRAUSS'S 'ARIADNE AUF NAXOS' IS NOW PART OF THE REPERTOIRE AT THE MARIINSKY THEATER CONCERT HALL. SEE REVIEW, **PAGE 16.**

CHERNOV'S CHOICE

The controversy over the money reportedly missing from a charity event headlined by **Vladimir Putin**, who made his debut as a singer performing "Blueberry Hill" and featuring Western celebrities such as Paul Anka, Sharon Stone and Mickey Rourke continues to grow.

The show turned out to have been organized by the freshly formed charity *Federatsiya* headed by former local musician and promoter **Vladimir Kiselyov**, a man whose reputation precedes him.

Kiselyov has been mired in controversies in the past, starting with his pop band *Zemlyane*, which was criticized for taking its name from a local respected underground rock band. Later, in the 1980s, it was revealed that his band's frontman did not sing, while the lead vocals came from the keyboard player, who didn't look that impressive.

Kiselyov was criticized as promoter of the rock festival *White Nights* in St. Petersburg in the early 1990s (there were a lot of accusations in the press, the mildest centering on the name having been taken from the city's established classical music festival) and his activities as the head of state company *Kreml* in Moscow in the 2000s.

In his recent statements, Kiselyov denied that the charity was a fraud scheme, that he had a criminal past and that he personally knew Putin. "Maybe we were on the same tram or bus. Leningrad is a small city," Kiselyov said on *Dozhd* television.

A 1992 photograph from a local newspaper taken during one of his festivals and available on the web, however, shows him standing next to the Jethro Tull frontman Ian Anderson, the late St. Petersburg Mayor Anatoly Sobchak and none other than Putin, the then head of the Committee for External Relations of the St. Petersburg Mayor's Office.

In a lengthy statement sent out to the press last week, Kiselyov dismissed the criticism as "a campaign that has been planned in advance by a certain section of the media" and complained that "the positive effect created by Putin's performance at the concert" was "totally ignored by the media."

"Such a coordinated informational vacuum emerged not even because of the stereotype and cliché of a diehard KGB man, but because suddenly he showed himself to be a person of fine musical taste, capable of feeling and expressing emotion through creative work, and was very decent at it to boot," Kiselyov wrote.

Good events this week include Belarus' premier band **Lyapis Trubetskoy** which will premier its latest album, "*Vesyoliye Kartinki*" (*Funny Pictures*), at *Glavclub* on Friday, March 18. See interview with the band's frontman **Sergei Mikhailok**, this page.

The *Sun Shine Fest*, held at *The Place* on Saturday, March 19, will feature **Markscheider Kunst** and the Finnish ska-reggae band **The Capital Beat**.

PTVP frontman **Alexei Nikonov** will mark the 15th anniversary of his debut as a poet with a poetry recital at *Zoccolo* on Wednesday, March 16.

— By *Sergey Chernov*

Belarus Freedom

Minsk's banned anarcho-punks Lyapis Trubetskoy premiere their new album.

By *Sergey Chernov*
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

Lyapis Trubetskoy, Belarus' premier rock band, has found itself blacklisted in its homeland as part of a crackdown by President Alexander Lukashenko in the wake of his December 19 re-election.

This week saw the cancellation of two sold-out concerts in the capital Minsk due on April 1 and 2. Earlier this month, the band was informed that its sold-out March 13 concert in Gomel, the country's second largest city, had been cancelled due to alleged fire security reasons.

"They don't even give any reasons anymore," frontman **Sergei Mikhailok** said in an interview with *The St. Petersburg Times* on Sunday.

"They have simply stopped bothering to invent them — an authoritative call comes from the Department of Culture, they say 'This concert is not happening,' and that's all. They act with brazen impunity now, caring about nothing."

Having started out as a punk band in Minsk, Lyapis Trubetskoy broke onto the music scene in Russia with a series of humorous songs with mass appeal in the late 1990s, but made an abrupt turn with a trio of socially-aware albums — "*Kapital*," "*Manifest*" and "*Kultprosvet*" — a decade later.

"They formed a sort of trilogy conventionally known as '*Agitpop*,'" Mikhailok said.

"They were united by social orientation, a rebellious, anarchist outlook and very loud, fast, crude music — without excessive melodicism or lyricism. That was the concept, the concept of a contemporary anarcho-punk collective with dramaturgy of revolutionary propaganda teams. With a lot of poems sounding like slogans and football fan chants."

In its new outing called "*Vesyoliye Kartinki*" (*Funny Pictures*) that premiered in Moscow last weekend, the band has become more introspective.

"Firstly, almost all the songs were recorded without a brass section; secondly, we left out almost all the songs that could roughly be defined as 'ska punk,'" Mikhailok said.

"The new album features songs filled with psychology, sensitivity. There are many songs using a lot of means of expression, a lot of different instruments. We were looking for the sound and atmosphere. There is a lot of philosophy in the lyrics; we touched not only on various aspects of human life, but also on some existential problems dealing with religion and ecology."

The album's title refers to a Soviet children's comic book, but is a metaphor for the modern mindset.

"This is an ironic take on the modern mindset, which consists of very conventional and approximate conclusions about things," Mikhailok said.

"People have no time to take a look into the essence of things, and it's enough for them to take a quick glance at something to come up with a conclusion. That's why most people act according to the patterns of society; they're sort of zombified. That's why they can be fed any nonsense via the television or radio and they will believe in all this. At the same time, they're very self-important and self-satisfied. But in reality they're like a litter of blind kittens."

"Hence, the irony. We see such pictures, but we don't look inside, into the depth of things and processes."

On the album, Lyapis Trubetskoy pays homage to late 1980s Russian rock legends — Yegor Letov of the Siberian punk band *Grazhdanskaya Oborona*, and Sergei "Oldie" Belousov of the Kaliningrad reggae band



Lyapis Trubetskoy pays tribute to Russian rock legends of the 1980s on its new album '*Funny Pictures*.'

Komitet Okhrany Tepla — by covering Letov's song "Zoopark" and Belousov's "Africa." He said that the song "Sacred Fire" (*Svyashchenny Ogon*) on the new album is dedicated to musicians like Letov and Belousov.

"We're taking a cue from the rock and roll heroes of the past, from protest guys who preserved their rebellious, anti-establishment spirit throughout their entire lifetime, and who didn't turn into bourgeois dinosaurs like the rock and roll stars of today," Mikhailok said.

"Contemporary rock stars are rich, successful and resemble so-called celebrities. I see no difference between pop stars and rock and roll millionaires. But people like Letov and Oldie still represent a certain model to me and maybe a sort of moral and ethical beacon from which my friends and I try to take a cue."

In the Belarusian presidential election, Mikhailok voted for dissident poet Vladimir Neklyayev, who is currently under home arrest awaiting trial.

Thousands were beaten and dispersed by security forces after taking to the streets of Minsk in December to protest results that gave almost 80 percent of votes and a fourth term in office to Lukashenko.

"The situation is changing for the worst, it's at least as bad as the Soviet Union," Mikhailok said.

