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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Top 10 Most Popular Stories of 2013

By Christopher Brennan

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The news in Russia over the course of 2013 had its ups and downs. Meteors and a NSA intelligence leaker appeared out of nowhere and landed in Russia while the Olympic torch relay was for the first time launched into the cosmos. Political movements came into their own, victories in the arena of international relations were lauded and tragedies were shared. While there are many ways to measure the significance of the year's events, we at themoscowtimes.com were interested in which articles caught our readers' attention and went viral, becoming our most popular stories of the year.

Here, chronologically, are the top stories that you, The Moscow Times' readers, clicked on throughout the year.

1. Heaviest Snowfall in a Century Hits Moscow, Feb. 5

Though the weather so far in 2014 has been relatively balmy, especially compared to other parts of the world, 2013 was the polar opposite and Moscow experienced the most snow it had seen in more than 100 years. By February, the capital had already seen far more snow (216

centimeters since the beginning of winter in 2012) than the average for the whole season (152 cm). Some, like President Vladimir Putin, would enjoy the powdery white stuff, though the snow's accumulation would cause power outages and heavy traffic congestion.



President Vladimir Putin plays with his dogs in March while wearing Olympic-themed outerwear. Alexsey Druginyn / RIA-Novosti / Reuters

2. Kerry Finally Reaches Lavrov by Phone, Feb. 19

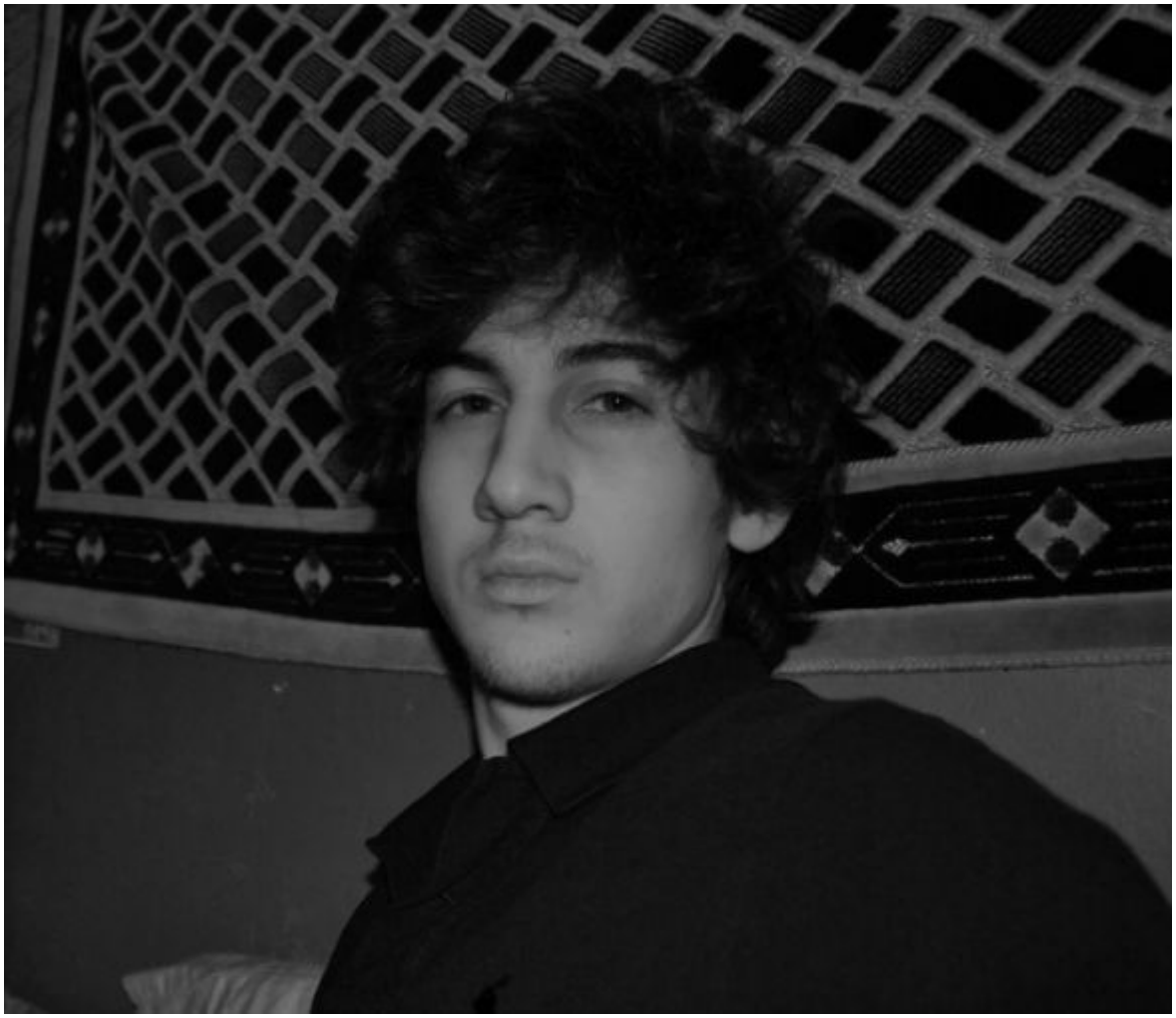
Though this story was published early in the year, our reader's interest in the relationship between the top diplomats of Russia and the U.S. foreshadowed the critical role that the two would play in international relations last year. In February, a statement from the Russian? Foreign Ministry announced that U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry had finally made contact with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who was busy traveling around Africa, in the aftermath of a North Korean nuclear test. Kerry's inability to reach his Russian counterpart was seen as a sign of deteriorating relations between the U.S. and Russia, a theme that would continue throughout the year. The pair also discussed Syria, months before what seemed like impending U.S. intervention in the Middle Eastern country was averted by a deal to eliminate Syrian President Bashar Assad's chemical weapons, brokered by Lavrov and Kerry.

