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Medvedev Says Russia Must Avoid Stagnation

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Russia must learn from its past and avoid plunging into the stagnation that set the stage for the collapse of the Soviet Union, President Dmitry Medvedev said Wednesday.

Medvedev, speaking at a new meeting with supporters, rejected claims that Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's imminent return to the presidency in March's election would further strengthen authoritarian trends and be a repetition of the late Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev's 18-year rule.

"The analogies are lame, they make no sense," Medvedev said. "We are living in another country, we aren't the same and we have another social and economic order."

Medvedev said, however, that Russia must remember its past and warned that "any stagnation is inadmissible." Russia needs to "gradually but steadfastly move forward," he said.

Medvedev promised a gathering of officials, businessmen, journalists and cultural figures

that many of them could take government jobs if he and Putin swap places after the presidential vote as they have agreed.

He said he wants to form a Cabinet that would encourage stronger feedback from society and engage in broader dialogue with civil society activists.

Medvedev's decision to step aside to let Putin, his political mentor who was the president in 2000-08, reclaim the top Kremlin job, has disappointed many Russian liberals who had been heartened by his pledges to strengthen rule of law, combat graft and make the political system more democratic. Wednesday's meeting, like a similar event over the weekend, was clearly aimed at assuaging the Russian middle-class nervousness about Putin's comeback.

Medvedev admitted that Russia's democratic institutions need strengthening and said he would champion further reforms if he becomes prime minister.

He also said Russia would keep friendly ties with other countries, adding that it would need their help to boost its economy.

"We won't be able to conduct modernization without help and support from other nations," Medvedev said. "The Iron Curtain never helped anyone, and concepts of autonomous development led into a deadlock."

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