"I think there's a revival of the Stalinist Gulag system going on; you can see it in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. Totalitarian totems and artifacts are coming back. In Belarus, at least, blacklists have appeared once again, banning free art and concerts."

"It's not to say that in fact freedom of thought and dissent are crimes now, in the center of Europe in the 21st cen-



The band will play the city Friday.

tury. I think artists, poets and musicians should be among the first to react to this, because somebody needs to sound the alarm."

"All those generals, bureaucrats, KGB men, fat pigs, they have returned and are respected again. But now they're even more frightening than before, because now they rob people openly."

Belarusian culture bureaucrats officially deny the existence of blacklists, but bands such as *NRM*, *Neuro Dubel*, *Krama* and *Palats* — described by Mikhailok as the "vanguard of Belarusian independent rock and roll" — have all found themselves banned. This month also saw the cancellation of a concert by *Zmiter Voityushevich*, a singer-songwriter who wrote songs set to poems by the repressed former presidential candidate *Neklyayev*.

"You can open *George Orwell's '1984'* at any page and you will see a description of contemporary Belarusian society," Mikhailok said. As time passes, the Belarusian totalitarian model has been expanded across post-Soviet countries, he added.

"Liberals and democrats in Russia laughed at us even seven or eight years ago, and it's only now that many liberally-minded Russians who make good money and pursue bourgeois lifestyles are beginning to feel that the screws are being tightened," Mikhailok said.

"But we in Belarus spoke about this a long time ago, it even appeared to us to be some sort of experiment. But now what we had in our country is beginning to happen in Russia and Ukraine, very fast."

Although many have left Belarus in order to flee the Lukashenko regime, the members of Lyapis Trubetskoy have no plans to leave Minsk, Mikhailok said.

"We live in Minsk and have never left it," he said.

"We've never planned to go anywhere, because we grew up and lived in this country long before this shameful and disgusting regime came into existence. As long as we have the strength and opportunity, we'll continue to live there. Many of us have parents and children there. My father has Parkinson's disease and my mother is a pensioner. How could I leave them?"

Sung almost entirely in Russian, "*Vesyoliye Kartinki*" features two songs in Belarusian. One of them, called "*Grai*" (*Play*), was released as a separate download late last year as a Christmas music postcard for Belarusians around the world.

"Even if there are dark and fearful times now, spring will return to our

homeland," goes the song, according to Mikhailok.

"We believe in this. We want real prosperity for Belarus, for people to be comfortably well off, we want a society that is not a caste one, and we want people not to be divided into rich and poor, important and insignificant."

"We're not for the communist utopia, we're not communists. We don't belong to any communist or anarchist organization. But the idea of freedom, of freedom of choice, is everything for us. That's why we sing about it."

"Crooks and thugs, fairytale villains — that's who is trying now to take on the role of messiah, who will allegedly protect stability and peace in our society. We believe that any tyranny, any totalitarian regime represents decay. It has nothing to do with humanity or humaneness."

Mikhailok believes that such regimes are doomed and refers to the revolutions in Libya and Egypt.

"People can't live under pressure in the 21st century," he said.

"Apart from food, idiotic television and a roof above their head, people should be fulfilled. They should be fulfilled creatively — in their work, their dreams, their hobby. They should fulfill their dreams and fantasies, not just sit like they are in a zoo and be thrown a piece of meat by the schedule. We've already seen it, and it can't exist."

"States such as the U.S.S.R. and Nazi Germany, empires like they did in Rome — they can't exist. History shows that all totalitarian imperial states born out of military power and the suppression of the people fall sooner or later, burying their creators under their debris."

"Wise men, people who are trusted should come to power. They should be cleverer and have higher morals and aesthetics; they should serve as a model. But when you have mentally deranged Napoleons in power, it gets scary. They don't play by the rules. Or they play by the rules that they themselves change every day."

According to Mikhailok, this week's concert will feature Lyapis Trubetskoy's new set based on the band's new album, as well as the "*Agitpop*" trilogy. "Despite everything, our band is still very positive and we create good emotions and give people hope," he said.

"With our music, we want to unite people. And make them happy."

Lyapis Trubetskoy will perform at 8 p.m. on Friday, March 18 at Glavclub, 2 Kremenchugskaya Ulitsa. Tel. 905 7555. Metro Ploshchad Vosstaniya / Ploshchad Alexandra Nevskogo.

The best of the Emerald Isle

St. Petersburg is set to host an Irish film festival timed to coincide with St. Patrick's Day on March 17.

By Olga Khrustaleva
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

The tradition of celebrating St. Patrick's Day spread far beyond Ireland's borders long ago. Along with the U.K., the U.S. and some provinces of Canada, Saint Patrick is also honored as a national saint in Nigeria.

In Russia, the tradition of celebrating the patron saint of Ireland dates back to 1992, when the first parade took place in Moscow. The celebration usually continues in pubs, although pubs in Ireland used to close for the holiday.

This year, both St. Petersburg and Moscow are to host an Irish film festival timed to coincide with the holiday, allowing enthusiasts to expand their plans for celebration. Although the festival will run for just five days in St. Petersburg, showcasing a different film on each day, the organizers have done their best to make the program diverse. Audiences will have the opportunity to see a comedy, a biography, a documentary, a subtle psychological drama and even a series of short films including comedies, such as a new and slightly scary version of "Sleeping Beauty" told by a grandmother to her granddaughter.

The festival opens with Lenny Abrahamson's "Garage," an 85-minute tragicomic story about Josie, a 40-year-old garage worker who lives in the same place in which he works and knows nothing outside his home town. His life occupies a very narrow circle, but after he meets David, a 15-

year-old whom Josie's boss hires to help in the garage, the man slowly but steadily begins to emerge from his shell.

"I think you could call it maybe 'minimal slapstick' or 'slapstick tragedy,'" Abrahamson says about his work. "It's a physical film. It's about this character who has a very strong visual kind of signature. He walks in a very particular way. He speaks in a very particular way. I think it's this curious style that allows 'Garage' to be tender without being sentimental."

The Sunday Times film critic Wendy Ide caught the author's message in her review: "The comedian and actor Pat Short brings a wonderful physicality to the character of Josie, a slow, simple but essentially good man whose frame of reference doesn't extend far beyond the rundown garage where he works. That Josie is always wearing an Australia baseball cap is poignant given that the total of his travel is between the local pub and his place of work. The film is full of lovely details like that, which build into a rich portrait of loneliness in a dying community."

The main character of the next film was, unlike Josie, always in the spotlight. The police hated him, fans adored him, the IRA and UVF were interested in his persona, but the legendary Irish thief and crime boss Martin Cahill — AKA "General" — lived according to his own laws. Coming from a poor Dublin suburb, Cahill began his career by stealing cream puffs for his family and wife-to-be, who was then just ten years old. During the next 20 years, he stole jewelry and works of art in total



'Pyjama Girls' follows two sleepwear-clad teenagers in Dublin.

worth more than 60 million dollars.

