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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

The Top 5 Bizarre Stories From 2013

By The Moscow Times

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The news coming out of Russia in 2013 was full of emotions.

Anti-gay laws and corruption scandals caused outrage, Olympic torches were carried with pride and falling meteors provoked awe that was captured on a small army of dash cams.

There were also stories that made our readers (and us at The Moscow Times) just say "Huh?"

Trying to make sense of it all, web editor Mark Lammey takes a look back at some of the strangest happenings that we reported on last year.

1. Daft Ministry.

At a time when Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu wants to perk up Russian servicemen at the start of each day by making them belt out the national anthem, choirs composed of police and soldiers were trying their hand at contemporary pop hits, with impressive results.

The Red Army choir first got people's pulses racing with a rendition of Adele's "Skyfall." Not

to be outdone, a police force ensemble pushed the envelope further with its performance of Daft Punk's summer of 2013 chart topper "Get Lucky" that dented the stereotypical image of the surly and best avoided Russian police officer.

Having said that, we don't advise trying to sing your way out of trouble if you get stopped for a document check.

Appearances are not what they seem when it comes to Interior Ministry officials. (YouTube / RIA Novosti)

2. The Animal in Putin.

President Vladimir Putin may have good reason to look back on 2013 with fondness.

He won praise for his much-read and commented on op-ed published in The New York Times, was talked up as a Nobel Peace Prize nominee thanks to Russia's role in ironing out an agreement to have chemical weapons removed from Syria, and September's nationwide mayoral and gubernatorial elections passed without any serious cries of foul play.

Putin also proved himself to be a talented artist with his rendering of a cat's backside during a visit to students in the Kurgan region on the first day of school.

Erm, OK... . Maybe he got a bit carried away with that one.

3. Bears on Parade.

In 2013, as in any other year, Russia's bears snaffled their share of the headlines, though usually in connection with sad events.

As can happen at the end of Russian winters, bears try their luck finding food in nearby villages due to snow lingering in forests, and a number of them were shot for encroaching on people's homes.

One villager being pursued by a bear had to take evasive action by climbing up a tree which, of course, bears are also quite good at doing.

On a lighter note, hundreds of thousands of viewers took time out to watch a video showcasing the skills of Tima, a professional acting bear. Although unlikely to find favor with animal rights activists, many people were suitably charmed by the bear, as he sat on a small plastic chair, "parped" on a horn and later made a seemingly rude gesture with his paws.

However, perhaps the most odd article featuring Russia's symbolic animal arose when men working on an oil and gas field in the Tomsk region came across a bear cub scavenging nearby and took it into their ward. They were even contemplating giving the bear some shifts if he could prove his worth as a pipe roller.

Although the video is titled "A typical Russian village" we can only hope such man-and-bear standoffs don't happen every day. (The Gdvideos / YouTube)

4. The Hapless Russian Post.

2013 wasn't the best year for Russian Post.

Its chief, Alexander Kiselyov, was sacked in April, around the same time that the company was being mauled in the media for the massive backlog of about 500 million tons of parcels that built up in Moscow's airports.

A month later the company had to investigate footage of parcels being unceremoniously hurled onto the platform from a train in Novosibirsk by an unidentified worker.

But the lowlight of the year for Russian Post came in March, when a video was posted on YouTube showing a staff member in a Moscow region branch losing her temper with a customer and chasing him down the street with a broom before throwing it at him.

This video helped many people understand why their packages never made it to their final destinations. (Vitaly Gurin / YouTube)

5. Crafty Crooks.

Russia boasts some of the planet's most daring thieves, and although we don't condone their behavior, it's nice to see crooks thinking outside the box, rather than using violence.

One eyecatching article from August reported how a phone thief in Kamchatka managed to escape arrest by diving into a nearby lake before "vanishing" from the pursuing police officers' view. Police found the man's washed up jacked, but not the man himself.

Top mention, however, goes to a daring robber in Smolensk who went into a bank in September and successfully used hypnosis to convince the teller to hand over 1 million rubles ($30,000).

The following articles didn't make it into the top five, but still deserve an honorable mention:

Vibrator Causes Post Office Bomb Scare

Novorossiysk Library Hires Cat as Assistant

Russia Offered New Zealand Nuclear Sub to Settle Dairy Debt in 1990s

Mystery Stink Returns to Perm

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