3. Stephen Fry Interviews Milonov for Gay Documentary, March 15

Russia's relationship with gay rights became front page news in 2013, as June's law banning the "propaganda" of non-traditional sexual relations to minors caused outrage in the West. Gay British comedian Stephen Fry, who would later call for a boycott of the Sochi Olympics because of the law, in March traveled to St. Petersburg, which first passed a version of the measure in 2012. As part of a documentary on being gay in different parts of the world, the actor interviewed conservative politician Vitaly Milonov, the force behind the law, though the two found little to agree on.

4. Chechen Brothers Linked to Boston Bombings, April 19

The Boston Marathon bombings in April left many in the U.S. and around the world looking for answers as to who staged the attack. Several days after the bombing investigators began the search for two Chechen brothers living in the Boston area, Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev. The announcement of their names sent journalists, including those at The Moscow Times, on a search to give readers more information as to who the Tsarnaevs were and how the pair became radicalized.



A picture of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev taken from his VKontakte page.

5. Q&A Sharapova's First Business Aims for the Sweet Spot, April 26

Though tennis star Maria Sharapova's time on the tennis circuit was cut short in 2013 due to a shoulder surgery, Russia's most famous athlete still drew a lot of headlines last year. She spent time as world No. 2 and topped Forbes magazine's list of Russia's foremost celebrities. In April, The Moscow Times' Ezekiel Pfeifer spoke with the 26-year-old about her first business venture, a foray into the world of brightly colored tennis ball shaped candies that reportedly brought in $6 million last year. In 2014 she will help U.S. broadcaster NBC with their coverage of the Winter Olympics in Sochi, her hometown.



Sharapova blowing a kiss while marketing her Sugarpova line of candies. mariasharapova.com

6. Lyudmila Putina Once Called Her Husband a Vampire, June 6

Though Putin's ex-wife Lyudmila remained private during her husband's time as the leader of Russia, the abrupt news of the first couple's divorce led our readers to be particularly interested in any gossip about their relationship that they could find. A 2001 book by Irene Pietsch, who knew the Putins when they lived in Germany and spilled the beans about trouble in their marriage, soon became popular reading material again during the media frenzy.

7. Russia Slams U.S. Pressure Over Snowden, July 26

NSA intelligence leaker Edward Snowden's disclosures brought a face (that was reproduced en masse due to a lack of fresh photos of the 30-year-old American) to the issue of widespread government surveillance that shocked readers throughout 2013. Snowden's arrival at Sheremyetevo Airport in June also created a standoff between the Kremlin and the U.S. over the possible return of the defense contractor, who in August was granted a year's asylum in Russia. The Moscow Times' audience was particularly interested in our article about extradition, in which officials and human rights activists criticized pressure to send Snowden back to face prosecution.

8. **Kiev Man Finds Dog That Looks Like Putin, Sept. 20**

The year 2013 was marked by serious headlines, but also by an increased fascination of Western readers with Russia's president, even when the subject matter was Internet silliness. Perhaps unsurprisingly, news that a Ukrainian man had found his canine doppelganger (and The Moscow Times' picture comparison with Putin) quickly went viral in September.



Internet commentators were quick to name the dog "Vladimir Poochin." kremlin.ru / obozrezatel.com

9. **Russian 'Breaking Bad' Fan Changes Name to Jesse Pinkman, Oct. 10**

Besides its usual fascination with animals, the Internet also gobbled up anything about the American television series "Breaking Bad" during the month of October, when the show's finale aired. One Moscow region fan, Kirill Andreyevich Nenakhov, loved the show so much that he legally changed his name to that of one the show's characters, Jesse Pinkman. Nenakhov's relatives were upset by the change, though actor Aaron Paul, who plays Pinkman on the show, posted a supportive message on his Twitter account.



Jesse Pinkman, played by actor Aaron Paul. Breaking Bad

10. What to Expect from the Year of the Horse, Dec. 31

Our most popular article at the end of last year was one that looked optimistically ahead to New Year's Eve and 2014, the year of the horse in the Chinese zodiac. Be careful though, some astrologers believe that the year could be "tempestuous."

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