Despite being followed 24 hours a day, Cahill was never proven guilty. The Irish Robin Hood of the 20th century, he was always harshly critical of state politics and gave money to the poor, saying that he was "paying tax" in this way. Cahill was true to his convictions, whether right or wrong, until the very end. And viewers are inclined to support him rather than the police officers throwing sticks at him and making jokes of his pregnant sister-in-law. Director John Boorman wants his audience to believe that Cahill was a noble thief, and his portrayal is convincing, ensuring that many viewers will empathize with Cahill, one of the luckiest, most resourceful and successful thieves in history.

The theme of loneliness reappears as Maya Derrington explores the topic of teenage alienation in her semi-documentary film "Pyjama Girls." The film focuses on the lives of two friends, Lauren and Tara, who hang around Dublin streets in their pajamas.

"I was inspired to make the film because of my own surprise and fascination with the daytime pajama phenomenon," said Derrington.

"There were two things in my mind as I began: One was the bright softness of the pajamas as a metaphor for female teenage life, and against that, the harsh lines of the flats. I was really struck by the architecture of the area which combined brutality and community." Lauren and Tara seem like aliens left on their own in a concrete jungle, desperately trying to find something to

do. Following them gently with the camera, the director creates the impression that the audience is also walking around Dublin, maybe even wearing pajamas.

John Carney's comedy "Zonad" is about a real alien who changes the life of an Irish town overnight.

"Our belief during the writing and making of 'Zonad' was that if we stuck to what we found funny ourselves, there would be enough people out there who would respond to it," said Carney. "With comedy, you've got to please yourself and hope that there'll be a few others out there who'll get it." Hopefully, Carney's humor will find resonance among Petersburg audiences, ensuring a fun St. Patrick's Day weekend for all.

The Irish Film Festival runs from Wednesday, March 16 through Sunday, March 20 at Formula Kino Galeria cinema, 30A Ligovsky Prospekt, 4th floor. Tel: 676 7776.

PROGRAM:

- Wednesday March 16, 8 p.m.
"Garage"
- Thursday March 17, 7.30 p.m.
"The General"
- Friday March 18, 7.30 p.m.
Short films
- Saturday March 19, 7.30 p.m.
"Zonad"
- Sunday March 20, 7.30 p.m.
"Pyjama Girls"

Remembrance of things past

An exhibition at the Anna Akhmatova museum sheds rare light on two wars between the U.S.S.R. and Finland.

By Sergey Chernov
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

Finnish veterans who survived the two wars between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1939-1944 have been given a voice via the exhibition "Veterans — What Was War Like?" that opened at the Anna Akhmatova museum earlier this month.

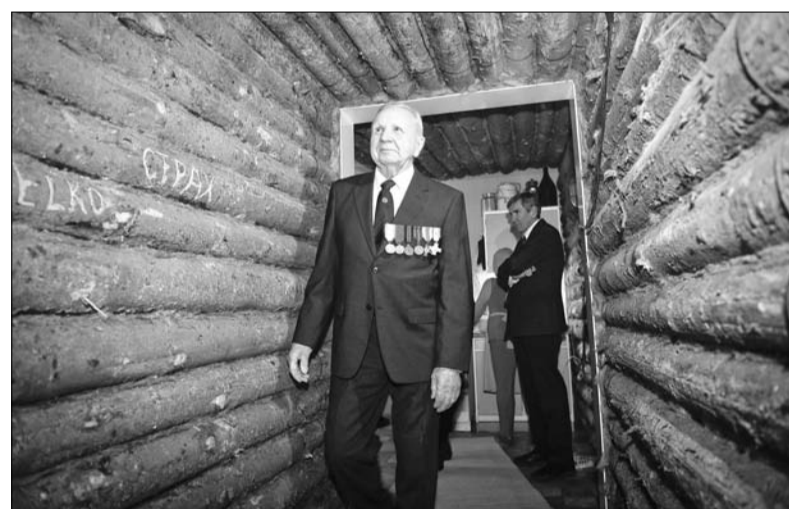
Based on interviews with 144 veterans taken in 2004 and 2005, the display does not resemble a typical war exhibition, but is instead an installation that uses technology to show old people haunted by past wars.

Visitors to the exhibition enter a modest apartment inhabited by a fictitious married couple of Finnish veterans, and discover that it is permeated with echoes of the wars.

Represented by wax figures, the husband is sitting by the coffee table solving a crossword, in which words such as "artillery" and "heavy losses" light up in the grid, while the wife is standing behind a gas stove — but the wall next to her is the log wall of a dugout with the word "Fear" carved into it in Russian.

Suddenly, a veteran looks out at visitors from what was a second ago the mirror. There is a stock of military first-aid kits in the bathroom and a handful of bullet casings scattered on the table. War makes its presence felt through projections and sounds, and the voices of veterans can be heard in the rooms, where excerpts of taped interviews (translated into Russian) are played in loops.

Rather than aiming to present precise information on the wars, "Veterans" seems focused rather on creating



A veteran walks through a dugout erected as part of the exhibition.

an impression that is disturbing and memorable.

The Winter War stemmed directly from the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed in Moscow on August 23, 1939 whose secret protocols divided Northern and Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence.

The next month, Germany and the Soviet Union invaded Poland and divided the country between them, after which steps were taken by Moscow to occupy the Baltic countries. Finland was attacked on November 30, 1939.

The U.S.S.R. was condemned for aggression and expelled from the League of Nations, but the world failed to provide Finland with sufficient help. Having put up fierce resistance, the country lost vast territories but preserved its independence.

During the Continuation War (1941-1944), Finland — then an ally of Nazi Germany — managed to claim

back the land lost during the Winter War, but eventually lost it again. Around 85,000 Finns and 330,000 Soviets died in the two wars.

Russian history clings to the Soviet concept of the Great Patriotic War, the portion of World War II starting from the German invasion of the U.S.S.R. in 1941. In the Soviet Union, the official line was that the Finnish territories occupied as a result of the Winter War were needed to protect St. Petersburg from Nazi Germany, despite the fact that U.S.S.R. and Germany were then allies who divided up Poland between them and held a joint military parade in Brest.

Referring to the Soviet propaganda version of the wars, the exhibition's accompanying booklet says: "Only in today's Russia is this conflict beginning to be seen more on the basis of its own merits." But the Soviet-Finnish wars still remain largely obscure. Russian

high school textbooks have only several paragraphs on the Winter War, which is seen as a pre-war conflict, while the Continuation War does not get any mention at all.

In December, Leningrad Oblast Governor Valery Serdyukov said at the foundation-laying ceremony of a war monument in Vyborg (formerly the Finnish city of Viipuri) that "During the Great Patriotic War, residents of the city fought bravely for the liberation from fascist invaders [i.e. Nazi Germany]," according to the official web site of the Leningrad Oblast.

In fact, Viipuri, then Finland's second largest city, was transferred to the Soviet Union along with the whole Karelian Isthmus — minus its population, who had deserted it — by the Peace of Moscow on March 31, 1940, recaptured by Finnish troops on August 29, 1941 and finally fell to the Red Army on June 20, 1944. More than 80,000 Finnish residents of Vyborg fled the city during and after the warfare.

Although roughly timed to coincide with the anniversary of the end of the Winter War (March 12, 1940), the exhibition looks at both the Winter War and the Continuation War.

As excerpts from the memoirs are not attributed either in the voice recordings played at the exhibition or in the accompanying booklet, the two wars are merged into one, which can be confusing for the unprepared visitor. But they do succeed in creating a sort of human noise, in which passing visitors can catch a phrase that might make them want to find out more.

Inevitably, the experiences and views of different veterans sometimes match and sometimes clash. "Oh yes, we were bitter about the Russians to

begin with, damn it, the whole business," says one veteran. "But we didn't have any personal grudge against the Ruskies. We were more bitter about the politics of Stalin and Molotov."

"As far as the Russians are concerned, I've always been a bit on the warpath," says another.

"Maybe it's that you can't really trust them. That's the attitude I took. Though I understand them as individuals."

Veterans differ on the future of the occupied territories that still comprise part of the Russian Federation.

One anonymous veteran says: "We always said, because we talked ever such a lot about Karelia, that we ought to get it back. But we don't any more. We wouldn't go there, nor would we be any use as workers if we got Karelia back."

"...There's nothing to prevent the Karelians from asking for the ceded area back, even though opinions differ in so many ways about whether Finland needs it," says another. "Finland needs it alright, there are tremendous riches there; the extremely beautiful city of Viipuri, Sortavala, and lots of other beautiful and dear things got left there. So it's a wonder that there are still people today who don't want it, and think it's right we had to give it up. But that's not how it is. That's how I feel."

"Veterans — What Was War Like?" is a welcome and insightful project tackling this period, but the need for a larger historical exhibition on the Russian-Finnish conflicts of the past century persists.

"Veterans — What Was War Like?" runs through May 8 at the Anna Akhmatova Museum, entrance from 53 Liteiny Prospekt. Tel: 272 2211. M. Gostiny Dvor / Mayakovskaya.

Theatrical fantasy

A new production of Strauss's 'Ariadne auf Naxos' hits home with its theme of wealthy arts patrons.

By Galina Stolyarova
THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

The Mariinsky Theater appears to have invented a new genre: Lounge opera, in which the staging has the aesthetic ambience of a wealthy person's sitting room.

Audiences received a taste of the genre during a new production of Richard Strauss's 1912 work "Ariadne auf Naxos," which premiered at the Mariinsky Concert Hall on Tuesday, March 8, directed by Michael Sturminger of Austria.

Strauss's "Ariadne" thrives on contrasts: Heroic opera and light commedia dell'arte, tragedy and nonsense, melancholy and frivolity. The story revolves around a doomed attempt to reconcile an opera seria and an opera buffa in one show, in an effort to placate a wealthy patron who commissioned both productions for a house party.

One worrying signal was that the publicity for the new show focused dramatically on the internationally acclaimed actress Ingeborga Dapkunaite, who enjoys two fleeting appearances in the spoken role of Major Domo, the wealthy patron's secretary who delivers the sponsor's demands to the actors rehearsing both shows.

Another disturbing moment came when Dapkunaite — already well into her character — suddenly mentioned the wealthy man's name: A certain Oleg Olegovich. Perhaps the director's intention was to make the libretto more relevant to modern Russia, where television audiences are fed a steady diet of the whims of the nouveau riches in forms far more shocking than a potentially tasteless mix of two theatrical genres. Worse, Dapkunaite, who is usually associated with style and elegance, was tangibly uncomfortable with her part, with both her speech and her movement in high heels showing signs of strain. "Ariadne auf Naxos" was not met with much enthusiasm when it was originally shown in Stuttgart in 1912, but eventually gained fame for its theatricality, wit and musical harmony. In 1912, the opera was written to be performed along with a



The opera depicts a farcical meeting between tragedy and comedy.

comic ballet version of Moliere's "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," for which Strauss also wrote the music. Audiences didn't accept the combination, and the idea was abandoned. The opera was performed in its current version only in 1916, when Strauss wrote a scenic prologue for "Ariadne."

What was meant to be "a witty paraphrasing of the ancient heroic style intermixed with buffoonery," as the opera's librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal described it, Sturminger turned into a show more tedious than witty, where tragedy and melancholy prevailed over frivolity and flirtatiousness. The performance in general was lacking spark, flair and ease — all essential ingredients for the opera.

In the prologue, the Composer (a male role written for soprano and performed here by Maria Maksakova, the granddaughter of the famous Russian actress Lyudmila Maksakova) is forced to bring commedia dell'arte characters into an opera he is writing based on the ancient Greek myth about Ariadne being abandoned by her beloved Theseus. Vocally uneven and at times

shaky on high-pitched notes, Maksakova made her character rather weaker and more fidgety than Strauss may have desired. The singer created a portrayal of the Composer as a desperate yet fussy man, a combination that draws little compassion.

Anna Markarova produced a visually monumental image of the pretentious Prima Donna, who is mortified by the idea of mixing her art with "the vulgar comedians" around her. As the opera's title character, Markarova, who possesses a rich dark mezzo that could have been more flexible, appeared emotionally unmoved, and the lack of much physical movement added to her further disadvantage — Ariadne spends much of her time sitting atop an elevated podium at the center of the stage.

A lack of sensible and justified movement on stage is one of Sturminger's major lapses. Traditionally for almost all operas that are played at the concert hall, the cast were at certain points scattered around the stairs and the balcony. That sort of movement did not save the show. In the meantime, the abundance of sophisticated and

glamorous costumes only adds to the parallels with the infamous Rublyovka, a village on the outskirts of Moscow that is popular with oligarchs.

The visual and emotional antithesis of both the Prima Donna and eventually Ariadne — Zerbinetta — was beautifully performed by Olga Pudova. Technically adroit, the singer was very much into her role as a vivacious and frivolous yet compassionate actress. With ten years as a soloist with the Mariinsky Academy of Young Singers under her belt, Olga Pudova attracted great acclaim with her stunning performance in the international project "The Infernal Comedy" — a literary and musical production performed last summer at the Mariinsky telling of the exploits of a serial killer, in which the lead role was performed by the renowned Hollywood actor John Malkovich. Pudova's beautiful fiorituras are now winning the singer plum roles in both the bel canto repertoire and expressionist early 20th century operas such as "Ariadne."

After the Prologue in the opera proper, Ariadne (Markarova) longs for death and calls for Hermes to take her to the underworld. She meets the flirtatious comedienne Zerbinetta (Pudova), who has little sentiment regarding men, and tries to convert Ariadne to her lighthearted philosophy of love.

Markarova's static and heavy Ariadne is convincing both vocally and artistically. Indulging in melancholy, on the verge of mental collapse, Ariadne is deaf to Zerbinetta's exhortations and temptations. The opposition between the two heroines is intense, but the director makes their stage presence in the opera rather static — most of their argument takes place on the same white podium.

Pudova and Sergei Skorokhodov (Bacchus) — who delivered a marvelous rendition of the sensual and captivating Roman god of wine — outshone the rest of the cast but the production in general appeared to drift and lack focus. Generally, the Mariinsky is at home in the territory of Richard Strauss. Productions of the composer's "Elektra" in 2007 and "Die Frau Ohne Schatten" in 2009 were both successful. Had the singers received a more detailed concept from the director for "Ariadne," their show would probably have been more engaging, vivid and consistent. As it was, the premiere gave the impression of really having been commissioned by a wayward Russian tycoon who had a bizarre fantasy about Ingeborga Dapkunaite appearing in a male role and in an opera — and who could afford for that fantasy to make it onto the stage of an internationally acclaimed theater.



Ingeborga Dapkunaite (c) has a male speaking role in the production.

in the spotlight

Putin Party

By Anna Malpas

Last week Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was outraged and demeaned at the idea of a nightclub party with semi-naked girls shouting his name. But luckily, democratic freedoms mean that it took place without any last minute discoveries of fire safety violations.

The Putin Party was put on by Rai, or Heaven, a nightclub in the old Krasny Oktyabr chocolate factory in Moscow. Women who go to the nightclub picked Putin as the famous man they found most attractive, the PR director told me, rather charmingly referring to the women in English as "go-go dancers." The vote also included football's golden boy David Beckham, along with some dubious candidates such as Bruce Willis and Russian rapper Timati, although I'm not suggesting it was in any way rigged.

They had a flyer designed to look like a ballot paper with a big lipstick tick next to Putin's name and banners saying "I want the prime minister." A touch bashful perhaps, Putin did not respond in person, but his press

secretary Dmitry Peskov made some vaguely worded statements about how they had to check whether the club was using Putin's name and image commercially and that

they could not stop it going ahead, but could stop them using such content.

In any case, the party went ahead, although sadly I only saw the photo-

graphic evidence. Blogger Ilya Varlamov had a full report, although the high nipple count means that it comes with an adult content warning.

The edgiest thing about the party was a sign saying: "Peskov, you're not right. We are not trading on Putin." There were also pictures from the calendar featuring Moscow State University journalism students who stripped off last year in a burst of enthusiasm for the dear leader's birthday. The girls also turned up, although they were lost in a crowd of women dancing topless. And the MC shouted "Only Rai, only Putin, only sex," Varlamov wrote in his blog.

Life News tabloid web site, which loves Putin and women's breasts, had a video of the party with girls shouting "We love you, Vladimir Vladimirovich."

"And it's true, how can you not love him? He's strong, creative and talented," a female journalist narrated in honeyed tones as we saw clips of him doing judo and playing the piano and singing badly at that charity event in St. Petersburg — now under question in the press as it emerged that no one seems to know whether it raised any money.

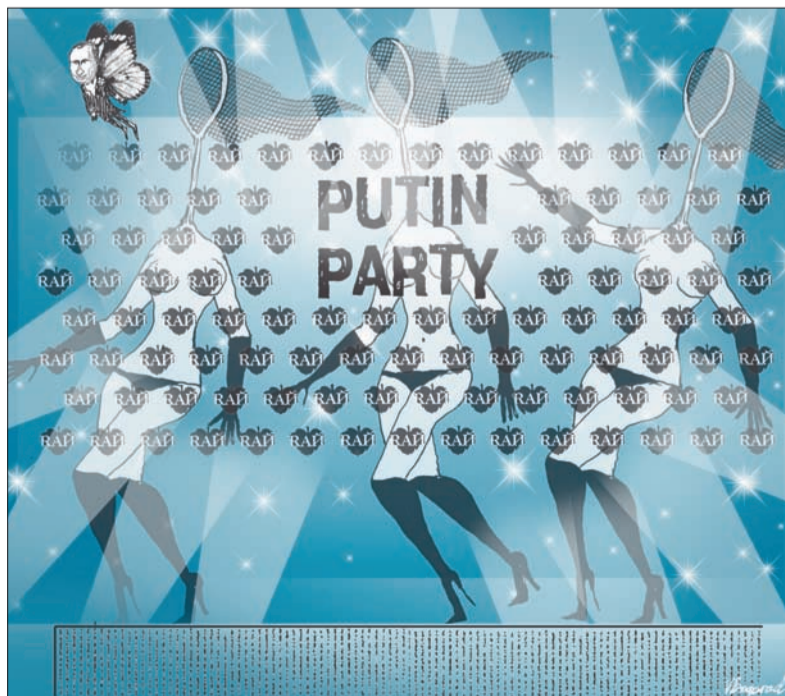
"You have to agree, 'Putin party' sounds a lot better than 'Obama party' or 'Gadhafi party,' or maybe it's just that we really love Vladimir Vladimirovich," the journalist concluded. "On this evening, there was only one master of women's hearts."

Moskovsky Komsomolets described how some of the non-professional girls "ripped their clothes off" along with the strippers.

Vedomosti got analytical, though, saying that "the Putin brand is becoming more and more glamorous" and backed it up with the cast-iron statement that "no one strips off for other top-level Russian politicians."

"The brand has taken on a life of its own, which is extremely convenient for the bearer of its name in the light of the upcoming election campaign. And maybe the party itself did not happen by accident, some conspiracy theorists might ask themselves," it stated obliquely.

Financial Times was more direct. "To many, the event looked like the (garish) start to a presidential campaign," Catherine Belton wrote in the newspaper's blog.



No Strings Attached (2011, U.S.) Ivan Reitman's romantic comedy starring Natalie Portman, Ashton Kutcher and Kevin Kline. *Crystal Palace, Khudozhestvenny, Mirage Cinema, Neva, Pik.*

Norwegian Wood (Noruwei no mori) (2010, Japan) Anh Hung Tran's love drama starring Rinko Kikuchi, Ken'ichi Matsuyama and Kiko Mizuhara. *Dom Kino.*

NEW! Office Romance. Our Time (Sluzhebny Roman. Nashe Vremya) (2011, Russia) Sarik Andreasyan's comedy starring Svetlana Khodchenkova, Vladimir Zelensky and Marat Basharov. *Avrora, Crystal Palace, Jam Hall, Mirage Cinema. Starts March 17.*

NEW! Rango (2011, U.S.) Gore Verbinski's animated film. *Crystal Palace, Jam Hall, Mirage Cinema. Starts March 17.*

NEW! Red Riding Hood (2011, U.S.-Canada) Catherine Hardwicke's horror film starring Amanda Seyfried, Gary Oldman and Billy Burke. *Avrora, Crystal Palace, Mirage Cinema. Starts March 17.*

Slove (2011, Russia-Germany-U.S.) Jurgen Staal's action thriller starring Alexei Chadov, Andrei Chadov and Pavel Derevyanko. *Pik.*

Tomorrow, When the War Began (2010, Australia-U.S.) Stuart Beattie's teen adventure movie starring Caitlin Stasey, Rachel Hurd-Wood and Lincoln Lewis. *Pik.*

Tricksters (Vykrutasy) (2011, Russia) Levon Gabriadze's romantic comedy starring Milla Jovovich, Konstantin Khabensky and Ivan Urgant. *Crystal Palace, Khudozhestvenny, Mirage Cinema, Pik.*

True Grit (2010, U.S.) Ethan Coen and Joel Coen's Western film starring Jeff Bridges, Hailee Steinfeld and Matt Damon. *Khudozhestvenny.*

You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger (2010, U.S.-Spain) Woody Allen's romantic comedy starring Gemma Jones, Pauline Collins and Anthony Hopkins. *Avrora.*

MUSEUMS

ACADEMY OF ARTS MUSEUM (The Scientific-Research Museum of the Academy of Arts) 17 Universitetskaya Nab. Tel. 323 6496, 323 3578 M. Vasileostrovskaya. Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Anchel Orezanz. 20 Years in Russia. Graphics, installation, videoart, photo. *March 3 through April 10*
German Yegoshin. Painting. *March 4 through March 27*
Viktor Yamsshikov. Painting. *February 17 through April 3*

ANNA AKHMATOVA MUSEUM AT THE FOUNTAIN HOUSE 34 Fontanka River, entrance from 53 Liteiny Pr. M. Gostiny Dvor, Mayakovskaya. Tel. 272 2211. Daily, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Monday and the last Wednesday of every month. www.akhmatovalibrary.org
Veterans. What Is War Like? Objects, photo, installation. *February 28 through May 8*



A work by Svetlana Druzhkova on display at the Borey gallery through March 19.

NEW! Viktoria Yaroslavova. Painting. *March 9 through March 23*

ARTILLERY MUSEUM (Military Historical Museum of Artillery and Engineers) 7 Alexandrovsky Park, M. Gorkovskaya, tel. 232 0296, 238 0704, Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed last Thursday of each Month
Artillery – Not Only the Roar of the Gun, but Science Too. Rare manuscripts from the 16th to first half of the 19th century. *November 19 – closing date to be confirmed.*
Fortresses of northwest Russia. Graphics. *January 21 through April 15*
Her Majesty's Sappers. Painting, drawing and lithography dedicated to the feats of military engineers from the 18th – early 20th centuries. Exhibits include sculptures, rare objects, manuscripts and documents. *January 21 through April 15*

ALEXANDER BLOK APARTMENT MUSEUM 57 Ul. Dekabristov Ul., M. Sadovaya, Sennaya. Tel. 713 8631. Daily 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Tuesday.

ISAAK BRODSKY APARTMENT MUSEUM 3 Pl. Iskusstv. M. Nevsky Prospekt. Tel 314 3658. Daily 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Monday, Tuesday

CITY SCULPTURE MUSEUM Exhibition Hall 179/2a Nevsky Prospekt. Entrance through Chernoretskogo Pereulok. Tel. 274 2635, 274 2579, 274 3860. Daily, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Thursday, Friday.
NEW! Lichiko. Female images at the beginning of the 20th century in Ilya Yevstifeyev's postcards and photo collection. *March 9 through April 17*

DERZHAVIN MUSEUM 118 Nab. Reki Fontanki. M. Technologicheskyy Institut, Sennaya, Sadovaya. Tel. 713 0717, 570 6511
Patchwork Entertainment. Decorative art. *February 28 through March 30*
Alexander Deryabin. Painting. *February 20 through March 20*

DOLL MUSEUM 8 Kamskaya Ulitsa, M. Vasileostrovskaya. Tel. 327 7224, 321 7869. Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Saturday 10.00 – master-class in making dolls.
Honor and Glory of the Motherland. Objects, decorative art. *February 22 through December 31*
Bears of Russia. Antique and collectable teddy bears. *February 7 through April 10*

DOSTOEVSKY APARTMENT MUSEUM 5/2 Kuznechny Pereulok, M. Vladimirskaya. Tel. 571 4031. Daily, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Monday and last Wednesday of each month.
NEW! Elsewhere: Oyvind Hjelmen (Norway). Photo. *March 20 through April 9*

KIROV APARTMENT MUSEUM 26/28 Kamennooostrovsky Prospekt. M. Gorkovskaya, Petrogradskaya. Tel. 346 0217. Daily 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Wednesday

KUNSTKAMERA 3 Universitetskaya Nab. Tel. 328 1412. Daily, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Monday and the last Thursday of each month. www.kunstkamera.ru

HEROIC DEFENDERS OF LENINGRAD MUSEUM MONUMENT PLOSHCHAD POBEDY. M. Moskovskaya. Tel. 371 2951, 373 6563.



Visitors attend the opening of an exhibition titled 'Dress Architecture. Corsets, crinolines and bustles' at the Ioannovsky ravelin of the Peter and Paul Fortress last week.

Daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday, Friday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed last Tuesday of each month.
Steps to Victory: Sergei Larenkov. Photo collage. *February 23 through May 10*

HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY MUSEUM 23 Professora Popova Ul. Tel. 346 1950. Daily 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Sunday, Monday.

HISTORY OF THE POLITICAL POLICE MUSEUM. 6 Admiralteisky Prospekt. M. Gostiny Dvor, Nevsky Prospekt. Tel. 312 2742. Daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Saturday, Sunday.
Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence in the U.S.S.R. from the 1940s to the 1990s. Objects, photo, documents. *February 28 through August 31*
From World War II to the Cold War. 1940-1990s. Objects, photo. *February 25 through March 31*

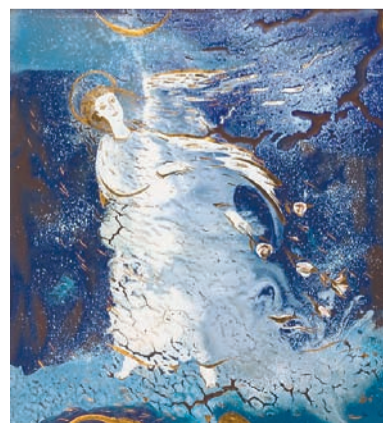
HISTORY OF RELIGION MUSEUM 14/5 Pochtamskaya. M. Nevsky Prospekt, Sennaya, Sadovaya. Tel. 571 0495, 314 5838. Daily 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Wednesday.
NEW! Armenia Faraway and Close: Ivan Dementievsky. Photo. *March 11 through May 10*

HISTORY OF ST. PETERSBURG MUSEUM PETER & PAUL FORTRESS. M. Gorkovskaya. Tel. 230 0329. Daily, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Wednesday. www.spbkrepost.ru
Permanent Collection The St. Peter and Paul Cathedral, housing the graves of most of the Romanov dynasty; History of the Mint; Museum of Old Petersburg; and more. Exhibits are housed in various locations in the Peter and Paul Fortress.
The History of the Trubetsky Bastion Prison 1872-1921 The Peter and Paul Fortress was Imperial St. Petersburg's main jail and this exhibition tells the story of the famous revolutionaries and opponents of the Tsar who were imprisoned there.

The Peter and Paul Cathedral and the Great Princely Necropolis of the House of Romanov The story of the last resting place of the Romanov Dynasty from Peter the Great to Nicholas II, who was finally reinterred here in 1998.
NEW! Dress Architecture. Crinolines, corsets and bustles. Female clothing from Anthon Prijmak's private collection, magazine illustrations and advertising. *March 12 through April 10*

HISTORY OF ST. PETERSBURG MUSEUM 7/9 Universitetskaya Naberezhnaya. Entrance from Mendeleyevskaya Liniya. Tel. 328 9683

HISTORY OF ST. PETERSBURG MUSEUM: Rumyantsev Mansion 44 Angliiskaya Naberezhnaya. M. Vasileostrovskaya, Nevsky Prospekt. Tel. 571 7544. Daily, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Closed Wednesday and the last Tuesday of each month.



Paintings by Olga Lysenkova are on display from March 17 at the Mokhovaya 18 Gallery in the 'Images of the Heavenly World' exhibition.

Japanese Spring in St. Petersburg. Objects, painting, decorative art. Graphics, sculpture. *March 5 through March 17*

MILITARY MEDICINE MUSEUM 2 Lazaretny Pereulok. M. Pushkinskaya. Tel. 315 5358, 315 7287. Daily 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Friday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Closed at weekends
NEW! Between Life and Death. Interactive exhibition. *Prolonged to September 1*

MUSIC MUSEUM AT THE SHEREMETEV PALACE 34 Nab. Reki Fontanki. Tel. 272 4441. Wednesday through Sunday 12 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed last Wednesday of each month. By prior appointment only.

VLADIMIR NABOKOV APARTMENT MUSEUM 47 Bolshaya Morskaya. Tel. 315 4713, 717 4502. Daily 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Weekend 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Monday. www.nabokovmuseum.org

NIKOLAI NEKRASOV APARTMENT MUSEUM 36 Liteiny Prospekt. M. Chernyshevskaya. Tel. 272 0165. Daily, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Tuesday and the last Friday of each month.
The Code of Painting is Color: Polina Kudelkina. Painting. *February 19 through March 19*

POLITICAL HISTORY OF RUSSIA MUSEUM 2/4 Ul. Kuibysheva, M. Gorkovskaya. Tel. 233 7052. Daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Thursday.
NEW! The Union is Inviolable? Objects. *March 18 through May 31*
NEW! The Tradition of Polish Diplomatic and Consular Services. Objects. *March 11 through March 21*

POPOV CENTRAL MUSEUM OF COMMUNICATIONS 3 Pochtamsky Pereulok. Tel. 323 9718. Daily 10.30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Sunday, Monday and the last Thursday of each month. www.rustelecom-museum.ru

CLUBS AND VENUES

ROCK, ETC.

ArcticA
A rock venue mostly featuring heavy metal concerts.
38 Ulitsa Beringa. Metro Primorskaya
Tel: 952 4696
www.arctica-club.spb.ru

Avrora
A new concert venue located at the St. Petersburg hotel.
5/2 Pirogovskaya Naberezhnaya.
Metro Ploshchad Lenina
Tel: 907 1917
www.avrora-zal.ru

Cheshire Cat
A new, third location for the underground club. Singers/songwriters and lesser known rock bands.
32 Zagorodny Prospekt
Metro Vladimirskaia/Dostoyevskaya
Tel: 575 6151
www.catartclub.ru

Chinese Pilot Jao Da
A local branch of the notorious Moscow underground rock club, which also has a branch in Montenegro. Seva Gakkel of Akvarium rock band and TaMtAm club fame is the venue's art director. Live rock, jazz and electronic music.
7 Ulitsa Pestelya
Metro Gostiny Dvor/Chernyshevskaya
Tel: 273 7487; +7 (911) 751 8339
www.spb.jao-da.com

Fish Fabrique
One of the oldest surviving local music clubs has expanded and now also has a larger room called Fabrique Nouvelle which hosts concerts and film screenings.
53 Ligovsky Prospekt
Metro Ploshchad Vosstaniya
Tel: 764-4857
www.fishfabrique.spb.ru

Flat
A small underground rock club.
28 Sadovaya Ulitsa
Metro Sennaya Ploshchad
Tel: 310 0098, 955 7409
www.flat-club.ru

GEZ-21
Part of Pushkinskaya 10 alternative art center. Mostly experimental and improvised music, some rock and electronic acts. A very limited selection at the bar.
53 Ligovsky Prospekt
Metro Ploshchad Vosstaniya
Tel: 764-5258, 764-5263
www.tac.spb.ru

Glavclub
A larger venue for big Russian and international rock and hip-hop bands.
2 Kremenchugskaya Ulitsa
Metro Ploshchad Vosstaniya
Tel: 905 7555
www.glavclub.com

Griboyedov
Located in a former bomb shelter, Griboyedov is one of the oldest and most respected local

clubs, with live concerts in the evenings and DJ sets at nights. Griboyedov Hill is a more recently opened restaurant on top of the bunker, where concerts are also held.
2A Voronezhskaya Ulitsa
Metro Ligovsky Prospekt
Tel: 764 4355, 973 7273
www.griboyedovclub.ru

Jagger
A rock music club and a brewery. Mostly cover bands.
2 Ploshchad Konstitutsii
Metro Moskovskaya
Tel: 923 1292
www.jaggerclub.ru

Kosmonavt
A larger concert venue launched by the team behind the now-defunct A2. Pete Doherty played here.
24 Bronnitskaya Ulitsa
Tel: 922 1300
www.kosmonavt.ru

Manhattan
A rock club with a restaurant and billiards.
90 Naberezhnaya Reki Fontanki
Metro Pushkinskaya/Zvenigorodskaya
Tel: 713 1945
www.manhattanclub.ru

Mod
A new location for the popular youth-oriented bar. Live concerts and DJ sets. Enter through the courtyard.
7 Naberezhnaya Kanala Griboyedova
Metro Nevsky Prospekt
Tel: 712 0734
www.modclub.info

Money Honey
A rockabilly club with a fixed schedule of cover bands. More diverse bands perform upstairs.
28 Sadovaya Ulitsa
Metro Gostiny Dvor
Tel: 310 0549
www.money-honey.ru

Orlandina
Yet another new location for the rock club, five minutes from the old one. Metal, rock, alternative.
3 Instrumentalnaya Ulitsa
Metro Petrogradskaya
Tel: 958 3888
www.orlandina.ru

PiR.O.G.I. on Fontanka
A branch of the hip Moscow network of restaurants with live concerts and art events launched last summer. A dining room and a bar with performances by bands and DJs.
40 Naberezhnaya Reki Fontanki
Tel: 275 3558
www.piterogi.ru

Shum
A new addition to the club scene, perfect for live rock concerts.
45 5-ya Sovetskaya Ulitsa
Metro Ploshchad Vosstaniya
Tel: +7 (921) 946 8969
http://shumclub.ru

Zal Ozhidaniya
A rock and pop concert venue. Part of Varshavsky Express retail and entertainment complex located in the former railroad station building.
118 Naberezhnaya Obvodnogo Kanala
Metro Baltiiskaya
Tel: 333 1069
www.clubzal.com



The Capital Beat, an eight-piece ska/reggae band from Finland, will perform alongside their local counterparts such as Markscheider Kunst and Spitfire at Sun Shine Fest, a reggae and ska event at The Place on Saturday.

Zoccolo
An underground rock club managed by the people from the now-closed Moloko club. Punk, indie, alternative and some experimental electronica.
2/3 3-ya Sovetskaya Ulitsa
Metro Ploshchad Vosstaniya
Tel: 274 9467
www.zoccolo.ru

JAZZ

Jazz Philharmonic Hall
The oldest local jazz venue directed by local jazz patriarch David Goloshchokin. Ellington Hall is a bar located in the upstairs area with a stage used for smaller concerts.
Mainstream, Latin jazz, blues.
27 Zagorodny Prospekt
Metro Vladimirskaia/Dostoyevskaya
Tel: 764 8565
www.jazz-hall.spb.ru

JFC Jazz Club
A smaller jazz club that operates daily.
33 Shpalernaya Ulitsa
Metro Chernyshevskaya
Tel: 272 9850
www.jfc.sp.ru

The Other Side
A bar and restaurant with jazz and blues concerts at weekends. A popular expat hangout.
1 Bolshaya Konyushennaya Ulitsa
Metro Nevsky Prospekt
Tel: 312 9554

Street Life
A pop-jazz club and restaurant.
6 2-ya Krasnoarmeiskaya Ulitsa
Metro Tekhnologicheskyy Institut
Tel: 575 0545
www.street-life.spb.ru

DJ BARS

Datscha
A notorious DJ bar, popular with students and expats.
Metro Nevsky Prospekt
9 Dumskaya Ulitsa

Dusche
An art bar launched by several members of rock band Leningrad.
DJs, fashion shows, occasional concerts.
Metro Ligovsky Prospekt
50 Ligovsky Prospekt (Korpus 6)
Tel: 610 1990

Fidel
A DJ bar next to Datscha.
Metro Nevsky Prospekt
9 Dumskaya Ulitsa

HelsinkiBar
A new art bar celebrates St. Petersburg's northern neighbor.
DJs, poetry readings.
31 Kadetskaya Liniya
Metro Vasileostrovskaya
Tel: 995-1-995
www.helsinkiBar.ru

Radiobaby
A DJ bar launched by the Achtung Baby team.
7 Kazanskaya Ulitsa,
in the courtyard
Metro Nevsky Prospekt
www.radiobaby.com

Siny Pushkin
An art bar conceived by Sergei Shnurov and Ivan Ushkov.
DJs, occasional concerts.
43/12 Khersonskaya Ulitsa
Metro Ploshchad Aleksandra Nevskogo

Tel: +7 (953) 347 6676
www.spushkin.ru

Stirka
A launderette bar.
DJs, small live concerts.
26 Kazanskaya Ulitsa
Metro Nevsky Prospekt
Tel: 314 5371
http://40gradusov.ru

GAY

Central Station
The city's premier gay club.
1/28 Ulitsa Lomonosova
Metro Nevsky Prospekt
Tel: 312 36 00
www.centralstation.ru

The Club
A recently opened gay club.
17 Shcherbakov Pereulok
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Please send updates and listings to Sergey Chernov, chernov@sptimes.ru

the word's worth

Marching In Like a Lion

By Michele A. Berdy

Март: March (third month of the year in Russia since 1700)

I hate *март* (March). I am so sick of my winter clothing I want to shred it. I hate hat head — that anti-fashion look of hair smashed flat by headwear. I hate the boot dilemma: wear rubber boots and your feet are dry but frozen; wear snow boots and your feet are warm but wet. I long for colors other than brown (mud, tree branches, filthy cars) and white (untrammelled bits of snow). And I really hate the sudden rumble that turns into a roar as three tons of ice and snow slide-crash off the roof onto innocent cars and unfortunate pedestrians. I want to close my

eyes, wave my magic wand and wake up in True Spring.

Over the millennia, Russians have not loathed March the way I do — presumably because hat head was not a sartorial issue in ancient Rus — but they have traditionally considered it a difficult month. The first problem is this: *Март — не весна, а предвесенье* (March isn't spring but the prelude to spring). *Иногда и март морозом хвалится* (Sometimes March boasts of freezing cold). Hence: *пришёл марток — надевай семеро порток* (The month of March is on, and seven pairs of pants you must don). In case you were wondering, the old Russian word for pants was *портки*, from *портно* (a rough canvas cloth, now called *полотно*), which has also given us the word

портной (a tailor; also the complaining hero of a Philip Roth novel).

But the weather of March is nothing if not changeable. *Март у матери-зимы шубу купил, да через три дня её и продал* (March bought a fur coat from Mother Winter and then sold it after three days). Or to use another metaphor: *Март неверен: то плачет, то смеётся* (March is fickle: Now it cries, now it laughs).

And it's windy: *Мартушка закрутит вертушку* (March swirls the whirligig). And really wet and muddy: *В марте и на корыте едешь* (In March, you can travel in a trough).

On a brighter note, *мартовская вода* (March water), from *мартовский снег* (March snow), was believed to have medicinal — if not magical —

powers. It was used for healing skin sores and jaundiced infants, washing away freckles and — most important — making the best beer: *Мартовское пиво — самое лучшее!* (March beer is the best beer!) It's also an excellent remedy for hat head: A bucket of melted March snow was prized for its powers to strengthen hair. You can gather up a bucket in the park. Just avoid the yellow snow.

Because *март зиму кончает и весну начинает* (March ends the winter and begins the spring), this in-between month has always been carefully observed for signs of the summer and harvest to come. *Если в марте вода не течёт, в апреле трава не растёт* (If water doesn't flow in March, the grass won't grow in April).

On the other hand: *Сухой март предвещает плодородие, а дождливый — неурожай* (A dry March portends a fertile crop, but a rainy March portends no crop).

So far I haven't found a Feast Day or folk omen that predicts — or, more crucially, fails to predict — two summer months of rainless, windless, sweltering heat combined with peat fires, but I'm still looking. But, judging by the fact that air conditioners are already sold out, real Russians know something I don't.

Maybe there was a sign in February.

Michele A. Berdy, a Moscow-based translator and interpreter, is author of "The Russian Word's Worth" (*Glas*), a collection of her columns.

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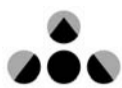
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Former British Foreign Secretary Sir David Owen visits St. Petersburg to launch the Russian translation of his book this week.



YEGOR SALAMASHENKO / SPT

A woman feeds pigeons outside the Andreyevsky Cathedral on Bolshoi Prospekt of Vasilyevsky Island last week.



ALEXANDER AKSAKOV / SPT

Visitors attend the opening of an exhibition devoted to dresses at the Peter and Paul Fortress on Monday.



ALEXANDER AKSAKOV / SPT



ALEXANDER BELENKY / SPT

A man's head is seen above a snowdrift as he sits on a park bench in the garden on St. Isaac's Square this week. The thaw this year looks set to be gradual, with temperatures not forecast to rise above freezing through the weekend.



ALEXANDER BELENKY / SPT

Ships are shown stranded in the ice in the Gulf of Finland on Monday while they await rescue from icebreakers.

